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**DWELLING ON THE LAND:  
THE LITERATURE OF AGRICULTURE  
IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC**

A Dissertation in

English

by

Mark C. Sturges

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The dissertation of Mark C. Sturges was reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Carla Mulford  
Associate Professor of English  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Robert Burkholder  
Associate Professor of English

Ian Marshall  
Professor of English and Environmental Studies

Stephen Browne  
Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences

Mark Morrison  
Professor of English  
Head of the English Department

\*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

## Abstract

This project explores the relationship between literature, agriculture, and political discourse in the early American Republic. Focusing on four locations—Virginia, Connecticut, the Susquehanna Valley, and Cherokee Territory in Southern Appalachia—I survey a range of regional writing from the 1770s to the 1830s, and in the process I argue that a sense of place has the potential to shape an environmental ethic. Each chapter demonstrates (1) how farmers from these four regions responded to environmental problems like soil exhaustion and deforestation; (2) how writers from each region expressed a new ecological anxiety about the waste of natural resources; and (3) how these writers employed different modes of literary persuasion to promote a more permanent sense of place and a more sustainable system of land management. In other words, my study tells the story of an early American environmental movement.

Typically, historians trace the roots of American conservation to a later date, often to the work of George Perkins Marsh or Gifford Pinchot, while literary critics privilege the writings of Henry David Thoreau or John Muir, but I find a similar environmental conscience in the early national era. Through new readings of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Timothy Dwight, David Humphreys, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, James Fenimore Cooper, William Bartram, and the Cherokee writer Elias Boudinot, my project recovers a lost ethic of agrarian land stewardship and thus proves that the canon of American nature writing has roots much deeper than the mid-nineteenth century.

These “founding farmers” cultivated a vision of sustainable agriculture that later inspired the Populist Party of the late-nineteenth century; in the twentieth century, their ideas resurfaced among neo-agrarian writers who began to challenge industrial agriculture; and today, the same core values have shaped the contemporary local-foods movement. Their work provides not just an insight into the past, then, but a model for a more durable future.

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## **Introduction**

### **The Agrarian Revolution**

In the summer of 1776, that most symbolic of American seasons, when the thirteen colonies declared their independence from Britain, Thomas Jefferson wanted to stay home. He had a headache, his mother had just died, and the mountains of Virginia easily trumped a trip to the city. Only reluctantly did he leave Monticello in May, return to Philadelphia, and resume his post in the Continental Congress. Over the next six weeks, in that immortal room on Market and Seventh, he sat at his immortal desk, immortal pen in hand, and drafted that immortal document, the Declaration of Independence.

Despite the mythology of history, Jefferson devoted more attention in those weeks to the affairs of his home state than to the content of the Declaration, which he regarded largely as a symbolic gesture. More vital to the fate of America, he believed, were the ongoing efforts to establish functional state governments. During May and June, Jefferson wrote three drafts of the Virginia Constitution, a document involving a more practical plan for the future than the blend of philosophical liberalism and emotional polemic comprising the Declaration. In the first of those drafts, Jefferson outlined a policy that would have allocated fifty acres of property to every landless Virginian before allowing speculators, land companies, or wealthy individuals to purchase the surplus. Although the plan never came to fruition, its proposal established a key relationship between land policy, environmental philosophy, and the national project. At this pivotal moment in American history, Jefferson was cultivating an agrarian ideal; he was framing an environmental ethic; he was dwelling on the land.<sup>1</sup>

In early August, shortly after the Declaration was signed, Jefferson sent a letter to Edmund Pendleton deliberating the issue of land tenure. He described American lands as “allodial,” the exclusive possession of the colonists independent of the king and his imperial regime. According to Jefferson, the new nation should abolish the feudal system and free private citizens from the economic demands of landlords and a distant sovereign. No longer would individuals pay rent or labor for another’s profit. Instead, they would work (and own) the land as freeholding farmers subject only to the authority of state governments. Of course, this vision of land ownership required a pair of erasures: first, the states had to incorporate and reformulate colonial titles and existing land claims; second, the American Indians either had to accept new laws and lifeways or relinquish their relation to the land. Jefferson closed his letter to Pendleton with a frenzied review of this second point.<sup>2</sup>

At the outbreak of the War of Independence, several Indian nations had allied with the British and launched a series of raids down the spine of the Appalachians against white settlers whom the Indians considered a threat to their territorial sovereignty. Jefferson believed that the success of the Revolution depended on forestalling these alliances between Native Americans and the British. The Shawnees and Delawares, he told Pendleton, “are disposed to peace.” The Iroquois, on the other hand, required a more forceful diplomacy. “We directed a declaration to be made to the six nations,” Jefferson wrote, “that if they did not take the most decisive measures for the preservation of neutrality we would never cease waging war with them while one was to be found on the face of the earth.” As for the Cherokees, Jefferson intended to make an example of them: “I hope the Cherokees will now be driven beyond the Mississippi & that this in future will be declared to the Indians the invariable consequence of their beginning a war.” Thus, the

conflict in the colonies provided Jefferson with a convenient excuse for displacing the native peoples, the brutal prerequisite for the fulfillment of his agrarian project.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, history too often spotlights the founding fathers, leaving other characters and their contexts in the darkness. Such is the theater of American exceptionalism. Throughout 1776, while Jefferson forged a link between national politics and agrarian economics, alternative visions of the land were evolving elsewhere in the colonies. On the southern frontier, William Bartram had just concluded a four-year tour of Creek and Cherokee territory. He served briefly in a Patriot militia in Georgia, but when hostilities escalated, he decided to return home. Back in Philadelphia, for the next fifteen years he wrote and revised an account of his travels. Primarily, Bartram hoped to present the fruits of his botanical study, but his representation of the American South also urged the federal government to develop a more humane Indian policy. Throughout the *Travels* (1791), Bartram described how the Creek and Cherokee nations adapted to natural and cultural landscapes, how their lifeways changed in response to environmental conditions and colonial conquests. Combining geographic description, romantic aesthetics, and scientific study, Bartram constructed an animate region of rich biodiversity and dynamic human communities. He presented natural and cultural history as part of the same evolving system, part of the same deep time. Ultimately, Bartram favored political unification between the Indian nations and the new American government, but he also implied that the Creek and Cherokee should maintain regional sovereignty while residing as republican citizens within the territory of the United States. Unlike Jefferson's agrarian vision, Bartram's natural history promoted a culture of democratic equality that included the Native Americans and respected the natural environment.<sup>4</sup>

During the final years of the American War of Independence, Jefferson wrote the first version of his own book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, later published in Paris in 1785 and in

London in 1787. In *Notes*, Jefferson remapped the land as an Enlightenment grid. By relocating native claims and commercial capitalism beyond the borders of Virginia, he portrayed his home region as an uncontested agrarian state that derived its moral and economic energy from working the land. “Those who labour in the earth,” he famously declared, “are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.” But this agrarian ideal—a vision of the small American farmer working his own land independently of the corrupting influence of modernity—emerged from a sentimental, highly suspect version of history. Looking to Europe, Jefferson blamed the feudal system for all inequities of property and power, embracing the myth of an imaginary Anglo-Saxon people who lived in arcadian harmony on a pastoral landscape until the Norman Conquest abolished their common right to the land. Jefferson imagined the United States as an alternative to this injustice, a promised land destined to redeem a fallen past, a natural nation full of republican freeholders. Thus, the agrarian ideal took root in a national discourse.<sup>5</sup>

But not all agrarian writers shared Jefferson’s patriotic optimism. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, the self-styled “American Farmer,” spent the years 1776-78 clinging anxiously to his farm at Pine Hill in Orange County, New York. Threatened by Indian raids from the north and west, and British forces to the south, this region became hostile terrain for individuals like Crèvecoeur who desired to remain neutral. During the War of Independence, Crèvecoeur pursued several options for relocating his family. On multiple occasions, he traveled south along the Susquehanna River, perhaps looking for land, only to hear accounts of past and present turmoil. In 1778, a party of Iroquois Indians in league with British Loyalists killed more than a hundred settlers in the Wyoming Valley of northern Pennsylvania, a bloody event that Crèvecoeur later described in detail. Increasingly, Crèvecoeur blamed the Patriot cause for destroying his agrarian

ideal, an irony that would have unsettled Jefferson. Indeed, the final chapters of *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), Crèvecoeur's fictionalized account of his experiences, depict violence as the prevailing trend of the times, the central story of the land. Eventually, Crèvecoeur fled the colonies, leaving behind his family and farm. He traveled to New York City, where the British imprisoned him (briefly) on suspicion of espionage, and not until 1780 did he finally set sail for London. Tragically, he later learned that Pine Hill had burned during an Indian raid, his wife had died, and two of his children had vanished.<sup>6</sup>

Such stories make a provocative prelude to this study of land and literature in the early Republic, and together they reveal a range of perspectives that have descended through history to shape contemporary attitudes about the environment. Writing from different backgrounds to different audiences, these writers inhabited a world as diverse and cosmopolitan as our own. They lived in a time of political revolution, social upheaval, and democratic reform. They witnessed sweeping changes in science, agriculture, economics, education, and religion. They were immersed in a transatlantic geography of cultural exchange, population growth, and mass migration—an era of globalization and great knowledge acquisition.

Much like our own age, the eighteenth century involved an enthusiastic environmental discourse. By midcentury, the Swedish scientist Carl von Linné had pioneered a new system of biological taxonomy, the British artist Mark Catesby had published his illustrated *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1731-43), and the French naturalist Comte du Buffon had compiled a complete history of every animal species then known to the western world. Meanwhile, the French political thinker Baron de Montesquieu expounded a theory of biogeography that attributed cultural differences to the effects of climate and topography, a method of environmental analysis that would later influence such writers as

Crèvecoeur and Alexis de Tocqueville. In 1743, Benjamin Franklin founded the American Philosophical Society and for the next decade he conducted the electricity experiments that advanced America's reputation in the scientific world. Following the War of Independence, Franklin's fellow Philadelphian Charles Wilson Peale opened a popular museum of curiosities where he displayed an enormous skeleton excavated near the Hudson River in New York, which along with evidence from Big Bone Lick on the Ohio River enlivened an ongoing debate about the beastly remains of the woolly mammoth. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, while comparing the fossils collected by his predecessors, a young zoologist known as Georges Cuvier posited a startling theory of species extinction, a profound insight that would later help Darwin discover that deeper, darker truth about nature—the law of tooth and claw.<sup>7</sup>

Jefferson, Bartram, and Crèvecoeur participated directly in this dynamic environmental discourse. In less than a decade, from 1782 to 1791, each published a work of regional writing that revealed the range and depth of the “environmental imagination” as it existed in the late eighteenth century, well before the birth of Henry David Thoreau.<sup>8</sup> Like Thoreau, these writers worked within and against a dominant agrarian discourse—that great, glorified dream of the farmer's republic articulated most famously by Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Set against Jefferson's vision, these various perspectives reveal in hindsight the myopia of early American land policy. Bartram's story of the South, for example, with its intimate portrait of the Creek and Cherokee nations, exposes the tragic failure of the United States to accommodate the American Indians. Meanwhile, Crèvecoeur's narrative of the Revolution, which depicts political unrest as the enemy of the agrarian ideal, denounces the violence inherent in the process of nation formation. As an ideology, then, the agrarian scythe could cut both ways.

### *Literary Geography and the Land Ethic*

The chapters that follow examine several juxtapositions, like those above, between agrarian ideals and alternative stories of the land. For the sake of narrative, we begin with Jefferson, although historically speaking he was by no means the sole spokesman for agrarian values. He adopted his beliefs (often contradictory) from a number of sources, among them the philosophy of classical republicanism, the politics of economic liberalism, and a transatlantic discourse of agricultural improvement. Various influences, including the French physiocrats and the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, by John Locke and Henry St. John Bolingbroke, Jefferson's thought remains an enigma to historians. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1790s, after the split between the Republican and Federalist parties, Jefferson became the voice of a "country ideology" in the United States, so he sets the stage for debates about early national land policy. In the end, he did more than envision an ideal; he was a prime mover behind several changes in the land, including the creation of the Virginia Land Office in 1779, the Land Ordinance of 1785, and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, to name just a few.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of organization, this study consists of four long chapters and advances through two main parts. The first half of the study compares a handful of writers from the North and the South in an effort to expose the ecological roots of antebellum political sectionalism, while the second half carries the discussion from the Atlantic seaboard to the Appalachian frontier. Each chapter opens with a work set in the late-eighteenth century and closes by tracking the politics of land use, within a given region, into the nineteenth century, thus building a bridge from the American Revolution to the so-called American Renaissance. Finally, the conclusion circles back to the Revolution in order to reexamine two key legacies of that critical historical event: agricultural improvement and Indian removal.

Although geography functions as the key organizing principle, each chapter also deals with a specific genre of literary persuasion. Chapter One, for example, interprets the agricultural survey as a form of environmental activism by focusing on the writings of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison, three Virginia planters who detected a stark irony at the heart of the plantation economy—namely, that it degraded both human lives and the land base upon which it depended. Despite their economic addiction to this broken system, these “founding farmers” crafted an enlightened argument for ecological awareness and sustainable land management. In turn, Chapter Two considers the georgic discourse of Timothy Dwight and David Humphreys, two Connecticut writers who viewed the problem of land use through a different agricultural environment. In their works of poetry and prose, they praised New England for its commitment to free labor, livestock production, and the science of soil improvement, and they promoted the growth of a rural economy more receptive to domestic manufacturing. In fact, mill owners like Humphreys believed that New England could best retain its cultural identity and political power by transforming its land base into an organic machine.

Next, Chapter Three examines a cluster of frontier narratives by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and James Fenimore Cooper set along the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania and New York. By recovering native claims to the land, these works recast the backcountry as a contested zone. In the process, they propose different solutions to the problem of political and ecological instability. While Crèvecoeur imagined private property as the key to social harmony, for instance, Cooper suggested that sustainable land management required a form of American feudalism that would enable a benevolent landlord to limit individual rights in the name of resource conservation. Finally, Chapter Four travels down the spine of the Appalachians to Cherokee Territory in the American South. This journey begins with the writings of William

Bartram, who articulated an aesthetic and scientific respect for the natural world while calling for political unification between Indian peoples and the U.S. government. Indeed, this chapter also makes a key contribution to Native studies by showing how Cherokee writers like Elias Boudinot harnessed the discourse of agricultural improvement to defend their territory from the relentless aggression of land-hungry white Americans.

From the 1790s to the 1820s, the United States experienced a market revolution that radically reshaped the rural landscape, restructured social relations, and redefined the very meaning of the agrarian ideal. This market revolution involved a dramatic transition from a mercantile economy based on agriculture and foreign trade to an industrial system integrating cash-crop production, domestic manufactures, and internal and external commerce. To meet market demands and maximize personal profits, American farmers often altered their land-use patterns, adopted more intensive forms of cultivation, and embraced an increasingly capitalist mentality. As a result, a host of environmental problems began to plague the eastern states. When farmers cleared land for livestock or planted monocultures for profit, they accelerated the process of deforestation and soil exhaustion. Meanwhile, fluctuating crop prices and the high cost of labor plunged many into debt and prompted others to abandon their homes in pursuit of better prospects. This trend of financial ruin and western emigration rapidly unsettled social stability and threatened to disrupt the agrarian ideal. By the 1830s, a new spirit of economic liberalism—defined by commercial self-interest and material luxury—had supplanted the classical republican values of close-knit community and personal frugality. These changes had a profound impact on the lives of American farmers, on the indigenous peoples of America, and on the land itself.<sup>10</sup>

During the early national era, American political leaders often responded to the problems of soil exhaustion and western emigration by promoting a dual program of agricultural reform

and domestic manufacturing. They believed that a better system of land management and a more self-sufficient domestic economy could ensure social and political stability while still allowing for national progress and prosperity. Combining economic and ethical modes of improvement, they urged American farmers to stay put, to adopt more efficient practices of soil improvement, crop rotation, and livestock production, and to develop a more permanent sense of place. While establishing a number of agricultural societies and engaging in their own personal experiments, these leaders also harnessed the written word, cultivating a vision of enlightened agriculture in a variety of literary genres, from natural history to georgic poetry, travel narratives to agricultural addresses, private letters to public reports. Such writings demonstrate an incipient ecological awareness and express a growing anxiety about the political and environmental durability of the United States. If Americans elevated personal profit above the common good, these leaders feared, then the fragile ecosystem of their republican empire would decline into ruin. Thus, the evolving political economy of the early Republic caused new tensions to arise between agrarian ideals and economic incentives.<sup>11</sup>

To make sense of such tensions, this study highlights the personal and regional contexts of early American land policy. While writers like Jefferson, Bartram, and Crèvecoeur all had connections to cosmopolitan culture, and while their work entered a global marketplace, they grounded their literary production in local stories and lived experience. Of course, each writer perceived his environment through a particular lens, so we should beware of generalizing their similarities. Together, however, they enlisted geographic discourse in the service of political and ethical agendas. Their representations of place and region responded directly to contemporary debates about land policy and political economy, sometimes endorsing, sometimes debunking the dominant trends. In other words, they constructed images of place and region to promote or

critique particular forms of political economy. Their narratives either advanced agricultural improvement, tested the integrity of agrarian capitalism against alternative stories of the land, or (in paradoxical Jeffersonian fashion) did both at the same time. Such political engagement, by definition, constitutes the first essential element of a literary geography.

The second element of a literary geography involves a more personal touch. On the one hand, these early American writers structured their texts to organize physical space as an abstract terrain subject to the rational scrutiny of the scientific mind. That is, they mapped the physical world in geographic terms, constructing taxonomies of place and region in order to control the chaos of volatile environments, to limn differences, to make sense of a messy reality. In this way, they employed representation for utilitarian purposes. On the other hand, personal narrative and emotional appeal infused their works with a deeper, more subjective quality. Their descriptions of the environment reveal the passions and the imperfections of human perception, and their personal stories texture the terrain with memory and meaning. In short, these writers employed literary representation to transform space into place. By dwelling on the land in life and letters, they developed that distinct imaginary quality that we now call “a sense of place,” the second essential feature of a literary geography. Taken together, these two elements, place and political engagement, define a literary geography. Put another way, a work of literary geography is an expression of the politics of place.<sup>12</sup>

The terms “place” and “region” play a key role in this study, so perhaps some clarification will help from the start. Generally speaking, a region is any geographic area demarcated by natural or political boundaries, by such features as coast lines and watersheds, rivers and mountain ranges, national borders and state lines. On a global scale, a region might include the American colonies, West Africa, or the Caribbean, but this study focuses on four

smaller regions within North America: Virginia, Connecticut, the Susquehanna Valley, and Cherokee Territory in the Southern Appalachians. These regions embody both abstract and concrete space, both political and agricultural geography. They also contain conceptual zones like the city and the country, the frontier and the settlements, the wilderness and the pastoral landscape. Meanwhile, regions shape both political ideologies and personal occupations, and residents often identify with their regions, or label others accordingly, as in John Taylor of Caroline or John Dickinson, the Pennsylvania Farmer. In short, we derive both individual and community identity from the geography we inhabit—from dwelling on the land.<sup>13</sup>

Region is akin to place, and often shapes a sense of place, but the terms are not quite synonymous. Instead, a place is a more familiar, more intimate terrain, a landscape invested with emotional and aesthetic qualities and brought to life in personal and cultural narratives. For example, we might see Jefferson's region as Virginia, or even the Blue Ridge Mountains, but his place was Monticello, his home ground, his domestic ideal. Similarly, Timothy Dwight resided in the region of New England, but his sense of place emerged from his direct contact with Fairfield, Connecticut, the location of Greenfield Hill, which provided both the title and setting for a book-length poem he published in 1794. The practice of dwelling, of actually living on the land, often enables a sense of place, but one need not inhabit a region to become intimate with it. William Bartram, for example, spent several years in the American South and studied the region through multiple lenses. In the *Travels*, he employed personal narrative and romantic aesthetics to represent several layers of the same landscape—its natural *and* cultural history—and thus he constructed a “deep map” of place. Even the ragged descriptions of otherwise unlettered travelers sometimes move beyond the surface of physical geography toward a deeper imaginary terrain, an

internal landscape of hope and desire, as with Jonathan Carver at the Falls of St. Anthony or Meriwether Lewis at the Great Falls of the Missouri.<sup>14</sup>

In such literary geographies an attachment to place can serve as the basis for a more environmentally responsible land ethic. The term “land ethic,” of course, refers to the ecological approach to land use defined by Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and perhaps the most important environmental thinker of the twentieth century. Writing a decade after the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, Leopold lamented the perpetual failure of government conservation, which tended to respond to such disasters with half-hearted voluntary programs and technological quick-fixes. The root of the problem lay deeper than land policy, said Leopold, in our very relationship to the natural world. For too long economic self-interest had determined our ethical behavior, and until that changed, the land would continue to suffer. To that end, Leopold challenged his fellow citizens to see themselves as members of the biotic community and to extend their social obligations to the land itself. “A thing is right,” he famously wrote, “when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” Thus, Leopold established a moral litmus test for evaluating the use of natural resources.<sup>15</sup>

As a professional biologist, Leopold understood the ecological importance of such a paradigm shift, but he also recognized that science alone could not change cultural attitudes. Instead, he employed the techniques of literary persuasion, merging ecological insights with an emotional appeal. When a publisher rejected the first draft of *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold revised and reorganized the text to begin with a seasonal calendar of personal essays describing the natural history of his farm in Wisconsin and his own deep attachment to the land. In other words, he constructed a sense of place as the foundation for a land ethic. Likewise, the central

figures in this study made a series of rhetorical choices to promote their own vision of a land ethic. Sometimes they delivered their arguments through literary persuasion, sometimes they adopted the language of nationhood, and sometimes their concerns about place and nation combined to create a rhetoric of conservation that anticipated Leopold's land ethic.<sup>16</sup>

### *From Political Economy to Nature's Economy*

In the early Republic, land use was the linchpin in a broader philosophical debate about the political economy of the new nation. As historians Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and J.G.A. Pocock have demonstrated, the founding fathers viewed the American Revolution in the light of a uniquely eighteenth-century republican ideology. They insisted that independence from Britain would allow an already virtuous people to flourish, as free and enlightened individuals, in a free and enlightened society. The founders fervently believed that the strength of a republic depended upon the moral character of its citizens. If the people lost their innate virtue, then the government would either crumble under the pressure of vice and degeneracy, or resort to tyranny to maintain social order. Accordingly, Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock explain the American Revolution as the culmination of a political philosophy, derived from the country ideology of radical whig writers in England, that was deeply distrustful of commercial exchange and modern capitalism. In turn, historians Joyce Appleby, Isaac Kramnick, and Allan Kulikoff have insisted upon a more liberal analysis of the Revolution that regards capitalism and commercial self-interest as driving forces behind political independence. They suggest that economic opportunities motivated middle-class merchants, mechanics, and farmers to join the Patriot cause. These different viewpoints are not, however, as incompatible as they may seem. Both sets of scholars provide substantial support for their arguments, suggesting a more likely scenario—namely, that republicanism and liberalism

coexisted throughout the eighteenth century. From the 1790s to the 1820s, however, the capitalist mentality of liberalism slowly eclipsed the conservative anxiety of republicanism.<sup>17</sup>

During the early national era, the discourse of agricultural improvement is especially fascinating because it captures the complex tension between these two political philosophies. Recognizing the delicate nature of the new republic and the political importance of economic development, American statesmen thought long and hard about the proper policies necessary to achieve a balance between individual liberty and national security. Some, like Jefferson, believed that only agricultural land use and a decentralized republican government could prevent moral degeneracy, while others, like Alexander Hamilton, argued that a strong central government and a manufacturing economy would ensure American independence by strengthening the financial system. Such debates about political economy preoccupied Americans from the time of the Revolution well into the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

These debates often strike modern readers as peculiar because we struggle to appreciate how eighteenth-century Americans thought about the historical process. First and foremost, they imagined human cultures advancing through a number of stages, from the primitive or savage state, where people subsisted by hunting and fishing in the wilderness, to the shepherd state, where they raised livestock in the pastoral countryside, to the farming state, characterized by permanent agricultural settlement and the beginning of a market economy, and finally to the commercial state involving urban residence, modern manufacturing, and global trade. Each of these stages could exist in different regions and among different groups of people at the same moment in time. Most political thinkers suggested, for example, that the indigenous inhabitants of America belonged to the savage stage while Euroamerican settlers fell into the farming stage.

Late in life, while surveying the American continent from his mountain at Monticello, Jefferson mapped this stadial theory of civilization in a stunning visionary passage:

Let a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly towards our seacoast. These he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so in his progress he would meet gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day.<sup>19</sup>

In this passage, Jefferson imagines a kind of economic development characterized by geographic regions, and he embraces the “improvement” of both people and place across time and space.

But as historian Drew McCoy has shown, eighteenth-century philosophers disagreed about the moral character of these different stages. Following Jean-Jacques Rousseau, some believed that human beings were inherently good and that evil resulted from the excesses of civilization; that is, too much luxury would lead to social decay. Others, like David Hume, argued that ethical behavior increased in proportion to economic development; in other words, luxury facilitated moral progress. While Rousseau feared the negative effects of industrialism and urbanization, Hume praised commerce and manufacturing as the guardians of enlightenment. Despite their differences, however, both agreed that a nation’s economic policy had a crucial effect on the moral character of its people.<sup>20</sup>

We might see Jefferson's agrarian ideal as an effort to strike a balance between these two positions—between nature, on the one hand, and civilization, on the other. Meanwhile, we might explain the conflict between Jefferson and Hamilton as a fundamental disagreement about the historical process. Hamilton envisioned manufacturing as a stepping stone to social progress, whereas Jefferson feared it would corrupt the character of the people and thereby destroy the American Republic. Of course, neither Jefferson nor Hamilton drew their lines so clearly in the sand. Both saw agriculture as the foundation for the wealth of nations, and while Jefferson accepted some forms of domestic manufacturing, Hamilton insisted that his economic plan was designed mainly to complement agricultural production. Nuances aside, these debates about political economy should alert us, for present purposes, to a crucial historical fact: *Americans in the early Republic saw a direct connection between economics and ethics*. Different forms of land use, they believed, would either enhance or erode the moral rectitude of the nation. Put another way, the single most important factor determining the integrity of the Republic was the relationship between the American people and American lands.

Even as Jefferson denounced the king in the Declaration of Independence, Adam Smith attacked colonial mercantilism in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), that most ponderous study of political economy. Today, Smith has become an icon for free-market economists and proponents of globalization, but his writings actually reveal a keen sensitivity to the ethical consequences of economic progress. After all, he spent much of his career as a professor of moral philosophy and he wrote two major books, the first of which, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), provides a counterpoint to aggressive economic liberalism. In that work, Smith focused his attention on the ethical character of his age and suggested that moral behavior emerges naturally from personal relationships and responsibilities. We are endowed, he believed, with a natural desire for others

to sympathize with our situation, a faculty which in turn motivates our sympathy for society at large. In other words, Smith implied, we are not economic machines but human beings. Thus, prior to celebrating the self-interest of the individual, Smith articulated a theory of social ethics that promised to curb the excesses of capitalism.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith envisioned a more complex relationship between economics and ethics than the casual reader may perceive. On the surface, the book seems to reject interpersonal obligations by promoting a system of unrestricted individualism. While depicting economic self-interest as the engine of social progress, Smith asserts that competition will lead naturally to the growth of national wealth and a higher standard of living for all. To that end, he advises governments to abolish legal restrictions—like the vestiges of feudalism—that have limited individuals’ freedom to pursue their personal profit. It is this reading of *The Wealth of Nations* that supports the free-market ideology of twentieth-century economists like Milton Friedman. But unlike present-day advocates of deregulation and globalization, Smith remains cautious about the social pitfalls of capitalist competition. He entertains few illusions about the moral character of merchants and manufacturers, who may enhance the wealth of nations but who have little incentive to behave altruistically, and he relies implicitly on his theory of sympathy to restrain the greed and avarice of the capitalist classes. At one point, Smith even suggests that agriculture, as an occupation, produces better citizens:

Not only the art of the farmer, the general direction of the operations of husbandry, but many inferior branches of country labour require much more skill and experience than the greater part of mechanick trades.... The common ploughman, though generally regarded as the pattern of stupidity and ignorance, is seldom defective in this judgment and discretion.... His understanding, however, being accustomed to consider a greater

variety of objects, is generally much superior to that of the other.... How much the lower ranks of people in the country are really superior to those of the town, is well known to every man whom either business or curiosity has led to converse much with both.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in *The Wealth of Nations*, a veritable manifesto for commercial interests, we find a romantic view of the independent farmer akin to Jefferson's agrarian ideal. Meanwhile, even as Smith promoted the division of labor, he anticipated the problem of alienation later identified by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In other words, during the late-eighteenth century, despite the rise of individual interest, the communitarian values of republican ideology remained present in theories of political economy—and especially in debates about agricultural improvement.<sup>23</sup>

Prominent statesmen like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison drew upon this transatlantic discourse of political economy to justify the forms of government they sought to establish in the United States. In this sense, one might argue, as Howard Zinn does, that the colonies fought the War of Independence in order to secure the property rights of wealthy individuals and abolish undesirable constraints on their economic freedom. According to Eric Nelson, however, the influence of an alternative republican tradition, derived from Greek political thought, led some of the founders to promote a radical redistribution of property that would have created a greater equality of wealth in America. Like Adam Smith, these founding fathers criticized mercantilism as an inefficient and oppressive system. Designed to enrich the crown, the mercantile economy concentrated wealth in the city, impoverished the countryside, and failed to maximize the use of land. At its core, this critique of mercantilism expressed a prophetic anxiety about the waste of resources. Thus, the American founders embraced many of the principles of conservation later implemented by Gifford Pinchot during the first years of the twentieth century: they saw resource management as the key to national wealth, they preached a

new gospel of efficiency, and they employed a rhetoric of democratic property rights to justify their prescriptions for land reform.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, Franklin, Jefferson, and others paid close attention to developments in the natural sciences originating in Europe and sweeping across the globe. During the eighteenth century, a new theory of “nature’s economy” emerged alongside the field of political economy to shape the world view of American statesmen. As Donald Worster has shown, we might see this era as an origin moment for modern ecology. In his discussion of the period, Worster locates two strands of thinking that would eventually shape the work of Darwin, Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and Barry Commoner. The first, an arcadian ethic of simplicity and humility, imagined a perfect harmony existing between humans and the natural world and urged individuals to respect and honor the divine design of God’s creation. The second, an imperial science descending from Francis Bacon, attempted to impose a rational order on the chaos of the natural world and so promoted an ethic of conquest and control. The culture of agricultural improvement in the early Republic occupied a middle ground between these two ethical positions.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1730s, the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné, also known as Linnaeus, developed a comprehensive system of biological taxonomy in order to identify and classify all species in the known world. In the process, Linnaeus implicated human beings in the natural order, placing them atop (but still within) the animal kingdom. In “The Oeconomy of Nature,” an academic thesis written in 1749, Linnaeus pictured all of creation as a great chain of being, an elaborate mechanism in which all parts were interdependent. At the heart of nature he detected a cyclical design, a common pattern that repeated itself everywhere—in the life cycle, in the water cycle, in the relationship between predator and prey—and despite the changes within individual lives, he said, the whole of nature remained a fixed and finite system. There could be no extinction, no

new creation. To Linnaeus, the growth economy of the twenty-first century, with its brazen disregard for ecological limits, would appear impossible, preposterous, a violation of natural law. Likewise, political economists Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, both readers of Linnaeus, asserted that the carrying capacity of the planet must always regulate the extent of economic development. In their view, the goal of political economy was to improve the human condition within the constraints of environmental reality, and to that end, they condemned the waste of resources and promoted a more efficient system of land management.<sup>26</sup>

As an alternative to the cold rationalism of Linnaeus and Smith, the arcadian strain of eighteenth-century thought often combined scientific study with an ethical imperative. For Gilbert White, a country parson who resided in the British midlands, nature study promised to renew the broken connection between human beings and the divine creation. In the midst of a mechanical age, with the factory system rising to prominence in Manchester and Birmingham, White published *The Natural History of Selborne* (1788-89), a series of letters devoted to the landscape of his local region. In one letter, praising the potential of dung, he described nature as “a great economist.” Later, pondering the role of earthworms in “the oeconomy of nature,” he moved toward a profound ecological insight: “Earth-worms, though in appearance a small and despicable link in the chain of nature, yet, if lost, would make a lamentable chasm.” Like most of his contemporaries, White believed that nature existed for human use, but he balanced that utilitarian notion with a vision of better land management. He pictured the natural world as the source of moral order, and his writings represent a powerful challenge to industrial progress. In other words, White formed a spiritual and emotional attachment to place that elevated an ethical vision of natural harmony above the fiscal imperatives of political economy.<sup>27</sup>

In subsequent chapters, we will encounter a collection of American writers who followed White's example during the years of the early Republic. By condemning the waste of nature and cultivating a sense of place, these writers contributed to a cultural discourse in support of a land ethic. While wrestling with the potential pitfalls of economic development, they articulated an early brand of ecological science and crafted complex literary responses to industrial progress. Importantly, this early national discourse also laid the foundation for the next generation of agrarian writers, including Susan Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau. We cannot fully appreciate the "environmental imagination" of these American Romantics, however, until we position their work in the context of an earlier tradition. After dwelling at length on the work of Jefferson, for example, we can better understand Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) as a radical statement on the moral and material economy of the individual as well as a retrospective revolutionary text. In the end, Thoreau's economic polemic, so often celebrated by environmentalists, responded not merely to the market capitalism of his contemporaries but to a long history of land use and abuse in New England and North America.<sup>28</sup>

### *Pastoral, Georgic, and Agrarian Traditions*

Because Jefferson offers a vocabulary to critique industrialism and state hegemony, in the past two centuries his ideas have consistently resurfaced in the tenets of agrarian regionalism and back-to-the-land movements. In the 1850s, Thoreau adapted Jefferson's agrarian philosophy to ridicule the dehumanization of the New England farmer, whose dependence on the market economy had plunged him into a life of "quiet desperation." In *Walden*, Thoreau attempted to reclaim an agrarian ethic of republican simplicity by distancing himself from market relations. His bean field, for instance, involved a system of agricultural production predicated on the

preindustrial tradition of common use, while his cabin entailed squatter's rights on Emerson's woodlot. Meanwhile, in the late nineteenth century, the Populist Party based its political platform on Jefferson's ideal of democratic land ownership, and a generation later, such regional writers as Willa Cather and Robert Frost, Liberty Hyde Bailey of the Country Life Movement, and the authors of the Southern Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930) all wielded Jeffersonian doctrine as a weapon against the forces of modernity and global capitalism.<sup>29</sup>

This agrarian tradition has a close kinship with pastoral literature. Indeed, because the agrarian ideal expresses some of the same impulses and desires as the pastoral ideal, we cannot truly understand one without the other. Such scholars as Leo Marx and Raymond Williams have traced the roots of literary pastoralism back to the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, through the work of British writers like Alexander Pope, James Thomson, and William Cowper, and across the Atlantic into the writings of Crèvecoeur, Jefferson, and Thoreau. Marx, for one, distinguishes between two modes of the pastoral. He dismisses the nostalgic brand of popular or sentimental pastoralism, which retreats from historical reality by yearning for an emotional escape from the forces of modernity, and he praises the imaginative or complex pastoralism that employs the metaphor of "the machine in the garden" in order to challenge economic forces, like industrial technology, that threaten to upset social stability. Both agrarian and pastoral traditions represent a particular landscape, the so-called middle ground, but the pastoral involves a certain artistic reaction to historical change—an awareness of ecological destruction, an anxiety about economic progress, and a consciousness of the ethical impact of modernity.<sup>30</sup>

According to Marx, during the late eighteenth century, this form of complex pastoralism earned its fullest expression in Query XIX of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Hoping to prevent European manufacturing from corrupting America, says Marx, Jefferson mandated a

middle landscape of small farmers and independent freeholders. He plucked the pastoral ideal from its literary context, that is, and applied it to reality, thus advancing pastoralism as a guide to political economy. Indeed, Marx insists on the uniquely *pastoral* character of Jefferson's vision. He did *not* endorse an agricultural system quite like that of the French physiocrats and English agronomists, who sought to maximize the efficiency and productivity of the rural economy, but rather he promoted small-scale farming practices as a means to preserve the moral character of American citizens, to protect the integrity of their republican virtue. As the standard for the ideal society, Jefferson rejected economic profit in favor of independence and self-sufficiency. In other words, he expounded a pastoral form of the agrarian ideal.<sup>31</sup>

But there are problems with this kind of pastoralism, too. For one thing, it downplays class differences in the rural economy. In Raymond Williams's view—more in line with Karl Marx than Leo Marx—the pastoral mode functions as an ideological construct that disguises the reality of economic and environmental history. On the one hand, pastoralism may have evolved as a radical reaction against economic luxury and modernity. Resistant to changes in the land, eighteenth-century poets like Oliver Goldsmith and George Crabbe articulated a potent critique of the capitalist forces that enclosed the commons and eroded rural communities. On the other hand, country landlords often enlisted pastoral ideology to glorify a golden past and so erase the reality of the market economy that created their wealth. They set the country against the city in an imaginary contrast that idealized the leisure and luxury of their rural estates and thereby elided the social effects of agrarian capitalism. In short, the pastoral critique of the city too often ignores the integrated economic system that exploits both land and labor while concentrating wealth in the hands of country landowners and urban manufacturers alike. According to historian Staughton Lynd, this type of pastoralism also influenced Jefferson's understanding of political

economy. By constructing a false dichotomy between the city and the country, he misconstrued economic history as a conflict between farmers and capitalists, when in fact southern planters and northern manufacturers often shared a common interest at least until the War of 1812. Put another way, as a disciple of the country ideology of radical whig writers in England, Jefferson saw political economy as a struggle between the landed and the moneyed classes rather than between the rich and the poor.<sup>32</sup>

Other scholars have insisted on a fundamental difference between pastoral and georgic modes of literary production. Timothy Sweet and Benjamin Cohen, for example, describe the pastoral ideal as a romantic fantasy of rural leisure and bucolic harmony, whereas the georgic ethic involves a relationship between humans and the natural world based on direct experience and the reality of labor. According to Sweet, we must move beyond the troubled paradigm of wilderness preservation and confront “our cultural engagement with the whole environment.” This line of argument views the pastoral tradition as escapist and resistant to the fact that humans must *use* nature, not simply look at it, in order to subsist. In contrast, these critics suggest that georgic literature promotes a life of labor, cultivation, and community value; a georgic ethic ties people to the land and produces virtue by the sweat of the brow. Ultimately, however, Sweet and Cohen overplay the distinction. The terms pastoral and agrarian may both refer to a physical condition of the landscape, a middle ground between civilization and the wilderness, and most georgic poetry of the eighteenth-century was set within a pastoral condition. Moreover, works like Thoreau’s *Walden* express both pastoral and georgic tendencies; certain types of rural retreat involve a great deal of hard work; and the act of authorship itself constitutes a form of labor that brings the writer into a deeper, more direct relationship with the whole environment.<sup>33</sup>

This study prefers to blur the line between pastoral and georgic modes of literature, between pastoral and agrarian ideals. In the process, the following chapters tease out a broader discourse of environmental ethics running through multiple genres—poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction, private letters and public addresses. The authors of these works harnessed a variety of literary techniques in order to challenge the growth economy as the sole standard of social progress, and in doing so they defined a different kind of progress, one that favored moral health above and beyond material wealth, one that promoted the progress of the individual and the production of better citizens, not bigger profits. If these writers did not belong to a unified movement, they still displayed a set of common concerns that urged a new land ethic in America, and they expounded a more ecological agrarian ideal. As historian Steven Stoll has illustrated, many of these figures embraced a system of agricultural improvement based on soil conservation and farm management, but for them, conservation represented more than an economic program; it stood for an ethic of social stability and rural occupancy, it supported the permanence of place, and it countered the trend of western emigration and expansion. Today, the agrarian vision of these “founding farmers” has inspired an important revival movement in American culture. Their work provides not just an insight into the past, then, but a model for the future.<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The definitive biography of Jefferson is Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*. For this brief sketch, I rely on the following more recent biographies: Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 24-63; R.B. Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson*, 15-35; and Kevin Hayes, *The Road to Monticello*, 174-90. For Jefferson's drafts of the Virginia Constitution, see *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Julian P. Boyd, et. al. (hereafter cited as *TJ Papers*), 1:329-86.

<sup>2</sup> Jefferson to Pendleton, 13 Aug. 1776, *TJ Papers*, 1:491-94. A brief note on the terminology: Throughout this study, I refer generally to the indigenous inhabitants of North America as "Indians," "American Indians," or "Native Americans," depending on context and the demands of syntax. Of course, these terms grossly oversimplify ethnic identity, but I risk them for the sake of convenience. Whenever possible, I name more specific affiliations, as with the Cherokees and the Iroquois. In recent years, academic trends have also prompted a departure from the general term "Americans" as a label for people of European descent residing in North America. Scholars often refer to these folks as "Euro-Americans" to differentiate them from Native Americans, and they distinguish between the United States as a political entity and North America as a continental landmass. In this sense, rather than "American literature" this study technically explores "U.S. literature." Occasionally, I follow suit and employ the terms "Euro-American" and "U.S." where clarification is necessary. Elsewhere, when the context is clear, I fall back on the catch-all "American" term, mostly for the sake of simplicity and prose rhythm.

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson to Edmund Pendleton, 13 Aug. 1776, *TJ Papers*, 1:491-94.

<sup>4</sup> For background on Bartram, I draw on the following: N. Bryllion Fagin, *William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape*; Ernest Earnest, *John and William Bartram: Botanists and Explorers*; and Thomas Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram*. The

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full title of Bartram's book is *Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws; Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians*, published in Philadelphia in 1791. When referring to this work, I quote from *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist's Edition*, ed. Francis Harper, first published in 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Jefferson produced an early draft of *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1781-82. In 1785, he published the first edition in Paris for private distribution. Two years later, a Paris publisher printed a translation without Jefferson's consent. The first authorized public edition of *Notes*, with Jefferson's corrections, was published in London in 1787. Throughout this study, I cite from William Peden's scholarly edition of *Notes*, first published in 1954. In Peden's edition, Jefferson's famous statement on the agrarian ideal appears in Query XIX, 164-65. For this reading of Jefferson's belief in the Saxon myth, which he derived from the so-called country ideology of radical whig writers like John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, and Henry St. John Bolingbroke, I draw broadly upon Ellis, *American Sphinx*, and Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*. In Jefferson's own writings, the Saxon myth appears most prominently in *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774).

<sup>6</sup> The first edition of *Letters from an American Farmer* was published in London in 1782. Legend has it that Crèvecoeur smuggled the manuscript through the port of New York in the bottom of a trunk full of botanical specimens. For Crèvecoeur's biography, I am indebted to Thomas Philbrick, *St. John de Crèvecoeur*, and Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America*, 106-34. Happily, when Crèvecoeur returned to America in 1783 to serve as a French diplomat, he located his two missing children in Boston. Despite his Tory sympathies, he also maintained his

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property at Pine Hill until 1787, when he sold the place, suggesting that perhaps he took an oath of loyalty to the Patriot cause before his flight in 1778.

<sup>7</sup> For a general overview of environmental discourse in this era, see Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 2-55; and Richard Judd, *The Untilled Garden*.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase “environmental imagination” alludes to Lawrence Buell’s ecocritical study, *The Environmental Imagination*.

<sup>9</sup> For a broad discussion of Jefferson’s political thought, see Hayes, *The Road to Monticello*. For the influence of Bolingbroke, see Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, and for the influence of Locke, see Mark Sturges, “Enclosing the Commons: Thomas Jefferson, Agrarian Independence, and Early American Land Policy, 1774-1789.” For an overview of U.S. land policy in this era, see John Opie, *Law of the Land*, 1-42. For a general view of how American founders derived the philosophy of classical republicanism (and country ideology) from radical whig writers in England, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*; and J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 506-52. Several historians have challenged the so-called “republican synthesis” theory of the American Revolution by emphasizing the influence of economic liberalism on the American founders. For examples of this “liberal counterthesis,” see Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, 1-33, 140-87; Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*, 1-40; and Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, 99-151.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the cultural shift from classical republicanism to economic liberalism from the 1790s to the 1820s, see Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order*; and Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*.

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<sup>11</sup> For this discussion, I draw upon several studies of agricultural history, including Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*; Benjamin Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*; Richard Judd, *Common Lands, Common People*; and Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow*. The work of Stoll, Cohen, and Donahue is sometimes referred to as the “new agricultural history” because it combines an impressive understanding of ecology and agricultural science with the methodology of the new social history. In other words, these scholars focus on the agroecological conditions of specific regions in order to illuminate the cultural meaning of everyday agricultural practices.

<sup>12</sup> In recent years, scholars from across the disciplines have worked to develop a full-fledged theory of the “sense of place.” For this discussion, I adapt my analysis from the cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (*Space and Place*) and literary ecocritics Kent Ryden (*Mapping the Invisible Landscape*), Lawrence Buell (*The Environmental Imagination*), and Rick Van Noy (*Surveying the Interior*). I have also borrowed some terminology from Ian Marshall, who explores the “literary geography” of the Appalachian Trail in his ecocritical work *Story Line*.

<sup>13</sup> For these definitions, I have found especially helpful Michael Branch and Daniel Philippon’s introduction to *The Height of Our Mountains*. Branch and Philippon outline several distinctions between place, region, and bioregion, while drawing upon all three categories to establish a definition of literary natural history.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts*, was first published in New York in 1794. Carver’s description of the Falls of St. Anthony appears in *Jonathan Carver’s Travels Through America*, ed. Norman Gelb, 83-87. Lewis’s account of the Great Falls of the Missouri appears in *The Journals of Lewis and Clark Journals*, ed. Frank Bergon, 160-64.

<sup>15</sup> Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 262.

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the textual history of *A Sand County Almanac*, see Curt D. Meine, “Moving Mountains: Aldo Leopold and *A Sand County Almanac*.”

<sup>17</sup> Again, for the republican interpretation of the American Revolution, see Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*; Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*; and Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 506-52. For the liberal interpretation, see Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, 1-33, 140-87; Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*, 1-40; and Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, 99-151.

<sup>18</sup> In *The Elusive Republic*, Drew McCoy provides an invaluable analysis of these debates about political economy during the early national era. I have also relied upon Lawrence Peskin’s *Manufacturing Revolution*, an excellent study of the development of domestic manufacturing from the 1760s to the 1830s, and Tamara Plakins Thornton’s *Cultivating Gentlemen*, which describes the relationship between conservative agrarian ideals and the agenda of economic improvement among upper-class Bostonians in the antebellum United States.

<sup>19</sup> Jefferson to William Ludlow, 6 Sept. 1824, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 583.

<sup>20</sup> McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 13-47. See also David Hume, “Of Commerce” and “Of Refinement in the Arts” in *Selected Essays*.

<sup>21</sup> For more on Smith’s social ethics, see Jerry Evensky, *The Moral Philosophy of Adam Smith*. Several literary critics have also discussed Smith’s theory of sympathy in relation to the early American novel. See for example, Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling* and Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy*.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 126-27.

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<sup>23</sup> The French physiocrats, François Quesnay and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, also had a major impact on Jefferson's economic philosophy. Turgot's *Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth* was written in 1766, printed in journal form in 1769-70, and published separately in 1776. In that work, Turgot further develops Quesnay's theory that the land is the only true source of national wealth.

<sup>24</sup> For Zinn's perspective on the American Revolution, see *A People's History of the United States*, 59-102. Eric Nelson's argument appears in *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, 195-233. For an analysis of Gifford Pinchot's conservation program, see Thomas Wellock, *Preserving the Nation*, 34-45.

<sup>25</sup> Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 2-55.

<sup>26</sup> Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 26-55. See also McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 190-95, for more on Thomas Malthus and his influence on Jefferson and Madison. Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798-1830) played a major role in debates about political economy in the early Republic, and both Jefferson and Madison read it thoughtfully. Malthus anticipated many later arguments about biological carrying capacity and the ecological limits of agricultural production. He insisted that political economy must honor the natural limits of the planet. But Malthus was also a proponent of economic self-interest and he insisted that government should not help the poor, because that would encourage them to procreate, which would in turn create a condition of scarcity and lower everyone's standard of living. Let the poor starve, Malthus said, to save the rest of society.

<sup>27</sup> White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, 27, 196.

<sup>28</sup> Again, the phrase "environmental imagination" refers to Lawrence Buell's landmark study of Thoreau and subsequent nature writers, *The Environmental Imagination*. Buell also

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points to Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* (1850) as a foundational work of American nature writing, although it lacked influence among later writers.

<sup>29</sup> This paragraph first appeared in a footnote to my article, "Enclosing the Commons" in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. For more on the legacy of Jefferson as an agrarian spokesman, see Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*. For more on agrarian ideology in Jefferson's day, see Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, 69-77 and 129-32, and Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*, 253-76. While this paragraph draws a straight line from Jefferson to Thoreau, the relationship is actually more crooked than that. In fact, Thoreau's challenge to the private property system represents a form of radical agrarianism more closely related to Thomas Paine's arguments in the pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1797). The editors of a recent anthology of American farm writing also provide a helpful definition of the agrarian tradition that often views Jefferson as a founder. "Agrarianism stands as a set of political, economic, ecological, and social convictions rising from the period when agriculture was central to American life," they write. "We take agriculture here in its root sense of tending and caring for the land, not just in its current economic meaning of an industry that produces commodities.... In keeping with this, we define as agrarian those who speak to something beyond the purely economic value of American farming" (Hagenstein, Gregg, and Donahue, eds., *American Georgics*, 4).

<sup>30</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, are the two most definitive studies of pastoral literature and they remain essential reading for anyone interested in the field. Terry Gifford offers a comprehensive summary of pastoral scholarship in his Routledge critical guide, *Pastoral*.

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<sup>31</sup> Marx's discussion of Jefferson appears in *The Machine in the Garden*, 74, 88, 117-44. Lawrence Buell also provides a helpful definition of "pastoral ideology" in *The Environmental Imagination*, 32-33.

<sup>32</sup> See Williams, *The Country and the City*, 74-79, 87-85; and Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, 16-17, 247-67. Timothy Sweet makes a similar argument about Crèvecoeur and Jefferson, and their effort to downplay class differences, in *American Georgics*, 97-121.

<sup>33</sup> For more on the distinction between pastoral and georgic modes, see Sweet, *American Georgics*, 1-5; Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*, 9-11, 18-23, 197-203; and Ethan Mannon's unpublished dissertation, *The Earth Workers*. See also Michael Ziser, "Walden and the Georgic Mode," in *More Day to Dawn*, eds. Sandra Petrulionis and Laura Dassow Walls, 171-88.

<sup>34</sup> Amusingly, Stoll dubs this discourse of soil conservation in the early Republic the "dunghill doctrines." In *Larding the Lean Earth*, a superb study of manure, soil science, and agricultural improvement, Stoll writes, "With so much converging on it, the furrow slice became a central location where Americans contemplated nature and economy in the early nineteenth century. Uninspired by distant river valleys, disdaining those statesmen who urged Americans to break the continent to the plow, an important minority of farmers and planters decided to dig in, preferring to rethink agriculture rather than remake their world on the frontier" (48). In short, Stoll concludes, "Improvement suggested a way for communities to hold or slow the extension of plowland into fields, forests, and waters, and it offered an opposite kind of change from the blaze and shift of nineteenth-century America" (167).

## Chapter One

### Cultivating Virginia: Agricultural Surveys and Ecological Anxieties

Textbooks on the subject of American history typically include a chapter or two reviewing the sectional conflict that finally resulted in the U.S. Civil War. Such surveys often reduce the major causes of disunion to a series of pat explanations easily accessible to the eighth-grade mind. The war had something to do with slavery, they say, and the question of whether new states entering the union would adopt a slave system, like the South, or a free labor economy, like the North; and it had something to do with states' rights and the power of the federal government to impose tariffs that would control the commerce of individual states. Indeed, according to the textbooks, the slavery debate in antebellum America had deep roots in political economy, which boil down to a neat set of regional differences: the industrial North versus the agrarian South, the factory system versus the plantation economy, banks and merchants versus planters and landowners, Federalists versus Republicans, Hamilton versus Jefferson.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, these simple dichotomies do not tell the whole story. In crucial ways, they ignore the variety of economic production in antebellum America and overlook the common ground that spanned the Mason-Dixon line. Northern manufacturers and southern planters, for instance, occupied different ends of the same system of agrarian capitalism and both depended upon international markets to meet their profit margins. Northern textile mills purchased southern staples, and northern merchants in the carrying trade shipped southern crops abroad. Both regions relied on agriculture as the mainstay of political economy, the foundation for the wealth of separate states and the united nation. Meanwhile, many farmers in the South, especially those living above the thousand-foot line in the Appalachians, owned few or no slaves

and worked their land with family labor. In the North, too, class differences existed between self-sufficient small farmers and market-oriented gentleman farmers, while states like New York and Pennsylvania contained their own western frontiers populated by Native Americans and white settlers who scratched out a living through hunting, trapping, and practicing a rugged brand of slash-and-burn agriculture. Below these mountain regions and east of these border zones, however, different agricultural environments did in fact characterize the North and the South, giving credence to some of those categories that structure a textbook summary.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the colonial era, the potential of the southern climate to produce such lucrative cash crops as rice, tobacco, flax, and indigo invited the growth of a plantation economy, which in turn promoted the development of slavery. Following the Revolution, the South continued to participate in this mercantile arrangement, maintaining a large-scale system of agricultural production that earned capital by exporting its raw materials abroad. This system supported a class of wealthy landowners who were often heavily in debt to British banks, which provided an additional incentive to exploit both land and labor. Most plantations held too many acres under cultivation to sustain soil fertility. Planters grew the same crops on the same fields in successive years without fallow or rotation, and they did not raise enough livestock to properly manure the land and prevent soil exhaustion. Instead, as fields became depleted and yields declined, planters directed their slaves to clear new land, thus accelerating the problems of deforestation and erosion. This shifting pattern of monoculture eventually drove the planters even deeper into debt. Their farms became unprofitable, and in order to support their slaves and repay foreign debts, they were forced to put more land into production. Some began speculating in western lands to make ends meet, while others declared bankruptcy and emigrated across the Appalachians to begin the cycle of destruction all over again.

In contrast, many farmers in the North practiced a system of diversified agriculture known as convertible husbandry. They devoted their lands to livestock production, constructing barns and pens to enclose their animals, whose dung they collected to manure their fields. They raised sheep and cattle for the renewable commodities of milk, butter, and wool, which they sold to both foreign and domestic markets. They owned fewer acres than southern planters but grew a greater variety of crops. As students of agricultural science, forest conservation, and ecosystem management, they rotated their fields, applied manure, and planted cover crops to restore soil fertility, thus creating ecological systems that supported sustainable yields. According to historian Steven Stoll, these commercial farmers of the North cycled nutrients through a limited landscape, whereas planters in the South required a constant supply of new land to feed their system of production. After the War of Independence, some northerners integrated their farms with the new system of domestic manufacturing. They built water-powered mills and imported different species of sheep to produce wool for the textile industry, effectively transforming the countryside into an organic machine. During the first half of the nineteenth century, gentleman farmers in the North often disdained the trend of western emigration, which upset social stability and encouraged a brand of unfettered democracy dangerous to their class interests while also weakening the political power of their home states. In response, they expounded a doctrine of agricultural improvement grounded in convertible husbandry. A better land ethic, they believed, would help promote the permanence of place.<sup>3</sup>

In the early Republic, the state of Virginia occupied a middle ground between these regional poles. Ever since John Rolfe's experiments in the seventeenth century, Virginia plantations had cultivated tobacco as their main cash crop. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Tidewater planters produced great quantities of this "sot-weed" for export, but at the end of

the century many of them transitioned to wheat production to capitalize on a grain shortage in Europe. All along, the planters grew what they called “Indian corn,” or maize, both as a market commodity and as a staple to feed their slaves. While most Virginia farms followed this three-crop system—tobacco, wheat, and corn—they did not resemble the southern plantations that often dominate our image of the antebellum South. Unlike the agrarian factories of South Carolina and Georgia, which produced rice and cotton, the typical Virginia plantation consisted of several medium-sized farms. These farms were mostly devoted to tobacco, but during the late eighteenth century, a regional revelation occurred. A small minority of planters recognized that tobacco culture had ruined the land base and they began to diversify their agricultural production in order to remain financially solvent and to achieve more economic independence from European creditors. In the process, they articulated an agrarian ideal that echoed that of the northern improvers. They called for a new era of rural occupancy and intensive cultivation, and they glorified the independent, freeholding American farmer who worked his land in a more sustainable fashion.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Jefferson was among the planters who preached this message of agricultural reform. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, his first and second inaugural addresses, and much of his personal correspondence, Jefferson described his ideal America as a loose confederacy of states united in a republic and rooted in the soil. He imagined that available lands in the West would allow a majority of citizens to participate in agricultural labor, preferably as small farmers who sold their surplus produce to the market while maintaining a basic level of self-sufficiency. Writing to John Jay in 1785, Jefferson argued that land policies favorable to small farmers would create a more stable society: “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independant [*sic*], the most virtuous, and they are tied to the country and

wedded to it's [*sic*] liberty and interests by the most lasting bands." Beneath this agrarian ideal, however, Jefferson voiced a number of local anxieties about tobacco culture, soil exhaustion, and the curse of slavery, while in his *Farm Book* he recorded an ambitious effort to restore the fields of Monticello through a seven-year cycle of crop rotation. He designed a new moldboard plow, he imported new varieties of seeds and sheep, and his son-in-law invented a new method of contour plowing. Meanwhile, in a collection of letters written to the English agronomist Arthur Young and published in 1801, George Washington complained that American farmers had ruined the very land base that defined their cultural identity. Washington worked to diversify his crops at Mount Vernon and even made plans to rent his lands to English farmers schooled in the art of soil improvement. During the War of 1812, John Taylor of Caroline published a series of essays, eventually collected under the title *Arator*, promoting agricultural reform in Virginia. And a few years later, on 12 May 1818 before the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, James Madison delivered a remarkable address, in the form of an environmental jeremiad, urging his fellow planters to adapt their systems of production to the natural limits of the land.<sup>5</sup>

An obvious tension exists between what these writers said and what they did, but this tension—this slippage between rhetoric and reality—makes fertile ground for a literary analysis. Even as planters like Jefferson and Madison advocated agricultural reform, they operated unsustainable plantations, grew soil-exhausting crops, and forced slaves to labor on their farms, so their ideal vision of Virginia certainly does not correlate with the actual condition of the state. In the years leading up to the Civil War, southern agriculture consistently failed to respect ecological realities, and the economic demands of the plantation system prevented much of the necessary reform. But Virginia's regional location placed it between the big plantations of the Deep South and the commercial farms of the North, a geographic situation that further

contributed to the dissonance of its agricultural discourse. The tension inherent in this discourse, the very paradox of Jefferson's agrarian ideal, lends itself to a literary interpretation. In such works of complex pastoralism as *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the rhetoric of the text embodies both personal anxiety about destructive land-use practices and a visionary ideal of a better future, a more harmonious form of political economy. Together, these Virginia writers developed an ethical critique of the plantation system, an economic regime that threatened their own independence by plunging them into debt and exhausting their lands.

In this sense, we might say that the agrarian ideal emerged in response to ecological reality. Jefferson, Washington, and Madison understood that the plantation economy could not sustain itself and that it threatened to destroy the very resources upon which the republic relied. They realized that their own methods of production could not promise a lasting land tenure in Virginia and that many farmers had already fled the state in search of a fresh start. On the personal level, they never broke free of their own self-interest as wealthy planters, but on a rhetorical level they learned to criticize their own destructive practices. Responding to a number of cultural and environmental problems, they constructed the agrarian ideal as a model for a more sustainable system of land management. A nation of small farms, intensive cultivation, and convertible husbandry, they argued, would respect the limits of the land while promoting self-reliance, economic independence, and republican virtue. Simply put, their version of the agrarian ideal envisioned a more ecological nature's nation.

#### *Cultivating a Sense of Place: Jefferson's Regional Survey*

Near the end of the War of Independence, less than a year before the decisive Battle of Yorktown, the British Army swept across the state of Virginia in an effort to intercept supply

lines and so break the back of the Patriot cause. In January of 1781, troops under the command of Benedict Arnold marched into Richmond, occupied the capitol, and shortly abandoned it. In the fray, Thomas Jefferson, then serving as governor, retreated home to Monticello, to the safety of his farm and his books. But the following June, a detachment of British cavalry stormed through Charlottesville on a direct path toward Jefferson's mountain. Disgracefully, the author of the Declaration of Independence fled the scene as enemy soldiers burned his crops and butchered his livestock. Along with the fall of Richmond, this raid cut deep into Jefferson's pride, inflicting a mark of shame that he would remember for the rest of his life. But worse, it threatened the sanctity of his domestic sphere, targeting his land, his livestock, his home ground. He had always regarded Monticello as a safe haven, a pastoral refuge from the evils of the industrial world, and now the British war machine had invaded his garden, uprooted his agrarian ideal.<sup>6</sup>

Admittedly, the British presence in Virginia had less to do with their animosity toward Jefferson and more to do with a deliberate military strategy. Two years earlier, the British Army had renewed its campaign in the American South, where forces led by Charles Cornwallis intended to subdue the Carolinas and persuade local Loyalists to rise up against the Revolution. By 1781, after initial success, Cornwallis headed north to consolidate his troops with Arnold's operation in Virginia. But later that year, commanded by General George Washington and bolstered by the French alliance, the Continental Army bottled up the British on a neck of the Chesapeake, and in October, Cornwallis finally surrendered. That victory would become the subject of patriotic tributes in print and painting, thus securing the fame of Washington, who had stoically defended America and heroically defeated the British on his home turf in Tidewater Virginia. After the war, Washington took leave of public duty and devoted himself to the

management of Mount Vernon, a symbolic gesture that earned him comparisons to the Roman general Cincinnatus who had likewise retired from the military to a life of farming.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the allure of rural retreat, both Jefferson and Washington would soon return to public service and further solidify their place in the history books. But the War of Independence had a profoundly different effect on these two Virginians. It transformed one into a national hero and tarnished the reputation of the other. After the raid on Monticello, Jefferson resigned his post as governor, and the Virginia House of Delegates launched an inquiry into his negligence during the war. Later that year, while Washington claimed victory at Yorktown, Jefferson lost a child to sickness, his wife became ill during childbirth—she would die the following year—and he suffered his own injuries after falling from a horse. The two men also took different measures to cope with the turmoil of the times. Washington engaged in practical efforts of military management, disciplined his troops, organized supply lines, mapped routes of transportation and communication. Jefferson, on the other hand, attempted to control the chaos of the Revolution through language, through the medium of text.

In the fall of 1780, François Marbois, secretary of the French legation in Philadelphia, had distributed a list of twenty-two questions about the American colonies designed to gather intelligence that would enable his country to evaluate their new political allies. Marbois solicited information about geographic features, economic productions, population demographics, cultural customs, and political institutions. As governor of Virginia, Jefferson accepted the task of providing answers about his home state, and by November he had already begun to compile material for the survey, although the invasion of Richmond soon interrupted his work. The following summer, after the raid on Monticello, during his wife's illness, and as the war reached its climax at Yorktown, Jefferson wrote the first draft of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, his effort

to respond in depth to Marbois's queries. Over the next few years, while the U.S. embraced its political independence and gained new territory in the trans-Appalachian West, Jefferson revised and expanded his text, eventually publishing the first edition in 1785. What began as a political task had become a personal obsession.<sup>8</sup>

One of Jefferson's first authorial decisions was to reorganize the original questions into a more logical order. As a result, *Notes* begins by mapping the natural and political boundaries of Virginia, then proceeds to detail the topography of the state, its rivers and mountains, its plant and animal productions, its climate, and the nature of its human inhabitants. The first part of the book functions as a natural history survey, while the second half enumerates Virginia's political, legal, and economic institutions—a rhetorical structure implying that human culture rests upon a natural foundation. Indeed, many scholars have read *Notes on the State of Virginia* as the ultimate expression of the myth of “nature's nation.” In the scene at Harper's Ferry, for example, Jefferson constructs a symbolic vision of America's post-revolutionary future as a peaceful order emerging naturally from the geology of the continent. In the rebuttal of Count Buffon's degeneracy thesis, which includes his famous description of the mammoth, Jefferson defends the size and vigor of American nature in order to prove that the New World possesses as much, if not more, potential for supporting civilization as the Old World. And in the chapter about manufacturing, he encourages the American people to draw their moral and material wealth straight from the soil of American lands.<sup>9</sup>

On the surface, Jefferson's book is a fairly mundane statistical report, a document full of facts and figures, tables and timelines, taxonomies and arcane arguments in response to eighteenth-century scientific debates. Indeed, much of the work feels like the product of a detached rationalism, the straightforward sensory experience of a mechanical Lockean mind. But

on another level, we can read *Notes* as a highly personal book, a work of literature both intimate and empirical. A month before the invasion of Richmond, in the early stages of composition, Jefferson declared in a letter to Charles-François D'Anmours, "I am at present busily employed for Monsr. Marbois without his knowing it, and have to aknolege [*sic*] to him the mysterious obligation for making me much better acquainted with my own country than I ever was before." For the next year, through personal and professional adversity, Jefferson completed the manuscript, then sent it to friends for commentary and revised it based on their feedback. Throughout his lifetime, he continued to modify the text, adding material and a map for the 1787 London edition, inserting an appendix about the Logan murders in the 1800 edition, and making changes in his personal copy well into the nineteenth century. In other words, while researching and reporting on Virginia, Jefferson wrote himself into a deeper relationship with his home state. He produced a literary geography with both personal and political dimensions, a regional survey with a sense of place.<sup>10</sup>

What Lawrence Buell has said of Thoreau's *Walden*, we might also say of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In the process of writing about place and striving for empirical accuracy, Jefferson engages in the "aesthetics of relinquishment." His narrative persona remains elusive throughout the text, dispersing into the environment and emerging only at rare moments: in his description of the Natural Bridge, in his measurement of the climate at Monticello, in the passage where he excavates an Indian burial mound. When he does write himself into the scene, he often invokes the second person pronoun, "You," to identify the subject position, and thus he decenters his authorial voice in favor of a narrative structure that locates agency outside of the self, in the natural world. At the Natural Bridge, he writes, "You involuntarily fall on 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 ach.”<sup>11</sup> Here, Jefferson’s personal location in the landscape, his “me,” emerges in the context of outward observation, an epistemological transaction in which the exterior terrain of Virginia inscribes itself on Jefferson’s interior world—and vice versa. Meanwhile, as a work of environmental nonfiction, *Notes* exemplifies the mimetic technique that Buell calls “dual accountability.” Because Jefferson employs both scientific and literary modes of representation, his text is simultaneously objective and subjective; that is, the cultural imagination filters and conditions the representation, but the text remains accountable to the facts of the physical world. In *Notes*, not only does Jefferson invoke romantic aesthetics to describe Virginia’s natural features, but he also oscillates between empirical representation and the cultural imagination; he constructs a textual map of what Virginia *is* and a personal vision of what it *might be*.<sup>12</sup>

In 1784, while serving in the Congress of the Confederation, Jefferson drafted a “Report of a Plan of Government for the Western Territory,” a proposal for surveying and settling the newly acquired lands between the Appalachians and the Mississippi according to a square-grid system that was later incorporated into the Northwest Ordinance of 1784 and the Land Ordinance of 1785. In the report, Jefferson called for the abolition of slavery in the new territories—a provision Congress later dropped—and imagined an economy of freehold farmers spreading across the continent to claim and occupy the lands left vacant after the war. That same year, Jefferson completed a revision of *Notes*—which also predicted the end of slavery—expanding the book to encompass the American West, an act of textual annexation encouraged by the presumed inevitability of territorial expansion. Whereas the first chapter of *Notes* delineates the boundaries of the state, disconnecting it from the West by listing its land cessions to the federal government, the second chapter reconnects Virginia to its western claims through commodity flows. Charting the rivers of the state, Jefferson stresses the problem of navigation, anticipates

improvement projects, and maps a network of trade routes to and from the interior of the continent. He suggests that the Potomac will eventually become the gateway to the West and thus forges a textual link between Virginia and the Ohio Valley. While proceeding westward, Jefferson casually exceeds the borders of the map he included in the 1787 edition, first shifting to a description of the Mississippi, “one of the principal channels of future commerce for the country” (7), and then speculating on the headwaters of the Missouri, despite the fact, he concedes, that the river is “no longer within our limits” (8).<sup>13</sup>

Although aware of political and topographical realities, Jefferson stretched the rhetorical geography of his text in order to suggest that America would need additional territory to prosper as an agrarian republic. His preferred form of political economy, a nation of freehold farmers engaged in small-scale agriculture, required a surplus of land to enable widespread property ownership, and much of the land east of the Appalachians was already occupied or exhausted. Indeed, we cannot separate Jefferson’s obsession with the West, which culminated in the Louisiana Purchase, from his understanding of agricultural production. In his view, the power and permanence of the new nation required that individual citizens migrate west, clear the forest or plow up the prairie, and produce an agricultural surplus for trade in the global market. On the one hand, this vision of a “republican empire,” as Peter Onuf calls it, justified an exploitative economy that extracted the fertility of the soil and shipped it abroad, a process that later agrarians have referred to as “mining the land.” On the other hand, Jefferson attempted to legislate a more permanent agriculture in America, envisioning the West as a place where small farmers could avoid the pitfalls of the plantation economy in the East. To achieve that end, the land simply demanded settlement, an assumption that many Americans regarded as an unequivocal fact and an inevitable destiny.<sup>14</sup>

As Thomas Hallock has suggested, the rhetorical goal of *Notes on the State of Virginia* was two-fold: to establish a uniquely American voice and to claim a geographic territory for this new republican identity. But in Jefferson's text there exists a tension between the environmental fact (the physical reality of Virginia) and the cultural fiction (the ideal of the republican farmer). Thus, Hallock reads *Notes* as a "cartographic text" that attempts "to mediate between a map and the terrain, between ideas and experience, between discourse and place." To promote a vision of the national future, says Hallock, Jefferson takes a similar stance toward Native Americans and the land, viewing both as opportunities for improvement, a space and a race upon which to realize the agrarian ideal. As evidence for this interpretation, we might consider the letter that Jefferson wrote to Brother Handsome Lake in 1802, in which he praised the Senecas for "going into a state of agriculture" and making more "productive" use of their land. Strikingly, Jefferson framed this back-handed compliment in a frank invitation to purchase lands from the Indians. In other words, he replaced the so-called middle ground of cultural accommodation with a normative myth of republican citizenship and agrarian land use. Through textual representation, he translated the actual place of Virginia into the potential place by erasing Indian land claims and rewriting American geography as an orderly Enlightenment grid.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, on the political level, *Notes* certainly attempts to conquer the land, but on a personal level, it also seeks to preserve a sense of place. While reading the book, we might imagine Jefferson at work on the manuscript, cultivating a deep attachment to Virginia. We might see him in the throes of empirical investigation, in a frenzied pursuit of facts, devoting his attention to the data of population surveys, poring through gazetteers and government documents, unrolling maps on the floor of his study, crawling across them, scrawling notes on scraps of paper, deliberating and dreaming the future. We can envision him studying the natural

histories of Mark Catesby and Peter Kalm, leafing through drafts of the Virginia Constitution, writing letters to scientific friends, and riding through the countryside in search of another layer of place. Indeed, sometimes his language seems to emerge almost as an incarnation of the land, and so we can picture him reeling with a headache atop the Natural Bridge, digging through an Indian grave, or gauging the winds at Monticello. While entertaining such images, we may find it difficult to dismiss Jefferson's text solely as a work of imperial science or territorial conquest. Instead, we can also read *Notes* as a chronicle of his commitment to place, a tribute to his home. Jefferson became native to his place by engaging the land through language, by investing his scientific study with memory, meaning, and a moral imperative.<sup>16</sup>

While Jefferson embraced a love of place, however, he also relished the politics of rejection. As early as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774) and the Declaration of Independence (1776), he adopted the country ideology of opposition groups in England as the foundation for his political theory. Inspired by the whigs, Jefferson challenged the mercantile system that exploited both the countryside and the colonies, favoring instead a decentralized economic order that located wealth and power in the land itself. Later, in his first and second inaugural addresses, and much of his personal correspondence, he continued to define his ideal government as a loose confederacy of states united in a republic and grounded in an agricultural economy. Believing that the health and safety of this agrarian society depended upon widespread land ownership, Jefferson rejected the traditional feudal system that restrained class mobility and access to property. He lobbied to reform inheritance laws, abolish entails, and eliminate primogeniture—the practice of leaving an estate to a single heir, usually the eldest son. He initiated an epic western survey and supported the creation of state and federal land offices to facilitate a more equal distribution of property among all members of society.<sup>17</sup>

To defend these efforts, Jefferson constructed a pastoral dichotomy that set the agrarian landscape in opposition to the city, which he regarded as the source of vice, luxury, and corruption. He abhorred the industrial centers of Europe, imagining the new factory system as crowded with degenerate workers, hopeless and hungry masses, cankers on the body politic, bleeding the state. He lamented the enclosure movement in the European countryside, which violated the common right of local peasants, displaced them from their agrarian homelands, and sent them into the city where they wasted away as wage slaves. To avoid that fate, Jefferson founded the first opposition party in the U.S. and vociferously rejected Alexander Hamilton's plans to industrialize America. When forced to choose between Hamilton's "paper economy" and the land-based economy of the French physiocrats and English agronomists—two groups who advanced the study of agricultural science, invented new methods of soil improvement, and cultivated large factory farms designed to maximize efficiency and production—Jefferson preferred the latter. Ultimately, however, these schemes of technological modernization still grated against his aesthetic and emotional desires. He remained skeptical about the social effects of enclosure and industrial agriculture, and he hoped to hold back this type of progress for as long as possible. Up until the 1800s, then, he embraced a pastoral-agrarian ideal, which led him to promote a sustainable economy of small farmers who would maintain a basic level of simplicity, frugality, and self-sufficiency while selling their surplus produce in a global market. Importantly, Jefferson's vision was not anti-capitalist. His mythic "cultivators of the earth" participated in a system of international agrarian capitalism, and his ideal republic relied on the existence of cheap and available lands. But his fundamental criteria for selecting a system of political economy was not entirely *economic*—it was also *ethical*.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, at any moment we might begin the collective finger-pointing, because the contradictions abound. Jefferson hated cities but he loved Paris. He wrote the Declaration of Independence but he owned slaves. He distrusted executive power but employed it aggressively to purchase Louisiana and enforce a trade embargo during his presidency. He idealized the small farm but his plantation lands consisted of almost 11,000 acres. He warned against luxury and excess but he had a taste for fine wines and expensive books. He took credit for American independence but remained deep in debt to British banks. He called for the abolition of slavery but he never emancipated his own slaves, and many scholars believe that he did more than simply own some of them. Indeed, we might cite a litany of examples and so roast Jefferson on the spit of hypocrisy. But it no longer suffices to repeat the crucifixion. Instead, in recent years, such historians as Joyce Appleby and Peter Onuf have moved us toward a deeper set of questions: Yes, Jefferson said one thing and did another—but why? What was he thinking? How did he use language, rhetoric, and literary persuasion to construct a set of ideals, and how did those ideals relate to political and economic reality? As Joseph Ellis has suggested, Jefferson’s mind was infused with an emotional idealism that encouraged him to think in terms of moral contrasts. In other words, he saw the political landscape as a series of absolute ethical conflicts: good versus evil, country versus city, liberty versus monarchy.<sup>19</sup>

This rhetoric of opposition runs throughout *Notes on the State of Virginia* and becomes especially pronounced in the many passages that take a comparative view of Europe and America. Early in the book, while surveying the plants and animals of the two continents, Jefferson establishes a geography of difference that shapes his perception of political economy. Later, in Query XIX, the well-known “Manufactures” chapter, he promotes the agrarian ideal by developing a moral contrast between farming and the factory system. First, he begins by drawing

a distinction between interior and exterior commerce, domestic and foreign manufactures. He admits that the War of Independence has obstructed transatlantic trade and forced many American families to fashion their own clothing from a “coarse, unsightly, and unpleasant” homespun that pales in comparison with the “finer” textiles from European factories (164). However, given their “attachment to agriculture,” says Jefferson, and their “preference for foreign manufactures,” Americans will inevitably return, as soon as possible, to producing raw materials for export (164). Both ethics and economics, in other words, invite a return to the soil. But Jefferson’s ideology of opposition, by setting America against Europe and agriculture against manufacturing, ignores the entangling realities of economic interdependence. He barely acknowledges the relationship between agriculture and manufacturing, implying that they are two different economic systems rather than two parts of the same global commercial capitalism, and in place of this complex relationship he substitutes an oversimplified dichotomy.<sup>20</sup>

In the next paragraph, Jefferson makes a more practical argument, suggesting that national economic policies must respect the physical conditions of the land. “The political oeconomists of Europe,” he writes, “have established it as a principle that every state should endeavour to manufacture for itself: and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstance which should often produce a difference of result” (164). In other words, the prevailing theory of political economy, a universal ideal, must be adapted to the geography of America, a particular reality. “In Europe,” says Jefferson, “the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator” (164). But in America, he insists, “we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman” (164). Because land remains abundant and available, agriculture is the obvious form of production. “While we have land to labour,” Jefferson declares, “let us never wish to see our citizens at a work-bench, or

twirling a distaff” (165). To conclude the chapter, he develops yet another moral dichotomy between *independent* farmers and *dependent* factory workers, employing a physiological metaphor that resembles the language of Renaissance humoralism: “The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution” (165). Thus, Jefferson defends his rejection of manufacturing with an emotional and apocalyptic image, a vision of the body politic suffering from the disease of an industrial economy.<sup>21</sup>

Now watch what happens in the following chapter. While examining Virginia’s “Subjects of Commerce,” Jefferson applies his structure of ethical opposition to a discussion of agricultural reform. He describes how, in 1758, the state exported its “greatest quantity” of tobacco, but that year marked the point of peak tobacco, so to speak, after which the planters of Virginia began a transition to wheat (166). Like Jefferson’s optimistic claims about the end of slavery in previous chapters, this narrative of agricultural reform whitewashes the facts on the ground. For instance, according to his own statistics, tobacco still constituted fifty-eight percent of Virginia’s total revenue from exports, compared to twenty-four percent for wheat (167). What’s more, Jefferson himself began growing tobacco at Monticello in 1768, well after the supposed transition to wheat had begun, and he did not diversify his farms until he retired from the cabinet in 1794. Then, in 1799, after five years of failed experiments with crop rotation schemes, he returned some of his fields to tobacco, which he grew for the rest of his life.<sup>22</sup>

Such realities remain buried beneath the ideals that dominate *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In Query XX, for example, he develops a moral contrast between tobacco and wheat

that essentially recasts his earlier opposition between the king and the colonies, Europe and America, manufacturing and agriculture. Consider these two descriptions:

*Tobacco*: “It is a culture of infinite wretchedness. Those employed in it are in a continued state of exertion beyond the powers of nature to support. Little food of any kind is raised by them; so that the men and animals on these farms are badly fed, and the earth is rapidly impoverished.”

*Wheat*: “Besides cloathing the earth with herbage, and preserving its fertility, it feeds the labourers plentifully, requires them only a moderate toil, except in the season of harvest, raises great numbers of animals for food and service, and diffuses plenty and happiness among the whole.” (166-68)

For Jefferson, tobacco functions as a kind of tyrant. It causes soil exhaustion just as the mercantile system drains wealth from the colonies. It exceeds ecological limits, upsets social stability, demands back-breaking labor, and leads to poverty and degeneracy. Meanwhile, wheat makes possible the agrarian ideal. It preserves soil fertility, requires little labor, and enables a life of pastoral leisure, thus yielding both economic independence and republican virtue.<sup>23</sup>

In retrospect, many of these claims appear somewhat dubious or simply false, and Jefferson seems surprisingly naïve about the problem of monoculture. He assumes that wheat will save the economy of the Old Dominion, miraculously solving the crisis of soil exhaustion while ensuring the happiness of its citizens. But in truth, like corn and tobacco, wheat can quickly “kill” the land when planted carelessly. By the twentieth century, wheat had actually become the new tobacco of American agriculture, a cash crop that controlled the landscape, exhausted the soil, and made farmers dependent on chemical fertilizers and the vagaries of the market. Some observers in Jefferson’s day were acutely aware of these pitfalls of monoculture.

While traveling through Virginia in 1795, the Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt reported that farmers in the state often planted wheat for six or seven years, without rotation, until their fields were entirely depleted. Likewise, the English farmer William Strickland, who took a tour of Virginia in the 1790s, was dismayed by the failure of its planters to rotate and diversify their crops. In Jefferson's defense, however, he had probably noticed that farmers to the north of Virginia, especially in Pennsylvania, had great success growing wheat when integrated with practices of convertible husbandry. As the passage above suggests, wheat farmers might preserve the fertility of their fields by raising animals, collecting their dung, and using their manure to improve the soil on their farms. Still, Jefferson's belief in the panacea of wheat relied on certain conditions in the global market. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, wars in Europe had created a massive grain shortage, allowing American farmers to capitalize on the elevated price of wheat and corn. After the War of 1812, though, grain prices began to plummet and finally bottomed out during the Panic of 1819. Thus, economic realities eventually gave the lie to Jefferson's dreams of wheat.<sup>24</sup>

In the pastoral design, there always exists an external force threatening to invade the arcadian garden and corrupt its happy inhabitants. In Query XIX, as we have seen, Jefferson depicted the manufacturing economy of Europe as a menace to America, a wicked regime hovering on the margins of the continent and plotting an industrial takeover. Later, he cast Hamilton, the Federalists, and the industrial North as an equally malicious threat to the agrarian ideal, an oppositional outlook that fed the moral indignation of the South in the years leading up to the Civil War. But often the evil exists within the garden as well. Thus, in Query XX, tobacco becomes a sort of serpent rising up within the agrarian landscape to poison the farmer, ruin the land base, and corrupt republican virtue. Along comes wheat to restore the field, but in

Jefferson's contrarian mind, yet another layer of evil resides within the solution, this time in the form of the grain weevil. After extolling the virtues of wheat, Jefferson warns of the potential danger of the weevil, recounting the various methods for controlling its effects: storing the wheat in subterranean granaries, heating the wheat in wood-fire kilns, coating the hogsheads with lime before shipping the wheat, or threshing the grain and warming it with the chaff (168). All of these measures require a considerable amount of labor, attention to detail, and awareness of particular conditions. In other words, while wheat promises to rescue the agrarian ideal from the tyranny of tobacco, only agricultural science can save wheat from the evil of the weevil and so sustain the ideal.

Perhaps, then, we can also read Jefferson's tale of two crops as an allegory about place. Much has been made of his faith in land ownership as the key to republican virtue, and *Notes on the State of Virginia* certainly suggests that property rights will naturally produce more virtuous citizens. But as the story of wheat reveals, material conditions alone cannot improve the ethics of land use. Instead, the farmer must engage in the study of agricultural science; he must observe his crops, understand the climate of his farm, regulate the heat and moisture when he stores his harvest, and adapt his techniques according to regional circumstances and varying conditions. In short, he must become intimate with his land through labor; he must cultivate a sense of place. While no single crop can redeem the plantation system, neither will land ownership alone conserve America's finite resources and so save the nation from a spiral into social decay. Property rights and land ownership might prepare the ground for the pursuit of happiness, but a land ethic must emerge from some deeper source, from the cultural appreciation for particular places, from a value system that transcends the economic. Unlike David Hume and Adam Smith, Jefferson did not believe that material wealth would necessarily improve people's lives. Instead,

he suggested that happiness results from direct contact with the earth. Ultimately, he believed that republican virtue relies on the strength of place-based relationships, on the intimate study of nature and a deep connection between individual citizens, regional communities, and their home ground.<sup>25</sup>

*Letters from an American Cincinnatus: Washington's Agricultural Survey*

George Washington joined the revolutionary cause, at least in part, because he resented his own economic dependence on the British mercantile system, a financial power structure that made him subordinate to a distant authority. Like Jefferson, he hoped to achieve not just political freedom for his fellow Americans, but personal liberation from a debt-ridden ledger book. In fact, Washington's own independence movement began much earlier than 1776. After the Seven Years' War, the British rewarded him for his military service with a number of land grants in the Ohio Valley, a generous nest-egg that formed the basis of his personal wealth. In 1759, when he married Martha Dandridge Custis, the most well-endowed widow in Virginia, he became part owner of a family estate along the York River, a collection of three plantations consisting of nearly three hundred slaves and 18,000 acres of land. By the time of the War of Independence, Washington had amassed 6,500 acres of land around Mount Vernon (on the Potomac River) and had acquired more than a hundred slaves of his own, thus securing his position as a respected member of the Chesapeake elite.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the magnitude of this fortune, Washington fell into debt during the 1760s and began to question the financial sanity of his participation in the mercantile system. At the time, like most Virginia planters, he relied heavily on the growth of tobacco, which he sold on consignment through a London merchant, Robert Cary, in exchange for European goods.

Because Washington and his family had become conspicuous consumers of foreign manufactures, his debt to Cary continued to balloon until he felt himself at the mercy of the market. He protested that his tobacco failed to fetch a fair price in England and that Cary undercut the cost, which he probably did, to turn an easy profit. In response, Washington vowed to abandon tobacco at Mount Vernon, diversify his agricultural production, and transition to wheat, a keen effort of his own to play the market more favorably. Meanwhile, he learned to harvest the Potomac River for herring and shad, two species of fish that ran upstream to spawn in an annual cycle, bringing the Atlantic fisheries directly to his doorstep each spring. He built a mill to grind corn and wheat, and he bought a ship to transport his produce to foreign markets. Although the Custis estate continued to grow tobacco as its primary staple, Washington never planted it again at Mount Vernon, and for the rest of his life he experimented with different systems of crop rotation.<sup>27</sup>

After the War of Independence, he famously retired from public service and returned home to Mount Vernon, where he cultivated his legacy as the American Cincinnatus. According to secular gospel, Washington commanded respect as a brilliant soldier and a national hero, without whom America would have lost the war, but he nobly chose to relinquish his claim to power and humbly dedicate himself the soil, an act of remarkable republican virtue. Reinforced through popular iconography, this myth of public service and pastoral retreat became a central component of the agrarian ideal during the early Republic, a narrative cycle reenacted frequently among members of the Virginia dynasty. But for Washington, the myth meant more than public admiration: his back-to-the-land movement was entirely sincere, and he believed wholeheartedly that the new nation must keep its roots firmly in agricultural production.<sup>28</sup>

In 1786, Washington began a correspondence with Arthur Young, an English agronomist who promoted new agricultural practices based on principles of soil conservation and economic efficiency. Later, as President, Washington continued to exchange information with Young while also extending his social network to include John Sinclair, a Scottish politician, writer on political economy and finance, and first president of the British Board of Agriculture. In fact, the longest and most frequent letters that Washington wrote as President dealt with matters of agricultural reform, and upon his death in 1799, many of these letters became available to the public. In 1801, Arthur Young, in an effort to promote a more scientific agronomy, enlisted a London printer to publish his correspondence with the American President, and two years later, a printer in Alexandria, Virginia, brought forth a second edition that included those letters written to Sinclair. As an historical artifact, *Letters from His Excellency George Washington* (1803) deserves more attention than it has previously received. Not only does the work reinforce Washington's legacy as a Cincinnatus figure, it also demonstrates the significance of a transatlantic discourse of agricultural improvement during the early Republic. Ironically, a decade after rejecting the British empire, the same Revolutionary leaders looked to English agricultural techniques to improve their own land-use practices in America, and Washington himself engaged in this transatlantic exchange. Viewed as a work of literature, *Letters from His Excellency* constitutes an agrarian jeremiad. It traces a narrative arc from Mount Vernon, to the presidency, and back to rural retirement; it delivers a potent critique of the failure of American agriculture to adapt to ecological limits; and it guides readers toward a better land ethic by persuading them to follow the President's personal example.<sup>29</sup>

The collection begins with several letters from Washington to Young, written at Mount Vernon from 1786 to 1788. Casting himself as a genuine republican, Washington stressed his

departure from public service and his devotion to the improvement of his farms. “Agriculture has ever been amongst the favorite amusements of my life,” he humbly declared, “though I have never possessed much skill in the art.”<sup>30</sup> After receiving a copy of Young’s *Annals of Agriculture*, a compilation of firsthand reports about British agriculture, Washington began to apply its methods to his own land. Writing to Young, he ordered two new ploughs from England and several varieties of seeds to facilitate a plan of crop rotation. He described the manure methods at Mount Vernon, pondered the potential of sheep farming in Virginia, and bragged about the construction of a new brick barn—evidence that he hoped to practice convertible husbandry much like a northern farmer.

But a distressing ecological anxiety invaded Washington’s agrarian idyll. He grumbled that his fellow planters had exhausted their soil with tobacco and all but destroyed the land base of Virginia. In a snarky parenthetical, he admonished the degradation: “The system of agriculture (if the epithet of system can be applied to it,) which is in use in this part of the United States, is as unproductive to the practitioners as it is ruinous to the land-holders” (6). Returning to Mount Vernon after the Constitutional Convention, he expressed growing discontent over the “use, and abuse” (12) of land in Virginia: “I must observe that there is, perhaps, scarcely any part of America, where farming has been less attended to than in this State. The cultivation of tobacco has been almost the sole object with men of landed property, and consequently a regular course of crops has never been in view” (11). Rising to a pitch of frustration, Washington suggested that a better land ethic would bring more happiness to America: “I am led to reflect how much more delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making improvements on the earth, than all the vain glory which can be acquired from ravaging it, by the most uninterrupted career of

conquests” (13-14). Like Jefferson, Washington feared that the decline of agriculture would lead to a dangerous moral degeneracy.

Yet Washington also regarded his home state as the best place in America, the cradle of the agrarian republic. Upon his arrival in New York (and then Philadelphia) to assume the office of President, he wrote fondly of the land he left behind and began to see its agricultural output as part of a national economic system. Mapping the union through a kind of climate discourse, he located his home ground between the extremes of North and South. Wheat crops in the North had recently suffered from the Hessian fly, while small grains in the South struggled in the oppressive heat, so the middle-Atlantic promised the best prospect for agricultural development. “In a word,” Washington concluded, “was I to commence my career anew, I should not seek a residence north of Pennsylvania, or south of Virginia” (20). Along with Jefferson, he embraced the Potomac dream, viewing his home river as the gateway to the West and the future “grand emporium” of the United States (21). On a copy of Lewis Evans’s map of North America, which he sent to Young, Washington traced the best lands in red ink, most of them in his home state. Similar to *Notes on the State of Virginia*, then, *Letters from His Excellency* functioned as a literary geography that constructed an imperial vision of the continent and projected its future settlement. Writing to Young, Washington predicted a win-win situation. If English farmers emigrated to America, they could profit on the prime land and also help to improve the quality of American agriculture.<sup>31</sup>

Like Jefferson, Washington emphasized the different circumstances in England and America, but unlike Jefferson, he regarded the British agricultural system as superior. With another biting parenthetical, he explained the way American farmers worked the land:

[T]he aim of farmers in this country (if they can be called farmers) is, not to make the most they can from the land, which is, or has been cheap, but the most of the labour, which is dear; the consequence of which has been, much ground has been *scratched* over and none cultivated or improved as it ought to have been: whereas a farmer in England, where land is dear, and labour cheap, finds it in his interest to improve and cultivate highly, that he may reap large crops from a small quantity of ground. That the last is the true, and the first an erroneous policy, I will readily grant; but it requires time to conquer bad habits. (22)

In this comparison, economic and ethical terms are intertwined. Washington condemns the lazy practice of “scratching” the land, contending that Americans must learn “to conquer bad habits.” Meanwhile, he praises the frugality of the English farmer, who “finds it in his interest to improve and cultivate highly,” a “true” method that promises financial profit and moral elevation. A year later, sounding the same note, Washington complained that most farmers in Virginia continued the “constant cultivation” of tobacco and Indian corn, “two very exhausting plants” (53), but he also suggested that a transition to wheat was underway, “and as this prevails the husbandry improves” (54). Indeed, said Washington, some farmers in America had developed a more sustainable agriculture and many of them resided in Pennsylvania. During his time in Philadelphia, Washington came to admire these northern improvers and hoped to see his own state follow their lead.

At one point, Young asked Washington for permission to print his observations in the *Annals of Agriculture*. Although he declined the invitation, fearing that the publicity would appear “as a piece of ostentation” (16), Washington agreed to gather a wealth of information about American agriculture and forward it to Young, a project of knowledge collection that

resembled Jefferson's response to Marbois's queries the previous decade. During the summer of 1791, in his official capacity as President, Washington launched a regional survey of the middle-Atlantic intended to facilitate agricultural improvement. He drafted a circular letter to a group of gentleman farmers in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, soliciting data about eight economic aspects of each state: the fee-simple price of land, the cost of renting farms, common modes of husbandry, crop yields, crop prices, livestock prices, the price of iron, and a list of taxes. Interestingly, Washington's survey occurred in the same year as Alexander Hamilton's *Report on the Subject of Manufactures*, delivered to Congress in December of 1791. As Secretary of Treasury, Hamilton published a series of three reports outlining his vision of political economy; in the first two reports, he recommended the consolidation of state debts and the creation of a national bank, a plan that Jefferson regarded as an unconstitutional effort to empower the federal government; in the third report, Hamilton called for a number of protective duties to promote the growth of domestic manufacturing. In fact, Washington's survey actually incorporated a few letters originally addressed to Hamilton, indicating a strong link between their economic agendas. Though Washington's focus remained on agriculture, Hamilton's desire for economic development—and his spirit of capitalism—seems to have rubbed off on the President, who now saw agricultural improvement as part and parcel of the national project.<sup>32</sup>

The first packet of survey material that Washington forwarded to Young included three letters from anonymous writers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, and established a hierarchy of land use in the middle-Atlantic. The Pennsylvania writer approached the survey with scientific precision and a tone of optimism, bolstering his report with several tables of statistics. He identified Franklin County as the ideal seat of agriculture—"few situations in America can claim a superior soil" (27)—and praised the influence of German farmers and their

descendants, who cultivated less land more intensively through the practice of convertible husbandry. In turn, the Maryland writer expressed a heightened awareness of environmental degradation. Tobacco and corn had depleted the fertility of the soil, and “this destructive course” (33) he blamed for impoverishing the state’s farmers and encouraging emigration. When planters relied on tobacco, he complained, “the land is wasted,” but still the monoculture persisted, causing two-thirds of Montgomery County to become “worn out” (33). Of the three, however, the Virginia writer delivered the most trenchant critique of his home state. “I never entertained very high opinions of our system of farming,” he began, “but what I had is certainly lower than it was” (39-40). Dubbing his fellow citizens “slovenly farmers,” he insisted that Virginia suffered not from a defect of the climate or natural fertility, but from “bad management” (40-41). When northern farmers bought land in Virginia, he observed, they made a decent living; in fact, he said, Quakers and Germans from Pennsylvania, settling in Loudoun County, had transformed it into the best farming region in Virginia. To redeem the state, the writer concluded, its farmers must begin to emulate the techniques of northern improvers.

Thus, *Letters from His Excellency* envisions Virginia as part of the middle-Atlantic region and links its farming future to the northern economy. Indeed, the structure of the text distances Virginia from the Deep South in a sort of symbolic secession from the plantation system. At the same time, Washington’s survey involved a form of collaborative authorship that reveals the political and social dimensions of agricultural improvement. He solicited information from an educated class of gentleman farmers who worked together, across state lines, to articulate a vision of national unity rooted in agrarian capitalism. The members of this community participated in commercial agriculture, believed in economic development, and saw a direct connection between agricultural improvement and national identity. In this sense,

Washington's letters advance a Federalist vision of political economy, as opposed to Jefferson's Republican ideal of the self-sufficient American farmer. Writing to John Sinclair in 1794, Washington emphasized this political angle: "I know of no pursuit in which more real and important services can be rendered to any country, than by improving its Agriculture" (116). To that end, before leaving office, Washington introduced a plan in Congress to establish a national agricultural society in America, a larger version of the more local societies that sprang up during the early Republic and a precursor, in a way, to the Department of Agriculture.<sup>33</sup>

Not every participant in the survey had complete faith in the potential of Young's system. Richard Peters, a lawyer from Philadelphia whom Washington called "one of the best practical farmers" (104) in Pennsylvania, expressed a certain degree of skepticism about the capitalist mentality of English agronomy. Peters, one of the founders of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, responded to Washington's queries in three separate letters, the first of which, originally sent to Hamilton, appeared to fully embrace the scientific method. Comparing four farms near Philadelphia, the letter took the form of an account book—a detailed analysis of inputs, outputs, and net profits—that accommodated Hamilton's agenda. At one point, Peters even suggested that American agriculture failed as an economic enterprise: "I find farming but a bad trade, when capital is calculated upon. There are few men of any talents, who cannot employ themselves in any other business to greater advantage. When I consider the actual profit of a farm, I am more astonished at the injustice and folly of those who have burdened the land with such heavy impositions" (70). Of course, we might see this statement as a warrant for Hamilton's plan to diversify the economy and develop manufactures, but we might also read it as tongue-in-cheek. Although the satirical tone may fall flat to our contemporary ears, Washington, for his

part, appreciated Peters as “a man of humour” (104), and indeed, sometimes Peters sounds a lot like Thoreau, who would later critique the property system with a similar sarcasm.<sup>34</sup>

After receiving the first installments of the survey, Young uttered amazement at the lack of capitalist efficiency in America. “Is it possible,” he wrote to Washington, “that the inhabitants of a great continent not new settlers, who live only to hunt, to eat, and to drink, can carry on farming and planting as a business, and yet never calculate the profit they make by *per centage* on their capital?” (87). In response to this question, Peters’s final letter chided Young for his incessant obsession with *calculation* and argued that American farmers profited not through financial *art* but through the bounty of *nature*. Bristling at Young’s “disagreeable comparisons” (95), Peters delivered a long, indignant polemic against the feudal institutions of Europe, aiming his ire at the aristocracy and the clergy. If Young wished to compare systems of land use, Peters retorted, he must acknowledge Europe’s “sable host of superfluous and pampered priests... who fatten on the property of the people,” second only to the wealthy landlords who oppress their tenants with “capricious terms of leasing lands” and so become “the principal engrossers” of national wealth (95). In contrast, said Peters, “our farmers are the proprietors of the soil they cultivate: they gather the honey, shear the fleece, and guide the plough, for themselves alone” (96). Though an American farmer may not generate the most money from his lands, he profits personally from his independence. Such a man “need not make nice calculations about per centage,” Peters boasted. “Instead of calculating, he labours and enjoys” (98-99).

Thus, Peters articulated a version of the agrarian ideal that sought to develop character more than capital; he implied that ethics ought to trump economics; and he believed that republican virtue meant more to national stability than economic development. Of course, Peters did not challenge capitalism and its progress narrative in the radical way that Thoreau would

later do. He regarded himself as a gentleman farmer, he engaged in commercial agriculture, and he hoped that “good general systems” and “the spirit of improvement” (70) would serve a national agenda. Nevertheless, he promoted a better balance between profit margins and the moral wealth of America, and in the process he sounded a strong note of skepticism against the starry-eyed futurism of Arthur Young.<sup>35</sup>

As an agrarian jeremiad, *Letters from His Excellency* follows a classic proposal structure: (1) What’s the situation now? (2) What’s wrong with it? (3) What should we do about it? In the first section, Washington testified to the conditions in Virginia, establishing the problems of soil exhaustion and ecological decline. While President, he conducted a regional survey gathering a range of statistical data and personal reports about the best and worst agricultural practices in America—a comparative analysis that made a case for reform. By the time of his second term, though, the question remained: What should we do? How can the nation move toward a better system of land management? Accordingly, Washington’s argument took a final turn toward the future. In December of 1793, in the last letter in the volume addressed to Young, Washington proposed a daring real estate scheme. Seeking to secure a retirement income, he decided to divide Mount Vernon into smaller plots and lease the land to tenant farmers. As a pension plan, the idea makes perfect sense, but in retrospect, given the prevailing image of Washington as a humble farmer, it may seem rather incongruous. The President envisioned himself retiring from office to become a feudal landlord living off the labor, not of black slaves, but of white sharecroppers. He insisted, however, that he did not intend to break his estate into too many parcels; instead, he sought tenants who could afford to manage 500-1000 acres of land. What’s more, he hoped to settle the land with “good farmers” (110) who were willing to sign long leases of a decade or two.

To attract potential tenants, Washington crafted his letter as a sales pitch. He celebrated the ideal location of Mount Vernon, which was set “between the extremes of heat and cold” along the banks of the Potomac River just miles from the future site of the nation’s capitol. “No estate in United America,” he claimed, “is more pleasantly situated than this” (106). He enclosed a map of the land and wrote glowingly of his home ground as the best spot in America. The region afforded “good roads,” he said, and “the best navigation to (and from) the Federal City, Alexandria, and George-Town” (106). His estate occupied “a high, dry, and healthy country,” which nevertheless provided access to “innumerable coves, inlets, and small marshes” (106), an intermingling of land and water that bespoke rural charm and natural abundance. He went on to provide details about the four farms he hoped to rent: Union Farm, Dogue Run Farm, Muddy-hole Farm, and River Farm. He described their soil as “a good loam” but also suggested that from the marshes “an inexhaustible fund of rich mud may be drawn, as a manure, either to be used separately, or in a compost, according to the judgment of the farmer” (106-07). Part propaganda, part personal devotion, the letter captured a love of place, but it also stressed the practical, agricultural use of the land. Not only did Washington seek to ensure his personal income, he also wished to promote rural stability and the permanence of place.

Indeed, Washington knew what kind of tenants he would welcome at Mount Vernon, and few of them came from Virginia. In fact, he preferred to rent his estate to English farmers schooled in the art of soil improvement. Such farmers, he believed, would bring a better land ethic to America. They understood the demands of a free labor economy, and they had learned through necessity to practice convertible husbandry, conserve natural resources, and manage their farms more sustainably. The land scarcity problem in England had forced these farmers to work within ecological limits, to overcome soil exhaustion, and to embrace the principles of

conservation. These English farmers would do for Virginia, Washington hoped, what the Dutch and Germans had done for Pennsylvania—improve the state’s agricultural practices, diversify its crop production, increase the value of its land, and elevate the moral character of its people. Three years later, in February of 1796, Washington repeated his plan to John Sinclair, but his letter, clouded with political double-talk, exposed the delicacy of the issue. Concerned about the propriety of an American President urging British citizens to abandon their homeland, Washington merely *implied* that he would like English farmers to defect to Mount Vernon; he did not *invite* them. At the time, certain British laws forbade mechanics from emigrating, and unsure if these laws applied to farmers as well, Washington danced around the issue. But still, the implication was clear: “I have but little expectation that arrangements will be made by the time limited [*sic*], for giving possession of the farms next year; nor should I wish to do it with such unskilful [*sic*] farmers as ours, if there was a prospect of obtaining them from any other country, where husbandry was better understood, and more advantageously practised” (121).

Ironically, this immigration policy courted British citizens who had become displaced during the enclosure movement, a national effort to maximize agricultural efficiency that Arthur Young had long supported. Throughout the eighteenth century, English landlords seeking to improve their lands (and their profit margins) had benefited from a number of Parliamentary laws that ended the right of peasants to farm, forage, graze livestock, and gather firewood on common lands. Many of these landlords enclosed their estates for pleasure grounds, or, following Young’s advice, converted their acreage to pasture for sheep production in order to play the market and capitalize on the price of wool. Evicted from their homelands, many small farmers moved to London, Manchester, or Birmingham and took jobs in the factory system; in effect, they became the victims of an exploitation economy, the collateral damage of Young’s scientific

agronomy. If Washington had such farmers in mind when he proposed his rental scheme, there is great irony in the fact. Apparently, he intended to become the American landlord of farmers formerly ruined by British landlords, and in turn those very victims of agricultural improvement would work to improve American agriculture.<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, hanging like a dark cloud over the entire plan was the silent fact of slavery. After the 1760s, Washington's transition from tobacco to wheat had rendered much of his labor force unnecessary and financially burdensome, but he felt a moral obligation to avoid selling his slaves, to keep families together, and to provide for their welfare until he could make other arrangements. In May of 1794, shortly after communicating his plan for English immigration, Washington indicated for the first time that he was serious about freeing his slaves. By selling his western lands and leasing Mount Vernon, he could reduce his economic dependence on slavery, provide an income for his family, and make emancipation financially feasible. One wonders if Washington imagined his personal plan as a pilot program for the entire plantation economy. He disdained the inefficiency and injustice of the slave system, and he lamented the failure of plantation owners to protect the land base. As a corrective, rental schemes like the one he proposed at Mount Vernon would achieve both economic and ethical reforms: they would improve agricultural practices, encourage a land ethic, and pave the way for the abolition of slavery. Unfortunately, Washington's plan stumbled at the starting gates. He could not locate suitable tenants and he dragged his feet in freeing his slaves. But finally, in his will, the vision was fulfilled. Washington emancipated his slaves upon Martha's death and provided for their future welfare. He distributed the remainder of his property equally among his twenty-three heirs, thus eliminating the foundation of a family dynasty, rejecting the aristocratic system, and discouraging the perpetuation of the plantation economy.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, *Letters from His Excellency* illuminates three key points. First, it represents Washington as a skilled farmer, a shrewd businessman, and an American statesman deeply invested in the ethics of land use. Second, the collection envisions Virginia as part of a middle-Atlantic region and reimagines its agricultural system as part of a free-labor economy based on convertible husbandry and ecological awareness, thus promoting a more permanent agriculture. And third, Washington's correspondence reveals the importance of a textual community of public figures who worked together to solve problems of political economy while debating the ethical effects of capitalist progress. Forging a link between agricultural improvement and the project of nation-building, *Letters from His Excellency* presented a Federalist vision of a more durable future.

The volume concludes with two letters from Washington, drafted at Mount Vernon where he had returned to a life of farming, followed by a two-page encomium written by John Sinclair that demonstrates how quickly Washington had become cultural property. Today, amidst the mania for appropriating the legacies of the founding fathers for partisan purposes, we might do well to observe what characteristics Washington's own contemporaries admired in the man. Hailing the former President as the great American Cincinnatus, the farming soldier who combined heroism with humility and devoted himself to the care of the land, Sinclair praised Washington for his "public virtue," his "literary endowments," and most of all, his interest in agriculture (127-28). This President did not simply embrace individual property rights or free-market capitalism, but he believed firmly in the national importance of a land ethic that combined personal virtue with a public trust. In short, he valued the permanence of place and the future stability of the land base.

*The Machine in the Garden of Monticello: Jefferson's Shifting Ground*

When Washington began his agricultural survey, he enlisted Jefferson, his Secretary of State, to evaluate the region around Monticello. As a result, three responses from Jefferson appear in *Letters from His Excellency*, the first of which described his home territory as “perfectly healthy” but decried its husbandry as “very slovenly” (47-48). In the second letter, Jefferson answered several queries from Arthur Young about the relationship between land and labor in the western portion of the state, suggesting that soon the day would arrive when the Blue Ridge region would develop a more intensive agriculture, but convertible husbandry did not yet benefit its farmers because land remained cheap and available. In the third response, Jefferson apologized for his lack of statistical rigor and promised to engage in a more thorough analysis once he arrived home. Apparently, he had already decided to quit his post as Secretary of State in protest against the politics of Hamilton and the Federalists. At the time, the conflict between Jefferson and Hamilton had driven a wedge through Washington’s administration, causing the new leader of the Republican Party to become increasingly estranged from the President. Yet even as Jefferson rejected Hamilton’s plans for economic development, he began to think in more capitalist terms about the productive power of the land, adopting many of Young’s market-oriented agricultural reforms to make his own plantation more profitable.<sup>38</sup>

In 1794, after resigning from Washington’s cabinet, Jefferson returned home, yet again, to an agrarian interlude at Monticello. In letters to friends, he renounced the evils of the political world and waxed poetic about his rural retirement. “I am going to Virginia,” he wrote to Angelica Church before departing from Philadelphia. “I am then to be liberated from the hated occupation of politics, and to sink into the bosom of my family, my farm and my books.” Adopting the language of pastoral retreat, he laid it on thick, like a layer of manure. “I return to

farming,” he told John Adams in April, “with an ardour which I scarcely knew in my youth.” A year later, bragging to Alexander Donald, he magnified his ideal place in the world: “there is no quarter of the globe so desireable as America, no state in America so desireable as Virginia, no county in Virginia equal to Albemarle, and no spot in Albemarle to compare to Monticello.” Yet despite the mythic quality of these claims—this scene of dew-pearled hills and larks on the wing—all was not right with Jefferson’s world. During the previous decade, while serving as Minister to France and Secretary of State, he had devoted precious little time to his farms, delegating the management to his overseers and functioning, at best, as an absentee landlord. The two-crop system of corn and tobacco had ruined the land, caused yields to decline, and pushed the estate deeper into debt. “I found my farms so much deranged,” he wrote upon his return, “that I saw evidently they would be a burden to me instead of a support till I could regenerate them.”<sup>39</sup>

Grabbing the bull by the horns, Jefferson set forth on a plan to restore the fertility of his fields and diversify his agricultural production. Like Washington, he eventually wanted to grow wheat as his primary staple, which would allow him to profit from high prices in Europe, but he understood that he must first rebuild the quality of the soil. He outlined a seven-year cycle of crop rotation, beginning with wheat followed by turnips; then corn and potatoes; winter vetch, peas, and potatoes; rye, barley, or clover; more clover and vetch, along with buckwheat and generous doses of dung; and then back to wheat. He also designed a new type of moldboard plow that would enable his slaves to till the land more efficiently—Jefferson himself rarely worked in the fields—and he assembled a new threshing machine to process his grain. He made a complete survey of his property, recording the results in two major documents, the Land Roll of 1794 and the Land Roll of 1810, between which he sold almost a thousand acres to repay debts. After his

presidency, taking his cue from northern improvers like David Humphreys, Jefferson imported a flock of merino sheep in an effort to maximize the value of his land by engaging in wool production and household manufacturing. He acquired a carding machine, a spinning jenny, and a loom, thus creating a miniature textile factory at Monticello. Turning his attention to the market end of agriculture, Jefferson sought to improve navigation on the Rivanna River by drawing up plans for a dam and a canal, not only for shipping purposes, but to better facilitate the operation of the three mills he owned on the water: a grist mill, a saw mill, and a flour mill.<sup>40</sup>

Many of Jefferson's improvement schemes, like his obsessive rebuilding of Monticello, had little to do with agriculture. Consider, for example, this delicious irony: In December of 1794, because he needed an additional source of income while his fields recovered fertility, Jefferson converted his blacksmith shop into a nailery, an incongruous industrial workshop in the heart of his pastoral garden. Operating continuously until 1812, this nailery employed a group of adolescent slave boys in the kind of mind-numbing, soul-stealing labor that led to degeneracy among factory workers in Europe, or so Jefferson believed. But he needed the money, so for the moment he buried those fears beneath a pile of pig iron. Each morning, the master of Monticello, apparently unaware of his inconsistency, would roll out of bed, read for a bit, and then wander down Mulberry Row to the blacksmith shop, which did in fact overlook his vegetable garden. Along the way, he might recite a few lines from Virgil or Horace: "O rural home: when shall I behold you! When shall I be able, now with books of the ancients, now with sleep and idle hours, to quaff sweet forgetfulness of life's cares!"<sup>41</sup>

Once inside the nailery, however, Jefferson would have quaffed an odor fully aware of life's cares—the smell of soot, the metallic flavor of hot iron, the pungent aroma of unwashed armpits and burnt hair. Perhaps because of his manic attention to detail, or because he loved a

mechanical challenge, Jefferson insisted on micro-managing his workers, from whom he demanded efficiency. In the morning, he measured out a portion of iron-rod for each of the nailers, and in the evening he returned to monitor their output, offering rewards to the most productive among them. All day, the boys heated chunks of iron over an open fire, then hammered the rod flat and cut each nail to length with a chisel. They inserted the pieces into a vice with a countersink, leaving a small tip exposed, then pounded the nail head flat. And they completed these steps, over and over in tedious monotony, until each worker produced, by Jefferson's count, twelve pounds of nails per day. One can only imagine the scene: In the heat of a Virginia summer, those boys literally slaving away at the anvil, sweat beads rolling into their eyes, hands blistered with burns, metal clanking, fires sizzling, the deep breathing of the bellows, an occasional curse as the vice pinched a finger or a nail punctured the skin.

Casting himself in the role of a feudal aristocrat, Jefferson boasted about the nailery in a self-congratulatory letter to Jean Nicolas D meunier: "My new trade of nail-making is to me in this country what an additional title of nobility, or the ensigns of a new order are in Europe." But instead of a coat-of-arms Jefferson did battle with a ledger book, and his business suffered many losses in the field. He struggled to find a market for his nails, several buyers failed to pay for the product on time, the foreman fell ill for several months, a cargo of nails sank in a shipwreck, and most insultingly, Jefferson's own dogmatic doctrine of political economy sabotaged his effort to corner the market. Attempting to sell his nails at wholesale prices in Richmond, he met with the resistance of a number of merchants who declined to buy, despite the favorable prices, because they supported a policy of discouraging domestic manufacturing. Soon enough, Jefferson recognized the limitations of his agrarian ideal, which had allowed a class of capitalist merchants to manipulate the market, jack up prices, leverage retailers, and reap huge profits from imports

because little domestic competition existed. Reluctantly, during the War of 1812, Jefferson came to accept the importance of a more balanced economy.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, his other improvement schemes experienced setbacks as well. His flour mill floundered under poor management, and a prolonged battle over riparian rights with the Rivanna River Company delayed his canal project. At Monticello, the crop rotation plan suffered from the whims of bad weather and worse luck, but it may have failed anyway even if the elements cooperated. Because most of his acreage stood in forest, Jefferson did not cultivate enough land to cover the costs of his labor—to feed and clothe his slaves, that is—and the land he did farm could not biologically support cash-crop production. Unlike the rich loam of Washington’s Tidewater estate, Jefferson’s Blue Ridge farms had a clay-based soil with a high iron content, and the steep slopes of the mountains, combined with run-off patterns, intensified erosion over time, leading to the loss of fertility. Today, farmers in this bioregion primarily raise livestock, not corn or wheat, for the market. But even Jefferson’s experiments with merino sheep eventually unraveled. Grazing near the mountains, these sheep became easy prey for wolves and wild dogs—allegedly—and while most American farmers wanted wool for the household manufacturing of coarse cloth, the merino grew a fleece too fine for this domestic use, so Virginians finally lost interest.<sup>43</sup>

Such personal failure compelled Jefferson to revise his ideas about political economy. Most obviously, the embargo crisis during his second term as President, along with the War of 1812, demonstrated the shortsightedness of his agrarian vision. But even in 1785, when he first published *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he described his agrarian ideal as “theory only” and acknowledged that Americans “have a decided taste for navigation and commerce,” which would ultimately demand a change of policy. He accepted the inevitability of population growth and

economic development, but he wanted to slow the destructive pace of capitalist progress, to restrain self-interest with ethical incentive. In 1804, Jefferson responded to a letter from the political economist Jean Baptiste Say, who had recently mailed two volumes of his writings to the President. Say's communication prompted Jefferson to read Thomas Malthus's work on population, which he found provocative for the connections it established between political economy and nature's economy. Although he found many of Malthus's ideas corroborated in Say's study, Jefferson still emphasized the "difference of circumstances" in America and Europe, insisting that a surplus of land remained available to the American farmer, which would facilitate the temporary perpetuation of an agricultural economy. Nevertheless, Say and Malthus influenced Jefferson to think more critically about the historical process, the problem of population growth, and the eventual role of manufacturing in the American economy.<sup>44</sup>

The following year, when asked about a new edition of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson responded that, if he had the time, he would revise Query XIX because conditions had changed and readers continued to misconstrue his argument as a reductive doctrine opposed to all forms of manufacturing. "I had under my eye when writing," Jefferson recalled, "the manufactures of the great cities in the old countries, at the time present, with whom the want of food and clothing necessary to sustain life, has begotten a depravity of morals, a dependence and corruption." But in America, Jefferson now believed, those who worked in the factory system could avoid such "dependence and corruption" because "vacant lands" were still available to them. If a factory owner attempted to underpay or otherwise exploit his workers, they would simply retreat to a piece of land where they could cultivate "the minimum of subsistence" and so maintain their independence.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of his presidency, however, Jefferson's tone continued to soften. "My idea," he told David Humphreys, who had just opened a woolen mill in Connecticut, "is that we should encourage home manufactures to the extent of our own consumption of everything of which we raise the raw material." Meanwhile, at the onset of the War of 1812, Jefferson had received some "specimens of homespun" from John Adams, which invited a telling comparison of the regional differences between the North and South. Jefferson praised the self-sufficiency of country families in Virginia who could spin their own wool, but he conceded that the coarse quality of such goods meant that the South must continue to "depend on your northern manufactories," a startling admission of economic dependence. At the same time, though, Jefferson reasoned that the interruption of trade with Europe, due to the war, presented a blessing in disguise because it motivated the U.S. to manufacture more of its own goods and achieve more economic independence. Writing to John Melish the following year, Jefferson confessed: "I have not formerly been an advocate for great manufactories. I doubted whether our labor, employed in agriculture, and aided by the spontaneous energies of the earth, would not procure us more than we could make ourselves of other necessaries. But other considerations entering into the question, have settled my doubts."<sup>46</sup>

Jefferson's letters about political economy revolve around three elements of economic reasoning: the fact of interdependence, the principle of adaptation, and the process of exchange. Writing to Benjamin Austin in 1816, Jefferson developed these themes to explain his evolving attitude toward domestic manufacturing. First, he surveyed the political developments that had occurred since the publication of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. "You tell me I am quoted by those who wish to continue our dependence on England for manufactures," he wrote. "There was a time when I might have been so quoted with more candor, but within the thirty years which

have since elapsed, how are circumstances changed!” In the 1780s, “Our independent place among nations was acknowledged,” the seas remained open and free, and American farmers could easily find a foreign market for their produce. “Under this prospect the question seemed legitimate,” Jefferson recalled, echoing Query XIX, “whether, with such an immensity of unimproved land, courting the hand of husbandry, the industry of agriculture, or that of manufactures, would add most to the national wealth?” But a decade later, France and England had begun to seize American ships, impress American sailors, and violate the “common right” of commerce. Invoking that old opposition between Europe and America, Jefferson rebuked the “rapid depravity” of France and England, whose “profligacy and power” had desecrated the “moral laws” of nature and upset the “social order” of the modern world.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the letter, Jefferson saw two roads diverging in a wood, one circling back into a thicket of *dependence*, the other leading to a mythic land of *independence*. Thirty years after *Notes*, this moral dichotomy continued to structure Jefferson’s political thought. On the one hand, he acknowledged America’s “dependence” on European manufactures and markets, a partnership that actually made possible his agrarian ideal, but on the other hand, he argued that “to be independent for the comforts of life we must fabricate them ourselves.” Only by expanding domestic manufacturing, he now believed, could America avoid “eternal vassalage to a foreign and unfriendly people.” Indeed, Jefferson had always insisted, especially in *Notes*, that abstract theories must adapt to regional realities, and now he simply applied that principle of adaptation to temporal differences as well. Expressing an anxiety about social decay, Jefferson declared, “He, therefore, who is now against domestic manufacture, must be for reducing us either to dependence on that foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins, and to live like wild beasts in dens and caverns. I am not one of these; experience has taught me that manufactures are now

as necessary to our independence as to our comfort.” In other words, economic policies must respect the different circumstances of location and population, the facts on the ground. The only constant is change, Jefferson suggested, the only rule of thumb is the principle of adaptation. If America wished to defend its independence, then it would need to evolve.<sup>48</sup>

But even the most independent economy still depends upon a series of relationships between land and labor, producer and consumer, nature and culture. Because of his desire for economic independence—that time-honored political goal—Jefferson blinded himself to the deeper reality of this ecological interdependence. Yet he could not entirely ignore the vital relationship between economic production and the natural world. As noted in the introduction, there existed in the eighteenth century a certain cross-pollination between theories of political economy and nature’s economy. That is, thinkers found the same natural laws at work in social relationships and biological processes. In his letter to Austin, Jefferson seems to have viewed economic policies through the lens of natural history. While explaining his faith in agriculture, for example, he argued that planting wheat produces a greater return than manufacturing lace because the farmer benefits from a more direct connection to nature. Just as a manufacturer invests capital in his workers to produce finished goods, a farmer invests labor in the land to yield a return of crops. In physiocratic fashion, Jefferson simply saw a better rate of exchange in the agricultural economy. “[T]o the husbandman a vast addition is made by the spontaneous energies of the earth,” he reasoned, “whereas to the labor of the manufacturer nothing is added.” By 1816, however, that ratio had changed, the market had evolved, and therefore, Jefferson concluded, “We must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturist.”<sup>49</sup>

The foreign policy crisis culminating in the War of 1812 caused Jefferson to significantly rethink his agrarian ideal. Relinquishing his rigid attachment to agriculture, he began to accept

domestic manufacturing as a necessary evil to protect American farmers from the uncertainty and injustice of global capitalism. But he continued to stress the accountability of the human economy to the natural world, developing three key themes—interdependence, adaptation, and exchange—that expressed a growing ecological awareness, a sense that economic policies cannot be separated from biological realities. By embracing the fundamental principle that culture must adapt to nature, Jefferson’s agrarian ideal promoted a set of values that placed an ethical limit on the growth economy. Meanwhile, his fellow Republican, James Madison, articulated an even deeper understanding of the relationship between agriculture and ecology after his own retirement from the presidency.

*Toward a Natural Constitution: Madison’s Agricultural Address*

Madison made his home in central Virginia, some thirty miles northeast of Monticello, at a plantation named Montpelier. Although he began farming early in life, not until the 1790s did he adopt scientific techniques of crop rotation, soil improvement, and contour plowing on his own lands. At the time, while serving in Congress and founding the Republican Party, Madison often wrote home with advice for experiments on the two farms then under his control. When his father died in 1801, he inherited the entire estate, and soon he was elected president of the American Board of Agriculture, a short-lived organization that sought to realize Washington’s dream of a national agricultural society. In 1817, following his retirement from the presidency, Madison returned to Montpelier, where he devoted his time to agricultural improvements, much like his Virginia predecessors. That same year, a group of local planters chose Madison as the first president of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, a post he held until 1824.<sup>50</sup>

On 12 May 1818, Madison attended his first and only meeting of the society, where he delivered an address later printed as a pamphlet and published in newspapers across the country. Despite the regional focus of the Albemarle society, Madison crafted his words for a national audience, and indeed, the length and language of the speech seems better suited for the written page than for oral delivery. Like Washington's letters, Madison's *Address to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle* took the form of an environmental jeremiad. American farmers, said Madison, had recklessly ignored the ecological limits of the land, exhausted the soil, and deforested the landscape. He listed seven cardinal sins committed against the land, and for each he demanded a corrective measure, suggesting improvements like deep plowing, crop rotation, fertilization, and forest conservation. In the rhetorical style of *The Federalist Papers*, Madison outlined the weaknesses of the current agricultural system and presented a plan to create a stronger, more stable relationship between Americans and the land; in effect, he called for the ratification of a new *natural constitution*.<sup>51</sup>

The *Address* begins by establishing the need for agricultural reform, which Madison regards as a vital part of the national project. Before suggesting any practical advice, however, he describes the relationship between civilization and agriculture, drawing upon his understanding of human nature to expound a theory of economic progress. Among animals, says Madison, only man has the intelligence to cultivate the earth, the power to make nature produce more than mere "spontaneous supplies."<sup>52</sup> But man must develop this faculty; he must climb the cultural ladder to perfect his agricultural skills. By locating different cultures along a spectrum of hunting, grazing, farming, and manufacturing economies, Madison embraces the classic stadial theory of human nature that appears so frequently in works of eighteenth-century political economy. Because the natural condition of man tends towards the hunting stage, he insists, heroic

individuals must take the initiative to introduce improvements among their people if they wish to advance the state of agriculture. As a civilized art, agriculture enables population growth, but it requires maintenance to prevent its decay. In other words, Madison suggests that agriculture will naturally decline unless strong leaders intervene to promote better land-use practices.<sup>53</sup>

To facilitate social progress, says Madison, American farmers must adopt a scientific approach to food production. They must engage in nature study to better understand how the world works, to *use* it more productively and more intelligently. Thus, the second part of the *Address* shifts into a philosophical discussion of nature that frames a newfound ecological awareness, a recognition of “the economy of nature” (265). Influenced by Thomas Malthus, whose work he had recently read, Madison explains the science of population biology, insisting that economic progress and population growth can occur only within natural limits. He also stresses the complexity of nature and warns against our efforts to oversimplify it. Farmers raise just a handful of plants and animals for subsistence, he observes, but “a vast profusion and multiplicity of beings” exist beyond the farm (263). If we destroy this biodiversity in order to produce only profitable crops and livestock—if we adopt a system of monoculture—we may warp the balance of nature. We should beware of this fatal temptation, this dangerous desire to control the whole environment, because it may result in unforeseen consequences. In Madison’s words:

May it not be concluded from this admirable arrangement and beautiful feature in the economy of nature, that if the whole class of animals were extinguished, the use of the atmosphere by the vegetable class alone, would exhaust it of its life-supporting power; that in like manner, if the whole class of vegetables were extinguished, the use of it by the animal class alone, would deprive it of its fitness for their support? And if such

would be the effect of an entire destruction of either class, in relation to the other, the inference seems to press itself upon us, that so vast a change in the proportions of each class to the other, and in the species composing the respective classes, as that in question, might not be compatible with the continued existence and health of the remaining species of the two classes. (265-66)

Such language, though convoluted and arcane, anticipates the field of deep ecology that would later emerge in the twentieth century. Indeed, despite the Enlightenment diction, these serpentine sentences might have come from the pen of Arne Naess or Loren Eiseley, while the basic idea—the concept of earth as a self-regulating organism—seems to foreshadow the famous Gaia hypothesis put forth by James Lovelock.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout the *Address*, Madison implicates “the agency of man” (268) in the natural world. We change the environment and manipulate it for human ends, he says, so we ought not assume that nature exists in some separate realm. But because we cannot harness all of nature for agricultural purposes, we must operate within a set of limits; we must respect the biological carrying capacity of the earth. To make the best use of those parts of nature that we *can* use, Madison believes, we must study the climate, the character of plants and animals, the quality and chemistry of the soil. We must manure the lands and experiment with different crop varieties and species of livestock. Thus, Madison strikes a balance between two extremes. On the one hand, he argues that we cannot, or should not, so completely change nature that we destroy biodiversity and upset the natural balance. On the other hand, we must *use* nature to survive and prosper, and in the process we will inevitably change it. In fact, we already have, and agriculture is proof. According to Madison, while humans have helped certain crops like rice and potatoes expand their range, we have also domesticated certain animals and eradicated others. But still, when we

adapt the world to meet our needs and desires, we must keep in mind the intrinsic value of ecological balance. Indeed, Madison is no hands-off romantic. He understands that humans have mixed their economy with nature, and the fact pleases him, but the question remains for America: Can the expanding nation promote social progress and population growth while also honoring ecological limits and ensuring the stability of the land base?

Invoking the myth of nature's nation, Madison identifies both natural *and* cultural reasons for the health of the new republic. "The enviable condition of the people of the United States," he writes, "is often too much ascribed to the physical advantages of their soil and climate, and to their uncrowded situation. Much is certainly due to these causes—but a just estimate of the happiness of our country, will never overlook what belongs to the fertile activity of a free people, and the benign influence of a responsible government" (269). Although agriculture supports both "population and prosperity," Madison insists, "the study and practice of its true principles have hitherto been too generally neglected" (269-70). In other words, the American people sorely need a better system of land management—a more ecological government. To that end, Madison closes with a discussion of agricultural reform in his home state.

The final part of the *Address* identifies seven agricultural errors and prescribes various remedies. First, Madison challenges the way Virginia farmers reckon the relationship between land and labor. They cultivate too much land, not intensively enough. They expend their labor on depleted fields, or bring unfertile land into production, rather than devoting their energy to soil improvement. Second, Madison laments the poor plowing practices that have prevailed in America, especially the habit of vertical plowing on hillsides, which leads to erosion and loss of fertility. In turn, he endorses both deep plowing and the horizontal cultivation of hillsides. Third,

he complains that the three-crop system of corn, wheat, and tobacco has exhausted the land, and he demands more soil improvement through the use of manure. Fourth, Madison promotes better irrigation practices; fifth, he argues that oxen are more efficient than draft horses; and sixth, he insists that farmers in Virginia raise more livestock than their lands can support. Finally, as the seventh deadly sin, Madison decries “the inconsiderable and indiscriminate use of the axe” and calls for a new era of conservation and reforestation in Virginia, a “more judicious management” of timber that follows the example of New England (282-83).

Thus, emulating the structure of the Constitution and its seven articles, Madison outlined a set of checks and balances between American farmers and American lands. Indeed, the *Address* reveals a direct connection between Madison’s political and ecological ideas. In many ways, in fact, it echoes his most famous piece of political writing, *Federalist* No. 10. Most obviously, both works identify a set of problems and present a series of solutions, and both engage in deductive reasoning through a formal syllogism, but the similarities extend beyond rhetorical structure. In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison describes how human nature inevitably leads to the rise of factions or parties within the political system. While pursuing their self-interest, individuals engage in different occupations and naturally acquire different amounts of property, which in turn encourages them to join together in interest groups. For Madison, the goal of good government is to control these factions without destroying the right of individual citizens to pursue their own interests—in other words, government should protect both liberty *and* property. In Madison’s day, conventional wisdom held that a democracy could succeed only in a small society with a relatively homogenous population who shared common interests, because in a large, diverse society too many competing interests would instigate social unrest. Either the will of the majority would crush the minority and violate property rights, or the strongest interest

would rise to power and create an oligarchy that oppressed individual liberty. Thus, many of the founders believed that America would enjoy social stability only when organized as a republic in which a set of disinterested leaders held public office and worked toward the common good.<sup>55</sup>

Turning the tables on these assumptions, Madison argued, first, that America could not necessarily count on the existence of enlightened leaders, for human nature suggests that every individual operates with some degree of self-interest. Moving beyond the classical republican ideology of the Revolution—which relied on public virtue to ensure social stability—Madison embraced a clear-eyed vision of human nature that accepted the simple facts of personal greed and lust for power. Second, contrary to popular belief, Madison argued that the very size of the American Republic, extending across a vast expanse of territory, would create a balance between competing interests. In other words, the federal union could expand beyond the old republican model of the Greek and Roman city-states and still remain stable because internal mechanisms would prevent the imbalance of power. Thus, Madison articulated a remarkably modern theory of pluralistic democracy in which individuals would pursue their interests while an intelligent government, structured with sound principles, would regulate the excesses of individual greed and protect the public good. The sheer quantity of factions, in other words, would create an equilibrium, and the system of checks and balances dictated by the Constitution would ensure the stability of the republic.

Similarly, Madison's *Address to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle* embraced the concept of an equilibrium. Like men in the political sphere, plants and animals naturally pursue their own interests, but the variety of climates and ecosystems, combined with life cycles and predator-prey relationships, all help to preserve an overall balance—what Madison calls “the economy of nature” (265). This ecological stability becomes threatened, however, when human

beings engage in irresponsible manipulation of the natural world, when they eradicate certain species or cultivate monocultures, for example. Thus, humans have the power to upset the natural system of checks and balances, to corrupt the government of nature, so to speak, and cause the collapse of an ecosystem, or, if you will, the decline of a biological republic. Like the Constitution and *The Federalist Papers*, Madison's *Address* constructs a set of sound principles that seek to regulate the reckless behavior of self-interested individuals who engage in destructive land-use practices. In short, he promotes a conservative check on the selfish tendencies of his fellow farmers while also advancing a radical vision of ecological interdependence.

Taken together, the *Address* and *Federalist* No. 10 demonstrate a reciprocal exchange between political and ecological wisdom. Even in the strictly political text of *The Federalist*, Madison invokes a natural metaphor to describe how democracies function: "Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could not be a less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency."<sup>56</sup> We cannot say, one way or another, whether Madison's understanding of nature influenced his theory of politics, or whether his keen sense of political relationships informed his broader view of the natural world, nor should we attempt to separate the two spheres. For in the end, Madison developed a profound insight about the nature of politics as well as the politics of nature. In doing so, he promoted the ratification of a *natural constitution*, the creation of "a more perfect union" between nature and culture.

Along with Jefferson and Washington, Madison expressed a deep anxiety about the durability of the United States, its territorial expansion and its economic growth. His political

and agricultural writings were consistently concerned with the twin problems of social and ecological stability, and while he loved liberty he also feared the unruly interests unleashed by the Revolution. Would the reckless behavior of individuals, he asked, with their commercial and democratic impulses, bring ruin to the agrarian republic? Would the new nation eventually outstrip the continent, exhaust its resources, and flounder like the Roman Empire? Would Virginia fall into decline as its citizens moved west in pursuit of cheap and fertile land? What sort of practices and principles would prevent this loss of place, this ecological collapse? How could American farmers continue to prosper without depleting the soil and abandoning their homes? Jefferson, Washington, and Madison found their answer to such questions in agricultural improvement, in a number of reforms that would have wed Virginia to the northern economy and transformed its unsustainable plantations into small farms engaged in convertible husbandry. While praising these “founding farmers” for their ecological sensibility, however, we must not forget the tragic paradox of slavery. In the end, though they possessed a deep regard for the land, some Virginia reformers, like Edmund Ruffin, became intoxicated with sectionalism and eventually promoted secession—a powerful reminder that neither ecological wisdom nor a sense of place can prevent the errors of political dogma.<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, many of the land policies that Washington, Jefferson, and Madison advanced, although intended to realize the agrarian ideal, actually sabotaged it. As Roger Kennedy has observed, during the sectional discord of the nineteenth century, political parties in the South appropriated and distorted the agrarian ideal to support a skewed argument for states’ rights and the slave-labor economy. Forming an alliance with western farmers, southern planters endorsed territorial expansion in a desperate effort to defend their own flawed economy from the industrial forces of the North. Meanwhile, their method of cultivation continued to exhaust the soil,

deforest the landscape, and demand new land for its survival. But none of this exploitation was inevitable. The southern climate may have invited both cash-crop production and a slave-labor system, but it did not require them. In other words, environmental determinism did not *cause* the ecological decline of Virginia. Instead, soil exhaustion and deforestation resulted from a series of specific decisions about land management, farm policy, and political economy.<sup>58</sup>

To explain such decisions, we might blame the invisible hand of the market, as if money had a mind of its own. Or like Jefferson, we might reduce all history to a simple dichotomy. In the early Republic, we might say, two systems of value came into conflict—the economic and the ethical—and the profit motive simply trumped the plea for environmental responsibility. Yet blaming the abstract forces of capitalism too easily absolves the human culprits and erases their personal accountability. In a free-market economy, when wealth and power is concentrated in the hands of a few men, the social good often depends upon their leadership, upon the depth of their moral conscience and political will. But as Madison suggested, we cannot always count on the benevolence of enlightened leaders, for human nature simply works in other ways. Instead, we must design a system of government, with sound principles and internal mechanisms, that will regulate competing interests, neutralize personal greed, and preserve the public good. In the U.S., unfortunately, we have yet to ratify the kind of *natural constitution* that might restrain our own selfish impulses in the name of a greater ecological good.

Nevertheless, we have always needed ideals to guide us toward a more ethical way of being in the world. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution have provided one such set of ideals, which Americans have fitfully strived to achieve over the past two centuries, and the agrarian writings of Jefferson, Washington, and Madison, this chapter has tried to suggest, might do the same. At the very least, these figures expressed an incipient ecological

awareness and projected a vision of more environmentally responsible American agriculture. In the next chapter, we look north to New England, where a pair of Connecticut writers cultivated a sense of place similar to these Virginia planters and began to contemplate their own set of regional improvements.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For this anecdotal introduction, I draw upon my own experiences teaching eighth-grade American history for two years at Nativity Preparatory School in New Bedford, Massachusetts. We used a textbook titled *A More Perfect Union*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1999, which I supplemented with chapters copied from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. In retrospect, my lessons about the Civil War seem terribly reductive and oversimplified.

<sup>2</sup> Staughton Lynd emphasizes the alliance between northern capitalists and southern planters in *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, 16-17, 263-67. In *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause*, Roger Kennedy describes how most planter families had a mercantile branch and how the thousand-foot line in the Appalachian Mountains marked a boundary between different modes of labor and land use. Timothy Sweet asserts that many "ideologies of farming" downplayed the class differences among American farmers in the early Republic; see *American Georgics*, 97-121. For more on the emergence of class consciousness among American farmers, see Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, 1-151.

<sup>3</sup> For this comparison between northern and southern agriculture, I draw upon the following works: Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 55-88; Timothy Silver, *A New Face on the Countryside*, 139-85; and Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*. Stoll makes a compelling argument for reading the "dunghill doctrines" of northern improvers as a political discourse that worked against the tide of emigration and promoted the permanence of place (30, 48, 73, 167). In Chapter Two, Stoll also constructs an extended comparison between Pennsylvania and South Carolina, with particular emphasis on the work of John Lorain and Edmund Ruffin (73-166).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ellis stresses the point about Virginia plantations as medium-sized farms in his biographies of Washington (*His Excellency*, 41) and Jefferson (*American Sphinx*, 140). Avery O.

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Craven's *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, provides an especially helpful guide to the regional problems of tobacco culture, as does T.H. Breen's *Tobacco Culture*. Breen describes how a "tobacco mentality" and a "culture of debt" structured the social life of Virginia planters throughout the eighteenth century. These planters complained about their financial woes in language that echoed the radical whig writers of England, and in fact, Breen concludes, the planters' economic dependence made them more receptive to country ideology and political rebellion in the 1770s. Thus, Breen finds a remarkable synthesis between agricultural reality and political ideology. For more about the problem of slavery in Virginia, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Freedom, American Slavery*. For a more ecologically oriented agricultural history of the state, see Jack Temple Kirby, *Poquosin*; Lynn Nelson, *Pharsalia*; and Benjamin Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*, 127-65.

<sup>5</sup> Jefferson to John Jay, 23 Aug. 1785, *TJ Papers*, 8:426. Other works to which this paragraph refers are as follows: George Washington, *Letters from His Excellency George Washington to Arthur Young and Sir John Clair* (1801); John Taylor, *Arator* (1813-18); and James Madison, *Address to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle* (1818). Susan Dunn delivers an excellent and succinct discussion of this Virginia "cult of the soil" in *Dominion of Memories*, 15-29. I also draw upon Barbara McEwan's helpful overview, *Thomas Jefferson: Farmer*.

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 125.

<sup>7</sup> For details about this final part of the War of Independence, see Edward G. Lengel, *George Washington: A Military Life*, 324-64. Tellingly, before the Battle of Yorktown, while marching south along the shores of the Chesapeake, Washington insisted on stopping for four days at Mount Vernon to check on his home and the condition of his farms—a brief detour that displayed the personal stakes of the Revolution. In *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the*

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*Enlightenment*, Garry Wills describes how Washington's retirement from public service, both after the War of Independence and after his second term as President, tapped into the myth of Cincinnatus and had the ironic effect of actually making him a more powerful political figure.

<sup>8</sup> For details about the composition and publication of *Notes on the State of Virginia* (hereafter cited as *Notes*), I draw on William Peden's and Frank Shuffleton's introductions to their respective editions.

<sup>9</sup> Literary interpretations that explore the relationship between *Notes* and the myth of "nature's nation" include the following: Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation*, 44-49; Christopher Looby, "The Constitution of Nature," 264-67; Ian Marshall, *Story Line*, 120-30; and Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 96-117.

<sup>10</sup> Jefferson to Charles-François D'Anmours, 30 Nov. 1780, *TJ Papers*, 4:168.

<sup>11</sup> Jefferson, *Notes*, ed. William Peden, 24-25. Hereafter I cite page numbers from the Peden edition in parentheses within the text.

<sup>12</sup> For Buell's theory of "dual accountability" and the "aesthetics of relinquishment," see respectively, *The Environmental Imagination*, 91-103, 143-79. Similarly, Rick Van Noy's theory of "literary cartography," which he applies to Clarence King and John Wesley Powell, among others, might also apply to Jefferson's *Notes*. According to Van Noy, writers like King and Powell, by merging cartographic representation with the literary trope of the sublime, map a correspondence between interior and exterior landscapes that effectively transforms space into place. See *Surveying the Interior*, 25-35.

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson's "Report of a Plan of Government for the Western Territory" appears in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 254-58 (hereafter cited as *Portable TJ*), and *TJ Papers*, 6:581-617, the latter including a revision and the text of the Northwest Ordinance of 1784. In *The Law of the*

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*Land*, John Opie argues that Jefferson's grid system had the adverse and ironic effect of working against the small farmer. In a superbly written and rambunctious narrative history, *The Grand Idea: George Washington's Potomac and the Race to the West*, Joel Achenbach describes the powerful conviction held by Washington, and to a lesser extent Jefferson, that geography and destiny had ordained the Potomac River as the national gateway to the West.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, passim. Twentieth-century neoagrarians who refer to abusive agricultural practices as "mining the land" include, among others, Liberty Hyde Bailey and Louis Bromfield. For specific examples in their work, see Hagenstein, Gregg, and Donahue, eds., *American Georgics*, 209, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 99, 101. Jefferson's letter to Brother Handsome Lake appears in the *Portable TJ*, 305-07.

<sup>16</sup> In *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, Kent Ryden writes, "A sense of place results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing a history within its confines" (37). During the composition of *Notes*, I mean to suggest, Jefferson developed such a sense of place

<sup>17</sup> In past decades, historians Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, among others, have established the influence of whig ideology on the American founders. As a young man, Jefferson read several books that indoctrinated him with whig principles, including Sir John Dalrymple's *History of Feudal Property in Great Britain* and Paul de Rapin's *History of England*. He also owned political writings by Henry St. John Bolingbroke, Thomas Gordon, and James Burgh, all members of the country party in England. For a more specific discussion of how Jefferson borrowed whig ideas in *A Summary View* and the Declaration of Independence, see Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 29-36, 42-43, 56-58. Recently, political theorist Eric Nelson has begun to

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challenge the standard narrative of the whig influence on the American founders. In “Patriot Royalism: The Stuart Monarchy in American Political Thought, 1769-75,” Nelson suggests that the majority of American “Patriots” embraced a pro-monarchy position up until December of 1775 when the King declared the colonies beyond his royal protection. Before that fateful rupture, such writers as James Wilson, Edward Bancroft, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams rejected Parliament’s legislative authority over the colonies by adopting a dominion theory of the British empire that located the colonies outside the realm of England and therefore beyond the reach of Parliamentary power. Viewing the royal charters as original contracts formed between the king and the colonies, these writers argued that the American colonies were within the *dominion* of the crown, as opposed to the *realm* of England, and exclusively under the King’s power. In the process, they revived a set of royalist arguments from the 1640s which defended the King’s prerogative power, and in this sense, says Nelson, they took an anti-whig position. While challenging the general view of whig influence, however, Nelson regards both Jefferson and John Dickinson as outlying figures. Jefferson and Dickinson were indeed followers of whig ideology, and Jefferson’s *Summary View* presents a radically different vision of colonial history than the majority of “Patriot” pamphlets published before 1776. For a response to Nelson’s article, see the replies of Gordon Wood, Pauline Maier, and Daniel Hulsebosch, as well as Nelson’s counter-argument, printed together as a scholarly “forum” in *William and Mary Quarterly* 68.4 (Oct. 2011): 533-96.

<sup>18</sup> While serving as Minister to France, Jefferson wrote about enclosure and the problem of European land tenure in letters to Madison (28 Oct. 1785 and 6 Sept. 1789) and the Marquis de Lafayette (11 Apr. 1787). See *TJ Papers*, 8:681-83, 15:392-97, and 11:283-85, respectively. For more on the way Jefferson historicized the enclosure movement to provide a rhetorical

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warrant for freeholding land policies, see Sturges, “Enclosing the Commons.” Jefferson outlined his opposition to Hamilton’s bank in his “Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank” (1791), which appears in *Portable TJ*, 261-67, and *TJ Papers*, 19:275-82.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter Onuf, ed., *Jeffersonian Legacies*, which includes an introduction by Joyce Appleby, 1-16. See also Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 1-17. Ellis’s *American Sphinx*, 3-23, 291-302, includes a helpful summary of how cultural attitudes about Jefferson have evolved. For more about Jefferson’s sex life and the controversy surrounding his alleged relationship with the slave Sally Hemings, see *Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture* edited by Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter Onuf; for a rebuttal to the allegations, see *The Jefferson-Hemings Controversy: Report of the Scholars Commission* edited by Robert F. Turner.

<sup>20</sup> In my understanding of how Jefferson oversimplified economic realities in the service of his agrarian ideal, I follow Raymond Williams’s theory of pastoralism in *The Country and the City* and Timothy Sweet’s reading of Jefferson’s “ideology of farming” in *American Georgics*, which argues that “the *Notes* construct a pastoral opposition between urban and rural that tends to obscure the realities of the rural class structure” (102).

<sup>21</sup> See Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 12-47, for a discussion of the “Manufactures” chapter and how it relates to debates about social progress and decay among eighteenth-century political thinkers.

<sup>22</sup> In Query XVIII, Jefferson describes the end of slavery as follows: “The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing . . . for a total emancipation” (163). Exhaustive details about tobacco and crop rotation at Monticello can be found in *Thomas Jefferson’s Farm Book*, 255-324.

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the political symbolism of tobacco and wheat, see Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 180-86, 205-06. Breen suggests that different agricultural systems, and different staple crops, have the capacity to shape political ideologies. Because tobacco and wheat demanded different labor patterns, they structured different social customs and annual routines. Tobacco required constant attention, occupied planters throughout the year, invited a scattered settlement pattern, and led to fewer social interactions. Wheat cultivation allowed for more free time and community interaction but was also more susceptible to the whims of natural disaster, which in turn inspired many wheat farmers to embrace evangelical Christianity.

<sup>24</sup> I would like to thank my friend and colleague Ethan Mannon for pointing out the irony of Jefferson's belief in wheat as an agricultural savior. As Steven Stoll suggests in *The Fruits of Natural Advantage*, 25-31, by the late-nineteenth century wheat had become the new tobacco in California, a single-crop system that dominated and depleted the landscape. Likewise, I learned from an audience member at the 2012 Virginia Forum that the transition to wheat at Monticello facilitated an ecological catastrophe that involved an alarming rate of soil erosion. Susan Dunn describes the Duke de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's thoughts on Virginia in *Dominion of Memories*, 23. Stoll discusses William Strickland's tour of America in *Larding the Lean Earth*, 31-33, where he quotes this passage from Strickland's *Observations on the Agriculture of the United States of America* (1801).

<sup>25</sup> For the standard interpretation of Jefferson's faith in property rights, see Hagenstein, Gregg, and Donahue, eds., *American Georgics*, 1-4, and Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 59-60. Jefferson's arguments about public education appear in *Notes*, 146-49, and his "Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia" (1818), *Portable TJ*, 332-46.

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<sup>26</sup> For these biographical details, I draw upon Ellis, *His Excellency*, and Achenbach, *The Grand Idea*. Achenbach observes that Washington's landholdings totaled 49,083 acres at the time of his death in 1799, which he valued at \$428 (*The Grand Idea*, 395).

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 52-53, 191. Achenbach, *The Grand Idea*, 1-9, 32, 139-140, 191. For more on the consignment system of tobacco trade and Washington's decision to abandon tobacco, see Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 80-82, 147-49, 181-82.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *His Excellency*, 191. In *American Sphinx*, Ellis describes the myth of rural retreat among members of the Virginia dynasty: "Incantations of virtuous retirement to rural solitude after a career of public service were familiar and even formulaic refrains within the leadership class of eighteenth-century America" (119).

<sup>29</sup> I focus here on the 1803 edition of Washington's letters, the full title of which reads: *Letters from His Excellency George Washington to Arthur Young, ESQ., F.R.S., and Sir John Sinclair, BART., M.P.: Containing an Account of His Husbandry and His Opinions on Various Questions in Agriculture; and Many Particulars of the Rural Economy of the United States* (Alexandria, VA: Cottom and Stewart, 1803). The character of Washington's audience implies that the President himself embraced a fairly bold-faced capitalist mentality. Young had become famous as a shrewd economic analyst who preached a gospel of efficiency and applied the scientific method to the question of agricultural improvement. Sinclair earned his reputation as a theoretical writer on matters of national finance, and while directing the compilation of the twenty-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99), he became the first writer in the English language to use the word "statistics." Not only did he serve as President of the British Board of Agriculture, but he also founded a society for promoting the improvement of British wool.

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<sup>30</sup> Washington, *Letters from His Excellency*, 6. Hereafter I cite page numbers from the 1803 edition within the text.

<sup>31</sup> Once again, see Achenbach's *The Grand Idea* for a lively discussion of Washington's "Potomac dream." Ellis describes Washington's obsession with the Potomac in *His Excellency*, 53-58.

<sup>32</sup> Hamilton's *Report*, along with previous drafts, appears in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 10:1-340.

<sup>33</sup> Washington's plan for a national agricultural society floundered in 1801 because Jefferson opposed expanding the powers of the federal government. See Lawrence Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 126. In *Notes from the Ground*, Benjamin Cohen writes in depth about the emergence of other agricultural societies during the early Republic. He also coins a helpful term, "book farming," to describe the way farmers in this era debated land-use practices and improvement techniques through textual production.

<sup>34</sup> Here is Thoreau in the first chapter of *Walden*: "I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man's life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well nigh crushed and smothered under its load creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture,

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and wood-lot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh” (3-4).

<sup>35</sup> Describing his bean field project in *Walden*, Thoreau echoed Peters’s skepticism about Young’s capitalist agronomy: “I learned from the experience of both years, not being in the least awed by many celebrated works on husbandry, Arthur Young among the rest” (58-59).

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the enclosure movement, see Sturges, “Enclosing the Commons.”

<sup>37</sup> For more about Washington’s will and his shifting position on slavery, see Ellis, *His Excellency*, 256-65, and Achenbach, *The Grand Idea*, 207-10.

<sup>38</sup> For Jefferson’s first response to Washington’s agricultural survey, see *Letters from His Excellency*, 47-50. For the second response, see 57-61, and for the third response, see 93-95. At one point, Jefferson made an estimate about wheat yields in Virginia that baffled Young, who responded with skepticism about Jefferson’s faith in the natural productive power of the soil. Jefferson and Madison, it should be noted, founded the Democratic-Republican Party in 1792 while Jefferson still held his post as Secretary of State.

<sup>39</sup> Jefferson to Angelica Church, 27 Nov. 1793, *TJ Papers*, 27:449. Jefferson to John Adams, 25 Apr. 1794, *TJ Papers*, 28:57. Jefferson to Alexander Donald, 30 May 1795, *TJ Papers*, 28:368. Jefferson to Jean Nicolas D meunier, 29 Apr. 1795, 28:341. In these letters, Jefferson echoed his own language from a decade earlier when he resigned as governor of Virginia: “I have taken my final leave of everything of that nature, have retired to my farm, my family and books from which I think nothing will ever more separate me.” Jefferson to Edmund Randolph, 16 Sept. 1781, *TJ Papers*, 6:118.

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<sup>40</sup> In *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book*, editor Edwin Morris Betts has gathered together Jefferson's writings about agricultural improvement, grouping his letters by topic with helpful introductions to each section. For details on Jefferson's crop rotation scheme, see 310-24; for more on his moldboard plow, see 47-49; for more on the threshing machine, see 68-69; for his Land Rolls, see 324-36; for more on Jefferson's interest in merino sheep, see 111-142; for details about spinning and weaving cloth at Monticello, see 464-95; for more about Jefferson's mills, dam, and canal projects, see 341-411.

<sup>41</sup> Details about the nailery, appear in Jefferson's *Farm Book*, 426-53. In his biography of Jefferson, Kevin Hayes identifies and translates this passage from Horace, which Jefferson had copied into his commonplace book; see *The Road to Monticello*, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Jefferson to Jean Nicolas D meunier, 29 Apr. 1795, 28:341. Problems with the nailery appear in Jefferson's *Farm Book*, 426-53.

<sup>43</sup> Again, see the related selections in the *Farm Book*: for Jefferson's mills, dam, and canal projects, 341-411; for crop rotation schemes, 310-24; for sheep, 111-42. For more on the history of soil exhaustion in Virginia, see Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*. Ellis discusses the lack of soil fertility at Monticello in *American Sphinx*, 138-40.

<sup>44</sup> Jefferson to G.K. van Hogendorp, 13 Oct. 1785, *TJ Papers*, 8:633. Jefferson to Jean Baptiste Say, 1 Feb. 1804, *Portable TJ*, 497-99. Drew McCoy discusses Jefferson's reaction to reading Thomas Malthus in *The Elusive Republic*, 190-95.

<sup>45</sup> For a useful selection from Jefferson's writings that tracks his shifting attitude about domestic manufacturing, see Michael Brewster Folsom and Steven D. Lubar, eds., *The*

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*Philosophy of Manufactures*, 15-32. I have drawn on this collection to cite letters in this and the following paragraph. Jefferson to Mr. Lithson, 4 Jan. 1805, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Jefferson to David Humphreys, 20 Jan. 1809, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 27.

Jefferson to John Adams, 21 Jan. 1812, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 27-28. Jefferson to John Melish, 13 Jan. 1813, *Philosophy of Manufactures*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Jefferson to Benjamin Austin, 9 Jan. 1816, *Portable TJ*, 547-49.

<sup>48</sup> Jefferson to Benjamin Austin, 9 Jan. 1816, *Portable TJ*, 549-50.

<sup>49</sup> Jefferson to Benjamin Austin, 9 Jan. 1816, *Portable TJ*, 548-49.

<sup>50</sup> For this summary of Madison's agricultural expertise, I draw on the editorial note to his *Address to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle*, in *The Papers of James Madison, Retirement Series*, vol. 1, 257-59 (hereafter cited as *Address*). For a discussion of Madison's interest in agriculture and his *Address*, see Andrea Wulf, *Founding Gardeners*, 190-212.

<sup>51</sup> Specifically, the address was printed in the *Richmond Inquirer*, the *American Farmer* of Baltimore, and the *Plough Boy* of Albany, New York.

<sup>52</sup> Madison, *Address*, 260. Hereafter I cite quotations from Madison's *Address* by page number in parentheses within the text.

<sup>53</sup> Allow me to qualify the final point in this paragraph. While today we are taught to eschew the "great-man" theory of history, Madison and many of his contemporaries did in fact embrace such assumptions about historical progress. Their study of classical republicanism was combined with a faith in civic engagement, which led them to see social and political stability as dependent upon the disinterested virtue of enlightened leaders.

<sup>54</sup> A Norwegian philosopher, Naess is often credited as originating deep ecology during the 1970s, though some may contend that Eiseley, an American anthropologist and author of *The*

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*Immense Journey* (1946), beat him to the punch. Others would argue that Gary Snyder deserves recognition as one of the founders of deep ecology as well. For a definition of deep ecology, see Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 20-23. For a discussion of Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, see Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 172-75, and Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 379-87.

<sup>55</sup> See Madison, *Federalist* No. 10, in *The Federalist Papers*, 48-55.

<sup>56</sup> Madison, *Federalist* No. 10, in *The Federalist Papers*, 49.

<sup>57</sup> To get a sense of how the War of 1812 changed the political landscape and prompted new ways of looking at the land, consider this comparison. In 1801, in his first inaugural address, Jefferson optimistically described the United States as "possessing a chosen country, with room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation" (*Portable TJ*, 292). By 1818, however, Madison argued that "we can scarcely be warranted in supposing that all the productive powers of [the earth] can be made subservient to the use of man, in exclusion of all the plants and animals not entering into his stock of subsistence" (*Address*, 263). For a collection of Edmund Ruffin's agrarian writings, and a helpful introduction to his work, see *Nature's Management* edited by Jack Kirby.

<sup>58</sup> For a summary of Kennedy's argument, see *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause*, 1-2.

## Chapter Two

### Manufacturing Connecticut: Georgic Discourse and the Didactic Sense of Place

The region of New England has often served as a focal point for studies of North American environmental history. These studies typically depart from a general premise: Americans have radically changed the environment and many of those changes have been harmful. To explain this pattern of ecological decline, historians William Cronon, Carolyn Merchant, and Ted Steinberg, among others, have located a few key turning points in the American past. In New England, they say, the first of these so-called “ecological revolutions” involved the arrival of European settlers and the colonial conquest of the indigenous peoples; the second entailed a transition to market agriculture and the scientific rationalization of the land; and a third wave saw the creation of an industrial mill system along with the rise of the modern corporation. Each of these turning points accelerated the commodification of the natural world, the single most powerful idea contributing to environmental problems.<sup>1</sup>

Arriving in New England, Europeans brought the plow, the pig, the gun, and the fence; they brought disease; they brought axes and milk cows; they brought the rat, the dandelion, and the black fly; but most of all, they brought the concept of capital and the notion of the natural world as a smorgasbord of commodities. Viewing the land as an economic resource, settlers overlooked its ecological networks and imposed their own sense of order on the natural chaos. They cleared and consumed the forests for firewood and potash, ship masts and lumber, and to claim new land for agricultural use. Such deforestation caused regional climate change, more frequent floods and droughts, soil erosion and recalibrated watersheds. Meanwhile, new plows made possible the cultivation of more acreage. Pigs, set loose to graze on common lands,

ravaged neighboring fields and inspired a series of fence laws that required farmers to enclose their crops. Wolves, suffering from habitat loss, preyed on domestic livestock, prompting a predator bounty that led to their extermination. Eventually, population growth and market agriculture exhausted the fertility of the soil and encouraged more aggressive land-use practices. Settlers built roads to connect their villages, they constructed dams and water-wheels to power their new machinery, and by the time the railroad arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, New England had become, according to Thoreau, “a maimed and imperfect nature.”<sup>2</sup>

Most studies of the New England environment have this basic trajectory in common. They chart a history of conflict and conquest leading toward an increasing control of nature, a relentless conversion of the land base into a money machine. But this outcome did not happen overnight; no one flipped a switch on the market revolution; instead, these changes unfolded slowly, over centuries, as part of a long historical process. Indeed, the very model of an ecological revolution—whether colonial, agricultural, scientific, or industrial—flattens history into a false teleology. For instance, despite improvements in technology and transportation, different modes of agricultural production existed simultaneously well into the nineteenth century. Although some farmers adopted practices of convertible husbandry to ramp up production and sell commodities to the global market, many neglected scientific advances and continued to rely on regional markets, while geographic isolation forced a few farmers to remain primarily oriented toward subsistence. As Richard Judd and Brian Donahue have shown, many Europeans settling in New England also brought Old World traditions of conservation to their new homes; the agrarian values of their rural culture taught them to serve as stewards of the common lands; and up until the nineteenth century, when market forces transformed agricultural production, many of these farmers practiced a more sustainable system of land management than

the standard story of ecological decline may lead us to believe. Likewise, the household manufacture of clothing and tools endured into the nineteenth century even as industrial mills infiltrated the countryside. These older forms of production would never entirely die out, but eventually the new factory system would become the dominant regional paradigm.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, not everyone in New England celebrated economic improvement to the same degree or for the same reasons. Well before Thoreau, a handful of conscientious critics began to recognize the natural and cultural damages that accompanied capitalist progress. None of them posed such a radical challenge to economic assumptions, but they did express a growing anxiety about the potential pitfalls of industrial development. Thus, a counter-discourse of conservation emerged alongside the ideology of improvement, calling for collective action to address the problems of deforestation, soil exhaustion, and the increasing rate of western emigration. Of course, these early arguments for conservation were often embedded in a capitalist mentality. Embracing an anthropocentric and utilitarian agenda, they aimed to ensure personal profits and national security. But this call for conservation combined its economic motives with an ethical desire to protect conservative social values such as religious conformity, community stability, and republican virtue. In other words, during the generation following the American Revolution, a dual discourse of *economic* and *ethical* improvement worked together to shape the future of New England, but eventually the economic agenda overruled the ethical.

The state of Connecticut provides a unique frame of reference for examining this conflict between economic and ethical values, and for exploring a range of responses to environmental change. Before the War of Independence, the state supported an agrarian economy in which farmers grew crops primarily for local and regional markets, a mode of production that kept property and wealth widely distributed. But during the 1790s, when Hamilton's financial plan

mobilized commercial interests, this balance of wealth shifted. A new banking system emerged, making capital and credit available for the shipping industry, which in turn allowed farmers to take better advantage of foreign markets. Soon, the carrying trade created a class of gentleman farmers, merchants, and ship owners who became dominant in local politics. During this period, Connecticut was the most conservative and orthodox state in the union. Its religious leaders in the Congregationalist Church had little tolerance for different belief systems, and some, like Timothy Dwight, expressed an almost comical paranoia about the danger of deism—which he called “infidelity”—and the democratic spirit sweeping the globe during the French Revolution. Meanwhile, as the Republicans rose to prominence on the national stage, the Federalist Party lingered on in Connecticut. Most of the merchants, bankers, and gentleman farmers who controlled the economy belonged to the Congregationalist-Federalist contingent, a Standing Order of political power devoted to conservative values and resistant to democratic radicalism.

From the 1790s to the 1820s, however, a series of religious, economic, and political changes swept across the state. In his study of Connecticut, Richard Purcell suggests that democracy took longer to develop there than elsewhere in the U.S., and a full generation would pass before the Standing Order broke down under pressure from a growing middle class. Until the War of 1812, the Federalists ruled both the electoral system and the state assembly, but following the war, an internal split in the party opened the door for democratic reforms, leading to the election of the first Republican governor and the creation of a new state constitution defending religious freedom. Despite the efforts of Congregationalists like Timothy Dwight, a general wave of liberalism also infected the religious life of the state. Other sects, especially the Episcopalians but also the Baptists and Methodists, earned recognition, rights, and a role in state politics. Meanwhile, during the embargo crisis of 1807-09 and the War of 1812, the shipping

industry sank into decline and many of the state's most promising citizens fled to western lands. In response, the leaders of Connecticut initiated a new era of economic improvement.<sup>4</sup>

The collapse of the carrying trade revealed the importance of agriculture to the state's economy. But because they lacked the land and capital, most Connecticut farmers were slow to adopt new methods of scientific production, and their old-fashioned practices, when intensified by market demands, further exacerbated the problems of soil exhaustion and western emigration. According to leaders like David Humphreys, the solution to these problems would require a combination of agricultural reform and domestic manufacturing. To prevent economic ruin, a number of scientific and agricultural societies sprang up throughout New England, sponsoring the nation's first agricultural fairs and teaching new techniques of soil improvement, convertible husbandry, and livestock production. Meanwhile, domestic manufacturing surged after Humphreys imported a flock of merino sheep from Spain, leading to the formation of a new woolen industry. Before 1800, water-powered mills in Connecticut catered exclusively to local communities, but in the first decades of the nineteenth century, these mills evolved into an industrial factory system that radically altered land-use patterns, labor relations, and economic interests. By 1820, the state supported a thriving textile industry, along with multiple munitions factories, paper mills, rum distilleries, glass factories, naileries, and a number of other facilities producing everything from clocks and tinware to buttons and bonnets.<sup>5</sup>

Timothy Dwight and David Humphreys built their careers across the arc of these changes. Both attended Yale College, the stronghold of the Standing Order, and supported the Patriot cause in the American Revolution. During the War of Independence, Humphreys joined the Continental Army and served as aide-de-camp to General Washington, then as diplomat to Spain and Portugal during the 1790s. After the election of 1800, seeking to purge the foreign

ministry of the Federalist Party, Jefferson recalled several diplomats from abroad, including Humphreys, who returned to New England and spent the rest of his life as a businessman and agricultural reformer. Dwight, on the other hand, served the state of Connecticut as a minister and educator. Following the War of Independence, he became pastor of Greenfield parish near Fairfield, Connecticut, and a decade later he was appointed president of Yale College, a post he held until his death in 1817. As part of their public lives, Dwight and Humphreys also crafted literary careers. Along with John Trumbull and Joel Barlow, they formed the Connecticut Wits, a group of Yale graduates who wrote a number of poems celebrating patriotic themes, criticizing moral and political corruption, and attempting to predict the future of America. But as the nation underwent a period of change from 1790 to 1820, this didactic poetry became obsolete and both Dwight and Humphreys eventually abandoned it. After 1800, they turned increasingly away from poetry, away from myth, toward the hard facts and empirical reality of prose.<sup>6</sup>

In such poems as Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* (1794) and Humphreys's *A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America* (1792/1804), we can see how the agrarian ideal defined the culture of Connecticut in the years after the Revolution. These works of literary geography construct a contrast between Europe and America that condemns the Old World for its vice and degeneracy and praises New England for its republican virtue, religious piety, and agrarian independence. With an impassioned strain of local pride and regional exceptionalism, Dwight and Humphreys presented Connecticut as a model for the rest of America, a pure place of social stability and self-sufficiency. Later, in prose works like *A Discourse on the Agriculture of the State of Connecticut* (1816) and *Travels in New England and New York* (1821-22), Humphreys and Dwight continued to advance the "Connecticut ideal" by demonstrating the social value of the New England village, the advantage of the township pattern of settlement, and the work ethic

of Connecticut farmers. But the two writers also invested their geographic vision with a capitalist mentality that regarded agricultural science and economic improvement as the best way to protect the state from the dangers of religious deism, reckless democracy, and the Republican Party. Filling their prose with a collection of facts, statistics, and scientific details, Dwight and Humphreys sought to create, in effect, empirical proofs of Connecticut's cultural superiority.

This transition from poetry to prose paralleled a market revolution that transformed the landscape of New England from an agrarian countryside into an organic machine. With the increase in domestic manufacturing, the creation of an industrial mill system, and the rise of the modern corporation, a capitalist mentality took hold of the region. Yet Dwight and Humphreys believed that Connecticut could, and should, pursue economic improvement without dramatically upsetting its social and political traditions. To reconcile the conflict between economic and ethical values, they embraced a doctrine of agricultural science and domestic manufacturing. Meanwhile, as didactic poetry lost its public appeal, they adopted new rhetorical methods to advance an old set of agrarian values. Through poetry and prose, public addresses and statistical surveys, Dwight and Humphreys sought to preserve the permanence of place—the social stability, cultural identity, and religious piety of the state of Connecticut. In short, they manufactured a sense of place in an effort to improve the culture of New England; they enlisted geography to shape the future of the region.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, Dwight and Humphreys had their differences, which makes them compelling figures to compare. Dwight was much less enthusiastic about industrial progress. Throughout his life, he remained resistant to cultural change; his general outlook was provincial, pessimistic, and backward-looking. The empirical, statistical structure of his *Travels* reads like a textual effort to freeze time, to capture a fleeting glimpse of history before democracy and deism ripped apart the

fabric of the nation. Against the sweeping changes in New England, he fought to preserve an agrarian ideal in Connecticut, a vision of rural stability and regional harmony. In contrast, Humphreys was more cosmopolitan, future-oriented, and optimistic. He believed that economic and ethical improvement went hand in hand—when in the right hands. Employing poor women and children in his woolen mills, and arranging for their education, he sought to combine social and industrial progress, and indeed, many viewed his company town as a great humanitarian effort.

From the writings of Dwight and Humphreys we can draw two basic conclusions about the agrarian ideal during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Between 1790 and 1820, the outlook of agricultural reformers like Humphreys became increasingly scientific and capitalistic in orientation. Yet conservative leaders like Dwight continued to enlist the agrarian ideal to challenge the pace of industrial progress and to defend a traditional set of social values. Thus, we might say that the period following the American Revolution involved a rupture in the agrarian ideal, a slow but sure detachment of economic motives from ethical values. In the twentieth century, in the work of Aldo Leopold, Louis Bromfield, and Wendell Berry, among others, we find an effort to reunite these threads of thinking, but it is here, in the early Republic, when they first began to unravel. Seeking to shape the future of Connecticut, figures like Dwight and Humphreys adapted the agrarian ideal to promote or critique different forms of political economy, and in the process, they redefined the meaning of the ideal. The rest of this chapter tells the story of this fundamental split in agrarian ideology.

*Topographical Poetry: Dwight's Georgic Verse*

In 1783, at the close of the War of Independence, Timothy Dwight became minister of the rural parish of Greenfield Hill, near Fairfield, Connecticut, where he would live and work for a dozen years. During that time, political and economic pressures increasingly threatened the stability of the American Republic, and Dwight began to fret that the Revolution had carried the torch of liberty too far. He regarded the spirit of democratic self-interest as dangerously corrosive to social order, and he worried that a growing class conflict between commercial citizens on the eastern seaboard and the small farmers of the frontier would soon spill over into violence. Many of these fears came true in 1786-87 when Daniel Shays led a group of disgruntled war veterans and indebted farmers in armed revolt against aggressive taxation and debt collection in the state of Massachusetts. The main events of Shays's Rebellion played out in the Connecticut Valley near Dwight's childhood home, and like other members of the Standing Order, he viewed the uprising as a symptom of the weakness of the Articles of Confederation and as proof of the pitfalls of popular rule. In turn, he supported the Constitution then taking shape in Philadelphia because it promised to restore social stability by strengthening the political system. But he also saw the document as insufficiently secular—too secular to motivate moral order—and would have preferred instead a more theocratic form of government.<sup>8</sup>

In the same year as the Constitutional Convention, Dwight began writing the first version of *Greenfield Hill*—or so he later claimed—a book-length topographical poem that promoted a program of social stability by representing the state of Connecticut as a pious and harmonious agrarian society free from political and economic unrest. Incidentally, Dwight completed the poem in 1794, when yet another agrarian revolt, the Whiskey Rebellion, took place on the American frontier. In the seven years between the poem's inception and publication, Dwight

witnessed a chain of events that struck at the heart of his conservative values. In spite of the Constitution, an emerging political factionalism threatened to split the federal union along regional lines, with the Republican Party representing the interests of frontier farmers and southern planters, while the Federalist Party aligned itself with the more commercial nexus of gentleman farmers, urban merchants, and ship owners along the eastern seaboard. Meanwhile, the French Revolution, accelerating toward the Reign of Terror in 1794, incited enthusiasm for the abstract ideals of personal liberty while also inspiring new pleas for the separation of church and state. At one point, with disdain for this secular turn in American politics, Dwight set aside *Greenfield Hill* to compose *The Triumph of Infidelity* (1788), a fire-and-brimstone jeremiad warning his fellow citizens that skepticism and rationalism would soon lead the nation into chaos. As a leading member of the Congregationalist Church, Dwight used the pulpit to denounce the evil axis of the French Revolution, the Republican Party, and Thomas Jefferson, who for Dwight represented everything awful in America: deism, democracy, infidelity, and social instability. In this context, we can see *Greenfield Hill* as an effort to reinforce a more conservative social order by reinterpreting the American Revolution through a Federalist lens.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the poem, Dwight employs a form of oppositional rhetoric that maps a geography of difference between Europe and America; he enlists the poetic mode of the georgic and the political philosophy of classical republicanism to suggest that Virgil's ideal agrarian society has come back to life in Connecticut; and he engages in persistent didactic instruction designed to cultivate public virtue in an audience of American farmers. To support this ideological agenda, the poem presents a highly localized view of the new republic. Dwight's sense of place—his attention to landscape features, land-use patterns, and episodes of local history—shapes the very structure of the poem. Indeed, biographer Kenneth Silverman regards

this “intense localism” as Dwight’s most important contribution to American literature. By devoting *Greenfield Hill* to “a parochial scene” in a specific region, says Silverman, Dwight achieved “a new concreteness” that was “unprecedented in any earlier American poetry.” Likewise, Leon Howard praises the poem for its “accuracy of observation” and “sensuousness of appreciation.” In a brief prose introduction, Dwight himself described the poem as a product of its setting, a geographic text that mines the landscape for social and political lessons. “In the Parish of Greenfield, in the town of Fairfield, in Connecticut,” he begins, “there is a pleasant and beautiful eminence, called Greenfield Hill, at the distance of three miles from Long-Island Sound.” From the prospect of this hill, the poem proceeds through a series of geographic frames, as various features in the landscape direct the trajectory of the argument.<sup>10</sup>

Given this loco-descriptive design, *Greenfield Hill* emulates a long tradition of topographical poetry in Britain, many works of which Dwight alludes to directly in the text, including John Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* (1642), Alexander Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* (1713), James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730), and Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village* (1770). Dwight admits that his project began as a conscious effort to imitate these British poets, but eventually, he insists, he abandoned the effort—though somewhat unsuccessfully. Indeed, we ought to appreciate the irony here. The poem’s celebration of American nationhood invokes the form and content of British literature, and even though Dwight rejects the influence of England, the mother country remains present in both his text and the culture he represents. Meanwhile, the predominant poetic mode of *Greenfield Hill* hearkens back to Virgil’s *Georgics* (29 B.C.) and the long literary tradition that followed in its footsteps. In a study of georgic poetry, Anthony Low provides a helpful definition; he suggests “that the georgic is a mode that stresses the value of intensive and persistent labor against hardships and difficulties; that it differs from pastoral

because it emphasizes work instead of ease; that it differs from epic because it emphasizes planting and building instead of killing and destruction; and that it is preeminently the mode suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations.” Building upon Low’s definition, Rachel Crawford describes how the georgic mode gained popularity among British poets in the early eighteenth century, only to lose its cultural authority in the 1770s when, first, the rise of empirical science “deflected” the didactic function of poetry into prose writing, and second, the American Revolution created the symbolic impression that agrarian values had emigrated across the ocean to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

We cannot fully understand *Greenfield Hill* until we situate it within this transatlantic context, for the poem involves not only the celebration of an American place, or the construction of an American identity, but the appropriation and relocation of various features of European ideology. William Dowling suggests, for example, that we ought to read *Greenfield Hill* as an expression of the country ideology that influenced so many of the American founders. As historians Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood have demonstrated, the leaders of the American Revolution adapted many of their political and rhetorical tools from a group of opposition writers in England who criticized the excesses of power and patronage in the British government. In the seventeenth century, these whig politicians instigated the constitutional reforms of the Glorious Revolution, which balanced the power of the King with a stronger Parliament, and throughout the eighteenth century they continued to challenge a perceived conspiracy between moneyed interests and the monarchy. According to Dowling, however, country ideology was not simply a false consciousness absorbed into society to the extent that it had become invisible. Instead, it involved a set of rhetorical strategies that enabled the *unmasking* of the dominant ideology then controlling the central government. By stripping away the cloak of tradition, country ideology

demonstrated how wealth, luxury, and self-interest had corrupted the English Constitution. Following that *unmasking*, the practitioners of country ideology sought to recover the ideals of classical republicanism and civic humanism—including the agrarian values of hard work, economic simplicity, and public virtue—which they derived from Roman writers like Horace, Livy, and Virgil.<sup>12</sup>

In *Greenfield Hill*, we can see this two-stage process in full effect. On the one hand, Dwight delivers a scathing critique of the British imperial power, condemning its luxurious culture and warning against the moneyed interests of an emergent capitalism. On the other hand, in pastoral opposition to Europe, he constructs an ideal vision of his home parish, picturing the state of Connecticut as the last refuge of civic virtue, a republic of frugal farmers living in social and natural harmony. Thus, we might say that the georgic mode itself functions as a form of ideology, for it entails more than a benign celebration of agricultural labor, more than a peaceful correlation between land and virtue. Instead, as Larry Kutchen argues, the structure of georgic poetry dramatizes the very process of nation-building; that is, the genre of the georgic implies an imperial agenda. Not only does Dwight seek to recover the lost world of Virgil's *Georgics*, but he intends to extend that agrarian society across the continent of North America, from sea to shining sea. Like Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* stretches the rhetoric of the text beyond the boundaries of its home ground to map the progress of empire across space. For Dwight, as for Jefferson, the extensive territory of North America promises a temporary escape from the forces of historical decay, a momentary reprieve from the internal pressures of social and political conflict. At the same time, however, both writers believe that the durability of the agrarian republic depends upon the intelligent settlement and ethical stewardship of the American land base.<sup>13</sup>

By recognizing the ideological function of georgic poetry, we can see how all the pieces of *Greenfield Hill* fit together. The poem proceeds through seven parts, each of them essential to the larger design. In Parts I and II, Dwight surveys the local scene, praises the agrarian paradise of Connecticut, and develops a contrast between Europe and America. Parts III and IV narrate two episodes of local history, suggesting that the agrarian ideal sits on contested ground, while Parts V and VI deliver advice to the villagers of Greenfield Hill in the voice of a clergyman and a farmer, both of whom promote a program of economic and ethical improvement. Finally, in Part VII, the poem concludes with a vision of Connecticut society extending across the continent. In each of these sections, by infusing geography with ideology, Dwight constructs a didactic sense of place; the topographical poem becomes as much a political sermon as a regional survey; and the local scene functions as the geographic prototype for a future republican empire.

Part I of the poem opens in spring, a symbolic gesture picturing Connecticut as the reincarnation of the lost Roman Republic. While mapping the agricultural landscape of the local region, Dwight praises the “industry” and “independence” of the people, insisting that the harsh climate of New England motivates hard work and moral vigor among its inhabitants. “Cold is thy clime,” he admits, “but every western blast / Brings health, and life, and vigour on its wings” (I.92-93). Unlike the “effeminate” influence of “milder climes,” the “rough soil” of New England requires “manly purpose” and “hardy labour” (I.96-109). Throughout the poem, Dwight also celebrates the so-called “competence” of Connecticut’s rural economy, by which he means the freehold ownership of land, the equal distribution of property, and the absence of class conflicts. “In little farms,” he writes, “They measur’d all thy realms, to every child / In equal shares descending” (I.140-41). Because the people of Connecticut have rejected the traditions of primogeniture and entail, because “every farmer reigns a little king” (II.166), they are free from

feudal dependencies and able to attain an independent lifestyle. Thus, Dwight asserts that the stability of American society rests upon the golden mean of the middle-class farmer.

After establishing this Connecticut ideal, Dwight compares it to the alternative of European society. Drawing upon the polemical techniques of country ideology, he warns against the luxury and vice inherent in the British commercial system, and like Jefferson, he constructs a geography of difference, a rhetoric of opposition that sets the agrarian values of America against the moneyed interests of England. “Look not to Europe,” the poet tells his fellow citizens, “for examples just / Of order, manners, customs, doctrines, laws, / Of happiness, or virtue,” because there you will find only evidence “Of wealth enormous, and enormous want; / Of lazy sinecures, and suffering toil” (I.234-44). Dwight depicts England as the source of moral degeneracy and the monarchical power from which his “happy swain” has escaped to replant republican virtue in the soil of a new continent. “Behold her jails,” he rants, “Her brothels,” wars, and countless crimes against humanity (I.251-55). Such corruption infects every segment of European society: “See every heart / And head from dunghills up to thrones, moon’d high / With fashion, frippery, falling humbly down” (I.267-69). “Say then, ah say,” the speaker appeals to American readers, “would’st thou for these exchange / Thy sacred institutions? thy mild laws? / Thy pure religion? morals uncorrupt? / Thy plain and honest manners? order, peace, / And general weal?” (I.293-97).

In Part II, Dwight continues this contrast by inverting the argument of Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*, a poem that decried the destruction of an English village at the hands of an avaricious landlord who chose to enclose the commons for a pleasure ground. Lamenting the depopulation of the rural landscape and the erosion of agrarian values, Goldsmith delivered a potent critique of agrarian capitalism and its class inequality. “Ill fares the land,” he wrote, “to

hastening ill a prey, / Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Goldsmith’s deserted village, Dwight dubs Greenfield Hill “the flourishing village,” a hint that England’s persecuted commoners might find a new and better home in Connecticut. “No griping landlord here alarms the door, / To halve, for rent, the poor man’s little store. / No haughty owner drives the humble swain / To some far refuge from his dread domain” (II.81-84). Thus, *Greenfield Hill* idealizes the New England village, which Dwight regards as the perfect settlement pattern for the preservation of rural community. He asserts that the physical design of the township—with its central school and church and modest homes surrounding a village common—naturally creates an educated and virtuous public. Ironically, however, this postcard version of the New England village was itself a product of the market forces that reshaped America after the Revolution. Many historians now believe, in fact, that New England citizens formed central villages not to preserve their old agrarian values but to fulfill their new commercial purposes.<sup>15</sup>

With full faith in the nation’s manifest destiny, Dwight calls upon American pioneers to clone the Connecticut village in the West. “And when new regions prompt their feet to roam, / And fix, in untrod fields, another home,” the poet proclaims at the end of Part II, “Towns, cities, fanes, shall lift their towery pride, / The village bloom, on every streamlets side” (II.677-716). Unlike Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, Dwight’s *Greenfield Hill* expresses little anxiety about the potential degeneracy of frontier life, despite the fears that would later define his Federalist politics. Instead, at this point in his career, Dwight believed that western settlers would simply replicate the social order of New England as they migrated across the continent. The pioneers would plant new villages, labor to improve the landscape, and sow the seeds of republican virtue in the soil of every region. In this imperial vision of emigration, Americans leave their homes behind not because of internal economic pressures in the eastern states, nor

because of the exhaustion of natural resources, but because they wish to perform their duty for the republican empire, just as Dwight's Puritan fathers had long ago performed their "errand into the wilderness."<sup>16</sup>

We can hardly underestimate the imperial implications of *Greenfield Hill*, for the act of conquest is built into the very structure of the poem. In fact, to conclude the entire book, Dwight circles back to the vision of republican empire glimpsed at the onset and detects the future of the United States embedded in the local scene. Part VII revolves around an allegorical episode in which a topographical spirit, the Genius of the Sound, emerges from the waters off the coast of Connecticut to expound a prophecy of America's future glory. Again, Dwight emulates his poetic predecessors, deriving this allegorical figure from Pope's *Genius of the Thames* and Thomson's *Genius of the Deep*. The obvious plagiarizing of such a trope demonstrates not only the link between *Greenfield Hill* and the tradition of British georgic but also the palpable way in which Dwight saw the same classical republicanism exalted in eighteenth-century Britain as resurrected in post-revolutionary America. "Here the best blessings of those far-fam'd climes," declares the Genius of the Sound, "Pure of their woes, and whiten'd from their crimes, / Shall blend with nobler blessings all my own" (VII.69-71). To prove that the geography of North America has more imperial promise than the wasteland of the Old World, Dwight maps the topographical features of a new agrarian paradise: "Profusely scatter'd o'er these regions, lo! / What scenes of grandeur, and of beauty, glow. / It's noblest wonders here Creation spreads: / Hills... Forests... Lakes... Landscapes... And plains" (VII.105-12). Here, then, at the end of *Greenfield Hill*, we discover the classic formulation of what Perry Miller once called the myth of "nature's nation" and what Myra Jehlen has labeled the "American incarnation"—the belief that

the very energy inherent in the continent would fuel the spirit of conquest and shape the identity of the nation.<sup>17</sup>

Let us not forget that Dwight allegedly composed *Greenfield Hill* in the shadow of the Constitutional Convention and ratification debate, leading him to boast that the U.S. had created “A new born structure” of government that would ensure both social stability and economic independence (VII.270). But again, this stability rests upon a theory of political economy, upon the backbone of agricultural labor and land ownership: “Through the whole realm, behold convenient farms / Fed by small herds, and gay with cultur’d charms; / To sons, in equal portions handed down” (VII.217-19). Instead of filling the coffers of a king or enriching a class of aristocrats, the Genius says, Americans channel their wealth toward the public good. Thus, the final part of the poem celebrates a variety of internal improvements then emerging in America—the construction of new roads, bridges, and canals; the creation of an original art, architecture, and poetry; and the scientific contributions of such figures as Benjamin Franklin and David Rittenhouse. Ultimately, Dwight portrays the U.S., and especially Connecticut, as an ideal site for new knowledge production, not only because of its natural potential but also because of its unique “competence”—its equality of property and its benevolent form of government.

But this agrarian utopia is not entirely free from the forces of evil. In Part II, for example, while surveying the local scene, the poet notices a black man working in the fields, prompting a reflection on the problem of slavery. Surreptitiously, Dwight deflects away from Connecticut any real culpability for the sins of slavery by insisting that the African laborer in New England earns the respect of his masters, maintains his human dignity, and so “Slides on, thro’ life, with more than common glee” (II.204). Looking beyond Connecticut, however, Dwight condemns the slave system because it violates not only human decency but the basic agrarian values of independent

labor and personal property rights. But rather than reproach the slave states of the American South for this obvious hypocrisy, Dwight locates the evils of the plantation system in the West Indies, a geographic sleight-of-hand that allows him to salvage a georgic vision of the U.S. as a free-labor economy. Throughout *Greenfield Hill*, in fact, Dwight consistently shifts the blame for such sins away from his fellow Americans, thereby purifying the white inhabitants of the U.S. and casting them as the rightful inheritors of the earth. But these efforts cannot fully conceal the cruelties of his Puritan forefathers nor the underlying fact that nation-building almost always involves a history of conquest and bloodshed.

To reinforce this recognition, the middle of the poem narrates two episodes of local history, demonstrating the degree to which Dwight lives on contested ground. Part III revisits a series of British raids along the southern coast of Connecticut during the War of Independence, a scorched-earth episode that culminated in the burning of Fairfield, while Part IV digs deeper into the past to recover the story of the Pequot War in the 1630s, reconstructing the events of the infamous massacre at Mystic, Connecticut, and the Indians' subsequent retreat to a swamp west of Fairfield. Inspired by features of the landscape, these historical tales complement the georgic mode, for not only do they bring history into alignment with geography, they offer the poet a means to reconcile his peaceful agrarian vision with the violence that made it possible. The very process of imperial conquest that revived Virgil's lost republic in Connecticut also entailed a series of armed conflicts and the expulsion of the Native Americans who originally inhabited the state. But even as Dwight acknowledges these unsavory truths, he evades responsibility by externalizing the causes of conflict, blaming the War of Independence upon the tyranny of the British empire and the Pequot War upon the equally savage character of the British and the

Indian peoples. Unfortunately, such explanations cannot fully contain the implication that the future of the United States, as it moves west, will reproduce the same imperial aggression.

Following these two historical interludes, which *unmask* the violence of nation-building, Dwight seeks to redeem the Connecticut ideal through two sections of didactic moral advice. Indeed, it is important to understand that the georgic mode is not only geographic and imperial in orientation—it is also economic and ethical. Thus, Dwight uses Parts V and VI to instruct the people of America in their civic duty, to encourage their public virtue and their work on behalf of the federal union, and to discourage their economic extravagance and democratic self-interest, the primary causes, in his opinion, of the political instability leading to Shays's Rebellion. In this sense, *Greenfield Hill* serves not only as a poetic vehicle for projecting the future of America, but also as a rhetorical weapon against an emergent capitalism. Dwight infuses the poem with a critique of human greed, materialism, and the inequality of wealth; he warns against the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods; and he exposes the danger that runaway self-interest poses to the traditional values of an agrarian community.

Part V begins with another image of seasonal rebirth, as the spring returns to Connecticut after a winter of war and violence. Having endured a series of past trials, Dwight's villagers emerge into the present moment clean and purified—a textbook example of the mythic cycle of redemption that Richard Slotkin calls “regeneration through violence.” At the center of this scene of rural harmony lives a clergyman, a self-righteous moral leader who, nearing the end of his life, decides to deliver a final sermon to the community. Dwight, revealing his own Calvinistic theology, praises the Preacher for his Puritan duty: “To bless, to save, his only care; / To chill the guilty soul with fear; / To point the pathway to the skies; / And teach, and urge, and aid, to rise” (V.65-68). Indeed, religion lies at the heart of Dwight's georgic ideal, for without the virtues and

values of social order, the republic will decline into corruption and infidelity. The Preacher maps two diverging paths for the people of his parish, the one leading to heaven, the other to hell. While shepherding his flock toward the virtuous path, he encourages them to unite their piety with agricultural labor and land stewardship. Because the stability of the agrarian republic depends upon Christian charity—or so Dwight believes—his clergyman urges the people to help the poor and sick, and to preserve the traditions of rural fellowship and hospitality.

In Part VI, Dwight complements this religious appeal for ethical improvement with an agricultural address aimed at economic improvement. He introduces a new speaker, who, like the Preacher, bestows his wisdom upon the villagers: “Not long since liv’d a Farmer plain, / Intent to gather honest gain, / Laborious, prudent, thrifty, neat, / Of judgment strong, experience great, / In solid homespun clad, and tidy, / And with no coxcomb learning giddy” (VI.7-12). The ideal American citizen, industrious and virtuous, educated yet unpretentious, this enlightened elder delivers more than seven hundred lines of octosyllabic verse celebrating the rural economy while promoting personal industry, public education, “*good neighbourhood*,” and “*parochial harmony*.” Resembling Benjamin Franklin’s Father Abraham, Dwight’s Farmer combines all the characteristics vital to the preservation of the republic, and his georgic vision involves a species of moral accounting that echoes Franklin and anticipates Thoreau—who would later lampoon this rhetorical tradition. The Farmer stresses the economic and ethical returns of hard work, steady habits, and social cooperation, while advising the villagers to maintain a “strict account” of their agricultural and spiritual wealth: “Let *order* o’er your time preside, / And *method* all your business guide” (VI.65-66). He instructs the people to save their money, to practice simplicity and frugality, and to avoid speculating on the market. As patriotic citizens, he says, they should pay their taxes punctually, support the government, and reject the sort of agrarian

revolt then upsetting the American frontier. Likewise, he tells them to stay out of debt and shun the luxury and vice of conspicuous consumption. In short, he promotes a highly conservative social order, because, he believes, “*On uniformity depends / All government, that gains its ends*” (VI.389-90).<sup>18</sup>

First and foremost, Dwight’s Farmer seeks to cultivate virtue in the villagers, a moral mission propped up with a botanical metaphor: “Virtues, like plants of nobler kind, / Transferred from regions more refin’d, / The gardener’s careful hand must sow; / His culturing hand must bid them grow” (VI.429-32). To that end, the Farmer sketches a parable of a local family who rides the wheel of fortune through three generations—an object lesson in the social dangers of excessive self-interest and class ambitions. The first father, poor in property but not in faith, works to clear the forest for a farm, improves the land and fattens his cattle, and so leaves a healthy inheritance for his son, who receives a college education and aspires to hold public office. But ambition and vanity soon lead the son astray, for political life does not promise the same virtues as agricultural labor. Instead, he “blends oeconomy with show,” and “Intent on office, as on gain,” he abandons his family duty (VI.620-24). His children become lazy, greedy, and profligate, and eventually they overrule their mother and plunge the family into ruin. Upon his father’s death, the next son squanders the family fortune, first as a result of bad business and then by gambling and whoring. So the wheel of fortune turns, and the next generation enters a life of poverty.

This family allegory reinforces Dwight’s belief that economic simplicity will produce moral wealth whereas the luxury of the consumer economy leads too often to corruption. Thus, according to the Farmer, both public education and strong family values are essential to the stability of the state. Fortunately, he says, Connecticut has the perfect combination of these

formal and informal institutions: “How bless’d this heaven-distinguish’d land! / Where schools in every hamlet stand; / Far spreads the beams of learning bright, / And every child enjoys the light” (VI.507-10). Meanwhile, the success of the agrarian republic also relies on a spirit of community cooperation, and so the Farmer concludes his address by rejecting the trend toward vexatious litigation. Do not sue your neighbors in pursuit of material gain, he says, nor out of revenge in response to perceived wrongs. Such petty lawsuits erode the public trust, and a true republican citizen need not harness the law to do his personal bidding. Instead, he will work together with his neighbors to resolve disputes for the good of the whole. When an individual becomes too obsessed with financial success, he concludes, the sense of community evaporates, and down goes the republican empire.

In the course of this didactic homily, Dwight’s Farmer delivers a hundred lines of practical instruction promoting scientific methods of soil improvement, livestock production, forest conservation, and a more permanent agriculture. Preaching a gospel of convertible husbandry, he advises the people of Connecticut to manure their lands, plant cover crops, drain marshes to bring wasteland into production, enclose woodlots to ensure a durable source of timber, and even raise sheep for the textile industry. But above all, Dwight envisions an economy of small farms, not the large-scale industrial production then common on Southern plantations. “‘Tis folly in th’ extreme,” says the enlightened Farmer, “*to till / Extensive fields, and till them ill*” (VI.127-28). Instead, he says, “Till a little, and that little well” (VI.138). Addressing the problem of soil exhaustion then afflicting New England, Dwight’s Farmer calls for a new era of soil improvement: “Some new manure must now be found; / Some better culture fit the ground. / Oft turn the soil to feel the weather; / Manure from every quarter gather, / Weeds, ashes, Paris-plaister, lime, / Marle, sea-weed, and the harbour lime” (VI.147-52). Importantly, the Farmer

does not imagine a culture of self-sufficiency, but rather a commercial agriculture devoted to livestock production for the sale of milk, butter, meat, and other renewable commodities. “*Your herds feed well, increase, amend, / And from the wintery storm defend. / No source will surer profit give, / Or furnish easier means to live*” (VI.163-65). Meanwhile, in the most ecological passage in the poem, the Farmer issues a plea for forest conservation that anticipates by twenty years Madison’s argument in the *Address to the Agricultural Society of Albemarle*. “What groves remain with care enclose, / Nor e’er to biting herds expose. / Your store with planted nuts renew, / And acorns o’er each barren strew” (VI.217-20). Thus, Dwight poetically promotes the same system of sustainable land management and convertible husbandry that Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were then attempting to import into Virginia.

Yet among these proposals for a better land ethic, we also see the shoots of a capitalist takeover, a growing emphasis on “profit” and increased productivity as opposed to the traditional values of economic simplicity and social stability. Indeed, at one point Dwight’s Farmer actually predicts the boom in wool production that would soon bring radical changes to the economy and environment of New England:

Let *useful flocks* your care demand,  
Best riches of the happy land.  
From them, shall swell the fleecy store,  
And want, and rags, depart your door;  
Your daughters find a sweet employ,  
And, singing, turn the wheel with joy:  
With homespun rich the loom be gay;  
Your households [*sic*] clad in bright array;

And female toil more profit yield,  
Than half the labours of the field (VI.175-84).

Such lines do not depict a hard-won agricultural self-sufficiency, nor even a modest agrarian independence, but rather a capitalist mode of production that links the Connecticut farm to the market economy. Still, a degree of ambivalence complicates this call for economic improvement. On the one hand, by celebrating the republican values of hard work and rural community, Dwight's Farmer seems to revive the homespun movement of the American Revolution, yet on the other hand, by stressing the utilitarian function of animal husbandry, in which "useful flocks" and "female toil" produce "riches" and "profit" for the landowner, he begins to embrace a vision of economic liberalism.

Indeed, this passage straddles the ideological shift from republicanism to liberalism that defined the American debate over political economy in the late-eighteenth century. Beginning with the Non-Importation Agreement in 1774, which encouraged the household production of homespun textiles and other goods, the colonies initiated a process of economic development that continued in the years following the War of Independence. Traditionally, women performed most of this labor on the farm, while their men tilled the fields, and accordingly Dwight regards the family as the most important economic unit in the pre-industrial agrarian economy. But following the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, citizens of the British empire began to think more critically about the division of labor and the added market value that such labor brings to the productive process. In this sense, we might say that Dwight portrays the exploitation of female labor in a way that anticipates the corporate model of the Waltham-Lowell textile mills. Meanwhile, despite the success of the carrying trade and the cultural persuasion of the agrarian ideal, many Americans in the 1780s and 1790s promoted an increase in domestic manufacturing

for patriotic purposes, hoping to achieve more economic independence, to protect the nation from the uncertainty of foreign trade and military conflict, and to develop a system of internal commerce. By echoing such clarion calls for economic improvement, Dwight followed Jefferson down a reluctant road: he began ever so cautiously to abandon the notion of an economy based primarily on agriculture, and in turn he looked forward to the creation of the industrial mill system that would soon transform the regional economy.<sup>19</sup>

In *Greenfield Hill*, then, we find the first stirrings of a rupture within the agrarian ideal, an awkward and uncertain tension between classical republicanism and economic liberalism. Through the form of the topographical poem, Dwight constructed a didactic sense of place that combined an argument for agricultural reform with a critique of an emergent capitalism, thus encouraging his readers to adopt a better land ethic. He merged Christian piety and community values with the financial interests of the rural family, thus forging a link between economic and ethical improvement. While the poem attempts to reconcile these economic and ethical agendas, however, it also adopts an imperial design that sanctions the spread of republican empire across the American continent and invites the exploitation of land, livestock, and labor for the sake of national progress. In this sense, Dwight holds two paradoxical socioeconomic visions in mind, the one founded on a traditional understanding of small-scale agriculture and the other moving toward a more modern form of industrial land use and market capitalism. Although the main thrust of the poem remains cautious about the dangers of democratic self-interest and the market revolution, a powerful undercurrent suggests that the imperial agenda of the United States will require American farmers to fully embrace a system of scientific and industrial agriculture.

As demonstrated in the first chapter, a similar shift in the principles of political economy led Jefferson to found a nailery atop his pastoral mountain, which began to operate, incidentally,

in the same year Dwight finished his topographical hill poem. What remains of this chapter will show not only how the discourse of agricultural improvement and the turn toward domestic manufacturing shaped political positions, but also how these changing patterns of land use influenced literary production. Following *Greenfield Hill*, Dwight did not return to writing poetry until after the War of 1812, very near the end of his life. In the years between, the georgic mode of didactic poetry went defunct; it could no longer meet the complex demands of empirical science and its instructional function simply migrated into prose. Meanwhile, the year after the publication of *Greenfield Hill*, Dwight left his rural parish for New Haven, where he became the next president of Yale College. His new academic duties and his new public identity also led him away from poetry and increasingly toward prose. But before exploring that transformation in Dwight's career, we turn to the work of another Connecticut Wit and agricultural improver, to the story of the merino sheep and the origins of the industrial mill system in New England.

*Fleecing New England: David Humphreys and Merino Mania*

During the 1790s, while living abroad and serving as Foreign Minister to Spain and Portugal, David Humphreys worked to create a positive image of the United States in European circles. Unlike most modern-day diplomats, however, Humphreys employed poetry as an instrument of foreign relations and as a vehicle of state propaganda. To celebrate his native country, he penned a number of patriotic poems, read them aloud at public gatherings, and sent copies home for publication. One of those works, *A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America*, manufactured an ideal image of Connecticut similar to Dwight's *Greenfield Hill*. With an epic tone of military triumph, the poem glorified the environmental conquest of North America, praised the political economy of the new republic, and advanced an argument for agricultural

improvement. But even as Humphreys expressed an ongoing cultural faith in the agrarian ideal, he began to embrace a more utilitarian form of capitalist progress.<sup>20</sup>

Humphreys wrote the first version of *A Poem on Industry* in 1792 while posted in Lisbon. Responding to current events, this version includes a lengthy denunciation of Algerian piracy, which had resulted in an American hostage crisis that Humphreys, as a diplomat, helped to resolve. To avoid similar fiascos in the future, the poem insists, the United States must develop a stronger navy and defend its commercial interests abroad. Indeed, according to Lawrence Peskin, *A Poem on Industry* perfectly captures the “neomercantilist” position of the Federalist Party because it calls for multiple forms of protectionism, including tariffs and naval defense, in order to stimulate economic growth and create a more favorable balance-of-trade. As a statement on public policy, Humphreys’s verse performs the same rhetorical function as a political pamphlet, and in fact, Mathew Carey, a pro-manufacturing booster, actually published the poem in his *American Museum*, a magazine that promoted U.S. economic independence. Thus, we can read *A Poem on Industry* as an argument for a more balanced national economy combining three vital components: agricultural production, domestic manufactures, and foreign trade.<sup>21</sup>

A decade later, Humphreys revised *A Poem on Industry* for his *Miscellaneous Works* (1804). Given the new political and economic context, he omitted the references to Algerian piracy and replaced them with a passage extolling the virtues of Connecticut. Like Dwight, he suggested that the rest of the U.S. should emulate the state’s republican virtues, and in the process he highlighted the differences between northern and southern systems of land use. In a series of awkward and affected couplets, Humphreys represented his home state as an agrarian paradise—“Thine every grateful gift, my native soil! / That ceaseless comes from *agricultural toil*” (lines 417-18)—and attributed the region’s happiness to its unique cultural institutions—

“Thou fount of learning where I drank, thou Yale! / Fount of religion and of knowledge, hail!” (lines 593-94). Thus, the second version of the poem retreated from a nationalistic call for naval supremacy into a more regional sense of place. Importantly, Humphreys revised the poem shortly after Jefferson fired him from the foreign ministry because of his Federalist loyalties, so the new version appeared in a more partisan climate when Humphreys fretted over the declining influence of New England. Like Dwight, he responded to that anxiety with a heavy dose of regional exceptionalism. Casting aside the politics of national unity, both men focused their attention more narrowly on the agricultural improvement of Connecticut.<sup>22</sup>

True to its title, Humphreys’s poem begins by praising the “industry” of the American people, by which he apparently means their personal work ethic. The first line of *A Poem on Industry* opens with a direct address to this abstract spirit, a mythic yet mundane force hailed as “the Genius of Culture!” (line 1). “Thou changest nature’s face,” Humphreys croons to the muse of industry (line 23). “Creation springs where’er thy plough-share drives” (line 25). During the eighteenth century, according to Leo Marx, the term “industry” simply denoted the quality of hard work, but as new technologies emerged in the 1780s and 1790s, the term developed new connotations, and by the 1820s it often referred specifically to manufacturing production. If we consider Humphreys’s use of the term in the context of his own efforts to support domestic manufactures, we might detect a subtle semantic shift between the two versions of the poem. In addition to the new sections about Connecticut, for example, the revised version includes new material about manufacturing mills, sheep production, and agricultural innovations.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, *A Poem on Industry* celebrates the conversion of the American continent from a wilderness into an agrarian landscape. Believing that such environmental change signals an emerging national greatness, Humphreys applauds it at every turn. In an homage to the past,

he even recounts the standard narrative of the Puritan errand into the wilderness, an epic story summed up in a heroic couplet: “Soon our progenitors subdu’d the wild, / And virgin nature, rob’d in verdure, smil’d” (lines 39-40). Like Dwight, then, Humphreys adopts a georgic design with imperial implications, endorsing the agricultural conquest of both the land base and the indigenous peoples. Later in the poem, returning to the theme of cultural conflict, Humphreys belittles the “savage life” (line 320) of the “rude Indian” (line 327) and predicts their ultimate demise in the wake of economic progress. Their mobile lifeways and means of subsistence, he insists, could never meet the needs of a civilized people: “For them the hunted wood / Now yields redundant, now penurious food— / Regorg’d or famish’d oft—a miscreant crew— / If few their wants, their comforts still more few!” (lines 335-38). In other words, the stadial theory of political economy simply dictated an inevitable transition from the hunter-gatherer lifeways of the Indians to the agrarian and manufacturing society of the United States.

At one point, *A Poem on Industry* compares northern and southern modes of agricultural production, drawing a distinction between the free-labor economy of the North and the plantation system of the South. Like Crèvecoeur, Humphreys repudiates slavery because it violates his faith in free labor, but unlike Crèvecoeur, he does not blame the climate for this degeneracy. Instead, he suggests that the South has warped its moral compass by relying too heavily upon the plantation economy. In order to achieve ethical improvement, says Humphreys, the South must first engage in agricultural improvement:

O’er fens, reform’d, let verdant grass succeed,  
The blue-ting’d indigo—pestiferous weed!  
Where dun, hoed fields, afford subsistence scant  
For those who tend Tobago’s luxury plant,

Bid other crops with brighter hues be crown'd

And herb for beast, and bread for man abound. (lines 85-90)

Thus, the poem advises southern planters to abandon tobacco and other destructive crops in favor of a more balanced system of grain production and convertible husbandry. At the same time, it predicts that the maple sugar industry will help eliminate slavery by reducing the demand for sugar cane. Once again, absurdly, Humphreys frames this agricultural reform in heroic couplets: “Thy sap, more sweet than Hybla’s honey, flows, / Health for the heart-sick—cure of slavery’s woes” (lines 107-08); “Bind up their wounds—then bless the dulcet tree, / Whose substituted sweets one slave may free” (lines 131-32). By undercutting the market for southern cash crops, Humphreys believes, northern farmers can achieve more economic independence *and* contribute to abolition. In this sense, the maple sugar boom of the 1790s sought to combine economic and ethical modes of improvement.<sup>24</sup>

After the election of 1800, Humphreys’s diplomatic position in Spain became untenable. In an act of political house-cleaning, Jefferson swiftly replaced all Federalist foreign ministers with members of the Republican Party, and Humphreys soon returned home to New England. For the rest of his life, he would split time between his home state of Connecticut and the city of Boston. Before his departure from Spain, however, he asked the Spanish court to deliver his gift of diplomatic service in the form of a livestock herd. So it was, in 1802, that a ship carrying a flock of one hundred merino sheep arrived in New York and transferred its pastoral cargo to a sloop bound for Derby, Connecticut. Later that year, Humphreys purchased a mill operation at Rimmon Falls on the Naugatuck River, just upstream from Derby, and began to design a woolen manufactory.

From 1802 to 1806, Humphreys tended his sheep, seasoned them to the climate, watched the flock grow in size, and waged a propaganda campaign to promote the breed. Not until the embargo crisis of 1807-09, however, and the subsequent War of 1812, did market conditions cooperate with his plans. When foreign commerce halted, Americans sought to achieve more economic independence by increasing domestic manufactures and developing internal markets for agricultural goods, and the merino sheep fit perfectly into this scheme. In 1807, Humphreys recruited John Wintherbotham, a wool manufacturer from Manchester (in England), to manage his mills at Rimmon Falls, and together the two men purchased additional land and machinery to convert the small operation into a full-scale company town. As they ramped up production, wool prices began to soar, the market value of the merino skyrocketed, and farmers across Connecticut hacked down the few remaining forests to clear new land for pasture. Before long, Rimmon Falls was renamed Humphreysville, and from 1808 to 1813 a so-called “merino mania” swept across the nation.<sup>25</sup>

The revised version of *A Poem on Industry* explicitly attempts to drum up support for the merino sheep. Directing his didactic verse toward agricultural improvement, Humphreys advises American farmers to convert wasteland and forests into livestock pasturage: “Then, rous’d from lethargies—up! men! increase, / In every vale, on every hill, the fleece! / And see the fold, with thousands teeming, fills / With flocks the bleating vales and echoing hills” (lines 229-32). Because wool production weaves together agricultural and manufacturing interests, Humphreys sees himself as both an American Cincinnatus and the captain of a new industrial agriculture.

Oh, might my guidance from the downs of Spain,  
Lead a white flock across the western main;  
Fam’d like the bark that bore the Argonaut,

Should be the vessel with the burden fraught!

Clad in the raiment my Merinos yield,

Like Cincinnatus fed from my own field. (lines 243-48)

Ignoring for a moment the lack of literary merit, we might read such lines as a sort of mock epic, for the martial tone certainly shears against the pastoral subject in a humorous way. Imagine, if you will, a picture of Humphreys in a merino toga, shepherd's crook raised like a sword in battle, surrounded by a troop of farmers who once served in the Continental Army. Cutting the air with his crook, he declares victory over the field—like a cross between Achilles and Don Quixote. Absurd as that image seems, Humphreys may have intended it. A soldier himself, he retained the title of Colonel throughout his life, and as a poet he hoped to emulate Virgil's *Georgics*, a work that merged martial and agricultural imagery in a nationalistic vision of land, labor, and military might. In this context, *A Poem on Industry* appears totally sincere. Humphreys earnestly regarded the merino sheep as yet another weapon in the agrarian arsenal of the U.S. empire, a belief that resulted in bad poetry, perhaps, and even worse consequences for the land base.

Following the War of 1812, Humphreys helped to establish the Society for Promoting Agriculture in the State of Connecticut and was elected the organization's first president. In 1816, at a meeting in New Haven, he read an address to his fellow members entitled *A Discourse on the Agriculture of the State of Connecticut, and the Means of Making It More Beneficial to the State*, a work of patriotic oratory performing the same didactic function as *A Poem on Industry*. After the publication of his *Miscellaneous Works* in 1804, Humphreys had abandoned poetry in favor of prose, often employing the genre of the public address to advance his georgic agenda. Much like the agricultural address that James Madison would deliver the following year in Virginia, Humphreys's *Discourse* took the shape of an environmental jeremiad. He identified a

litany of problems facing the nation—including soil exhaustion, deforestation, western emigration, political factionalism, an unfavorable balance of trade, and fledgling domestic manufactures—and in response he advocated a program of agricultural reform.<sup>26</sup>

Humphreys's *Discourse* responds directly to the postwar economic crisis of the 1810s, which caused wheat prices to plummet and severely diminished the value of land. During the War of 1812, the shipping industry had basically vanished, and after the Treaty of Ghent the short-term increase in domestic manufactures had also begun to languish. "At this crisis," Humphreys proclaims at the beginning of his speech, "the encouragement and extension of our Agriculture becomes, in my view, all-important." Hailing agriculture as "the principal cause of the wealth of Nations," Humphreys argues that all theories of political economy must first look to the land. If the U.S. truly wishes to correct its social and political woes, he says, then the nation must embrace a system of agricultural improvement. To promote the necessary reform, the *Discourse* persistently taps into a classical republican ideology. Embracing the principle of economic independence, Humphreys urges his fellow Americans to achieve more national self-sufficiency by increasing domestic manufactures, producing homespun textiles, building new roads and canals, and developing a network of internal commerce. Meanwhile, he petitions the federal government to support new agricultural societies and to found a national university where students can study the art and science of agriculture.<sup>27</sup>

For Humphreys, this vision of national greatness remains rooted in a local perspective. Accordingly, he describes his home state of Connecticut as an ideal republican society, a "commonwealth of farmers," a "well-instructed honest, hardy and laborious yeomanry" who possess "virtuous manners" and "industrious and sober habits" (8). Yet even this regional character cannot ensure economic stability. Humphreys observes, for example, that western

expansion had caused an alarming rate of emigration from the eastern states. As more farmers moved west in search of land, New England lost not only its political influence but also the population necessary for its economic prosperity. Without a stable labor force, the manufacturing sector would remain forever immature. To slow the tide of emigration, Humphreys encourages farmers to plough more deeply, manure more thickly, and root themselves in place with a retrenched regional loyalty. “The best means to prevent emigrations,” he decides, “will be to convince our citizens that old and worn land can be renovated and enriched by labour and manure, so as to bear good crops” (16). Some may choose to leave, he concedes, but those who stay put will reap the harvest of an agricultural renaissance.

The majority of the *Discourse* outlines a number of specific reforms—from building better fences to designing more efficient tools, from adopting better fertilizers to breeding more productive livestock. Combining Sir Humphry Davy’s agricultural science with Benjamin Franklin’s didactic rhetoric, Humphreys shifts between arguments for soil improvement and moral improvement, advising farmers to reform their personal habits of crop rotation and seed selection, irrigation and enclosure, domestic order and financial management. Meanwhile, despite the postwar decline in wool prices, the merino sheep—the paragon of agricultural reform—still takes center stage in Humphreys’s program. “I may be permitted to indulge the hope,” he boasts, “that the *acquisition* of the GOLDEN FLEECE, as a *rich staple of commerce* hereafter, and as furnishing a *material to supply abundantly* for us, at present, one of the most *imperious wants* of civilized man, is *an event of some importance*” (22). Thus, with the proverbial wool over his eyes, Humphreys continued to see the merino sheep as an economic panacea: it promised at once to raise the value of land, maximize agricultural production, boost domestic manufactures, and increase commercial exports.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, the merino sheep also brought about a more degrading form of environmental exploitation in New England. By founding a woolen industry in Connecticut, Humphreys and company transformed regional land-use patterns, tied the interests of farmers more closely to manufacturers, and converted the land base into an industrial machine. In retrospect, the rapid increase in sheep production in the first two decades of the nineteenth century constituted an ecological revolution, which eventually paved the way for a corporate mill system at places like Waltham-Lowell and Fall River, Massachusetts. With the best of intentions, Humphreys had hoped to combine economic and ethical modes of improvement. He endorsed the republican values of personal industry, frugality, and close-knit community. He hired a labor force of local women and poor children, promoted their education, and worked to limit western emigration, but his efforts led to unexpected results. Following the War of 1812, wool prices plummeted, sheep farmers sank into debt, and “merino mania” accelerated both the economic and the ecological decline of New England.

In the end, we might read the story of the merino sheep as a cautionary tale, a classic example of a boom-and-bust pattern of capitalist land use. According to agricultural historian Steven Stoll, Humphreys and his fellow merino boosters overlooked the long-term ecological impact of sheep farming in favor of immediate economic gain. Placing all of their chips on the merino sheep, they gambled on the market and attempted to maximize the value of land by speculating on the fluctuating price of a consumer product. At the behest of these agricultural leaders, small farmers in the North often oriented their labor exclusively toward the production of wool, falling into debt in order to support the delicate merino breed, and abandoning the more diversified forms of convertible husbandry that had served them adequately in the past. Many of these farmers became dependent upon factory owners to purchase their wool supply, creating a

complex political alliance between agriculture and manufacturing interests. A decade after Humphreys's death, in fact, his successors threw their support behind the Tariff of 1828, which restricted imports to protect the textile industry. In turn, southern planters decried this "tariff of abominations" as a blatant form of regional favoritism and developed the infamous "doctrine of nullification" rejecting the power of the federal government to undermine their own regional welfare. Thus, in a roundabout way, "merino mania" shaped the economic interests that eventually fueled the most significant sectional conflict before the Civil War.

From the 1790s to the 1810s, Humphreys shifted his literary efforts from georgic poetry into the prose address, and in the process he adopted a more capitalist mentality that treated the land base as an economic resource demanding exploitation. While the theme of agricultural improvement appears consistent throughout his work, its ultimate goal changed radically over the years. In *A Poem on Industry*, Humphreys promoted sheep farming mainly for the sake of defending a traditional agrarian ideal. Two decades later, his logic of improvement led him toward a form of economic liberalism that elevated self-interest above the conservative values of social stability and republican virtue. By the time he wrote *A Discourse on the Agriculture of the State of Connecticut*, his system of animal husbandry had become nothing short of an extraction industry. "Farmers!" he declared. "There is a mine in your land. It is so near the surface as to be reached by the shares of your ploughs. Explore it. Bring the treasure to light" (10). Thus began the destructive process of mining the land that latter-day agrarians like Louis Bromfield and Wendell Berry have so eloquently condemned.

*A Statistical Sense of Place: Dwight's Travels*

In 1799, members of the newly formed Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences launched an ambitious regional study designed to gather information about each of the state's 107 townships. Simeon Baldwin, the recording secretary of the Academy, distributed five hundred copies of a circular letter to learned gentlemen around the state, a twelve-page survey that solicited feedback on the following subjects: the history of town settlement and the origin of the settlers; the presence and population of the Indian peoples, their customs and manners, their burial grounds and monuments, and their names for local geographic features; a description of the mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, springs, and waterfalls; the availability and utility of water; the existence of mines and minerals; the past and present condition of the forests; the availability of timber for firewood and building purposes; the number of furnaces, forges, and mills; the growth of domestic manufactures; the regional agricultural conditions, including specific kinds and quantities of crops, the quality of the soil, the use of manures, the methods of plowing, the prevalence of fences, the modes of crop rotation, and the number and variety of livestock; the quality of the fisheries; the state of ship-building; the number of roads, bridges, and canals; the natural history of wild animals and native plants; the number of schools, churches, and other public buildings; the population of the poor and free blacks; the frequency of major storms, floods, and droughts; the existence and history of diseases; the notable characters of the town; and so on.<sup>29</sup>

This tedious list illustrates a fundamental epistemological assumption controlling the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences. Its members believed that an exhaustive empirical study of the state would allow them to understand the history of its economic development, assess the value and durability of its land base, and chart a course for the future. Indeed, the

majority of subjects in the circular letter concerned matters of production and navigation, with particular attention to agriculture, manufactures, and natural resource extraction. As a whole, the survey sought to collect specific facts regarding any and all changes in the land occurring in Connecticut since the beginning of colonial settlement, thus enumerating quantifiable proofs of the state's economic improvement. According to Christopher Bickford, the Academy hoped to gather together in one publication a totalizing vision of the state—a statistical sense of place—with the goal of further improving the nation. By establishing Connecticut as the cultural model for the rest of the American Republic, the leaders of the Academy saw themselves performing an essential national duty, which ironically took shape as an argument for regional exceptionalism. Simply put, these learned gentleman believed that Connecticut represented the best republican values in America; therefore, the state ought to serve as a guide for the social and economic improvement of the nation.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, the statistical account project failed to generate a substantial response. Over the course of the following decade, the Academy received reports from only half of the townships in the state, and the project soon faded from memory. Nevertheless, the effort reveals a prevailing statistical mentality then pervading the culture of the early Republic, and although the project initially flopped, Timothy Dwight would eventually revive and fulfill its mission in his massive, four-volume literary geography, *Travels in New England and New York*, published posthumously in 1821-22.<sup>31</sup>

In the decades following the American Revolution, a statistical approach to both nature and culture became a dominant paradigm in the newly formed United States. Seeking to define and defend a national identity, and to lay the groundwork for various improvement projects, Americans conducted a number of place-based studies involving geographic, economic, and

natural history analysis, many of which aimed to establish the value of particular regions for the nation as a whole. Such studies resulted in the publication of several new books and historical gazetteers, among them Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Jeremy Belknap's *The History of New Hampshire Containing a Geographical Description of the State* (1791-92), Samuel Williams's *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont* (1794), and David Ramsay's *A Sketch of the Soil, Climate, and Diseases of South Carolina* (1796). Meanwhile, in Britain, John Sinclair oversaw an epic official survey that culminated in the twenty-volume *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99), a work that set the standard for collecting and presenting factual data about place. Sinclair was among the first writers in the English language to use the word "statistical," a term he derived from the German and defined as "an inquiry into the state of a country, for the purposes of ascertaining the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its inhabitants, and the means of future improvements." Sinclair's printed questionnaire served as a template for the Connecticut Academy's circular letter, itself the first publication in North America to employ the term "statistical."<sup>32</sup>

The Connecticut Academy's statistical account project grew out of the combined efforts of Noah Webster and Timothy Dwight, the two principal founders of the Academy. According to Christopher Bickford, Webster actually put the survey in motion before Dwight got on board, but later, when Webster left the state, Dwight became the primary catalyst behind the project. In the mid-1790s, Webster had already completed his own statistical study related to the yellow fever epidemic and other public health concerns, which he published as *A Collection of Papers on the subject of Bilious Fevers, Prevalent in the United States for a Few Years Past* (1796). Detecting a link between statistical studies and public improvement, Webster regarded the collection of facts as an essential enterprise for the sake of national security. He followed Sinclair's method of

gathering material through a printed questionnaire, which he sent to educated individuals throughout the country, and later in his 1806 dictionary, he defined the term “statistical” for an American audience. Meanwhile, Dwight had become annoyed with the inaccurate accounts of the United States found in European travel books, so in 1796, during vacations from the Yale College academic year, he began a routine of traveling through New England and recording his observations with the goal of creating a more correct account. While notes from these early excursions later appeared in the *Travels*, Dwight did not fully envision the scope and structure of his book until after the Connecticut Academy initiated its statistical account project. Indeed, Dwight served as president of the Academy from its founding in 1799 until his death in 1817, and he authored the first statistical report (about the city of New Haven), which he published separately in 1811 and later incorporated into the first volume of the *Travels*. As he wrote and revised his work, Dwight increasingly adopted a statistical methodology; he cited figures from the census of 1810; and he supported his observations with numerical data from multiple government reports completed after 1800.<sup>33</sup>

In the Preface to the *Travels*, Dwight complains that European observers of the United States approach their subject with too many misconceptions and prejudices, but worse, they embrace vague generalizations and commit gross factual errors—that most heinous empirical sin. In contrast, Dwight pledges to achieve a precision of description, to devote his pages to “correct knowledge” and a “minuteness” of detail derived from direct experience.” “What I have seen and heard,” he writes, “the reader will, I believe, find reported with a good degree of exactness as well as with sincerity. But it ought to be observed that the state of this country changes so fast as to make a picture of it drawn at a given period an imperfect resemblance of what a traveler will find it to be after a moderate number of years have elapsed.”<sup>34</sup> Briefly, Dwight summarizes the

history of his travels and recalls that often he found himself wishing to know how the country appeared a century before his time, but he could find no acceptable account. So he set himself the task, as a public duty, of describing New England for the sake of its future inhabitants. He stresses the many changes that have occurred since the arrival of the Puritans in the seventeenth century and expresses a desire to capture a view of the country before the course of history alters it further. But he also celebrates the environmental conquest of the continent, the “conversion” of the wilderness into a civilized landscape, and the many “improvements” made by New England residents. On the one hand, then, we might read the *Travels* as a textual effort to freeze time, to preserve the permanence of place in the face of sweeping social and political change. On the other hand, Dwight’s account does not occur in a vacuum; his facts and statistics chart a narrative of historical change; and his attention to both economic and environmental history demonstrates a keen awareness of temporality. He understands and accepts that New England will evolve through time, but he hopes to steer such change in an ethical direction.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Dwight’s emphasis on particular details, he opens the first chapter of the *Travels*, “Journey to Berwick,” with a general description of New England. Like Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, this section begins with a topographical survey. Dwight maps the boundaries of New England, praises the region for its coastal harbors and inland lakes, its rivers and mountains, and its many *mill-streams* suitable for generating power. He describes the soil of New England, the forest trees, the fruits and vegetables, the major crops and the domestic livestock. At one point, again like Jefferson, Dwight delivers a rebuttal of Comte du Buffon’s degeneracy thesis, complete with a statistical table. Next, he shifts his focus to the climate of New England and engages in a statistical comparison of population growth in Connecticut, Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Though his number-crunching is difficult to follow, his data analysis yields

positive results for New England, represented of course by his home state of Connecticut. But Dwight also acknowledges certain problems afflicting his native region. Several times throughout the book he mentions the Hessian fly and its destruction of the wheat crop. He confesses that the husbandry in New England suffers from many shortcomings, among them a shortage of labor to properly plow, manure, and weed the fields, and improper crop rotation. Such problems are not the fault of the land itself, he insists, but rather the consequence of poor land-use practices. Likewise, Dwight laments the destruction of the old growth forests, but he regards their consumption as the cost of improvement and assures his reader that proper management will allow woodlots to regenerate themselves within fourteen years.

Following these opening remarks about the present condition of New England, Dwight turns his attention to the past. He describes the manners, customs, and character of the Indians, emphasizes their hunting and farming lifeways, and spends several pages speculating about their origins, a favorite pastime of natural history writers in early America. Dwight contends that the Indians migrated from Asia, a theory he supports by appealing to the oral traditions of the native peoples themselves, citing these stories as factual proofs. "All traditional accounts which are regularly retained by any nation concerning the place of origin are almost of course true," he concludes. "Those who first communicated them communicated facts....great and commanding facts" (I.88). In turn, Dwight delivers his own origin story, sketching a partial history of the colonization of New England and the Puritans' errand into the wilderness. Addressing an imaginary English correspondent, Dwight rejoices in the conquest of the New World:

Were you an American and had you with me traversed the several settlements made by the people of New England in its immense forests, had you traced the hardships and discouragements with which these settlements were made, had you seen the wilderness

converted by them into fruitful fields, had you surveyed the numerous, cheerful, and beautiful towns and villages which under their forming hand have sprung up in a desert, you would regard this mighty work as an unanswerable and delightful proof of both the enterprise and the industry of this extraordinary people. (I.122)

Polishing the historical narrative, Dwight defends the Puritans in their dealings with the Indians, blaming any and all violent conflict, as he did in *Greenfield Hill*, on the evil of external parties. The Puritans caused none of the five major Indian wars of New England, he says; rather, these unfortunate events were triggered by the ungrateful Pequots, the meddling French, and the tyrannical British. Indeed, Dwight's jingoism shines through from the very beginning of the *Travels*. In his mind, the citizens of New England, the descendants of the Puritans, can do no wrong. They are the most frugal, industrious, and pious people on the planet.

Amusingly, more than one hundred pages into the *Travels*, Dwight's actual travels have yet to begin. Instead, he employs the first fourteen letters to set up an epistemological shift, a cinematic zoom-in to the state of Connecticut and the city of New Haven, his home ground and the prospect point from which he views the future of New England. At Letter 15, finally, Dwight commences his journey to Berwick by announcing a shift in descriptive strategy, a transition from the general to the particular perspective. Thus far, he has displayed a wide-angle snapshot of New England's geography and history, but now he will deliver a first-hand account of specific people and places. In this letter, he draws a distinction between two types of travelers. While *incurious* observers remain content with "general principles" and "the outline of a picture," *curious* observers "follow in detail, so far as leisure permits, every object which they consider as meriting their inquisition" (I.129-30). Combining these modes of analysis, Dwight explains his rhetorical technique: "It is my intention to give you a view of my proposed subject, at once

comprehensive and minute” (I.130). To that end, he abruptly shifts into a detailed description of his home city, replicating much of the material he had gathered years earlier for the Connecticut Academy’s regional survey and his subsequent publication, *A Statistical Account of the City of New-Haven* (1811). Thus, Dwight establishes the empirical methodology of the *Travels*, and his statistical report serves as a point-of-departure for his journey to Berwick.<sup>36</sup>

As Dwight travels north from New Haven, riding up the Connecticut Valley to Hartford, he praises the towns along the road as peaceful and orderly communities, situated on fertile ground, inhabited by prosperous and industrious citizens. He attributes this happiness to the unique political economy of the state and the legal tradition of freeholding land tenure. After describing several houses in the town of Northford, he provides this point of clarification:

I say *their owners*, for you are to understand that every man in this country, almost without exception, lives on his own ground. The lands are universally holden in fee simple, and descended by law to all the children in equal shares. Every farmer in Connecticut and throughout New England is, therefore, dependent for his enjoyments on none but himself, his government, and his God; and is the little monarch of a dominion sufficiently large to furnish all the supplies of competence, with a number of subjects as great as he is able to govern. (I.155)

Here we see Dwight embracing the same republican ideology at work in *Greenfield Hill*. Two decades after composing his topographical poem, he continued to believe that a relative equality of property—a basic economic “competence”—was the key to political stability and social harmony. But unlike most states, Connecticut had designed the structure of its government to ensure both civic engagement and economic equality. While pausing at Hartford, then, Dwight applauds the political system of the state, its town meeting and election laws, the republican form

of its original charter, and the close relationship between church and state. “Connecticut is a singular phenomenon in the political hemisphere,” he declares. “Such a degree of freedom was never before united with such a degree of stability” (I.208). Indeed, Dwight maintained that a democratic republic must balance the values of liberty and order, and so he reserved his greatest praise for those people who displayed both religious piety and social conformity. For Dwight, of course, it was no accident that such republican citizens most often resided either in the state of Connecticut or that portion of western Massachusetts directly to the north.

While recounting his journey up the Connecticut Valley, Dwight combines aesthetic, economic, and ethical modes of analysis, and his language is freighted with both romantic and utilitarian values. Consider, for example, his description of Rocky Hill: “This parish is a rich agricultural country, and carries on a considerable commerce.... The people are prosperous, the houses generally very good; the church, a new building, is handsome; and everything which meets the eye wears the appearance of industry and prosperity” (I.162-63). Later, after leaving Hartford and arriving in western Massachusetts, Dwight admires the scenery at the falls of South Hadley, which he regards as a classic example of romantic aesthetics. “A caratact of course is a romantic and delightful object,” he observes, “particularly in a great river.” Painting a portrait of the scene, he continues, “A spectator standing about a quarter of a mile below the fall sees on the eastern bank a pretty assemblage of meadows, pastures, and farmhouses, and on the western similar grounds, interspersed with scattered trees and small coppices. A grove of pines, farther northward on the same shore, lends its gloom to vary the landscape” (I.236). For Dwight, however, a large part of this aesthetic appeal involves the presence of human improvements—farms, fences, houses, and churches. At South Hadley, the “singular prospect” of a canal and a dam add a degree of human art to the natural scene, while the buildings of the town, including a

sawmill and a forge, “impress on the mind very sprightly ideas of bustle and business” (I.236-37). Because Dwight’s appreciation rises to a pitch when he witnesses human intervention in the landscape, we might characterize his descriptive mode as an *aesthetics of improvement*.

On his first journey, reluctant to leave behind the Connecticut Valley, where he was born, Dwight decides to climb Mount Holyoke before heading east for Berwick, Maine, then circling back through Rhode Island to Connecticut. Describing the view, which he calls “the richest prospect in New England, and not improbably the United States,” Dwight writes:

On the highest part of the summit, the inhabitants have cleared away the trees and shrubs so as to open the prospect in the most advantageous manner. From this spot the eye is presented with a vast expansion to the south, comprehending the southern part of the county of Hampshire, and a portion of the state of Connecticut. . . . But the most exquisite scenery of the whole landscape is formed by the river and its extended beautiful intervals. . . . A perfect neatness and brilliancy is everywhere diffused, without a neglected spot to tarnish the luster or excite a wish in the mind for a higher finish. All these objects united present here a collection of beauties to which I know no parallel. (I.257-59)

Significantly, the “objects” to which Dwight refers in this last line include not only the river and forests, but also the farms and fields covering the valley “like terraced gardens,” “a straight road” running “like an alley” through the rural settlement, and “the numerous churches which gem the whole landscape” (I.258-59). Unlike Thoreau, Dwight has little interest in pockets of sublime wilderness in New England; instead, he relishes the picturesque quality of pastoral scenes and celebrates the relentless conversion of the wilderness into an agricultural landscape of farms, fields, and fences. Despite frequent moments of romantic reverie, Dwight’s vision remains persistently economic and utilitarian, and his landscape aesthetics primarily serve a didactic

function: they allow him to collect and present visible evidence of New England's progress across time and space.

Dwight's preoccupation with economic improvement continues throughout the *Travels*, and in later chapters he often pauses before leaving Connecticut to praise the development of domestic manufactures in his home state. In "Journey to the Canada Line," for example, while traveling along Mill River north of New Haven, Dwight passes a new firearms factory erected by Eli Whitney and digresses into a discussion of Whitney's contributions to the political economy of the United States. Indeed, says Dwight, here is an interesting story in the history of both agriculture and manufacturing. Whitney graduated from Yale College in 1792 and left Connecticut for Georgia, where many New England emigrants were then moving in search of better prospects. After learning about the problem of separating seeds from short-staple cotton, Whitney invented his famous cotton gin. He returned to Connecticut and began manufacturing the new machine, but he lost many of the potential profits because patent laws failed to protect his intellectual property, because competitors found the design easy to copy, and because his factory eventually burnt down. In 1798, he secured a contract with the federal government to manufacture muskets in an effort to resupply the Continental Army, and though he lacked experience in the process, he built a new manufacturing mill and began to experiment with interchangeable parts, a technique later employed at the federal armories in Springfield and Harper's Ferry. Historians have debated the extent to which Whitney pioneered the method of manufacturing interchangeable parts, and most now believe that he simply borrowed a technique then becoming popular in Europe, but such historical qualifications matter little for Dwight. Instead, Dwight hails Whitney as a captain of American industry, a heroic entrepreneur, and one of New England's "eminently ingenious" citizens (II.199). Dwight fails to acknowledge,

however, that Whitney's legacy is fraught with complications, for the cotton gin enabled the continuation of slavery in the American South. It helped cotton to become the largest U.S. export and tied the southern plantation economy to the northern manufacturing economy, thus creating a system of interdependent agrarian capitalism in which southern planters sold cotton to northern textile mills—a powerful alliance that involved the exploitation of both land and labor.<sup>37</sup>

Later in the *Travels*, on a trip commenced in 1811, Dwight rides northwest out of New Haven and visits David Humphreys's milltown near Derby, Connecticut. The first letter of this chapter, "Second Journey to Lake George," describes how the natural topography of the Housatonic and Naugatuck Rivers, when combined with intelligent engineering, furnishes an ideal setting for water-powered mills. Dwight gives a detailed account of the machinery at Humphreysville, a catalog of technological improvements consisting of "a gristmill, a sawmill, a paper mill, a woolen manufactory, and a cotton manufactory" (III.275). While explaining how the river current propels a collection of shearing machines, carding machines, spinning jennies, and fulling mills, Dwight waxes poetic about the power of nature, the organic machine of the industrial river, and the ingenuity of the manufacturing complex. But Humphreys has combined these economic and environmental improvements, says Dwight, with a complementary mode of ethical improvement. Although his company town employs a labor force of women and children, the workers receive fair wages, room, and board, and the apprentices receive an education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Indeed, Dwight insists that Humphreys has designed a factory system that does not lead to moral degeneracy, as Jefferson had feared. "In Europe," writes Dwight, "complaints have been made of manufacturing establishments as having been very commonly seats of vice and disease. General Humphreys began this with a determination either to prevent these evils, or if this could not be done, to give up the design" (III.276). To that end,

education became a centerpiece of the milltown, Humphreys dismissed workers found guilty of moral infractions, and in 1813 he pushed a law through the legislature that instituted an official system of government regulation and oversight.<sup>38</sup>

Dwight also admires the patriotic dimension of Humphreysville, for the woolen mill employed only American workers, used American raw materials, and produced American goods for the domestic market, thus advancing the cause of economic independence that so excited public opinion during the War of 1812. Essentially, Dwight portrays Humphreys as a paragon of Yankee ingenuity and, like Whitney, a captain of American industry. To conclude, Dwight delivers a succinct summary of Humphreys's legacy:

In this manufactory he has, I think, fairly established three points of great importance.

One is that these manufactures can be carried on with success; another, that the workmen can be preserved in as good health as that enjoyed by any other class of men in the country; and the third, that the deterioration of morals in such institutions, which is so often complained of, is not necessary, but incidental, not inherent in the institution itself, but the fault of the proprietor. (III.277)

Thus, two decades after the publication of *Greenfield Hill*, Dwight's principles of political economy, like Jefferson's, had shifted toward a recognition of the necessity of domestic manufacturing. Yet both men rationalized the industrialization of the countryside using the same republican ideology that supported the agrarian ideal; that is, they promoted modes of production that advanced the economic independence of the American people, transferring the ideal of individual household independence to the nation as a whole. In the process, both Dwight and Jefferson discovered that they could not, and should not, set agriculture and manufacturing

against one another, for the reality of economic development stitched these modes of production together into one, integrated capitalist system.

Near the end of the *Travels*, Dwight repeats his praise for both Whitney and Humphreys in a follow-up chapter entitled “Manufactures of New England,” a prosaic survey of the regional economy combining the ideology of improvement with a statistical sense of place. The section begins with a general description of the manufactures of the United States cribbed directly from Albert Gallatin’s *Report from the Secretary of the Treasury...on American Manufactures* (1810). Gallatin served as Secretary of Treasury from 1801-14 and compiled this information after the census of 1810, but Dwight uses it primarily to prove New England’s manufacturing superiority. Next, Dwight presents two statistical tables detailing the manufactures of Massachusetts and Connecticut, which he derived from Tench Coxe’s report, *A Statement on the Arts and Manufactures of the United States* (1814), followed by some random facts about Rhode Island, which Dwight received from a friend. Functioning as a sort of appendix to the *Travels*, this chapter tells the story of domestic manufactures as they evolved in the years before the War of 1812, and the wealth of statistical data supports an overall narrative about the improvement of New England. Although these facts and statistics lack literary merit, they demonstrate the basic reasoning behind Dwight’s rhetorical methodology. In these years, facts and statistics carried an impressive persuasive weight, so Dwight tapped into the cultural authority of empirical science and statistical analysis to bolster his argument that Connecticut was the best state in the union, the economic hub of the new republic, a place of beauty, industry, prosperity, and piety, where natural geography and cultural ingenuity worked together to create an ideal society.

Dwight’s readers had already seen this Connecticut ideal flourishing in *Greenfield Hill*. In that work, in fact, Dwight explicitly predicted his eventual transition from didactic poetry to

statistical prose. “A thorough and impartial development of the state of society,” he wrote in an endnote to Part I, “and a complete investigation of the sources of its happiness, would probably throw more light on the true methods of promoting the interests of mankind, than all the volumes of philosophy, which have been written. . . . To facts, alone, therefore, ought we to resort, if we would obtain this important knowledge.”<sup>39</sup> In the *Travels*, Dwight embraced this factual mode of analysis in order to adapt the georgic design of *Greenfield Hill* to an age of increasingly capitalist production, an era when the growth of domestic manufacturing and agricultural science were transforming the nature and culture of New England. While the *Travels* celebrates many of the same agrarian values as *Greenfield Hill*, it recasts those values in the economic prose of the government report and the statistical account project.

In the conclusion of the *Travels*, “Prospects of the United States,” Dwight’s readers also found a forthright imperial vision—that key component of the georgic design—resembling the final part of *Greenfield Hill*. With patriotic zealotry, this conclusion depicts the U.S. as a rising empire advancing across a continent blessed with a healthy climate, with numerous rivers and ports to facilitate navigation and commerce, and with a fertile soil and mineral deposits to bolster the productivity of agriculture and manufactures. Dwight lists several commodities that form the backbone of American trade—cotton, rice, tobacco, sugar cane, indigo, silk, wool, corn, flax, hemp, every kind of domestic livestock, and countless fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, he projects that the population will continue to grow and white settlements will spread inevitably to the Pacific. He celebrates the “enterprise” of the American people, their “vigorous constitutions,” their “firmness of body as well as resolution,” and the industrious work ethic that has enabled “the conversion of a wilderness into a fruitful field” (IV.365). But the single term that Dwight employs the most to praise American progress is, of course, “improvement.” He provides yet

another catalogue of examples, citing as proof of improvement the development of agriculture, manufactures, ship-building, and navigation; the construction of new roads, canals, and bridges; and the promotion of art, science, education, and religion. At one point, like Jefferson, he even predicts the end of slavery in the very near future.

Yet despite such triumphant rhetoric, despite this vision of national progress, Dwight closes the *Travels* by considering the possibility of disunion. He admits that some of his readers, steeped in classical political theory, will naturally object to the size of the American empire he has predicted. Following Montesquieu, many political thinkers of Dwight's generation believed that a republic—especially a democratic republic—could remain stable only if it encompassed a relatively small territory and governed a homogenous population. As the United States expanded across the continent and incorporated a diverse population, these thinkers warned, the practical demands of political stability would lead either to dissolution or tyranny. In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison famously refuted these assumptions by insisting that the size of the American Republic would, in fact, enhance its stability by creating a balance of interests. Similarly, Jefferson's first inaugural address articulated a vision of a transcontinental republican empire in which western expansion would preserve the twin pillars of liberty and order. Unlike Jefferson and Madison, however, Dwight accepted the very real possibility of disunion, and it is this new anxiety that marks the difference between *Greenfield Hill* and the *Travels*.

During the embargo crisis of 1807-09 and the War of 1812, members of the Federalist Party often accused the Republicans of plotting to destroy the shipping industry along with the class of middle-class merchants who relied on foreign imports. In 1815, a group of New England Federalists gathered in Hartford, Connecticut, to express their discontent with the Madison administration and the ongoing restrictions on foreign trade. These delegates to the so-called

Hartford Convention drafted a list of printed resolves that lobbied for the rights of small states. They proposed a series of constitutional amendments that would, among other things, require a two-thirds majority in Congress to declare war, impose embargos, and admit new states into the union; limit the President to a single term; forbid the election of successive Presidents from the same state (a clear backlash against the Virginia dynasty); and reduce Southern representation in Congress by eliminating the clause that allowed states to count slaves as two-thirds of a person. Unfortunately, the war concluded before these demands had any political impact, and as an effort to reclaim regional power, the Hartford Convention failed miserably. The Republican Party accused the Federalists of treason, undermined their credibility, and used the debacle to gain political momentum in Connecticut, eventually leading, two years later, to the election of the state's first Republican governor. But as a symbolic event, the Hartford Convention illustrated the extent to which political factions throughout the nation (not just in the South) would defend their sectional interests against the federal government.

The sectional agenda of the Hartford Convention pervades the conclusion to the *Travels*. If disunion becomes inevitable, Dwight suggests, and if the American states break apart to form separate nations, at least New England and New York will remain intact, a regional republic in the classical sense with a homogenous population and common economic interests. "The inhabitants are now substantially one people," he declares. "Should they be separated from their sister states, there cannot be a doubt that their citizens will hereafter find in their local situation, soil, and climate; in their manners and morals; in their health, energy, and activity, ample, perhaps peculiar sources of national greatness and prosperity" (IV.373). Thus, Dwight's ideal American Republic had begun to shrink into a regional vision of New England and New York.

No longer could he trust the federal government, nor the rest of the union, to represent the interests of his home ground, and so he consoled himself with an image of regional nationhood.

Between 1787, when he began *Greenfield Hill*, and 1817, when on his deathbed he asked a friend to finally publish the *Travels*, Dwight witnessed a series of political, economic, and environmental changes transforming his beloved New England. The market revolution, the rise of the Republican Party, and the decline of Connecticut's Standing Order restructured the terms in which he could engage in both literary production and didactic instruction. Responding to these changes, Dwight discarded the poetic mode in favor of statistical prose, he recast the agrarian ideal in more capitalist terms, and he accepted a practical alliance between agriculture and manufacturing. Between the hopeful years of the Constitution and the dreadful fears of the Hartford Convention, he adapted to a new world of political economy and cultural possibility, but he would only forfeit so much. Never did he abandon his faith in the religious order of New England, his belief in public virtue, nor his effort to combine economic and ethical improvement. But despite this conviction, his Connecticut ideal failed to keep pace with the radical social changes unfolding in America. As a Federalist, Dwight feared that the democratic policies of the Republican Party would soon fracture the federal union, and so he retreated into a shrinking sense of place. In the end, his regional exceptionalism, once the model for an expanding United States, collapsed into a contracted form of political sectionalism, a prototype for the divisive rhetoric that would characterize conflicts throughout the antebellum period and push the nation ever closer to the brink of civil war.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion of New England's environmental history draws upon Cronon, *Changes in the Land*; Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*; and Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated*. For a broad overview of American environmental history and the common argument about the role of capitalism and commodification, see Steinberg, *Down to Earth*.

<sup>2</sup> Cronon borrows this line from Thoreau to frame the discussion of ecological decline in *Changes in the Land*, 4. Likewise, in both *Nature Incorporated* and *Down to Earth*, Steinberg invokes Thoreau's writings to frame a narrative of ecological change.

<sup>3</sup> In *Manufacturing Revolution*, 4, historian Lawrence Peskin describes how the model of an industrial revolution oversimplifies the array of economic production at work in the early Republic. For more on the traditional practices of land management embedded in New England's agrarian culture, see Judd, *Common Lands, Common People*, and Donahue, *The Great Meadow*. For a thoughtful reflection on the standard narrative of New England's environmental history, see Donahue, "Environmental Stewardship and Decline in Old New England." For a detailed analysis of the rise of the industrial mill system in New England and its environmental impacts, see Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated*.

<sup>4</sup> For this analysis of political, economic, and religious changes in Connecticut, I rely upon the old but enduring study by Richard Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818*. For an excellent study of the changing character of Connecticut from 1690 to 1765, see Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*.

<sup>5</sup> For these details, I rely mainly upon Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, and Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*. Although this chapter focuses on the regional context of Connecticut, we can see the work of leaders like Humphreys as part of a larger national effort of agricultural

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improvement, especially in terms of livestock production. For a discussion of this movement in Boston and Philadelphia, respectively, see Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860*, and Eric Stoykovich, “The Culture of Improvement in the Early Republic: Domestic Livestock, Animal Breeding, and Philadelphia’s Urban Gentlemen, 1820-1860.”

<sup>6</sup> See Leon Howard, *The Connecticut Wits*; Kenneth Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*; Edward Cifelli, *David Humphreys*; and Barbara Solomon, “Introduction” to Dwight’s *Travels*.

<sup>7</sup> In *New England Literary Culture*, 283-303, Lawrence Buell describes the various literary genres that helped shaped a regional sense of place. While Buell focuses largely on topographical poetry, regional fiction, and local-color sketches, he also mentions in passing the wide variety of nonfiction writing in the era, including travel narratives, natural history accounts, and autobiographical memoirs. As Buell suggests, between the American Revolution and the American Renaissance we can detect a move away from didactic poetry toward more regional prose writing. In this chapter, I track this rhetorical shift in the work of two writers, but in doing so I do not mean to imply that literary production as a whole abandoned poetry in favor of prose. Even as Dwight and Humphreys adopted new literary modes, writers like William Cullen Bryant worked to develop a new style of American poetry. Yet given their economic and political goals, Dwight and Humphreys saw the agricultural address and the travel narrative as the more effective rhetorical tools to advance their ideological agendas.

<sup>8</sup> In *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, Charles Beard famously argued that many elite Americans supported the Constitution because they wanted a government that would protect their rights as creditors and force their debtors to pay up. For a compelling reinterpretation of the economic causes behind the Constitution, see Woody Holton,

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*Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*. Holton argues that we commit an injustice against ordinary Americans when we accept at face value the opinion of elite members of society who criticized the people's capacity for self-rule. In fact, says Holton, the Constitution emerged as much from grievances against unfair tax policies in the states, which led to popular revolts like Shays's Rebellion, as it did from the upper crust's desire to call in debts. Prior to the Convention, many of the delegates actually agreed with small farmers like Shays that the fiscal policies of the states were woefully inadequate and often unfair. Specifically, some delegates believed that state governments were too responsive to popular dissent and that they consented too easily to demands for tax relief and recklessly printed paper money, leading to inflation. In contrast, small farmers argued that the state governments had been coopted by a small group of wealthy individuals who desired to line their pockets with profits from debt collection and bond speculation. Whereas the delegates sought to distance the federal government from popular opinion in order to stimulate the economy and attract investment capital, Holton concludes, they could not carry their desires in a completely elitist direction because they knew that the people would resist a document perceived as anti-democratic.

<sup>9</sup> We might say that *Greenfield Hill* began, in 1787, as a little-f federalist poem and evolved into a capital-F Federalist manifesto by 1794.

<sup>10</sup> Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 56-57. Howard, *The Connecticut Wits*, 222. Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 5. Hereafter, I cite *Greenfield Hill* by part and line number in parenthetical citations within the text. Although the 1794 edition from which I quote includes the long-s of eighteenth-century typography (that is, the letter s is printed as an f), I have elected to modernize this element of the spelling. Other archaic spellings, however, will remain as printed.

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution*, 12. Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape*, 91-93. Crawford identifies three evolutions in British georgic during the eighteenth century. First, she dates its rise in popularity to the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707 and John Philips's subsequent work, *Cyder* (1708), followed shortly thereafter by the most famous British georgic of all, James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730). The georgic mode eclipsed the epic in popularity, Crawford believes, because of the widespread recognition that Britain's imperial power had come to rest upon an agricultural foundation. As her second point, Crawford argues that "the national and moral agenda accompanying georgic was deflected from poetry into prose over the course of the century as science in general, not merely agricultural science, went through a period of unprecedented popularity" (93). Finally, she says, the American Revolution "diverted the association in the public imagination between political leadership and agrarian ideals from the Hanovers to the newly constituted United States of America, from George III, the Farmer King, to George Washington, the Cincinnatus of his race" (93). For more on the English georgic as a literary mode, see John Chalker, *The English Georgic*.

<sup>12</sup> In general, see Dowling, *Poetry and Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut*. For the standard narrative of how whig politics and country ideology influenced the American founders, see Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, and Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic* and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. For more on the tradition of civic humanism and classical republicanism as related to the American Revolution, see Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 506-52. For a recent challenge to the standard narrative of the whig influence on the American founders, see Eric Nelson, "Patriot Royalism: The Stuart Monarchy in American Political Thought, 1769-75."

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<sup>13</sup> Larry Kutchen, “Timothy Dwight’s Anglo-American Georgic: *Greenfield Hill* and the Rise of United States Imperialism,” *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, 4. For a more nuanced discussion of Goldsmith’s poem, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 74-79.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the history of the New England village, see Joseph S. Wood, *The New England Village*, and Stephen Nissenbaum, “New England as Region and Nation.” In *New England Literary Culture*, 304-18, Lawrence Buell describes the role of the “village as icon” in nineteenth-century New England literature.

<sup>16</sup> See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, for an argument about the role of the Puritan past in shaping U.S. national and imperial ideology.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 209; Jehlen, *American Incarnation*, 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> Dwight employs the terms “*good neighbourhood*” and “*parochial harmony*” in a brief paragraph introducing the argument of Part VI.

<sup>19</sup> Eventually, with the “ruralization of manufacturing” in the 1790s, as Lawrence Peskin calls it, the majority of farm families in New England would supplement their agricultural labor with work in local textile mills. Not until the 1830s, when the corporate model of the industrial mills at Waltham and Lowell became dominant, did rural populations abandon their agricultural labor for full-time work in the mills, which led to the rapid urbanization of New England and the decline of its agricultural economy. See Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*. For more on the ideological shift from republicanism to liberalism, see Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*; Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*; Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism*; and

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Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*. For a succinct summary of these historical debates, see Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*, 1-12.

<sup>20</sup> For biographical details, I draw mainly upon Edward Cifelli, *David Humphreys*.

<sup>21</sup> Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 120-23. In addition to Mathew Carey's *American Museum*, the *New-Haven Gazette and Connecticut Magazine* and the *Connecticut Courant* also published versions of Humphreys's *A Poem on Industry*.

<sup>22</sup> The revised version of *A Poem on Industry* appears in Humphreys's *Miscellaneous Works* (1804), which was reprinted in 1968 by Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints. Parenthetical citations within the text refer to page numbers in this reprinted edition.

<sup>23</sup> For a note about the definition of "industry" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 166n.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the maple sugar boom of the 1790s, specifically as it played out in upstate New York, see Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 119-38.

<sup>25</sup> Although Humphreys hailed his flock of merino sheep as the first arrival in the U.S., historians have challenged that chronology. In fact, it appears that E.I. du Pont imported a flock a full year before Humphreys. Meanwhile, agricultural historians often credit Robert Livingston and George Washington Parke Custis, along with Humphreys and du Pont, as the first breeders in America. With the help of Livingston, Jefferson and Madison imported the merino sheep to Virginia, which they began to breed at Monticello and Montpelier with the aim of distributing among local farmers to improve the state's agricultural production. In fact, despite their political differences, Jefferson and Humphreys actually corresponded about merino sheep; Humphreys sent Jefferson specimens of raw wool and finished textiles; and Jefferson applauded Humphreys for his patriotic agricultural service. See Jefferson's *Farm Book*, 111-42, for more details. For

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more on the role of merino sheep in the early Republic, see Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 108-20; Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 174-77; and Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*, 92-95. In 1802, Humphreys was awarded a gold medal from the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture in recognition for his experiments with merino sheep, and in 1807 he was elected to the Royal Society in London. See Humphreys's *Dissertation on the Breed of Spanish Sheep Called Merino* (1802) in *Miscellaneous Works*, 343-58. Not all agricultural reformers, however, shared Humphreys's undying faith; see, for example, the cautious skepticism of the pamphlet entitled *Antidote to the Merino Mania Now Progressing through the United States* published in Philadelphia in 1810.

<sup>26</sup> The agricultural societies before which Humphreys (in 1816) and Madison (in 1817) delivered their addresses were both created in response to complex economic and ecological issues facing the nation during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. According to Lawrence Peskin, from 1808 to 1812, a half dozen new agricultural societies cropped up across the country, and during the economic panic of 1817-19, another twenty societies were founded. To slow the pace of western emigration, solve problems of soil exhaustion, and boost production, these societies promoted more scientific practices and often endorsed a more direct connection between agriculture and manufacturing. While working to improve various breeds of American livestock, groups like the Pennsylvania Society for Improving the Breed of Cattle and the Merino Society of the Middle States of North America participated directly in the merino boom of 1808 to 1813. See Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 123-28, 173-77, and Benjamin Cohen, *Notes from the Ground*, 127-65.

<sup>27</sup> Humphreys, *A Discourse on the Agriculture of the State of Connecticut*, 5-6. After reading his address on 12 September 1816, Humphreys gave permission to the society to publish

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his work, which was printed in New Haven by T.G. Woodward. Hereafter, I cite the Woodward edition by page number in parentheses within the text.

<sup>28</sup> Despite the didactic tone of Humphreys's advice, he was not without a sense of humor. At one point during the *Discourse*, in a moment of self-reflexive irony, he actually satirizes the standard rhetoric of agricultural addresses by inserting a list of twenty reforms from a fake book about farming. A back-handed critique of slovenly farming techniques, this satirical interlude urges young farmers to neglect their work, fail to mend their fences, plant cash crops without manure, borrow tools without returning them, and allow weeds to fester in their fields. But of course, Humphreys's listeners knew better and this clever irony only reinforced his earnest argument for reform.

<sup>29</sup> This circular letter is reprinted in Bickford, *Voices of the New Republic*, xii-xv. For more on the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences and the statistical account project, see Bickford's introduction to *Voices of the New Republic*, "Taking the Measure of Human Happiness," 1-19. The results of the statistical survey are also reprinted in this volume.

<sup>30</sup> Bickford, "Taking the Measure of Human Happiness," 1-7.

<sup>31</sup> Over the years, many scholars have considered the environmental politics and the regional exceptionalism at work in the *Travels*. For compelling discussions, see Jane Kamensky, "'In These Contrasted Climes, How Chang'd the Scene': Progress, Declension, and Balance in the Landscapes of Timothy Dwight," and Thomas Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 186-95. Although Kamensky and Hallock both discuss the intersection between Dwight's conservative anxiety and his conservationist ethic, they arrive at different conclusions about the political value of his overall position. While Kamensky praises Dwight as a proto-conservationist who expounded a progressive environmental philosophy, Hallock regards the *Travels* as a reactionary

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effort to roll back the democratic reforms of the Revolution in favor of an old guard of social and political order. Neither Kamensky nor Hallock, however, discuss Dwight's preoccupation with the development of domestic manufacturing, nor do they consider the statistical methodology driving Dwight's approach to the land base. I have attempted to build upon the arguments of Kamensky and Hallock by emphasizing these elements of the *Travels* and describing how they shaped Dwight's sense of place.

<sup>32</sup> Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland* is quoted in Bickford, "Taking the Measure of Human Happiness," 4. For more on the emergence of a statistical mentality in the early Republic, see Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People*, 150-74.

<sup>33</sup> For more on the role of Webster and Dwight in the statistical account project, see Bickford, "Taking the Measure of Human Happiness," 6-11.

<sup>34</sup> Dwight, *Travels*, I.2-3. Hereafter, I cite the *Travels* by volume and page number in parenthetical citations within the text.

<sup>35</sup> Although Dwight crafted the *Travels* as a series of letters to an English gentleman, a literary device often employed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel books, he specifically intended his work for an American audience.

<sup>36</sup> The editor of *Travels*, Barbara Miller Solomon, acknowledges the resemblance between Dwight's *Statistical Account of the City of New-Haven* and Letter 15 of the *Travels*. Dwight begins the letter by detailing the topography of New Haven, with particular attention to its geology, revealing the influence of Benjamin Silliman, who wrote extensively about the geology of the Connecticut Valley in the 1810s. Dwight's language is loaded with aesthetic value, as he praises the "beauty and healthfulness" of the city, the "handsome" houses, the "neat and tidy" buildings, all of it presenting "a delightful appearance to the eye" (I.132). He includes

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a statistical table listing the number of people engaged in different professions, he evaluates the commerce and manufactures of the city, and he writes about a plan for a new public cemetery. He praises the “industry” of New Haven’s residents, but condemns the “shiftless, diseased, or vicious” character of day laborers (I.139). He describes the produce market, which is ample but lacks “a regular system,” and he laments the shortage of firewood. Finally, he argues that the people of New Haven are “remarkably happy,” neighborly, religious and virtuous (I.140). By the 1810s, New Haven had become Dwight’s new Greenfield Hill. “Few places in the world present a fairer example of peace and good order,” he concludes. “The views in and around this town are delightful. Scenery does not often strike the eye with more pleasure. A great number of charming rides in its environs add not a little to the pleasure of a residence in New Haven. Take it for all in all, I have never seen the place where I would so willingly spend my life” (I.141).

<sup>37</sup> For Dwight’s entire passage about Whitney, see *Travels*, II.196-199. Incidentally, Whitney married Dwight’s first cousin in 1817. For more on Eli Whitney, the cotton gin, and the manufacture of interchangeable parts, see Constance McLaughlin Green, *Eli Whitney and the Birth of American Technology*, and for a recent reassessment of Whitney’s legacy, see Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin*, 47-71, 177-89.

<sup>38</sup> For more details on Humphreysville and the merino sheep industry, see Cifelli, *David Humphreys*, 109-16; Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 79-81, 105-11; Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 108-20; and Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 120-29.

<sup>39</sup> This endnote, referring to Part I, line 223, appears in the notes section at the end of *Greenfield Hill*, 169-70.

## Chapter Three

### Settling the Susquehanna: Frontier Narratives and the Culture of Improvement

During the eighteenth century, the American colonies expanded from the eastern seaboard to the western frontier, a large swath of land extending along the chain of the Appalachian Mountains from present-day Maine to Georgia. Facing problems of overpopulation, soil exhaustion, and deforestation, many colonists emigrated to this backcountry region in pursuit of new economic opportunities. By and large, they desired an agrarian independence defined by individual land ownership and personal autonomy. Importantly, however, they did not seek an escape from the market economy. Instead, as frontier settlers cleared the forests, they shipped timber and potash to commercial ports. As they established farms, they produced grain and livestock in exchange for sugar, coffee, and tea. As they built roads and improved river navigation, they developed transportation networks to circulate commodities between the eastern seaboard and the western frontier. In other words, they participated in a form of market agriculture that connected the backcountry to the Atlantic commercial world.<sup>1</sup>

While the first half of this study analyzed the discourse of agricultural improvement among political leaders in Virginia and Connecticut, the second half considers the process of western settlement in two regions lying within the Appalachian backcountry: the Susquehanna Valley and Cherokee Territory. To explore the full scope of the literature of agriculture in the early national era, we must shift our perspective in this direction. In doing so, we discover a tension between two key legacies of the American Revolution: agricultural improvement and Indian removal. Indeed, when Euro-American settlers emigrated to the Appalachian frontier, they found a crowded country. They encountered groups of Indians who, likewise exploiting the

natural resources of the backcountry, had altered the environment by setting fires to manage the forests, by clearing land for agriculture, and by hunting animals in the fur trade. Eventually, old conflicts resurfaced and new hostilities arose among whites and Indians, landlords and squatters, real estate barons and government officials, all of whom contended for control of the frontier while pursuing their own versions of political and economic independence. Thus, the great promise of the agrarian ideal found itself mired in the violence of political reality.

The frontier has long held a special place in the study of American history. At the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner expounded his famous frontier thesis, which argued that western expansion and backcountry settlement was the defining national experience. Turner celebrated the frontier as a proving ground for American democracy, a mythic geography that shaped both political culture and masculine identity. More recently, scholars of the so-called “new” western history have worked to overturn, once and for all, Turner’s frontier thesis. By focusing on the perspectives of the oppressed and the colonized, historians Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, among others, have emphasized the reciprocal relationships between men and women, Indians and white settlers, and Mexican and Asian immigrants. Occasionally, they have found a “middle ground” of accommodation and cooperation among multiple groups of settlers, but more often, they tell a story of racial violence and resource extraction, reminding us that cultural values have collided on the frontier with tragic consequences. Shattering the illusion of the frontier as an empty wilderness, these scholars have replaced Turner’s myth with a more accurate vision of the backcountry as a contested ground. In short, says Limerick, we ought to read the essential story of the American frontier as a “legacy of conquest.”<sup>2</sup>

The Susquehanna Valley, running from western New York into central Pennsylvania, provides an ideal location for exploring this “legacy of conquest.” Today, we may not imagine

the Susquehanna as part of the American West, but it certainly shares a similar narrative of frontier history. In the eighteenth century, for example, the valley served as a middle ground where Indians and whites lived and worked in relative harmony, but after the Seven Years' War, this era of accommodation degenerated into a period of racial conflict that intensified during the American Revolution and resulted in the displacement of the native peoples. The valley also experienced a series of market revolutions, a boom-and-bust pattern of resource extraction that thrust various groups into conflict as they competed for natural resources, radically reshaping the landscape in the process. During the colonial era, the fur trade led to the near extinction of the beaver population; in the nineteenth century, timber and coal companies rapaciously exploited the Susquehanna's economic potential; and today, a new wave of natural gas drilling has begun, once again, to ravage the region.<sup>3</sup>

Studies of the Susquehanna have often identified a culture of improvement as the key characteristic of the region's inhabitants. Peter Mancall, for example, refers to the Susquehanna as a "valley of opportunity," while Susan Stranahan calls it a "river of dreams." In both cases, these historians explain how settlers have flocked to the valley in pursuit of economic ambitions; how their eyes have widened with the prospect of profit and independence; and how the goal of economic improvement has connected the frontier with the Atlantic commercial world, thus accelerating the capitalist transformation of the countryside. Unfortunately, these economic "improvements" have also damaged the land base, polluted the river, and displaced those people on the losing end of capitalist competition. So the story of the Susquehanna flows both ways, glistening with opportunity and independence for some, clouded with cultural violence and environmental destruction for others.<sup>4</sup>

During and after the American Revolution, the French immigrant and gentleman farmer J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, the land developer William Cooper, and his son, the novelist James Fenimore Cooper, conjured their own “Susquehanna dreams” and mapped them upon this so-called “valley of opportunity.” In the 1770s, Crèvecoeur took three different excursions along the North and West Branch of the river, perhaps seeking land to replant his recently uprooted agrarian ideal. As tensions escalated between Patriots and Loyalists near his home in New York, Crèvecoeur may have imagined the Susquehanna as a possible refuge. But on his final trip to the region, he witnessed the aftermath of the Battle of Wyoming, a violent event that destroyed his dream of agrarian retreat. In 1785, William Cooper arrived in the Susquehanna Valley to survey the Otsego Patent, a tract of land located at the headwaters of the North Branch, which he hoped to develop into a settlement. For the next two decades, Cooper lived the dream, so to speak, as his town grew from a frontier outpost into a commercial village, earning him fame and fortune in the process. Meanwhile, as a child, James Cooper watched his father rise to political power in the Federalist Party, only to suffer defeat and defamation at the hands of his Republican opponents. He also saw the radical transformation of the countryside that accompanied the growth of Cooperstown: the felling of the forests, the clearing of the fields, the hunting of the game to the brink of extinction. A generation later, fulfilling the classic boom-and-bust pattern of capitalism, the Cooper estate collapsed into financial ruin. Thereafter, in his novels of the 1820s, James Fenimore Cooper imagined his own “Susquehanna dream” by reviving the romantic landscape of his youth, restoring a fictional version of his family estate, and advancing an alternative vision of environmental stewardship.<sup>5</sup>

These individuals each wrote a frontier narrative that captured the history of conflict and conquest in the Susquehanna Valley. They did not, however, simply report the facts. Instead,

they constructed an ideal sense of place in order to advance particular ideological agendas and to pass judgment on the forces that threatened their ideals. In Crèvecoeur's "Susquehanna" (1778), William Cooper's *A Guide in the Wilderness* (1810), and James Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), we find a mixed story of economic opportunity, racial violence, and environmental destruction. When read in conjunction, these narratives express a dual political and ecological anxiety about the culture of improvement. On the one hand, seeking to realize the agrarian ideal, they endorse the agricultural conquest of the Susquehanna Valley, but on the other hand, to different degrees, they lament the negative consequences of economic development—the forced removal of Indian peoples, the brutal property disputes, the rapacious use of natural resources, and the degradation of the landscape. While William Cooper's narrative erases the former inhabitants of the valley and ignores their competing land claims, both Crèvecoeur and James Cooper highlight these conflicts in order to expose the "legacy of conquest" at the heart of the culture of improvement. Crèvecoeur begins his "Susquehanna" sketch by celebrating the agricultural settlement of the Wyoming Valley but then introduces an element of political violence that blames the American Revolution for unsettling the agrarian ideal. Likewise, in *The Pioneers*, a similar story of frontier development unfolds in a fictional Otsego region, but again, the agrarian ideal breaks down when Cooper draws attention to the destructive land-use practices of the backcountry settlers. In other words, even as these works envision the agricultural settlement of the Susquehanna Valley, they ask us to consider the cost of the culture of improvement.<sup>6</sup>

Crèvecoeur and the Coopers also contended for ideological control of the Susquehanna by advancing specific forms of political economy. While criticizing land speculators and real estate barons, Crèvecoeur suggested that the equal distribution of property among American farmers would cultivate a peaceful, egalitarian culture of backcountry settlers who, working

together in a cooperative rural community, would improve the frontier and connect it to the Atlantic market. Similarly, William Cooper celebrated the freeholder ideal, but his reckless speculation eventually reduced opportunities to own land outright, resulting in a condition of increased tenancy in the Otsego region. Meanwhile, Cooper's inability to manage the economic and environmental resources of his settlement led to a period of ecological and financial decline following his death. Finally, James Fenimore Cooper suggested that most American settlers, if left to pursue their own self-interest, would simply strip the land base and destroy the possibility of long-term social and ecological stability. Reviving his father's dream of aristocratic paternalism, Cooper promoted a form of American feudalism in which a wealthy and benevolent landlord would control the natural resources of the backcountry, regulate the land-use practices of its settlers, and so establish a more sustainable system of land management.

While these visions of political economy differed in detail, they shared a central desire to impose ecological limits upon the excesses of democratic liberty. In other words, Crèvecoeur and the Coopers feared that the American Revolution had unleashed dangerous social and economic energies that threatened both political and ecological stability. As a result, their narratives about the Susquehanna Valley expressed a fundamental tension at the heart of political culture in the early American Republic—that between classical republicanism and economic liberalism. While celebrating the opportunity of agricultural settlement, the acquisition of property, and the pursuit of self-interest, they sought to balance economic improvement with ethical restraint. Thus, if only in fiction, Crèvecoeur and James Fenimore Cooper promoted a better land ethic for the settlers of the American backcountry.<sup>7</sup>

*Unsettling the Valley: Crèvecoeur's Critique of the Revolution*

In the first half of the eighteenth century, a diverse population of Indians resided in villages along the Susquehanna, where they practiced a combination of hunting and farming lifeways, which slowly eroded as they engaged more aggressively in the fur trade. The Iroquois, for one, attempted to control the geography of the river in an effort to maintain a southern boundary to their territory in New York. They invited the Susquehannocks, Tuscaroras, and Delawares to move into the upper valley, but this buffer zone ultimately failed to discourage the arrival of white settlers. Following the Seven Years' War, emigrants from the eastern seaboard acquired land in the region and flooded into the Susquehanna Valley at a vigorous pace. They cleared forests and drained swamps, built roads and mills, and connected their farms to the Atlantic market. Meanwhile, a group of settlers from Connecticut, calling themselves the Susquehanna Company, detected a loophole in their colonial charter, which, they believed, entitled them to a slice of northern Pennsylvania. For the next thirty years, a violent (but often forgotten) conflict known as the Yankee-Pennamite Wars pitted New England emigrants and Pennsylvania farmers against one another in a territorial struggle that took the lives of hundreds of settlers.<sup>8</sup>

More than any other event, however, the American Revolution left a legacy of bloodshed in the Susquehanna Valley and reset the clock on its economic development. During the War of Independence, many of the resident Indians sided with the British in order to defend (or reclaim) their territory, while the white settlers of the region split their support depending upon their economic interests. The majority of "Yankees" embraced the Patriot cause, whereas some of the Pennsylvanians who had lost property to the Susquehanna Company joined with the Loyalists. Local hostilities blended with the Revolution, culminating in a bloody episode in 1778 when British troops, Loyalist forces, and Iroquois warriors launched a series of raids—from Cherry

Valley in New York to the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania—designed to destroy white settlements. In response, the Continental Army stormed the Susquehanna on a scorched-earth campaign, obliterating Iroquois villages, burning crops, and depopulating the region of native peoples. Ultimately, the War of Independence unsettled the agrarian ideal for both whites and Indians, bred resentment and hatred, and temporarily reversed the culture of improvement.<sup>9</sup>

Arriving in North America in 1755, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur joined the French militia, worked as a surveyor and cartographer during the Seven Years' War, and for the next decade traveled extensively through the American colonies, from New Hampshire to Virginia, through the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes region. In 1769, he settled in Orange County, New York, where he purchased 120 acres of land and reinvented himself as a gentleman farmer. But with the outbreak of the Revolution, Crèvecoeur's agrarian ideal rapidly eroded, forcing him to abandon the colonies. During the 1770s, before his departure from America, Crèvecoeur took three excursions to the Susquehanna Valley in northern Pennsylvania and western New York. His first visit occurred in 1774, the second in 1776, and the third in 1778, shortly after the Battle of Wyoming. Sometime between this final trip and his eventual flight from Pine Hill in January of 1779, Crèvecoeur drafted a manuscript entitled "Susquehanna," a sketch of frontier life that remained unpublished until the twentieth century but which Crèvecoeur may have intended to include in a second volume of *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782).<sup>10</sup>

"Susquehanna" highlights the rise and fall of a specific settlement in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania (near present-day Wilkes-Barre) consisting primarily of New England emigrants who had arrived the previous decade when the Susquehanna Company began selling tracts of land to Connecticut families. In three distinct parts, corresponding to Crèvecoeur's three excursions, the narrator presents snapshots of the new settlement, its agricultural improvement,

its trials and tribulations, and its ultimate destruction during the American Revolution. On its surface, the sketch promotes the culture of improvement, predicts the future cultivation of the region, and envisions the conversion of the wilderness into an agrarian landscape. Like Farmer James, the fictional narrator of *Letters from an American Farmer*, the narrator of “Susquehanna” celebrates the agricultural conquest of the backcountry and constructs an agrarian ideal of freeholding American farmers. But beneath this surface, Crèvecoeur depicts the Susquehanna Valley as a contested zone and disrupts the agrarian ideal by introducing antagonistic forces. Thus, as Thomas Philbrick and A.W. Plumstead have suggested, “Susquehanna” emulates the basic plot of *Letters from an American Farmer*.<sup>11</sup>

If we close-read the rhetorical structure of “Susquehanna,” we find a classic pastoral design unmasking the failures of the American Revolution. As the sketch unfolds, the reality of history invades the garden of the Susquehanna and displaces its inhabitants. First, Crèvecoeur shows how the territorial conflict between Connecticut and Pennsylvania pitted Americans against one another in the Yankee-Pennamite Wars. Then he compares the white settlements of the Wyoming Valley and the West Branch with the Iroquois towns of the upper Susquehanna, reminding the reader that agricultural improvement would eventually, violently and decisively, displace the native people of the region. Finally, he demonstrates how the political turmoil of the Revolution thrust these various groups—Iroquois, Pennsylvanians, and New Englanders—into conflict. Those settlers favoring independence began to persecute their neighbors who remained loyal to the crown. Soon, the Loyalists fled from home and sought refuge among the Iroquois. When the Iroquois appealed for assistance in harboring these refugees, the Patriots denied their request, and in turn, many of the Iroquois allied with a group of Loyalists and British troops to attack the Wyoming Valley. By depicting political self-interest as the enemy of social harmony,

the sketch lodges an emotional critique of the American Revolution. In the end, Crèvecoeur blames all three parties—the Indians, the Patriots, and the Loyalists—for their failure to find a middle ground. For Crèvecoeur, the Revolution is tragic not only because it results in bloodshed but because it reverses the culture of improvement and unsettles the agrarian ideal.

In effect, “Susquehanna” has four distinct parts: a brief geographic opening and three accounts of the narrator’s different excursions to the Susquehanna Valley. The first few pages introduce the Susquehanna Valley and invite the reader to view the region on a map. Just as Farmer James wrote to Mr. F.B. in *Letters from an American Farmer*, the sketch addresses a British audience and imagines how visitors from Europe might view the North American countryside. First, the narrator draws attention to the declining condition of agriculture in the settled regions along the Atlantic seaboard. Many coastal farms, he says, maintain soil fertility because they have access to river mud and manure, but in other areas the soil has begun to lose its productive potential. In other words, the sketch begins with an expression of ecological anxiety. According to Crèvecoeur, the crisis of soil exhaustion has prompted many settlers to emigrate west, and these emigrants often follow the great rivers of the Atlantic coast up to their headwaters, where they find prime land for agricultural improvement in places like the Otsego region of New York and the upper Susquehanna Valley of Pennsylvania.

Crèvecoeur sees the Wyoming Valley as a prime example of frontier settlement because it displays various stages of improvement and dramatizes the epic process of converting the wilderness into an agricultural landscape. But, he admits, this process has involved political, legal, and military conflict between Connecticut and Pennsylvania settlers, suggesting that the agrarian ideal must always wrestle with the reality of human nature and the danger of democratic self-interest. For Crèvecoeur, the Wyoming Valley merits attention precisely because it presents

an object lesson in the mixed legacy of the culture of improvement. Ultimately, he concludes, it is not the land itself that prevents the success of any particular settlement; rather, the failure of political order results from the warped values of particular populations. Such a conclusion ought to remind us that Crèvecoeur studied the writings of Abbé Raynal, who argued that although climate and geography *influenced* human societies, cultural and political systems ultimately *determined* the fate of civilizations.<sup>12</sup>

From the start, Crèvecoeur establishes the “Susquehanna” sketch as a literary geography. “The part which I want to select for your amusement,” the narrator begins, “is a geographical account of this country, a description of its soil, a general idea of this noble river which by its immense ramifications extends its course through so vast a region” (354-55). Next, he refers the reader to a map to locate the narrative about to unfold: “If on the map you will follow the river Susquehanna, you will soon come to the great forks which divide it into two branches. In your passage to this remarkable spot you will not fail to observe the many fair rivers which fall and mingle their waters with those of the parent stream” (355). With an incipient understanding of watershed ecology, Crèvecoeur suggests that all parts of the region are interconnected. At the same time, this image of the river, when set alongside Farmer James’s description of American settlers in *Letters*, functions as a national metaphor. Just as immigrants from Europe move to America, blend together in a great melting pot, and adopt a new cultural identity, the various tributaries of the Susquehanna flow together into a “parent stream,” a symbolic confluence that brings together different races, religions, cultures, and classes.

But again, this process of political unification does not occur without conflict. Much like Jefferson viewing the Potomac at Harper’s Ferry, Crèvecoeur sees the Susquehanna as a wild and tumultuous river overflowing with the chaos of the Revolution. To survive, a settler must

navigate both physical and cultural geography. He must beware of territorial disputes and the fraudulent behavior of land speculators, both of which may pilfer his property and uproot the agrarian ideal. Believing that cultural survival requires geographic knowledge, Crèvecoeur portrays the Yankee-Pennamite Wars, in turn, as a warning against the dangers of geographic ignorance. “The right by which Connecticut claims a tract of land so unctiguous and distant proceeds from the ambiguous words of its charter,” he observes. “Little did the grantors know of the geography of this country” (355). And beneath that blindness, they paved the road to war. Thus, Crèvecoeur insists that geographic literacy is vital to establishing peaceful and permanent settlements, and to avoiding personal loss at the hands of land speculators.<sup>13</sup>

After the introductory section, Crèvecoeur organizes the next part of the sketch around his first excursion to the Wyoming Valley. Because geography remains integral to the plot, the text continues to function as a map, and in fact, the narrator assumes his audience will trace his route both textually and visually. “Please to follow me on the map,” he urges, “and to cast your eyes on the western frontiers of the provinces of New York” (357). In doing so, the reader discovers a landscape that reflects the culture of improvement. Setting forth from Pine Hill, Crèvecoeur pays homage to the mature agricultural economy of his home region. West of the Delaware River, however, he finds himself among the fresh clearings and forested terrain of the backcountry. Indeed, for Crèvecoeur, the Delaware marks the line of the frontier, and within two miles of its “desolate ridges,” after passing through an area “inhabited principally by people who keep saw mills,” he says, “I entered the great wilderness” (358). In this sense, the first excursion of “Susquehanna” charts a reverse journey through the early stages of economic development as understood in eighteenth-century theories of political economy.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the danger of the wilderness, Crèvecoeur believes that the backcountry explicitly invites agricultural settlement. During his first trip, he persistently predicts the improvement of the frontier, constructing an image of the region as the garden of the world. Even while crossing the Great Swamp, an “extremely wet and disagreeable” landscape, he imagines the labor of draining and clearing it for the sake of agricultural prosperity. “When the age, the wealth, the population of this country will be arrived to such a pitch as to be able to clear this immense tract,” he raves, “what a sumptuous, what a magnificent sight it will afford!” (362). Rejoicing in possibilities, he continues: “Here imagination may easily foresee the immense agricole riches which this great country and this spot in particular contain” (362). Accordingly, Crèvecoeur’s first journey develops a vision of improvement and cultivates an imaginary agrarian ideal.

While surveying the Wyoming Valley, the narrator also praises the industry of the New England settlers, most of whom had arrived in 1770, just four years before Crèvecoeur’s visit. Depicting the Susquehanna as an ideal site for agricultural improvement, Crèvecoeur writes, “Few rivers in this part of the world exhibit so great a display of the richest and fertilest land the most sanguine wish of man can possibly covet and desire” (364). Reaching toward hyperbole, he insists that the valley’s bottom lands “produce in the greatest abundance all sorts of grains fit for the use of Man” (364), and the river’s alluvial islands, replenished each year in the spring floods, “contain the strongest vegetative powers which nature can give” (365). Like Timothy Dwight, Crèvecoeur embraces an aesthetics of improvement, and the Susquehanna scene suggests a sort of natural providence framed in romantic landscape aesthetics.<sup>15</sup>

Proceeding on his first journey, Crèvecoeur travels from Wyoming to the West Branch, where he visits a settlement of Pennsylvania farmers at Warrior’s Run. Of these Pennsylvanians, he writes, “I never saw a greater display of plenty in my life than these people possessed; they

had every kind of grain that they chose to sow, excellent cattle, great number of swine in the woods, venison and fish for catching” (371). Representing both branches of the Susquehanna as an agricultural paradise, Crèvecoeur constructs a myth of natural bounty that reads like straight settlement propaganda. “No situation,” he observes, “can be conceived more advantageous for the emolument of human nature. . . . What a pity that this and other branches and ramifications of this immense river. . . cannot be permanently settled” (368). Thus, the sketch articulates a desire for *permanent* settlement, *permanent* agriculture, and a more *permanent* sense of place. This wish for permanence, however, emerges as a response to the instability of the region, its political history and turmoil, its boom-and-bust pattern of settlement. In other words, by constructing an ideal sense of place, Crèvecoeur takes refuge from the chaos of the times and retreats into a pastoral fantasy. But not for long.

After visiting both Wyoming and the West Branch, Crèvecoeur shifts to a narrative of conflict, relating the events that culminated in the Yankee-Pennamite Wars and so stripping the wool from the eyes of his pastoral vision. He observes that the Connecticut settlers at Wyoming were perceived as “intruders on the Pennsylvanian territories,” and what began as a noble effort to settle the region soon degenerated into a “grand landed contest” (373-74). Importantly, then, he closes the first part of “Susquehanna” on a note of conflict without resolution—a surprising outcome for a frontier narrative that seemed, at first, determined to praise existing settlements and prepare the ground for the culture of improvement. On the one hand, Crèvecoeur insists that, because of its natural bounty, the region enjoyed general peace and harmony, but on the other hand, he exposes the greed and avarice of backcountry settlers and suggests that the vices of human nature threaten to alienate the American dream. Crèvecoeur does not fault the land itself for the collapse of the settlement ideal, as the critic John Hales has argued, but rather he blames

human beings for their own failure to develop a functional land ethic. This culpability becomes even more pronounced as the narrator sets forth on his next trip to the valley.<sup>16</sup>

Set in 1776, Crèvecoeur's second excursion narrative compares the Indian towns along the upper Susquehanna with the settlements at Wyalusing and Wyoming. In effect, this part of the sketch completes a survey of the main groups of settlers in the region: the Pennsylvanians, the New Englanders, and the Iroquois. By placing these different communities in conflict, Crèvecoeur demonstrates how the agrarian ideal failed to accommodate figures of the middle ground and how the culture of improvement displaced the Iroquois people, first forcing them to cede their hunting grounds and political buffer along the Susquehanna (after the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix), and then forcing them to take sides in the War of Independence—an event that divided the Six Nations, devastated all Iroquois peoples, regardless of their tribal affiliations, and forever erased the possibility of interracial harmony in the Susquehanna Valley.<sup>17</sup>

Before returning to Wyoming, however, Crèvecoeur lingers for a week in Oquaga, where he applauds the “neat and warm habitations” of the Iroquois, their “usual hospitality,” and their “extremely flourishing” fields. Indeed, he portrays the village as having already achieved the sort of improvement that he wishes upon the settlers of the Wyoming Valley. “I saw with pleasure,” says the narrator, “[a] great deal of industry in the cultivation of their little fields” (377). During the visit, Crèvecoeur encounters a few white people who had arrived in Oquaga seeking medical assistance from the Iroquois. After watching his hosts treat a white woman with a breast ulcer, the narrator marvels at their “medical knowledge” and nonchalantly describes how he “procured the receipt...by making one of their principal squaws drunk” (378). Meanwhile, observing that some Iroquois have agreed to receive inoculations for smallpox, he delivers a long argument in favor of the practice. This portrait of Oquaga implies that Indians and white settlers can coexist

in harmony on a middle ground where they share knowledge from both cultures while working toward the common goal of backcountry improvement and accommodation. But once again, as Crèvecoeur travels south through the valley, the possibility of peace breaks down.

In December of 1776, not long after Crèvecoeur's visit, the Mohawk chief Joseph Brant passed through Oquaga and persuaded many of its people to side with the British in the War of Independence. The following year, Oquaga became a headquarters for Loyalist forces in the Susquehanna Valley, and in turn, George Washington ordered a Patriot regiment to invade the village. Following the raid, several Oquagans fled to Niagara and joined Brant's forces, then forging an alliance with the British commander John Butler, with whom they would later attack the Wyoming Valley. In retaliation for that event, Washington sent John Sullivan on a campaign through all of Iroquoia, a brutal military march that laid waste to nearly every Indian settlement in the upper Susquehanna Valley. In short, the series of events that followed Crèvecoeur's visit to Oquaga devastated the Six Nations. The Revolution intensified old and created new divisions in Indian communities; it brought violence to a formerly peaceful region; it destroyed the middle ground of accommodation as well as the Iroquois ideal of the Covenant Chain; and it left a legacy of animosity that precluded the possibility of racial coexistence along the Susquehanna.<sup>18</sup>

The residents of Oquaga were of multiple backgrounds and different religious affiliations, but Crèvecoeur missed many of these details. According to Colin Calloway, Crèvecoeur "saw an orderly religious community" but "did not see" the existing divisions between Christian Indians, traditionalists, and missionaries. Likewise, he "misidentified the residents...as Senecas" when the majority were Oneidas. For Calloway, such errors undermine the value of the account, but in truth, we cannot know exactly what Crèvecoeur "saw," only what he wrote. His description of Oquaga is perhaps more interesting precisely because of its slippage between historical fact and

literary representation. The Oneidas, for instance, eventually sided with the Americans during the Revolution, whereas the Senecas remained loyal to the British. Whether or not Crèvecoeur intended to make the slip matters less than its effect. By portraying Oquagans as Loyalists who later suffered at the hands of Patriot aggression, Crèvecoeur aligns the village with the victims of his unpublished English sketches—and with Farmer James as well. Likewise, the slip provides a kind of foreshadowing mechanism for the later attack on the Wyoming Valley, a retaliation by Indians and Loyalists who felt wronged by the Patriot cause. In “Susquehanna,” as we shall see, this 1778 attack on Wyoming functions as the key act of violence, so the Seneca-Oneida error actually reinforces Crèvecoeur’s argument that the Revolution transforms previously peaceful settlers into marauding war parties.<sup>19</sup>

Crèvecoeur’s 1776 journey sets the stage for his third and final excursion, during which he witnesses the aftermath of the Battle of Wyoming. Before describing that devastating event, however, he creates a sympathetic sketch of the Iroquois people in order to explain their motives of retaliation and to challenge the propaganda circulating after the battle—which demonized both Loyalists and Indians and referred to the event as a “massacre.” By analyzing the organization of “Susquehanna,” we may challenge those critics who interpret the sketch as a proto-republican progress narrative. Thomas Hallock, for example, has suggested that Crèvecoeur essentially promotes frontier conquest by erasing native claims. In an effort to advance a transition from one form of land use to another, Hallock contends, Crèvecoeur downplays the intercultural acts of accommodation inherent to the middle ground. In other words, the sketch functions as a work of settlement propaganda that ignores the cross-cultural relationships that defined the American backcountry. However, upon closer scrutiny of the text, one might draw the opposite conclusion. Rather than erasing the legacy of frontier conquest, “Susquehanna” forces the reader to confront

it. That is, even while favoring agricultural settlement, Crèvecoeur constructs a juxtaposition of events that encourages the reader to consider the costs of the culture of improvement.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike previous parts of “Susquehanna,” the final section does not read as an excursion narrative, although it does describe the scene Crèvecoeur encountered during his 1778 trip. This part of the sketch reconstructs the events leading up to the Battle of Wyoming on 3 July 1778. The first two excursions prepare the reader for this culminating event because they show how internal conflicts arose among frontier settlers and how those settlers denied the Indians’ claims to political justice and property rights. In the end, however, Crèvecoeur places the blame for the failure of the Wyoming settlement on the white settlers themselves. Neither wild Indians nor the wilderness unsettled the agrarian ideal. Instead, the political violence of the Revolution laid waste to Wyoming, and in this sense, the New England settlers dug their own graves.

This final part of “Susquehanna” begins by describing the patriotic fervor that infected backcountry settlers on the eve of the American Revolution. “It spread among the lower classes like an epidemic of the mind,” says the narrator, pinpointing the Patriot cause as his main target of critique. He condemns the Revolution as “A fatal era which has since disseminated among them [the settlers of the Susquehanna Valley] the most horrid poison, which has torn them with intestine divisions, and has brought on that languor, that internal weakness, that suspension of industry, and the total destruction of their noble beginning” (380). In the War of Independence, as Crèvecoeur knew from his own experience, neutrality was rarely an option, and like Oquaga, the white settlements of the Susquehanna were forced to take sides. Many of the upper towns remained loyal to Britain, whereas the lower towns sided with the Americans. As Crèvecoeur contends in many of his unpublished English sketches, these Patriots viciously persecuted the

Loyalists. “Every order was destroyed,” he declares, including “the new harmony and good understanding which began to prevail [among Yankees and Pennamites]” (380).

Stripped of their property, many Loyalists fled their farms and took refuge in the Iroquois towns of the upper Susquehanna. Before long, however, the Iroquois realized that they could not harbor so many war refugees without assistance, so they sent a convey down the Susquehanna to Wyoming, where they requested the property of the Loyalists who had come to live among them. But the Patriots of the Wyoming Valley and the West Branch scoffed at this request and chased the Iroquois back upriver. Indeed, Crèvecoeur portrays the Iroquois as caught in the middle of an American civil war, with little choice but to choose sides. Yet he also suggests that they viewed the instability of the Revolution as an opportunity to regain the southern buffer zone of their territory, so their decision to unite with the Loyalists and attack the Wyoming Valley was both a calculated political strategy and an act of territorial self-defense. In contrast, Crèvecoeur insists that the white settlers of the Wyoming Valley “seemed to invite the enemy” (382). Their original hostility in 1763 toward the Iroquois settlement at Wyoming, which the Susquehanna Company destroyed in order to clear the ground for Connecticut land claims, along with their refusal to aid the Iroquois during the War of Independence, led inevitably toward retaliation.<sup>21</sup>

With few options left, many Iroquois (following Joseph Brant) allied with the Loyalist and British troops at Niagara, and in July of 1778, these forces advanced upon the Wyoming Valley. In turn, the Connecticut settlers of Wyoming retreated to their stockade at Forty Fort. When the “assailants” arrived and found their enemies ensconced, the British commander John Butler offered them terms of surrender, but the Yankees refused, choosing to fight instead. Thus, Crèvecoeur insists that even until the final moment, the Connecticut settlers had an opportunity to make peace with the Iroquois, but their own arrogance and self-interest led them astray. As the

story goes, the Connecticut men then left the stockade to engage in battle, but soon fell into a trap. Realizing their mistake, many attempted to flee by swimming the river, but the Iroquois warriors chased them into the waters and easily killed them.

While reporting these events, Crèvecoeur's narrator employs a kind of narrative misdirection. He toys with the reader's expectations by setting the scene for a dramatic Indian raid, a bloody massacre in which the white settlers are depicted as the victims of savage violence. But then he undermines these expectations by exposing the artificial romanticism of his frontier narrative. "As no bard has as yet appeared," Crèvecoeur writes, "to sing in plaintive strains: 'Mourn, Susquehanna! Mourn thy hapless sons, thy defenceless farmers slaughtered on thy shores!' shall I be excused in following my feelings and in finishing the short account of their final catastrophe as my untutored but honest impulse directs?" (382-83). Echoing the voice of Farmer James, Crèvecoeur self-consciously constructs an expectation of Indian violence, but he persistently qualifies the behavior of the Indians, explaining their actions as the inevitable result of the Wyoming settlers' original hostility and refusing to characterize the event as a massacre.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, Crèvecoeur confounds the typical conventions of the eighteenth-century frontier narrative. On the one hand, the "Susquehanna" sketch develops the expectation for a melodramatic account of Indian-on-white violence, but on the other hand, it defends and even redeems the behavior of the Iroquois. To achieve this effect, Crèvecoeur often uses the language of uncertainty, as when he describes how the Wyoming settlers "began to fear lest their ill-judged conduct should bring down at last the vengeance of a much larger body of assailants than they could well propel" (382). He alludes to "The cruel treatment they *expected* to receive from the wrathful Indians" (384, italics added). And he admits that his account of the event relies on

hearsay: “*It is said* that those who were then made prisoners were tied to small trees and burnt the evening of the same day” (384, italics added).

As part of this narrative misdirection, Crèvecoeur leads the reader to believe that the Indians plan to murder the women and children left alone in the fort. According to the narrator:

They had scarcely finished scalping the numerous victims which lay on the ground when these fierce conquerors demanded the immediate entrance to the fort. It was submissively granted. Above a hundred of them, decorated with all the dreadful ornaments of plumes and colour of war, with fierce and animated eyes, presented themselves and rushed with impetuosity into the middle of the area, armed with tomahawks made of brass with an edge of steel. (385)

But even as Crèvecoeur constructs this image of violent penetration, he frustrates the standard expectation of atrocity. “Happily,” he declares, “these fierce people, satisfied with the death of those who had opposed them in arms, treated the defenceless ones, the women and children, with a degree of humanity almost hitherto unparalleled” (385). Indeed, as Crèvecoeur interprets the attack on the Wyoming settlement, the event is decidedly *not* a massacre. It is a legitimate act of warfare in retaliation for prior wrongs, followed by a remarkable show of restraint and mercy for the women and children. Nor were the victims of the attack innocent American farmers. Siding with the Patriot cause, they had persecuted the Loyalists and displaced the Iroquois people from their homes. If those who perished were victims at all, they were not victims of the Indians; instead, they were victims of their fellow countrymen and the patriotic pride of the Revolution.

Finally, the concluding pages of “Susquehanna” summarize the unsettling of the region. The Iroquois and Loyalist forces burn the Wyoming settlements to the ground, converting the agricultural landscape back into a wilderness. In the end, the culture of improvement fails in the

face of political violence, and the progress of previous years rolls back into the past. Some of the surviving settlers head downriver to Sunbury and Northumberland, but most begin a long walk across the same terrain they had traveled years earlier while engaged in the process of settlement. “Such was the mournful procession,” the narrator laments, “Such was their situation, while the carcasses of their friends were left behind to feed the wolves of that wilderness on which they had so long toiled, and which they had come to improve” (390). Rather than celebrating the triumph of frontier conquest, the sketch culminates in the tragic reversal of the settlement ideal. Meanwhile, notes the narrator, the dismantling of Wyoming required an immense effort in its own right: “Houses, barns, mills, grain, everything combustible to conflagrate; cattle, horses, and stock of every kind to gather; this work demanded a considerable time. The collective industry of twelve years could not well be supposed, in so great an extent, to require in its destruction less than twelve days” (388). Thus, in a passage that sounds almost biblical, the Revolution finally unsettles the agrarian ideal. In twelve days, the settlements fell, their inhabitants retreated from the frontier, and the culture of improvement was temporarily reversed.

Much like the final chapter of *Letters from an American Farmer*, which also reflects Crèvecoeur’s personal experience at Pine Hill, the “Susquehanna” sketch closes with a tragic scene in which the reality of history arrives, like a locust swarm, and devours the agrarian ideal. Beyond its plot structure, however, the specific geographic setting and historical context of the “Susquehanna” sketch should encourage us to rethink our critical approaches to both Crèvecoeur and his canonical text.

In past decades, scholars have revised their reading of Crèvecoeur in two principal ways. First, emphasizing the complex literary techniques of *Letters*, they have redefined the work as a novel and recast Crèvecoeur as a writer of fiction. Second, uncovering the historical contexts of

Crèvecoeur's life, they have positioned him within a transatlantic discourse and interpreted *Letters* as a sophisticated social, political, and economic commentary. According to Ed White, these developments have overshadowed Crèvecoeur's personal experience as an American farmer anchored in an actual physical location. By focusing on literary motifs or cosmopolitan contexts, we downplay the geographic foundation of Crèvecoeur's additional writings and fail to see the centrality of the Susquehanna Valley in his vision of the American backcountry. Indeed, as many as eight or nine of Crèvecoeur's additional sketches in English—those essays that went unpublished during his lifetime but later appeared as *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (1925)—are set in the Wyoming Valley. Therefore, we ought to pay close attention to the history of this region when analyzing Crèvecoeur's work. If we read *Letters* as part of these sketches, White argues, we find a “textual dispersal” involving a plurality of rhetorical modes, narrative voices, and cultural perspectives. This dialogic effect suggests that Crèvecoeur engaged in an encyclopedic, mosaic writing project intended to represent multiple Americas.<sup>23</sup>

Because the Wyoming Valley played a key role in Crèvecoeur's view of the backcountry, and because he set so many of his unpublished sketches in the greater Susquehanna region, we can re-plant *Letters* within this geographic context as well. We should recall, for instance, that Crèvecoeur placed his fictional narrator, Farmer James, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, an extension of the Susquehanna Valley west of Harrisburg. If this location was a conscious choice—and let us suppose that it was—why choose the Susquehanna Valley? Quite simply, when viewed as a member of the same geographic community as the Wyoming settlers, James becomes a victim of the very culture he celebrates. While working to establish the isolated agrarian settlements of the frontier—like Andrew the Hebridean's farm—James effectively creates the conditions that intensify the violence of the Revolution, and thus his actions are not as innocent as his tone. In

the end, the white settlers of Wyoming, the Iroquois inhabitants of Oquaga, and the fictional Farmer James all share in the boom-and-bust pattern of settlement in the Susquehanna Valley, and their stories expose the “legacy of conquest” at the heart of the culture of improvement.

*A Pamphlet of Improvements: William Cooper's Settlement Propaganda*

While the Revolution depopulated the Susquehanna Valley and erased the possibility of racial harmony, it also prepared the ground for a new wave of white settlement. Abandoned farms and villages invited newcomers to resume the work of agricultural improvement, and, in some places, the burning of crops had actually replenished the fertility of the fields. Soldiers who traveled the region during the War of Independence, often on campaigns of terror, discovered a landscape ripe with the promise of agrarian independence. After the war, many soldiers returned to the Susquehanna and began to rebuild the rural economy. Meanwhile, a new generation of land developers organized the resettlement of the valley and controlled its economic resources well into the nineteenth century. Such real estate barons seized the political moment of the Revolution to acquire vast tracts of land forfeited by Loyalists or left vacant by British land companies; they established settlements in the backcountry, financed improvement projects, and connected the Susquehanna Valley to the market economy of the Atlantic commercial world.<sup>24</sup>

In 1785, William Cooper, a Quaker wheelwright from Burlington, New Jersey, arrived at the headwaters of the Susquehanna to survey a tract of land he intended to purchase. An aspiring developer, Cooper untangled a complex fabric of legal claims to the Otsego Patent, gained control of the title, and commenced the work of settlement. During the 1790s, he rose to power, first as a wealthy landlord and founder of Cooperstown, then as a county judge and political tycoon. An ardent Federalist, he was elected to Congress in 1794, but at the end of the decade,

with the ascent of the Republican Party, he lost favor with the people, resigned his seat on the bench, and rode the wheel of fortune out of public office. According to historian Alan Taylor, the founding of Cooperstown exemplifies the mixed legacy of the American Revolution, which, on the one hand, enabled a new class of upstart entrepreneurs to develop trade networks, domestic manufactures, and commercial relationships. Celebrating personal self-interest, these bourgeois businessmen toppled the old aristocratic hierarchy and replaced it with a power structure based on property ownership. In this sense, Cooper's success illustrates how economic liberalism shaped the political culture of the early American Republic. On the other hand, Cooper fashioned himself as a colonial gentleman, seeking the kind of paternalistic authority often associated with classical republicanism. But in the wake of the Revolution, the American people increasingly rejected such cultural elitism, so in the end, we might say, Cooper chose the wrong side of history.<sup>25</sup>

Near the end of his life, Judge Cooper (as his contemporaries called him) recounted his experiences as a frontier developer in a pamphlet entitled *A Guide in the Wilderness*, published posthumously in 1810. As a work of settlement propaganda, promotional literature, and that ever-popular genre, the published correspondence between Federalist gentlemen, *A Guide in the Wilderness* celebrates Cooper's accomplishments and provides a wealth of practical advice for would-be land developers. As a frontier narrative, however, the pamphlet demonstrates how the culture of improvement took control of the American backcountry, erased competing claims, commodified the environment, and converted it into a commercial landscape.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, Cooper argues that landlords ought to allow the organic process of frontier settlement to unfold without excessive restrictions. He espouses a fundamental faith in the free market, advises landlords to offer freehold title to settlers, and chastises those developers who

either reserve land for future speculation or impose foolish rules upon the common people. In this regard, *A Guide in the Wilderness* delivers a pseudo-populist discourse on the needs and knowledge of the frontier farmer. Judge Cooper believes that his settlers—most of whom come from New England—possess an impressive amount of practical expertise about the process of timber cutting, land clearing, and frontier cropping, and a landlord must honor these skills if he wishes to settle the land quickly and reap an immediate profit. But even as the Judge defends the economic interest of his settlers and channels the democratic energy of the Revolution, he embraces a Federalist philosophy of paternalistic authority. He suggests that the upper-class landlord has a public duty to promote the common good by developing the land, supporting improvement projects, and dictating the economic policies of his particular region.

Cooper wrote *A Guide in the Wilderness* at the request of William Sampson, a lawyer in New York who befriended the Judge during the early 1800s. Accordingly, the pamphlet begins with a prefatory letter from Sampson, which establishes Cooper's credibility by framing his personal history in the context of a fellow gentleman's request for information. While praising the Judge for his practical experience and public service, Sampson suggests that Cooper's written reflections will further contribute to the national project of settling the frontier. In this context, the term "guide" touches on multiple registers. Most obviously, Cooper served as a guide for new settlers in the Otsego region, and the pamphlet records that experience. Additionally, by participating in the Federalist discourse of agricultural improvement, Cooper becomes a guide for future land developers, and thus the pamphlet functions as a handbook—a guide to national economic improvement. Consequently, Sampson positions Cooper's correspondence within the same discursive community as George Washington's *Letters from His Excellency*. "Whatever our respective opinions may be as to the advantage of foreign commerce," writes Sampson, "in

this we both agree, that the first and best of arts is agriculture” (1). Elevating Cooper to the status of frontier celebrity and political advisor, Sampson declares, “I should delight to follow in your footsteps through the Wilderness” (2). Thus, Cooper’s frontier narrative begins with a framing device that defines the work as an account of practical experience and public instruction.

Sampson closes his opening letter with a list of “Queries” designed to structure the document. First, he asks Cooper to explain the best method of purchasing land on the frontier. He requests a description of the kind of settlers a developer should invite. He solicits a summary of locations in New York where Cooper anticipates commercial markets will emerge. Likewise, Sampson inquires about possible roads, canal projects, and other internal improvements that will connect the backcountry with the market economy. Next, Sampson urges Cooper to provide an agricultural survey of the frontier with details related to climate, soil quality, timber, crops, and wild animals. In other words, Sampson desires an inventory of commodities, a list of natural resources with economic value. Finally, he asks Cooper to predict the growth of domestic manufactures and describe the potential profits from developing raw materials. These opening “Queries” establish the economic mentality and utilitarian philosophy that will guide Cooper’s frontier narrative. First and foremost, Sampson and Cooper care primarily about the economic value of the natural world; that is, they commodify nature in order to assess its utility for the farmer and its potential profit in the market economy. In this sense, *A Guide in the Wilderness* advances a philosophy of economic liberalism. Sampson and Cooper promote new transportation networks to connect the backcountry to the Atlantic commercial world; they trumpet the culture of improvement; and they hope to convert the “wilderness” into an agricultural marketplace.

*A Guide in the Wilderness* also glorifies the masculine conquest of the American frontier and embraces the stadial theory of civilization by imagining a certain teleology leading naturally

toward agricultural settlement. In the opening letter, for example, Sampson endorses “the liberal and manly enterprise of reclaiming from its rude state the barren wilderness, and scattering the smiling habitations of civilized man in those dreary wastes” (2). Later, when Cooper describes his first journey to the Otsego region in 1785, he constructs a narrative of discovery that reads as a mythic vision in the wilderness:

In 1785, I visited the rough and hilly country of Otsego, where there existed not an inhabitant, nor any trace of a road; I was alone, three hundred miles from home, without bread, meat, or food of any kind; fire and fishing tackle were my only means of subsistence. I caught trout in the brook and roasted them on the ashes. My horse fed on the grass that grew by the edge of the waters. I laid me down to sleep in my watch coat, nothing but the melancholy Wilderness around me. In this way I explored the country, formed my plans of future settlement, and meditated upon the spot where a place of trade or a village should afterwards be established. (9)

By representing the region as pristine, Cooper erases the evidence of previous settlement, and in biblical fashion he carries out the divine work of conquest and conversion. Indeed, Sampson and Cooper ignored a long history of inhabitation in the upper Susquehanna Valley, which included not only the Iroquois, who had resided in the region for generations, but more recent settlers as well, like the colonial land baron George Croghan, who had constructed a feudal estate at the foot of Lake Otsego, or the white squatter David Shipman, who lived in a cabin in the woods and subsisted by hunting much like the character of Natty Bumppo in *The Pioneers*. Rhetorically, the pamphlet’s omission of these earlier settlers justifies their dispossession while legitimating the “future settlement” of Cooperstown. In other words, as William Cronon has argued, the concept

of “wilderness” functions as a tool of conquest; by definition, it clears the frontier of a human presence and denies the existence of competing claims to the land.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the pamphlet, Cooper provides instructions for those who wish to follow in his footsteps of conquest. He advises the would-be developer to acquire a large piece of land—perhaps 50,000 acres—and open the entire tract for sale. Invite as many settlers as possible, he directs, even if they have shaky credit. For Cooper, labor is the key to the rural economy, so a landlord should encourage the cooperation of his settlers, bribe them with alcohol if necessary, and maintain an active presence in the community in order to monitor their improvements. Likewise, Cooper believes that individual land ownership motivates industry and prosperity. When settlers pursue their own agrarian independence, they will perform more labor, work the land more intensively, and accomplish more improvement. To facilitate this mentality of self-interest, landlords should offer freehold title and long mortgages to the settlers. Even if a farmer defaults on his mortgage, resulting in foreclosure, Cooper contends, the land will still have increased in value. In turn, the landlord has a duty to finance improvement projects like new roads, bridges, mills, and canals. Cooper, for example, opened a general store and extended a line of credit to new settlers, making them grateful and more dependent upon his patronage. Thus, *A Guide in the Wilderness* endorses a culture of improvement that borrows elements from both economic liberalism and classical republicanism. Cooper seeks to unleash the self-interest of his settlers by sponsoring the creation of a market economy and developing a commercial village, but he also casts himself as a benevolent aristocrat upon whom the people depend for political and economic leadership.

Although class hierarchy plays a key role in Cooper’s model of frontier settlement, he warns his fellow Federalists against the pitfalls of paternalism. At the end of the pamphlet, the

Judge records several examples of British gentlemen emigrating to America with the aim of establishing an estate. Mocking the pretentious elitism of these educated Europeans, Cooper describes how they imposed abstract theories of land management upon the rough reality of the backcountry. They forced their settlers to adopt learned practices of timber cutting, often with elaborate technologies, and they mandated the science of agricultural improvement as developed in England. Snubbing the direct experience of American settlers, these gentlemen elevated theory above practice, and the result was a comedy of errors. Their projects failed, says Cooper, because they hindered the organic process of settlement and rejected the expertise of the common people. “I never could see that the practical farmer had derived much advantage from the closet,” quips Cooper. “As yet I think it safer that the philosopher should learn from the farmer, than the farmer from the philosopher” (49). In other words, *A Guide in the Wilderness* debunks Arthur Young’s school of scientific agronomy, which sought to establish theoretical rules for soil amendment and crop rotation. By ridiculing the learned culture of gentleman farmers, Cooper reveals his own class consciousness as a man who began his career as a common wheelwright.<sup>28</sup>

Yet Cooper also conducts an agricultural survey that resembles the kind of scientific land analysis implemented by Jefferson, Washington, and Madison on their plantations in Virginia. For instance, when advising developers how to locate the best lands for agricultural production, Cooper flaunts his knowledge of soil science by explaining the ecological relationships between vegetation, watersheds, and mineral deposits. He also evaluates the soil fertility of frontier lands based on principles of biogeography. He insists that the northern climate of Cooperstown, with its heavy annual snowfall, prepares the ground for successful wheat cultivation, and he recalls his own trial-and-error with fruit culture. To an extent, then, he roots his agricultural instruction in

his own direct experience—and experiments—but he neglects to mention one of his own most significant follies: the failure of the maple sugar industry in the Otsego region.

In the early 1790s, in an effort to diversify economic production and develop domestic manufactures, Cooper urged his settlers to tap into the maple business. He borrowed capital and kettles from his wealthy friends in Philadelphia, who in turn printed advertisements in an effort to stimulate demand. Over the next few years, a maple sugar boom took hold of the Susquehanna Valley as improvers attempted to create an alternative to the sugar cane of the West Indies. According to boosters like Tench Coxe and Benjamin Rush, maple would not only meet the demand for sugar in the domestic market, but it would also reduce the nation's economic dependence on slavery. No longer profiting from sugar cane, plantation owners would have no choice but to emancipate their labor force. Thus, Cooper and his colleagues hailed the maple as an ideal commodity because it combined egalitarian production with social reform. Achieving initial success, Cooper earned praise from Jefferson and Washington, both of whom planted maple trees on their home plantations. But soon enough, the sweet dreams went sour. First, a series of long winters shortened the sugar season and limited production, and then, during transport to Philadelphia, rain leaked into the hogsheads that held Cooper's first shipments, spoiling the product with mold. From 1789 to 1792, Cooper had advocated the conservation of maple groves in order to fuel the sugar industry, but when the business failed, he turned his attention to the production of potash, which ironically involved the destruction of the very trees he had touted as a renewable resource. While this shift to potash allowed Cooper to recoup his financial losses, it resulted in devastating ecological losses.<sup>29</sup>

Ignoring such failures, *A Guide in the Wilderness* portrays the Otsego region and the rest of western New York as an agricultural paradise. In addition to providing excellent soil for wheat

cropping and fruit orchards, Cooper declares, “All other vegetables grow to an uncommon size” (26). Likewise, he observes, “The mutton of the hilly counties is fat and juicy, and very delicate; the wool fair and the fleece heavy” (26). Ultimately, Cooper favors a form of extensive frontier farming rather than the convertible husbandry that would soon become the cornerstone of the agricultural improvement movement. When accounting for the cost of clearing and enclosing the land, for example, he highlights the immediate profit of potash production. He also argues that effectively employing the ashes of the trees to fertilize the land will yield impressive harvests in the short term. Indeed, Cooper believes that “a man’s profits are never greater than at the time of clearing his lands” (39). In this sense, *A Guide in the Wilderness* reveals a capitalist mentality that promotes the commodification of the natural world for the sake of financial gain.

When Cooper surveys other elements of the backcountry, this same utilitarian ethic informs the account. Assessing the forest, the Judge employs a terminology that establishes his economic criteria. “As to the timber,” he writes, all that matters is “its utility, its abundance, and its qualities” (26). He labels the white pine “useful” and “valuable,” praises the sugar maple as the “best fuel,” and considers hickory “of great use for the fabrication of many farming utensils” and “an excellent timber for the cabinet makers” (26-27). Describing the “wild beasts” of the region, *A Guide* focuses only on their value as natural resources or their danger to crops and cattle. Cooper willingly concedes that his survey ignores flora and fauna that play no role in economic affairs. “There are a number of other animals indigenous in the woods,” he concedes, “but as they are unimportant to the farmer, neither yielding him advantage on the one hand by their flesh or fur, nor on the other giving him any annoyance it would be wandering from our purpose to describe them” (31). Simply put, industrious landlords like Cooper have no time for frivolous nature study. Instead, once they have established an agricultural economy, he advises,

they should devote their energy to developing domestic manufactures. To that end, he predicts the discovery of additional iron mines; the construction of foundries, furnaces, and factories; and the next stage of frontier conquest—the industrial revolution.

Like Adam Smith, Judge Cooper turns economic self-interest into a moral virtue, but in the process, he implores frontier land developers to behave as colonial gentlemen, paternalistic aristocrats who patronize the public by sponsoring improvement projects, dictating the terms of settlement, and maintaining a stable social order. Thus, *A Guide in the Wilderness* straddles the line between economic liberalism and classical republicanism. Midway through the pamphlet, for example, Cooper says to Sampson, “You have asked me what my motive was for first settling the Wilderness; it is pretty clearly shown in my answer to your first inquiry, to have been for the sole purpose of promoting my interest” (37). Indeed, given his capitalist mentality, Cooper seems constitutionally incapable of seeing past his own self-interest, but occasionally he does recognize the existence of other values—both ethical and aesthetic.

While cataloging the commodities of the backcountry, for example, Cooper pauses to ponder the aesthetic value of Niagara Falls, which he calls “the most sublime and interesting scene of nature” (34). He celebrates the “rich variety of landscape” visible at the falls, and the “admirable contrast between the frowning terrors of forest-crowned precipices, and the cultivated abodes of industry and peace” (34). Much like Timothy Dwight, Cooper articulates an aesthetics of improvement by finding both beauty and a moral lesson in the contrast between the wild terrain of the falls and the settled landscape of western New York. “From the number of heavy wagons, strong teams, and valuable loadings passing to market,” he declares, “an idea may be formed of the wealth of the country and the prosperity of its inhabitants” (34). But following this economic estimate, Cooper delivers the most impassioned description of the entire pamphlet:

Next is the Grand-pitch—before this majestic image of eternal power the soul is fixed in awe and reverence—the voice of a companion is irksome—self is forgot—full of the idea of Almighty power—though terrible, delightful—sense dwells upon the image—thought wanders obscurely after something which it cannot grasp, and the beholder is lost in ecstasy as I am in description! (35).

Though rudimentary and cliché, such stock imagery reveals the presence of other values within the culture of improvement and suggests that even William Cooper, despite his rigidly economic and utilitarian world view, possessed a capacity for humility and aesthetic appreciation.

Finally, amid the sanguine celebration of environmental conquest, *A Guide* includes a striking moment of slippage when discussing the problem of deforestation. While surveying the timber resources of the Otsego region, Cooper responds to an ominous inquiry from Sampson. “You ask whether there is no danger of a future scarcity of timber?” he recalls. “I have always thought there was” (27). He explains the causes of the potential crisis: “Our winters require large supplies of fuel, and we have neither peat nor coal to resort to, when constant consumption in fuel and fencing will have rendered that most necessary article scarce. . . . The soil being all fit for culture, will be all cultivated, and the wood of course wasted” (28). While Cooper never escapes the capitalist mentality of economic profit, this passage reveals a subtle, nervous recognition that the culture of improvement will eventually exhaust the land base, leading to a period of scarcity and decline. Although rooted in utilitarian land use, Judge Cooper’s incipient concern paves the way for his son’s later expression of ecological anxiety in *The Pioneers*, which, as we shall see, lodges a critique of frontier conquest.

Indeed, just as Crèvecoeur’s “Susquehanna” enriches our understanding of *Letters from an American Farmer*, William Cooper’s *A Guide in the Wilderness* sheds critical historical light

on the first of James Fenimore Cooper's Leather-Stocking Tales. In the process of promoting frontier settlement, William Cooper inadvertently acknowledges that his system is unsustainable without a constant supply of new land entering production. Despite his detailed instructions, he offers no practical advice for landlords seeking to establish a more permanent agriculture. Nor did he effectively address these problems on his home ground in Cooperstown. Instead, after 1800, he devoted his energies to new land speculations in northern New York, leaving the next generation of Otsego residents to cope with an impending crisis of soil exhaustion, deforestation, and ecological decline.

#### *Conserving Cooperstown: Land Management in The Pioneers*

The story of Cooperstown carries us from the republican ideal of the 1790s to the democratic zeal of the 1820s. In this period, a market revolution swept across the United States, creating new economic possibilities on the American frontier while also transforming the political culture of the early Republic. As settlers arrived in the Otsego region, cleared the forests and connected the backcountry to the market economy, radical ecological changes followed in their footsteps. The hills of Cooperstown could only support a few years of aggressive wheat cultivation before yields began to decline. Meanwhile, agricultural pests like wheat blast and the Hessian fly often undermined the "Susquehanna dreams" of the region's settlers. Following the War of 1812, grain prices plummeted, the farmers of Otsego County suffered from a severe economic recession, and the problems of soil exhaustion and deforestation became prominent points of political concern. In other words, the economic decline of Cooperstown paralleled an ecological decline. Thirty years after William Cooper initiated the settlement of the valley, the land base could no longer support the extractive practices of frontier farming. In response, a group of gentleman farmers

organized an agricultural reform movement; they founded a local agricultural society, promoted crop rotation and convertible husbandry, and expressed a growing sense of ecological anxiety.<sup>30</sup>

Born in 1789, James Fenimore Cooper moved the following year with his family to the foot of Lake Otsego. He matured along with his father's settlement, which grew rapidly from a frontier outpost into a commercial village, and by 1819, after all of his older brothers had died, he became the executor of his father's estate, which soon crumbled into financial ruin. When Otsego Hall went to auction, Cooper turned to professional authorship to support his family, to forge a new identity for himself, and to move beyond his father's legacy. In *The Pioneers, or the Sources of the Susquehanna* (1823), Cooper looked back upon the political and economic forces that had dramatically altered the landscape of his childhood. While fictionalizing the history of Cooperstown and the Cooper family, the novel expresses a dual political and ecological anxiety about the durability of agricultural settlement in the upper Susquehanna Valley. Like his father, Cooper feared that backcountry farmers, if left to pursue their own interests, would deplete the forests and fields and so destroy the possibility of a permanent agriculture. To prevent this fate, he suggested that a benevolent landlord should control the development of the region, limit the unrestricted individualism of the lower classes, implement conservation laws, and manage the valley in a more sustainable fashion.<sup>31</sup>

Both a frontier narrative and an environmental jeremiad, *The Pioneers* represents a series of conflicts over land use and property rights, and in the process, it recasts the backcountry as a contested ground. Whereas William Cooper attempted to erase competing claims to the Otsego region, James Cooper recovers those claims and attaches them to particular characters in order to criticize his father's generation and their ethic of frontier conquest. Likewise, the novel exposes the negative consequences of the culture of improvement, namely, the rapacious waste of natural

resources and the subsequent degradation of the land base. Because the plot of *The Pioneers* pivots on a center of ecological anxiety, the structure of the book also illustrates the centrality of environmental problems in the early Republic. Finally, in the resolution to the novel, Cooper proposes a potential solution to both political and ecological instability. In short, he argues that the future success of the U.S. nation-state will depend not upon *conquest*, but upon *conservation*, and in turn, such conservation will require the environmental education of future generations—the ultimate goal of the agricultural reform movement in which Cooper himself participated.<sup>32</sup>

*The Pioneers* opens with a geographic description of the Otsego region, locating the events of the story at the source of the Susquehanna River, in a backcountry settlement that experienced a land boom following the American Revolution. Stressing a generational shift from the 1790s to the 1820s, Cooper declares, “The expedients of the pioneers who first broke ground in the settlement of this country, are succeeded by the permanent improvements of the yeoman, who intends to leave his remains to moulder under the sod which he tills.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, the novel begins with a celebration of agricultural improvement, implying (dubiously, perhaps) that the early settlers and their extensive slash-and-burn practices have been supplanted by a class of enlightened farmers and their systems of convertible husbandry. When read in the context of the agricultural reform movement, as we shall see, *The Pioneers* becomes a more obvious work of environmental activism aimed at promoting a better land ethic among American farmers.

The action of the novel begins in 1793, with the local landlord Marmaduke Temple and his daughter Elizabeth traveling through the snow on Christmas Eve. Temple’s wife has recently died and his daughter is returning home to the family estate. While their sleigh passes through the forest, Temple spots a deer and orders his driver to stop. He fires two shots and hears a third from another gun; the buck falls. Natty Bumppo and his young friend Oliver Edwards emerge

from the forest to claim the game, but Temple insists he shot it himself. The hunters disagree and press their rights. Natty locates the first shot in a nearby tree—a clear miss. Oliver opens his coat, exposes a fresh wound, and reveals the course of the second shot. Horrified at shooting another human, Temple insists on carrying Oliver into the village for medical treatment. Thus, the first chapter establishes a conflict between Temple, Natty, and Oliver. Cooper depicts the Otsego region as a contested zone where frontier settlers challenge the authority of the local landlord, revealing a complex tangle of class tensions. Likewise, Oliver's subsequent entrance into the Temple home puts in motion his own claim to the Otsego Patent. In effect, the opening of the novel invites the reader to ask: Who controls the resources of the Susquehanna Valley, and how legitimate is Temple's authority?

The first volume of *The Pioneers* takes place on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day of 1793. Over the course of these two days, Cooper introduces the reader to a cast of characters whose multicultural diversity reflects the cultural and economic conflicts that frontier settlers negotiated throughout the eighteenth century. We meet a slave named Agamemnon; a free black named Abraham Freeborn; the sheriff Richard Jones; a French storekeeper, Monsieur Le Quoi; a German soldier, Major Hartmann; a former British sailor, Ben Pump; a Yankee house servant, Remarkable Pettibone; an Episcopal clergyman, Mr. Grant, and his daughter Louisa; a Delaware Indian, John Mohegan; a Yankee wood-chopper, Billy Kirby; and an assortment of settlers, lawyers, and tavern-keepers. When all goes well, these characters exist in relative harmony on a middle ground of cooperation, but when their values clash, the result is racial animosity, class antagonism, and backcountry conflict.

Cooper's representation of John Mohegan and Billy Kirby is especially critical of the culture of frontier conquest. Mohegan (i.e., Chingachgook) enters the story when he arrives at

Temple's mansion to dress Oliver's gunshot wound with native herbs. First, Cooper delivers a brief (and apocryphal) sketch of Indian history in the Otsego region with special attention to the conflict between the Delaware and Iroquois nations. He portrays Mohegan as both a bicultural figure and the last of his people; indeed, the myth of the vanishing Indian clearly informs the description, but so does the process of accommodation and acculturation that played out in the upper Susquehanna Valley during the previous century. Mohegan wears a medal etched with the image of George Washington; he drapes himself in a blanket, which he symbolically flings aside when engaged in supposedly "native" behavior; his medical knowledge clearly exceeds the local doctor's; and although baptized by the Moravians, he practices both Christian and Delaware religions. Despite such elements of acculturation, Mohegan's presence in the novel exposes the tenuous nature of Temple's title. Cooper frequently sets Mohegan's "natural right" to the region against the property rights of white society. Thus, the novel complicates the narrative of frontier settlement by reviving the native claims that William Cooper had erased.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, when Billy Kirby steps on stage during the annual Christmas Day turkey shoot, Cooper presents the land-jobber and wood-chopper as an American "Hercules" whose heroic occupation makes possible the agricultural settlement of the region (190). But the depiction also reveals a degree of ecological anxiety, suggesting that Kirby's labor, founded upon an ethic of frontier conquest, leads to devastating environmental consequences. After clearing the forest, writes Cooper, "the jobber would collect together his implements of labour, light the heaps of timber, and march away, under the blaze of the prostrate forest, like the conqueror of some city, who, having first prevailed over his adversary, applies the torch as the finishing blow to his conquest" (191). In such passages, a sense of ambivalence pervades the

vision of agricultural improvement. The very pioneers who open the backcountry to settlement, Cooper suggests, also strip the land of its resources and so render their settlements unsustainable.

Throughout *The Pioneers*, Judge Temple and Natty Bumppo (i.e., the Leather-stocking) serve as the principal spokesmen for Cooper's own ecological anxiety. In the first volume, when the Temples gather for dinner on Christmas Eve, a conversation ensues concerning the problem of deforestation. Temple notices a maple log burning on the hearth and laments the destruction of "these jewels of the forest" (105), which he intends to develop into a local sugar industry. For Temple, like William Cooper, such waste is primarily an economic problem, not an ethical one; his utilitarian agenda aims to maximize production through the careful management of natural resources. In other words, a capitalist mentality shapes his conservation program. Later in the first volume, when the villagers meet at the local tavern, Temple continues his train of thought by praising the state's decision to regulate fishing, hunting, and the felling of timber through a series of conservation laws. Natty interjects to complain that such laws violate his common right to the resources of the forest, and he insists that farmers, not hunters, have created the problem of scarcity through habitat destruction. The conflict between Natty and Temple blends into a larger class tension between market hunters, frontier squatters, yeoman farmers, and real estate developers. While defending their own economic interests, the Leather-stocking and the landlord blame each other for environmental decline.<sup>35</sup>

Cooper further contrasts the environmental values of Temple and Natty by reconstructing their different visions in the wilderness. Early in the second volume, prompted to describe the origin of his settlement, Judge Temple recalls his first visit to the valley when he surveyed the Otsego Patent from atop Mount Vision. At the summit, he climbed a tree and looked down upon an apparently unpeopled landscape. "No clearing, no hut, none of the winding roads that are now

to be seen, were there,” he says, “nothing but mountains rising behind mountains” (235). Like William Cooper, Temple erases (at first) the presence of existing settlers, and thus far his vision resembles the myth of discovery in *A Guide in the Wilderness*. But unlike the pamphlet, the novel complicates the myth when Temple descends the mountain to find Natty’s hut near the lakeshore. By recovering the presence of a frontier squatter, Cooper re-envisioned the Otsego region not as a pristine wilderness, as his father saw it, but as an occupied territory. Not until the end of the novel do we learn that Natty was also serving as a caretaker for the Effingham family, who held the Otsego Patent before the American Revolution. Because the Delaware people had conveyed the region to the Effinghams prior to the war, and because Temple seized the opportunity of the Revolution to claim it for himself, Natty regards the developer’s plans as both an encroachment upon Indian sovereignty and an act of personal dishonor. In other words, Natty punctures Temple’s vision with a kind of native resistance to the work of white settlement, and in turn, this fiction of competing land claims reminds us that Cooperstown itself was founded upon a legacy of conquest.<sup>36</sup>

Later in the novel, Natty narrates his own vision in the wilderness when he tells Oliver about a place in the Catskills where he would occasionally retreat to reflect upon human society. Unlike Temple, Natty does not look upon the world (or the wild) with the intention of changing it. Instead, the hunter seeks refuge from the chaos of conflict and the madness of civilization. Anticipating John Muir’s eco-panteism, Natty perceives God’s presence in the wilderness; he heads to the hills for spiritual renewal; and he embraces the aesthetic value of the land above and beyond its economic value. Recalling a particular waterfall, Natty draws a distinction between God’s divine handiwork and man’s dirty work of economic progress: “The stream is, maybe, such a one as would turn a mill, if so useless a thing was wanted in the wilderness. But the hand

that made that ‘Leap’ never made a mill!” (293). In other words, Natty believes that the culture of improvement has no place in the wilderness because it lacks a reverence for nature. From the hunter’s viewpoint, once Temple arrives with his economic ambitions, he fouls the forests and transforms the sacred wilderness into a wretched settlement.<sup>37</sup>

In the first five chapters of the second volume—the structural center of the novel—Cooper highlights a series of land-use conflicts that dramatize the tension between Natty and Temple. In this sense, the plot of *The Pioneers* revolves around a core of ecological anxiety. Chapter XX opens with a change in the weather as the seasons advance from winter into spring. Temple and his cohort ride through the country to survey the settlement, and along the way, he and Richard discuss the prospects for developing the maple sugar industry. Richard advises the Judge to take a more scientific approach to forest management in order to maximize production; Temple, in turn, faults “the extravagance of the people” (221) for stripping the forests and concludes that such an improvement scheme must begin with conservation. Yet the Judge also displays his ecological ignorance when he ponders the possibility of improving maple cultivation “by the use of the hoe and plough” (222). Richard scoffs at the notion, and they ride on.<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, the party finds Billy Kirby boiling sap at a maple sugar bush, where Temple delivers yet another argument for forest conservation. On the one hand, Temple criticizes Kirby for his “extremely wasteful” (224) management of the maple grove, but he also questions the wood-chopper about the sugar production process, once again revealing his want of knowledge. Like William Cooper, Temple envies the practical wisdom of his Yankee settlers, and by tapping such cultural resources he hopes to learn more about managing natural resources. But Kirby offers little help, providing only vague answers to the Judge’s inquiries and expressing contempt for the pretensions of the upper class. Echoing Richard, Kirby sneers at Temple’s ecological

anxiety, arguing instead that the forests of the backcountry are boundless, and their abundance simply invites exploitation. “I call no country much improved,” says the wood-chopper, “that is pretty well covered with trees” (229). Indeed, an evident class tension colors the conversation. At one point, Kirby accuses Temple of planning to enclose the forest for his pleasure grounds like a British landlord ending the common right of the local people. In response, Temple insists that he wishes only to promote the sound management of the region’s natural resources for the sake of everyone’s economic gain.

Paradoxically, even as Temple’s utilitarian ethic encourages conservation, it remains rooted in a capitalist mentality that elevates profit over preservation. Despite their differences, both Temple and Kirby belong to the culture of improvement, and both help to accelerate the ecological exhaustion of the land base. Still, this chapter captures a fundamental conflict between the democratic self-interest of frontier settlers like Kirby and the aristocratic values of landlords like Temple. To an extent, Temple resembles a feudal landlord whose enclosure of the commons seeks to maximize agricultural productivity, but his democratic system of settlement lacks the capacity to control the rapacious impulses of individual settlers. Because the ideology of agrarian independence overlooks the ecological limits of the land, Temple must depend upon the state to mandate a system of restraint. “We are stripping the forests,” he declares, “as if a single year would replace what we destroy. But the hour approaches, when the laws will take notice of not only the woods, but the game they contain also” (229). Through his active presence in promoting conservation laws, Temple functions not only as a frontier developer but also as a Federalist improver, a proponent of the agricultural reform movement of the early Republic.

In Chapter XXII, as the year springs into April, an enormous flock of passenger pigeons arrives in the valley, and the villagers organize a pigeon shoot. They flood into the streets with

every kind of fire-arm in their possession, from shotguns to pistols, cross-bows to rifles, and even, in one case, a cannon. Cooper describes the scene in military language, like an epic battle from *The Iliad*, as if the settlers waged a war on nature. Men and boys “posted themselves” at strategic points throughout the valley before “the attack commenced” (244). With the enemy’s approach, “The reports of the fire-arms became rapid [and] death was hurled on the retreat of the affrighted birds” (245). Seeking fame and glory, Richard hauls forth a swivel gun abandoned in the region during the War of Independence and prepares “an assault of a more than ordinarily fatal character” (245). Meanwhile, Natty protests the pigeon shoot like a preacher bemoaning the sins of man: “it’s wicked to be shooting into flocks in this wastey manner” (247). He condemns the culture of frontier conquest, suggesting that the villagers wrongly perceive the abundance of nature as an invitation to destruction, and in contrast, he articulates a land ethic that combines the rules of sportsmanship with an ecological concept of the biotic community. “It’s much better to kill only such as you want, without wasting your powder and lead, than to be firing into God’s creatures in this wicked manner,” he proclaims. “I don’t relish to see these wasty ways that you are all practysing, as if the least thing was not made for use, and not to destroy” (248).

Environmental historians now believe that market hunting actually contributed more to the extinction of the passenger pigeon than either agricultural settlement or habitat loss. Given this context, critics like Timothy Sweet have argued that Natty’s occupation as a market hunter makes him just as culpable as the villagers for the destruction of the game he pretends to defend. Sweet sees a troubling hypocrisy and historical irony undermining Natty’s critique of the pigeon shoot. But we must also recognize that Natty, as a hunter, honors a code of sportsmanship that sets ethical limits upon excessive harvesting. We might recall as well—albeit anachronistically—that Aldo Leopold’s belief in conservation began with his own passion for hunting; as a boy, he

learned to follow the rules of sportsmanship, and those early precepts eventually evolved into his larger land ethic concept. Like Leopold, Natty understands that humans must *use* nature in order to survive, but he decries the villagers' disrespect for the nature they consume. When Temple attempts to forge an alliance with the hunter, Natty rejects the partnership because he sees the Judge himself as the source of the problem. "Put an ind, Judge, to your clearings," he replies, articulating his version of a land ethic. "Use, but don't waste. Wasn't the woods made for the beasts and birds to harbour in? and when man wanted their flesh, their skins, or their feathers, there's the place to seek them." (248). Thus, Natty views the wilderness as an ecosystem that man should enter as a visitor but not as a conqueror; it is a place of biodiversity and balance which the culture of improvement has begun to disrupt.<sup>39</sup>

Although Temple shares Natty's ecological anxiety, he lacks an awareness of his own culpability in environmental degradation. In the end, the Judge cannot control the process of frontier conquest he has put in motion, and, tellingly, he joins the villagers in their slaughter of the pigeon flock. Afterwards, full of remorse, his only recourse involves creating a market for the dead pigeons, so he encourages the village boys to gather the birds in exchange for sixpence a hundred. Nor is Natty entirely innocent himself. Earlier in the chapter, the hunter's reputation as a marksman motivated him to accept Billy Kirby's challenge to shoot a pigeon on the wing; he cannot resist masculine competition, despite its affiliation with the waste he abhors. He shoots just a single pigeon, however, then leaves the field in symbolic fashion, refusing to participate further in the slaughter. Because Natty cannot accommodate himself to the settlement culture, his departure from the pigeon shoot foreshadows his flight from Templeton for the western frontier.

Following the pigeon shoot, the plot of *The Pioneers* picks up in the middle of summer when Richard Jones organizes a seine-fishing party on Lake Otsego. Chapter XXIII begins by

explaining how traditional methods of harvesting fish proved inadequate for the settlers, whose appetites demanded more aggressive fishing gear. Because “the slow, though certain adventures with hook and line were ill-suited to the profusion and impatience of the settlers,” writes Cooper, “More destructive means were resorted to” (251). Temple urges Richard and the fishermen to “be more saving of the game” (252), but none of them heed his warnings. Thus, the character of Richard represents the voracious land-use practices that prevailed among frontier settlers. First, he advises Temple to invest more scientific method into the maple sugar industry to maximize production and profit; then he leads the military assault on the pigeon flock; and finally, he drags the lake with a massive seine designed to haul fish by the thousands.

Throughout the novel, technology plays a role in reflecting ideologies of land use. In the first chapter, for example, insisting that the long rifle is the most accurate and humane weapon for hunting game, Natty censures Temple for using a shotgun. Likewise, in Chapters XXIII and XXIV, Cooper contrasts Richard’s seine net (an example of proto-industrial fishing gear) with Natty’s fishing spear and Mohegan’s bark canoe. Symbolically, Cooper also compares the imagery of the fires that accompany each fishing party. Richard’s seine fishermen have built a bonfire from quick-burning brush, which “glimmers for a moment, and dies again” (253)—perhaps implying that their land-use practices are short-lived and unsustainable. Observing this fire from afar, Temple and Elizabeth walk down to the lake to view the fishing festivities. They find Richard, along with Billy Kirby and Ben Pump, engaged in a masculine bragging contest. Soon, however, the fishing party sets out to drag its net, hoping to haul in Otsego bass (a species of whitefish native to the lake) as well as pike, pickerel, perch, and lake trout.

As with the pigeon shoot, Cooper depicts the fishing episode in telling terms, this time invoking the language of captivity. He refers to the fish as “prisoners,” “alarmed victims,” and

“captives thus drawn from the bosom of the lake” (258-59). Temple responds with a dose of ecological anxiety. “This is a fearful expenditure of the choicest gifts of Providence,” he says. “The world has no better fish than the bass of Otsego; it unites the richness of the shad to the firmness of the salmon” (259). Once again, however, Temple’s concern remains rooted in utilitarianism; he fears not for the health or biodiversity of the lake as an ecosystem, but for the loss of its culinary treasures. He ponders the ability of fishing laws to regulate such waste, but concludes that the seasonal cycle of the Otsego bass will protect it from potential extinction. In fact, Temple had already passed a law that regulated the fishing season, but as Timothy Sweet suggests, that law was ineffective because it allowed the harvesting of bass precisely when they were most vulnerable, during their summer spawn. In other words, even as Temple attempts to manage the land more sustainably, his ignorance of fish biology sabotages the effort.<sup>40</sup>

In Chapter XXIV, Cooper introduces the traditional fishing methods of Natty Bumppo and John Mohegan as an alternative to Richard’s industrial trawling. While watching the seine fishermen, Elizabeth notices “a small and uncertain light,” which “seemed to struggle for existence,” dancing across the lake and shining as “a steady ball of fire.” “It did not at all resemble the large and unsteady light” of the settlers’ fire, Cooper writes, “being much more clear and bright, and retaining its size and shape with perfect uniformity” (263). Set against the seine fishermen’s fire, this image creates a juxtaposition between the settlers’ boom-and-bust pattern of resource extraction, which flares up with great profit, “glimmers for a moment, and dies again” (253), and the traditional, sustainable lifeways of Natty and Mohegan. While the seiners drag their greedy net through the lake, Natty and Mohegan approach the shore in a bark canoe, which has “the power of regulating its own progress” (265). Natty carries a long spear, a

form of fishing gear designed for control. Both their technology and their mentality, that is, demonstrate a capacity for restraint, a sensitivity to scale and “proper management” (267).

In due course, Natty denounces the settlers for their over-fishing practices and warns them against the so-called tragedy of the commons: “I eat of no man’s wasty ways. I strike my spear into the eels, or the trout, when I crave the creators, but I wouldn’t be helping to such a sinful kind of fishing” (265). Once again, Temple shares Natty’s ecological anxiety, but the hunter rejects the alliance. “No, no,” he says, “we are not much of one mind, Judge, or you’d never turn good hunting grounds into stumpy pastures. And you fish and hunt out of rule; but to me, the flesh is sweeter, where the creator has some chance for its life” (266). Overhearing the conversation, Richard mocks the potential partnership: “A very pretty confederacy, indeed! Judge Temple, the landlord and owner of a township, with Nathaniel Bumpo, a lawless squatter, and professed deer-killer, in order to preserve the game of the country!” (266). Thus does the novel dramatize a fundamental class conflict posing a challenge to conservation.

Finally, Cooper concludes the allegory of the fishing episode by putting in motion the two technologies he has introduced. Elizabeth and Oliver join Natty and Mohegan in their canoe; they paddle out into the lake; and Natty spears a lunker of a lake trout. Meanwhile, the seiners struggle to find a balance; they fail to effectively navigate their boats; Ben Pump curses the crew; Kirby dashes his oars; and Pump falls overboard, nearly drowning were it not for Natty, who plucks out the sailor with his spear. In other words, the fishing episode constructs a contrast between a bark canoe that glides over the water in a steady fashion, carries four passengers in perfect balance, and unlocks “the secrets of the lake” (269), and a reckless seine-fishing fleet full of masculine bravado that nearly capsizes while harvesting an immense number of fish. In the end, not only do the seiners lack physical balance; they disrupt the ecological balance of the lake.

Because *The Pioneers* depicts Temple as an advocate of the maple tree, a critic of the pigeon shoot, and a potential ally of Natty Bumppo, some scholars have suggested that Cooper saw his own father as an environmental steward. According to Alan Taylor, however, the novel actually portrays a landlord incapable of controlling the appetites of his backcountry settlers and all too dreamy about market speculation himself. When the fiercely independent wood-chopper, Billy Kirby, recklessly damages a sugar bush, Judge Temple fails to convince him of the merits of forest conservation. Nor can the Judge restrain the destructive tendencies of the settlers engaged in the pigeon shoot and the fishing episode. In fact, Temple only values the resources of the region for their economic potential, and he can only respond to the pigeon shoot by creating a market for the slaughtered birds. Likewise, shortly after articulating his own version of a land ethic, Natty poaches a deer out of season. Despite his earlier critique of waste, the hunter cannot resist the temptation of the chase and he dismisses Temple's efforts to legislate conservation. After killing the buck, he snorts in defiance, "So much for Marmaduke Temple's law!" (299). Like the other settlers, Natty cannot control his own rapacious impulses and so fails to exercise the kind of ethical restraint he earlier advocated.<sup>41</sup>

At the close of *The Pioneers*, Natty strikes out for the territories, leaving the settlements behind and ironically opening the way for the future conquest of the frontier—the very process he criticizes throughout the novel. The conclusion neatly resolves the central conflicts over land use and property rights that had functioned as the principal plot device. Mohegan dies; Natty departs; Oliver reveals his true identity as the heir of Effingham, marries Elizabeth, and so unites all existing claims to the land. But this unification does not occur without conflict. Near the end of the novel, after Natty has escaped from jail (where he was serving time for poaching), he and Oliver retreat to Mount Vision, while the posse in pursuit of the fugitives accidentally lights the

forest on fire. When Elizabeth arrives at the summit to deliver a bag of gunpowder to Natty, she finds Mohegan encircled in flames, engaged in a religious revival. He has cast aside his blanket; he rejects the trade of basket-making, recollects his youth as a warrior, and accuses the white man of stealing his people's lands.

As the backdrop for Mohegan's death, this fire signals the end of Indian culture in the Susquehanna Valley. Cooper implies that the cultural history of empire-building parallels the natural history of forest succession; the flames that ravage Mount Vision simply make way for a new generation of trees. Yet Cooper blames this particular fire on poor land-use practices. The lack of sound management enhances the severity of such fires, because settlers who strip timber from the forest leave only a brush pile of dead branches. In this sense, the fire enacts both Richard Slotkin's myth of regeneration through violence and Thomas Hallock's trope of the fallen tree. While interpreting the symbolic meaning of the scene, however, few scholars have acknowledged its environmental and ethical implications. While the wasteful method of harvesting firewood transforms the forest into an ecological tinderbox, the haphazard diplomacy between the U.S. government and Indian nations creates a kind of racial antagonism that likewise functions as a political tinderbox. If settlers were to manage the land better, the novel contends, and diplomats were to manage Indian affairs better, then peace and prosperity would prevail.<sup>42</sup>

After the fire, the villagers rally around Richard's militia and march on Mount Vision to apprehend Natty and Oliver. Richard lugs the swivel up the mountain and prepares to attack the cave where the fugitives have taken refuge. Cooper stages the scene as a comedy of errors, which culminates when Natty shoots Hiram Doolittle, the preposterous justice of the peace, in the seat of the pants. But finally, Judge Temple arrives to restrain the violent behavior of the villagers by exercising his genteel authority. He intervenes like a feudal landlord and imposes aristocratic

reason upon the passions of frontier democracy. In this act of reconciliation, Cooper charts the future solution for both his political and ecological anxiety. The marriage between Oliver and Elizabeth unites conflicting land claims in a feudal marriage of property and power. The young couple begin a new dynasty in the region, and their relationship frames a vision of American nationhood. The new nation-state, Cooper suggests, will remain politically and economically viable only if it embraces a better system of land management. Put another way, the novel insists that the national project, although hitherto predicated upon *conquest*, must also become dependent upon *conservation* for the sake of future generations.

Facing the rise of populist politics in the 1820s, Cooper sought to suppress what he considered the dangerous social forces that threatened the early American Republic. In fiction, he returned to the landscape of his youth in order to construct a national myth that would allow an elite class of aristocrats to transfer their genteel authority into a legal system that would contain the democratic fervor of the frontier. In other words, Cooper wrote *The Pioneers* in an effort to revise history and direct the future of the nation. At the end of the novel, Judge Temple combines the power of the legal system with his own personal authority to subdue the characters of Natty Bumppo, Richard Jones, and Squire Doolittle. Thus, Cooper implies that the stability of the United States depends upon a class of aristocratic leaders capable of exercising benevolent paternalism. But the novel also depicts Temple as partly inadequate, unable to achieve absolute authority because he lacks the trimmings of true gentility. Therefore, the plot closes with yet another transfer of power, as Temple relinquishes his estate to Oliver and Elizabeth. This next generation, Cooper hopes, will redeem the shortcomings of Judge Temple, quell the forces of frontier democracy, and reign like feudal landlords over the future of the settlement.<sup>43</sup>

Because Cooper came of age under the shadow of his father's Federalist politics and attended Yale under Timothy Dwight's regime, we might recontextualize his novels by setting them alongside *A Guide in the Wilderness* and *Travels in New England and New York*. Like these earlier works, *The Pioneers* acknowledges the problem of resource scarcity and suggests that the school of agricultural improvement can help to establish a more scientific, sustainable system of land management. Yet Cooper himself later supported the Jacksonian Democrats, a political shift leading some critics, like Lloyd Willis, to read *The Pioneers* as a rejection of Cooper's Federalist forebears. True, the novelist expresses a deeper degree of ecological anxiety than both his father and Timothy Dwight, and *The Pioneers* more visibly calls into question the capitalist imperatives of land developers, but that does not mean the book denies the potential of Federalist improvement. In fact, the question of political allegiance—Federalist, Republican, or Democrat—largely misses the point. Ecological anxiety in the early Republic emerged from multiple political corridors, and often the most trenchantly partisan opponents—like Jefferson and Dwight—advocated similar reforms. Nor can we draw clear lines in terms of class. While gentleman farmers led the improvement movement, they hoped to establish a better agricultural system for the sake of entire regions and for the benefit of all members of society.<sup>44</sup>

Even as the Federalist Party faded into oblivion after the War of 1812, Cooper himself jumped on the bandwagon of agricultural improvement. When his father died in 1809, Cooper was serving in the Navy in New York, where he met his future wife, Susan DeLancey. Soon after their marriage, they began planning their return to Otsego County. Cooper purchased several parcels of land and founded two agricultural operations, Fenimore Farm and Mt. Ovis, where he later raised a flock of merino sheep for the wool trade. The couple relocated to Cooperstown in 1813, but a series of financial calamities ultimately forced them, four years later, to take refuge

in New York. Aside from a few follow-up visits, the family would not return to the Otsego region for seventeen years. Before leaving home in 1817, however, Cooper helped to found the Otsego County Agricultural Society (OCAS), and during his absence he continued to serve the organization as corresponding secretary.<sup>45</sup>

New York's first agricultural society, OCAS sponsored the state's first county fair and promoted more scientific methods of land management in the Otsego region. The society urged local farmers to transition from corn and wheat cultivation to livestock production; its members imported sheep and dairy cattle into the county; and they worked to develop a more stable rural economy based on crop rotation, convertible husbandry, and technological innovation. Indeed, Cooper's membership in OCAS reveals a keen sensitivity to land-use problems in his home region. While his father and brothers all resided in the village, Cooper attempted, however briefly, to live and work among the rural people of Otsego County. Well before his career as a novelist, his earliest publications consisted of OCAS announcements in the local newspaper, and on a few occasions he even exchanged letters with the prominent improvers Elkanah Watson and David Humphreys. Importantly, OCAS operated from 1817 to 1825, reaching its peak just as Cooper drafted *The Pioneers*.<sup>46</sup>

The fictional Judge Temple belongs to the same class of Federalist improvers as George Washington, Timothy Dwight, and David Humphreys, and throughout the novel he expresses a similar desire to maximize economic efficiency through environmental conservation. Cooper describes Temple as an economic visionary capable of predicting the market but incapable of ignoring potential profits. The most complex character in the book, Temple struggles to resolve an internal conflict between his own capitalist ideology and his simultaneous ecological anxiety. He resembles a Federalist-era agricultural reformer in his desire to manage natural resources for

the sake of the public good, but his financial interests ultimately undermine his conservation agenda. In this sense, Temple embodies the tension between classical republicanism and economic liberalism that defines the legacy of the American Revolution. Perhaps he is too ecologically ignorant and economically invested to serve as an effective conservationist, as Sweet and Willis believe, but at the end of the novel he *does* restore order, restrain the militia, and demonstrate his benevolence toward the villagers. Furthermore, even though Natty rejects Temple's overtures, their common concerns point to a potential alliance among upper and lower classes. Let us remember that Natty had served as a steward for the Effingham family, and the next leader of the region, Oliver, was a close friend of the hunter, so class cooperation for the sake of conservation remains a possibility.

In the end, *The Pioneers* functions not as a rejection of Federalist improvement, but as an illumination of the challenges that face all environmental movements. Contending with political, economic, and cultural conflicts, agricultural reformers jockeyed for ideological control of the American backcountry while attempting to restrain the human impulse to ravage the land. They sought to replace a legacy of conquest with an ethic of conservation. But a fundamental paradox existed at the heart of the movement. Even as improvers advocated ethical limits, they embraced economic growth and so fueled the very fire they sought to control. *The Pioneers* dramatizes this fundamental tension and ends on a note of uncertainty. Will Oliver and Elizabeth find a way to sustainably manage the resources of the region? Or will the economic interests of landlord and settler alike continue to trump the ecological value of conservation? For us, too, the question remains: How do we balance our commitment to the free market with the need to conserve the land base for the sake of future generations?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms “backcountry” and “western frontier” interchangeably to refer to the Appalachian region two or three hundred miles from the Atlantic coast that began to experience increased white settlement in the second half of the eighteenth century. During the early national era, this backcountry zone was very much the American West, so theories of frontier settlement may apply to this region as well as the plains and mountains beyond the Mississippi. Works that inform my knowledge of frontier settlement and economic development include the following: Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors* and *William Cooper’s Town*; Alan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*; Andrew R.L. Cayton and Frederika J. Teute, eds., *Contact Points*; Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire*; and Peter C. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*. I borrow the term “agrarian independence” from Paul B. Moyers, *Wild Yankees*.

<sup>2</sup> See Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*. Later scholars, like Henry Nash Smith, carried Turner’s patriotic torch through the mid-twentieth century by studying the myth of the West and the symbol of “virgin land” in literature and culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, such critics as Richard Slotkin and Annette Kolodny detected a sinister motive beneath this national narrative, which, they insisted, overshadowed the experiences of women and native peoples. While Slotkin recast the myth of the frontier as a violent conflict between white settlers and American Indians, Kolodny recovered the stories of frontier women in order to critique the masculine ideology of the United States. See Smith, *Virgin Land*; Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* and *The Fatal Environment*; and Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her*. Works of new western history that inform my knowledge of the field include the following: Richard White, *The*

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*Middle Ground* and “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*”; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* and *Something in the Soil*; and Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History*. In *From the Fallen Tree*, Thomas Hallock calls for more conversation between literary ecocritics and the new western historians, a synthesis he achieves by drawing on White’s concept of the “middle ground” and Limerick’s emphasis on “conquest” in his reading of frontier narratives.

<sup>3</sup> For this history of the Susquehanna region, I draw on the following: Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*; Susan Stranahan, *Susquehanna, River of Dreams*; Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*; and Moyers, *Wild Yankees*. For a discussion of the natural gas boom, see Tom Wilber, *Under the Surface*. For a treatment of one particular settlement at the forks of the Susquehanna and its evolution through the eighteenth century, see James H. Merrell, “Shamokin, ‘the very seat of the Prince of darkness’: Unsettling the American Frontier.”

<sup>4</sup> See Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*; and Stranahan, *Susquehanna, River of Dreams*.

<sup>5</sup> For biographical details about Crèvecoeur and the Coopers, I rely upon the following sources: Thomas Philbrick, *St. John de Crèvecoeur*; Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*; and Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years*.

<sup>6</sup> Readers can find a revised version of Crèvecoeur’s “Susquehanna” in the Penguin edition of *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America*, and a transcription of the original manuscript in Dennis D. Moore’s scholarly edition of *More Letters from the American Farmer*. A clean reading edition of the text is scheduled to appear in 2013 in a new Harvard University Press edition of *Letters from an American Farmer and Other Essays*. William Cooper’s settlement pamphlet, *A Guide in the Wilderness*, was first published in Dublin in 1810, the year following his death. Incidentally, the second printing occurred in 1897, just a

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few years after Turner declared the closing of the American frontier. I cite from the third printing in 1936. When James Fenimore Cooper published *The Pioneers* in New York in 1823, it was an immediate market success. The text went into a second edition in 1832 and a third edition in 1851, the year of Cooper's death. These textual histories receive more treatment below.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the tension between classical republicanism and economic liberalism in the early American Republic, see Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic and The Radicalism of the American Revolution*; and Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order and Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*. Historians continue to debate the role of these political philosophies in the shaping of the early Republic. While Wood and Appleby offer two competing interpretations of the American Revolution and early national political culture, I believe that both are right—that is, liberalism and republicanism existed in a complex tension throughout the late eighteenth century, but by the 1820s and 1830s, the rise of Jacksonian democracy and economic individualism had largely eclipsed the more conservative discourse of classical republicanism. Nevertheless, in the mid-nineteenth century, environmental writers like Susan Fenimore Cooper and Henry David Thoreau recast the reactionary principles of republicanism in order to critique the market mentality of Americans and the destructive land-use practices then common throughout the country.

<sup>8</sup> For details about Indian settlement along the Susquehanna River, see Barry C. Kent, *Susquehanna's Indians*; and Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 27-94. For an overview of the Yankee-Pennamite Wars, see Moyers, *Wild Yankees*; and Richard T. Warfle, *Connecticut's Western Colony*.

<sup>9</sup> For a history of the American Revolution in the Susquehanna Valley, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 130-216; Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*;

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Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 108-28; Taylor, William Cooper's Town, 57-85; and Frederick J. Stefon, "The Wyoming Valley," in *Beyond Philadelphia*, 133-52.

<sup>10</sup> Crèvecoeur's "Susquehanna" has a complicated textual history, just as the author has a complicated biography. Following the War of Independence, Crèvecoeur returned to the United States as a French diplomat and devoted his energies to promoting agricultural improvement and facilitating the exchange of botanical knowledge, but in 1790, again, he departed for France, where he remained for the rest of his life. The "Susquehanna" sketch went unpublished during Crèvecoeur's lifetime, but he did publish two essays in French (perhaps a partial translation), which he included as Letters 8 and 9 in the 1787 expanded edition of *Lettres d'un Cultivateur Américain*. After Henri Bourdin rediscovered the manuscript in the 1920s, the first two thirds were printed in the *Yale Review* (titled "Crèvecoeur on the Susquehanna") and the final third in *Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (titled "The Wyoming Massacre"). Apparently, Bourdin and his fellow editors attempted to follow Crèvecoeur's own decision to split the manuscript when he translated portions of it into French. In the 1981 Penguin edition, Albert E. Stone reunited these two pieces of the manuscript and titled the unified essay, "On the Susquehanna; The Wyoming Massacre." Unfortunately, in both the Bourdin and Stone versions of the text, the editors cut important passages for no particular reason, and the text lacks annotations to explain editorial emendations and eliminations. In 1995, Dennis D. Moore brought forth a scholarly edition of all of the manuscripts in English left unpublished at the time of Crèvecoeur's death. This edition presents a reliable but virtually unreadable text (titled "Susquehanna—"), cluttered with brackets, strike-throughs, misspellings, and grammatical errors. Finally, in a new edition of *Letters from an American Farmer* scheduled to appear in 2013, Moore will present a clean

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reading text of “Susquehanna” along with twelve other essays from Crèvecoeur’s notebooks in the Library of Congress. Because that edition was unavailable at the time of this writing, I have decided, reluctantly, to quote from Albert Stone’s Penguin edition. Unless otherwise noted, parenthetical citations refer to this edition. For more on the textual history of *Letters*, see A.W. Plumstead, “Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur”; Moore, *More Letters*, xi-xci; and Ed White, “Crèvecoeur in Wyoming.”

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this analysis, I refer to Crèvecoeur-the-author and Crèvecoeur-the-narrator more or less interchangeably. It may be wise, however, to acknowledge the difference. Because the “Susquehanna” sketch is related by textual provenance to the manuscript of *Letters from an American Farmer*, which is narrated by the fictional Farmer James, we cannot simply assume that the narrative voice in “Susquehanna” speaks for Crèvecoeur-the-author. The reader should understand that, when discussing the text of the sketch, I refer to Crèvecoeur-the-narrator, but when discussing biographical details, I do mean Crèvecoeur-the-author. This slippage between historical reality and rhetorical representation is partly what makes the sketch a compelling text. Critics who discuss the plot structure of *Letters* and “Susquehanna” include, first and foremost, Thomas Philbrick and A.W. Plumstead. While analyzing the “structural unity” and “submerged plot” of *Letters*, Philbrick detects an overall trajectory of “disillusionment.” The first three letters construct an agrarian ideal of the American farmer rooted in James’s experience. The next five letters step away from that sense of place and take a more empirical and analytical approach to Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, thus alienating James from his environment. Finally, in the South Carolina letter, the snake-and-hummingbird letter, and the last letter in the book, when violence unsettles the agrarian ideal, the pastoral myth crumbles. Philbrick thus reads *Letters* not only as an articulation of the American dream, but as a potent critique of that myth, a work that

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traces “the downward arc of the dream gone sour.” See Philbrick, *St. John de Crèvecoeur*, 84-88.

While focusing his attention on Crèvecoeur’s additional sketches in English, Plumstead sees a plot structure that resembles *Letters*. “The central plot,” he says, “is a turn from peace and modest prosperity on the frontier to attack, loss of home, property, loved ones, near or actual death, imprisonment, escape.” Meanwhile, Plumstead describes the “Susquehanna” sketch in particular as “a mini-*Letters*.” See Plumstead, “Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur,” 223-25.

<sup>12</sup> For the influence of Raynal on Crèvecoeur’s work, see Philbrick, *St. John de Crèvecoeur*, 67-70, and Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*, 131-76.

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson’s view of Harper’s Ferry appears in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> This first excursion follows a route from Pine Hill to the Wyoming Valley by way of New Jersey. To begin, Crèvecoeur traverses the Catskill and Minisink Mountains, crosses the Delaware River, then heads overland into Pennsylvania. From there, he rides through the Great Swamp, fords the Wallenpaupack River, locates the Lackawanna River, and finally descends into the Wyoming Valley. After failing to locate this route, Thomas Hallock finally declared it a fiction. I wonder, however, if that conclusion was premature. I’ve had some luck following Crèvecoeur’s path on historical maps of the region, specifically William Scull’s 1770 *Map of Pennsylvania*. Cartographic representations of the region have, of course, changed over time, and so has the land itself. Crèvecoeur frequently describes the process of draining and clearing swamps for agricultural settlement, but many changes in the land had yet to occur in the 1770s. Old maps depict a huge swath of land called the Great Swamp between Shohola and Wyoming, which Crèvecoeur crossed (through Blooming Grove) on his first journey. Modern maps depict this region much differently, and I suspect the difference is only partly due to cartographic techniques. The landscape itself has actually changed dramatically; the vegetation is different;

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the watershed was recalibrated by the draining of swamps; and we have paved over Crèvecoeur's landscape with our own geography of concrete and asphalt.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Dwight's "aesthetics of improvement," see Chapter Two. Like Dwight, Crèvecoeur seems preoccupied with the language of vision. He repeatedly refers to events as "spectacles," encourages readers to visually trace his narrative on a map, and imagines how the Battle of Wyoming would appear in a landscape painting.

<sup>16</sup> John Hales reads "Susquehanna" as a unified sketch organized around Crèvecoeur's three trips to the Wyoming Valley. He argues that these three parts construct a narrative of the rise and fall of a settlement, which draws upon the stadial theory of civilization and captures the eighteenth-century interest in the historical cycle of empire. He also suggests that the sketch employs geography to unsettle the optimism of the agrarian ideal. Thus far I agree with Hales. But he also insists that Crèvecoeur "features wilderness degeneration as the *cause* of the destruction of an established and thriving American community" (40, my emphasis). In this sense, the work of civilization and wilderness oppose one another as antagonistic forces. Ultimately, says Hale, Crèvecoeur regards the geographic setting of Wyoming as more culpable for its destruction than the political conflict of the Revolution. I see real problems with this conclusion and, in fact, I see the sketch as suggesting just the opposite—that the violence of the Revolution, and by extension the politics of Britain and America, are to blame for the Wyoming tragedy. The landscape itself, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is depicted as naturally fertile and bountiful, a place inviting both settlement and improvement. It is not the wilderness, then, that destroys Wyoming, but rather the political violence of a poorly managed imperial regime and the self-interest of its citizens. That is, Crèvecoeur pictures human nature as the true culprit, and he blames the British American political system for failing to accommodate both Patriots

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and Loyalists, both Indians and white settlers. “Susquehanna,” then, functions as a critique of the Revolution, not, as Hales suggests, as a critique of the wilderness. See Hales, “The Landscape of Tragedy: Crèvecoeur’s ‘Susquehanna.’”

<sup>17</sup> On this second journey, Crèvecoeur travels from Pine Hill to the Delaware River, passes through the Delaware Forks and up the Fish Kill branch. Then he crosses overland to Oquaga, an Oneida town on the North Branch of the Susquehanna near present-day Windsor, New York. Finally, he floats downriver through Wyalusing to Wyoming, where he surveys the progress of that settlement since his first visit two years earlier.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the impact of the Revolution in Iroquois country, see Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*. For a description of Oquaga, see Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 108-28.

<sup>19</sup> For Calloway’s brief discussion of Crèvecoeur’s account, see *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 120-21.

<sup>20</sup> See Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 77-95. Hallock offers a lucid analysis of the “middle ground” concept in “Susquehanna,” and he makes compelling use of Dennis Moore’s manuscript transcription, but I believe he mistakenly reads the essay as a “failure.” Indeed, he seems to assume an effort on Crèvecoeur’s part to erase conflicting land claims and clear the ground, like Jefferson, for agricultural settlement. But if we assume that Crèvecoeur intended to construct this sketch as a critique of the Revolution (like his other “sketches”), then perhaps it succeeds in that regard even while failing as propaganda. Hallock also describes Crèvecoeur’s politics as an early form of Jeffersonian Republicanism. Yet Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, as I have suggested in the introduction, did not see the Revolution in the same light, so we cannot assume that they shared the same vision of backcountry settlement and frontier conquest. For more

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details about the so-called “Wyoming Massacre” and Patriot propaganda about the event, see Stefan, “The Wyoming Valley,” in *Beyond Philadelphia*, 133-52.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the history of the Revolution in the Susquehanna Valley and the Battle of Wyoming, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 130-216; and Moyers, *Wild Yankees*.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, even though his 1920s editors labeled part of the manuscript “The Wyoming Massacre,” perhaps taking their cue from the French edition of *Lettres*, nowhere in the English manuscript does the term “massacre” appear.

<sup>23</sup> See White, “Crèvecoeur in Wyoming.” White argues that Crèvecoeur highlights the importance of the settlement patterns that both enabled an ideal agricultural experience and endangered that ideal during the Revolution. This rural isolation, expressed in the myriad voices and perspectives of Crèvecoeur’s texts, creates a kind of decentering effect that serves as a foil to the totalizing vision of eighteenth-century ethnography. For Crèvecoeur, neither the local nor the cosmopolitan, the enlightened nor the common, could alone describe the process of frontier settlement or the causes of the Revolution. Instead, only a mosaic presentation of multiple perspectives could capture the meaning of American pluralism and its historical significance. In this sense, “Susquehanna” offers an interpretation of the American Revolution that blames colonial settlement patterns for the upheavals of the 1770s.

<sup>24</sup> For these details, I draw upon Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*; Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*; Moyers, *Wild Yankees*; and Hinderaker and Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire*.

<sup>25</sup> Throughout this section, biographical information about William Cooper is derived primarily from Alan Taylor’s magisterial study, *William Cooper’s Town*.

<sup>26</sup> Cooper probably wrote *A Guide in the Wilderness* sometime in 1807-08, shortly before his death in December of 1809. The first edition of the pamphlet was printed in Dublin, Ireland,

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in 1810; a second edition appeared in Rochester, New York, in 1897, with an introduction by Albany Cooper (also known as the younger James Fenimore Cooper); a third edition was later published by the Freeman's Journal Company in Cooperstown in 1936. The following in-text citations refer to this third edition. The full title of the pamphlet is *A Guide in the Wilderness; or the History of the First Settlement in the Western Counties of New York, with useful Instructions to Future Settlers*.

<sup>27</sup> Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness." For details about the previous settlement of the Otsego region, see Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 30-56. We should acknowledge that Cooper does not *entirely* erase the previous settlers of the Otsego region, although the rhetorical elision is overwhelming. Early in the pamphlet, he mentions the role of the Burlington Company, and later, he describes the presence of Indian field-works and ruins in western New York. But Cooper refers to these former settlers either as an object lesson in the failure of land development or as evidence for a stadial theory of civilization leading toward the rise of the American empire.

<sup>28</sup> For more on Arthur Young's school of scientific agronomy, see Chapter One.

<sup>29</sup> For this history of the maple sugar boom, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 195-98; Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 119-26, 130-34; and Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 128-32. As a market phenomenon, this maple sugar boom resembled the merino sheep mania (described in Chapter Two) that captured the popular imagination two decades later.

<sup>30</sup> For the agricultural history of Cooperstown, see Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 190-95, 217-38, and Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 86-92, 384-89. For a study of environmental change in Cooperstown through the lens of literary representation, see Michael P. Branch, "Five Generations of Literary Coopers: Intergenerational Valuations of the American Frontier."

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<sup>31</sup> For biographical details, I draw primarily upon Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years*. According to Franklin, we cannot understand Cooper's life and legacy without attention to the economic motives that guided his actions. Franklin rejects the frequent representation of James Cooper as a petty, litigious, combative elitist—the image that Taylor presents in *William Cooper's Town*—and instead favors a view of the novelist as a warm and affectionate family man who only resorted to legal measures to save his own sinking fortune and protect his intellectual property for the sake of securing a steady income. Franklin credits Cooper not only as a pioneering American writer who developed several genres—from the sea narrative to the frontier novel—but who also established the precedents for professional authorship in America. For the most part, Cooper was alone in navigating the early U.S. book trade, and his work set the stage for the nineteenth-century literary marketplace.

<sup>32</sup> According to Wayne Franklin, *The Pioneers* was especially successful as a bestseller because it highlighted the theme of settlement at a moment when western emigration dominated both national politics and the cultural imagination. From 1816 to 1821, for instance, six new states entered the union. Franklin also suggests that Cooper chose the term “pioneers” to describe frontier settlers precisely because the word implies a forward-looking process as opposed to the eighteenth-century term “backcountry.” See Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 336-43.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper, *The Pioneers*, 16. I cite from the 1988 Penguin edition of *The Pioneers* edited by Donald A. Ringe. Hereafter, all citations appear in parentheses within the text.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Hallock provides an especially compelling analysis of Mohegan as a figure of the middle ground. According to Hallock, the plot of *The Pioneers* “naturalizes a claim to place” by forcing middle-ground characters, like Natty and Mohegan, to the margins of frontier society. Even as Cooper acknowledges the history of accommodation and acculturation that dominated

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the American backcountry, he fictionalizes Indian land claims as already in the past, and thus the novel white-washes the future while also assuaging Euro-American guilt over Indian removal by representing the progress narrative as inevitable. See Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, 196-216.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of game laws in the Otsego region and their role in *The Pioneers*, see Charles Swann, “Guns Mean Democracy: *The Pioneers* and the Game Laws,” and Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics*, 156-64. Sweet reads *The Pioneers* as an environmental allegory that pits different land-use systems against one another through the depiction of different characters: Natty as a market hunter, Kirby as a land-jobber, and Judge Temple as a landlord and real estate developer concerned about conservation but lacking the proper ecological knowledge to successfully manage the land base. Ultimately, Sweet perceives Temple as a character who was moving toward conservation but whose ignorance sabotaged his efforts. Meanwhile, he insists that Natty is less an enlightened land steward than a self-interested market hunter.

<sup>36</sup> My interpretation of Temple’s vision is indebted to Alan Taylor’s brilliant analysis of the slippage between William Cooper’s myth of discovery and his son’s fictional representation of frontier conquest. See *William Cooper’s Town*, 54-56.

<sup>37</sup> For a reading of Natty as a representative of the pastoral ideal, see Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land*, 89-96. While focusing upon Cooper’s preoccupation with the character of Natty Bumppo, who embodies the masculine ideal of the frontier hero, Kolodny argues that the novel rejects other characters as potential environmental stewards.

<sup>38</sup> According to Wayne Franklin, Cooper wrote the entire first volume of *The Pioneers* in a period of vigorous work leading up to Christmas of 1822. He was distracted by business affairs related to his whale ship, which pulled him away from his writing desk, and then he returned to the manuscript the following spring. So the composition of the novel may have followed a

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seasonal cycle and influenced the structure. In other words, both seasonality and ecological anxiety shape the plot of the novel. See Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 352.

<sup>39</sup> On the extinction of the passenger pigeon, see Jennifer Price, *Flight Maps*, 1-55, and Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth*, 67-69. For a discussion of the pigeon shoot in *The Pioneers* and its allusions to market hunting, see Sweet, *American Georgics*, 156-64. Leopold credits hunting as an influence on his land ethic in *A Sand County Almanac*, 127-29.

<sup>40</sup> Sweet, *American Georgics*, 158-60. Importantly, near the end of Chapter XXIII, when Temple delivers an elegy for vanishing ecologies, Richard retorts by exposing Temple's most fundamental contradiction—his desire to economically develop the backcountry while also conserving its resources.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 134-36.

<sup>42</sup> See Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence*, and Hallock, *From the Fallen Tree*, both of which recast Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis as a more violent story of national conquest founded upon racial conflict and Indian removal.

<sup>43</sup> Once again, this analysis owes much to Taylor's reading of *The Pioneers*, in *William Cooper's Town*, 406-27.

<sup>44</sup> According to Lloyd Willis, *The Pioneers* resembles William Cooper's *A Guide in the Wilderness* and Timothy Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York* because it expresses a similar concern for resource scarcity, but the novel ultimately rejects the solution of Federalist improvement. Willis also makes a provocative case for reading *The Pioneers* as a work of closet environmentalism, suggesting that James Cooper was exiled from canonical American literature by such critics as Van Wyck Brooks, F.O. Matthiessen, and Leo Marx because his novels reveal Federalist sympathies and express an "environmental anxiety" at odds with the myth of virgin

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land central to pastoral criticism. Because Cooper challenged the American exceptionalism and democratic ideology that these critics celebrated in Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, and Whitman, he was cast aside in the twentieth century—or so the story goes. According to Willis, this critical rejection of Cooper constitutes an act of “environmental evasion” that silenced a pervasive anxiety about the violent conquest of the American continent and the potential exhaustion of the land base. See Willis, *Environmental Evasion*, 37-53.

<sup>45</sup> For more details about the Otsego County Agricultural Society, see Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*, 384-89, and Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 203-09.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, Alan Taylor and Wayne Franklin disagree on the class politics of the agricultural reform movement. According to Taylor, the members of OCAS sought to exert social control over the common settlers and small farmers of western New York, most of whom resented the effort. But as Franklin argues, the gentleman farmers of OCAS were responding to *real* economic and ecological problems; they believed that the land-use practices of the previous generation now threatened the stability of the land base; and they genuinely sought to establish a more permanent agriculture for the sake of all settlers. In other words, the project of agricultural reform was not necessarily an elitist effort to maintain a class hierarchy in the countryside by elevating the commercial interests of gentleman farmers. To be sure, many common farmers bristled at the movement’s aristocratic pretensions, but Cooper and his OCAS colleagues also worked toward the democratic spread of new knowledge. In this sense, the agricultural reform movement transcended partisan politics. See Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town*, 384-89, and Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 203-09.

## Chapter Four

### Surveying Cherokee Territory: Literary Geography and U.S. Indian Policy

In the colonial era, the Cherokee people of Southern Appalachia cultivated a complex trading relationship with the white colonists of the Atlantic seaboard. In exchange for deerskins and other furs, they acquired goods such as iron kettles, gunpowder, firearms, clothing, and liquor, and the mutual benefits of this trade promoted cooperation and accommodation between the Indians and their British-American neighbors. The Seven Years' War, however, disrupted the delicate balance of the deerskin economy and briefly unraveled the Cherokee alliance with the British. As tensions escalated in the backcountry, white settlers demanded a campaign against the Indians, eventually leading to the Cherokee War of 1759-61. On three occasions during the conflict, colonial troops marched into Southern Appalachia in an effort to remind the Cherokees of their position in the imperial hierarchy. Although ending in a stalemate, the Cherokee War set a precedent for increasing hostility between British-Americans and the Southeastern Indians. By the 1760s, the middle ground had all but eroded, and thereafter a doctrine of "separate creations" began to define the relationship between whites and Indians.<sup>1</sup>

These racial tensions resurfaced during the American Revolution, which served as a dramatic turning point for all Appalachian Indians. In the North, as we have seen, the majority of the Iroquois made a tactical decision to side with the British, prompting the Continental Army to launch a raid through the upper Susquehanna Valley designed to devastate the Indians and clear the backcountry for future settlement. Meanwhile, in the South, the Cherokees joined once again with the British in an effort to defend their territory from the voracious appetite of land-hungry white Americans who desired to displace them. In exchange for assistance in the war, the British

vowed to protect Cherokee lands and guarantee Indian sovereignty in Southern Appalachia. In turn, many white settlers joined the Patriot cause because they believed the British had denied their right to Indian lands. Victory in the War of Independence, they reasoned, would seal the deal of Indian removal and open the backcountry to economic development. Sure enough, after the war, ignoring the borders of Cherokee territory, white settlers flooded into the Appalachian foothills, established farms and settlements, built new roads and improvements, and profited from a post-war land boom—much like their fellow countrymen in the Susquehanna Valley.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, perhaps nobody had less respect for Indian sovereignty than Jefferson's mythic American freeholder. In this sense, we cannot separate the agrarian ideal of the early Republic from the reality of Indian removal and the politics of Indian-hating that plagued the American frontier throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the Revolution, the Patriots staged at least seven attacks against the Cherokees, each of them modeled after the destructive campaigns of the Cherokee War. In the summer of 1776, just as Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, American troops stormed through Southern Appalachia, killing warriors and women alike, and relentlessly pursuing a policy of genocide. Some historians have suggested that this Indian War served as a training ground for the broader battle against the British while also symbolically cleansing the ethnic pluralism of colonial society. An army of white men from various colonies forged a collective identity in bloody opposition to the Indians, generating a new nationalism through the shared act of violence. Meanwhile, retreating to the Chickamauga region, a group of Cherokee refugees joined a resistance movement led by the leader Dragging Canoe, who carried on a guerilla war against white Americans lasting until 1794.<sup>3</sup>

Following the War of Independence, the U.S. government convinced the Cherokees to sign the Treaty of Hopewell (1785), an agreement pledging to protect both Indian territory and

their right to self-government. Shortly thereafter, George Washington and his Secretary of War Henry Knox framed a new U.S. Indian policy, offering the promise of equal citizenship to the Cherokees if they committed to a program of acculturation. As historian William McLoughlin has observed, this policy was born of the founders' Enlightenment philosophy, which held that all men were created equal, that situation and circumstance determined cultural lifeways, and that any people could become "civilized." Put another way, the stadial theory of civilization—that hallmark of eighteenth-century thought—actually allowed for racial integration. Seeking to realize this ideal, the new U.S. Indian policy demanded a kind of *agricultural acculturation*.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning in the 1790s, a small minority of Cherokees—perhaps twenty percent—sought to achieve the goal of equal citizenship by promoting a series of "improvements." By the 1830s, they had experienced a dramatic cultural transition that involved the adoption of Euro-American agricultural practices (including cash-crop production and chattel slavery), the formation of a written syllabary, and the creation of a political document that emulated the U.S. Constitution. In other words, the Cherokees began to cultivate a national identity rooted in republican ideology, and they fashioned a cultural heritage that elevated their status in the stadial theory. But even as these progressive Cherokees fulfilled the expectations of the so-called "civilization program," the majority of white Americans moved toward a more racialized world view and denied the Indians legitimacy as equal citizens. In 1828, the Indian-fighter Andrew Jackson became president, and thereafter, the states' rights movement sought to squash Indian sovereignty once and for all.<sup>5</sup>

From the 1780s to the 1830s, then, the Cherokee people confronted two key legacies of the American Revolution—agricultural improvement and Indian removal—and their complex response to these movements both defined and divided their cultural identity. Meanwhile, in the early national era, the United States carried a double-edged sword into Cherokee country. On the

one hand, the federal government recognized Indian sovereignty, but only after forcing extensive land cessions and requiring the Indians to abandon their traditional lifeways in favor of intensive agriculture and a capitalist mentality. On the other hand, despite the promise of equal citizenship, the U.S. failed to regulate white settlement on Cherokee lands. Federal agents (and the Indians themselves) were helpless against the prerogative of individuals and states who were determined to acquire native lands. Because Washington's "benevolent program" had no fangs to enforce its promise, white settlers simply squatted on Cherokee territory, begged the federal government to honor their preemption rights, and weaseled their way into free farms when each new treaty forced additional cessions from the Indians. This pressure on Cherokee territory resulted in at least three separate removal crises well before the infamous events leading to the Trail of Tears.<sup>6</sup>

The writings of Quaker botanist William Bartram and Cherokee activist Elias Boudinot function as book-ends to this era of Indian-white relations, leading us from the Revolution to the Removal debate. Bartram traveled through Cherokee Territory in the 1770s, then returned home to Philadelphia to describe his experiences in a sprawling excursion narrative and botanical study known in shorthand as the *Travels* (1791). In that book and two brief essays about Creek and Cherokee culture, Bartram carried Enlightenment thought to its logical conclusion. Embracing the federalist mentality of the Constitution, he called for a more perfect union between American Indians and the new U.S. Republic. Three decades later, Boudinot completed a speaking tour of the eastern United States, where he delivered "An Address to the Whites" (1826) celebrating the various improvements of his people and soliciting donations for a printing press and a Cherokee school. After returning to the Cherokee nation in Southern Appalachia, Boudinot became the first editor of the first Indian newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, and wrote a series of editorials defending the agenda of the Cherokee nation. Although writing a generation apart, both Bartram

and Boudinot depicted Cherokee society as already “civilized,” as already fulfilling the demands of U.S. Indian policy, and as willing to make additional efforts to acculturate to white lifeways. In other words, they crafted their writings to respond to U.S. Indian policy and to influence those leaders in charge of shaping Indian-white relations.<sup>7</sup>

Bartram and Boudinot employed the techniques of literary geography to defend Cherokee sovereignty and debunk the argument for Indian removal. As defined in the introduction to this study and demonstrated in previous chapters, literary geographies enlist modes of place-based writing in the service of political and ethical agendas; they construct images of specific regions to promote or critique different forms of political economy; and they infuse representation with an emotional appeal that transforms space into place. Bartram and Boudinot harnessed a variety of genres—the travel narrative, the customs-and-manners account, the agricultural survey, and the public address—in order to advance a vision of Cherokee culture in which the lay of the land, its physical properties and natural commodities, created the conditions for Indian “civilization” and agricultural improvement. That is, by surveying Cherokee territory, they cultivated a sense of place that functioned as a form of political advocacy.

Bartram, for example, set forth on a tour of Southern Appalachia in order to complete a botanical study of its natural history. In addition to surveying the natural landscape of the region, he also conducted an ethnographic study of its cultural landscape. He visited Cherokee villages, participated in their ceremonies, observed their land-use patterns, conversed with their leaders, and described in detail their manners and customs. Likewise, in both “An Address to the Whites” and the *Cherokee Phoenix*, Boudinot conducted a comprehensive survey of Cherokee country. He listed commodities, accounted for profits, and constructed a catalog of improvements; he presented evidence of acculturation by charting a history of his people’s transition from hunting

to farming lifeways; and he argued that cultural survival required agricultural improvement. Furthermore, Bartram and Boudinot both defined Cherokee identity in direct connection to the land. By rooting Cherokee culture in a particular sense of place, they bolstered their arguments against Indian removal. Eventually, after 1833, Boudinot reluctantly concluded that the Cherokee nation could survive as a political entity only if it consented to removal—a reversal of opinion that many regarded as an act of betrayal. Before that fatal decision, however, Boudinot, like Bartram, passionately defended a vision of Indian sovereignty as linked to a sense of place.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we cannot grasp the full complexity of these literary geographies unless we read them through the lens of political events. When we set Bartram's *Travels* in the context of the Revolution and the frontier conflicts between Patriots, Loyalists, and Appalachian Indians, we find a provocative connection between natural history and U.S. Indian policy. Likewise, we can view Boudinot's fraught defense of Cherokee nationhood as an effort to negotiate between two key legacies of the American Revolution: agricultural improvement and Indian removal. While comparing the work of Bartram and Boudinot, however, we must also consider their generational and cultural differences. From the 1790s to the 1820s, a more racialized political culture evolved in America. At the outset of this era, Bartram was able to envision a more perfect union between Indians and Euro-Americans, yet fifty years after the Revolution, Boudinot could only imagine the Cherokee people as equal to, but separate from, the white citizens of the United States.<sup>9</sup>

#### *The Routes of a Botanical Survey: Bartram in Cherokee Territory*

William Bartram grew up near Philadelphia on the banks of the Schuylkill River, on a small farm where his father, John Bartram, operated an experimental garden and tree nursery. In the mid-eighteenth century, the elder Bartram earned international renown as a self-taught professional

botanist, leading to his appointment, in 1765, to explore Britain's newly acquired territory of East Florida. William, then working as a merchant in North Carolina, abandoned his floundering business to join his father on the expedition—the young botanist's first extended journey in the American South. Before arriving in Florida, however, the two men stopped in Charleston and Savannah, where William met several colonial leaders, including John Stuart and George Galphin, both of whom would assist him the following decade on his second expedition.<sup>10</sup>

From 1773 to 1777, Bartram took a longer, solo excursion through the American South for the sake of discovering and classifying new botanical species, an ambitious natural history survey that he would later record in the *Travels*, published in 1791. Another wealthy gentleman, John Fothergill of London, financed the trip and asked Bartram to prepare specimens, drawings, and written reports for shipment to England. Fothergill, who himself owned an experimental garden in England, specifically instructed Bartram to collect a variety of plants in Cherokee territory. Because those upcountry species might better adapt to the European climate, Fothergill intended to market them to buyers across the continent. Thus, not only did Bartram explore the vast (and at times violent) landscape of the American South, but he also navigated the complex terrain of colonial patronage. Bartram's personal affiliation with John Stuart and George Galphin is especially significant, for these two gentlemen contended for control of Indian affairs in the American South throughout the late eighteenth century. As a result, in the *Travels*, we find an inextricable link between the physical geography of Indian country and the political geography of Indian-white relations.<sup>11</sup>

John Stuart served in the British militia during the Seven Years' War and became familiar with the Cherokees when posted at Fort Loudoun in the Southern Appalachians. While learning the culture of Indian diplomacy, Stuart befriended the Cherokee leader Attakullakulla

and helped to negotiate the peace treaty that concluded the Cherokee War. In 1762, Stuart was appointed official British superintendent of Indian affairs in the southern colonies. He also drafted a map of Cherokee country that Bartram would later consult during his own travels through the region. When Bartram returned to the South in 1773, he promptly sought out Stuart in Charleston, where the superintendent briefed him on the state of Indian affairs. Over the next three years, Bartram repeated the visit on multiple occasions to solicit information on the safety of backcountry travel. In his official capacity, Stuart attempted to manage the Indian trade and maintain peace on the Carolina and Georgia frontiers, but he often butted heads with wealthy traders who carried more clout among the Creeks and Cherokees. Stuart especially resented the interference of men like George Galphin, who used his economic influence to steer diplomacy in a more profitable direction. During the Revolution, Stuart remained loyal to the British and many believed that he urged the Southern Indians to attack American settlers. Although those reports would later prove false, they forced Stuart to flee to Florida in the War of Independence.<sup>12</sup>

Before the Seven Years' War, while residing among the Lower Creeks, George Galphin became the most influential white trader in the Southern Appalachians. Eventually, he moved to a plantation near Augusta, but because his company continued to monopolize the deerskin trade, he and his fellow members amassed huge fortunes and even greater political weight in the years leading up to the Revolution. Before the War of Independence, these traders would strong-arm the Creeks and Cherokees into ceding nearly two million acres of land in exchange for repaying trade debts. Galphin sided with the Patriots and served as an assistant American superintendent for Indian affairs in the South, effectively replacing Stuart and perhaps fueling the rumor that the British intended to incite an Indian war.<sup>13</sup>

Because Bartram straddled a personal and political fence between these two titans of Indian affairs, we cannot separate his study of natural history from the politics of Indian-white relations. Indeed, his four-year odyssey through the American South, as portrayed in the *Travels*, offers a unique glimpse of Indian country on the eve of the American Revolution. During this expedition, Bartram took two separate excursions through Cherokee territory, in 1773 and 1775. By closely examining these two different tours, we can better understand how the backcountry violence of the revolutionary era led Bartram to promote a more benevolent Indian policy.

In April of 1773, while visiting John Stuart in Charleston, Bartram learned of an upcoming Indian conference—scheduled in Augusta later that spring—where the governor of Georgia, James Wright, planned to negotiate a land cession from the Creeks and Cherokees. Gladly accepting Stuart’s invitation to attend, Bartram spent a few weeks wandering through Savannah (where he called on Governor Wright) and botanizing on the Georgia coast before leaving for Augusta. Along the way, Bartram and his traveling companion stopped at George Galphin’s estate, Silver Bluff, where they likely heard the veteran trader’s favorable opinion of the land cession. Upon arriving at Augusta in mid-May, Bartram met again with Stuart and obtained some additional background on the Augusta Conference.<sup>14</sup>

In previous decades, hostilities in the American backcountry, combined with a declining deer population, had disrupted the Indians’ seasonal hunting patterns and upset the balance of the trade economy. In Southern Appalachia, the Cherokees suffered the additional setback of several military raids, which unsettled their villages and destroyed their agricultural economy as well. Nevertheless, they continued to acquire European goods, despite their inability to pay for them. During the 1750s and 1760s, colonial traders extended a long line of credit to the Cherokees, accumulating a massive debt with British merchants, and by the 1770s, they began to demand

payment from the Indians. George Galphin and company, seeking to recoup their losses, urged the state of Georgia to arrange a land-for-debt deal with the Creeks and Cherokees. In other words, if the Indians ceded a large tract of land to Georgia, the traders would forgive their debt. In turn, when sold to white settlers, these ceded lands would convert the traders' losses into easy profits. Although Stuart disliked the plan, Governor Wright had approval from the crown and so went ahead with the negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

The conference concluded on 1 June 1773 with a deal known as the New Purchase Cession—but not without controversy. Although most of the debt belonged to the Cherokees, Governor Wright had set his eyes on a tract of land that bordered Creek and Cherokee territory, so the deal required the consent of the Creeks as well. After much debate and back-door bribery, Wright finally convinced the Indians to cede some two million acres northwest of Augusta. The governor commissioned a party of surveyors, along with a group of Creek and Cherokee Indians, to run the line of the ceded lands, and Bartram obtained permission to accompany them. A week later, the survey crew set out from Augusta to mark a boundary between the upper Savannah and Altamaha watersheds. In the opinion of historian Edward Cashin, the Augusta Conference and its dubious land deal essentially “launched a chain reaction that led to the American Revolution in Georgia.” Bartram seems to have anticipated this course of events, and thus his writings take an ambivalent approach to the New Purchase Cession, expressing an uneasy mixture of republican optimism about frontier settlement and political anxiety about Indian-white relations.<sup>16</sup>

Importantly, within the plot of the *Travels*, Bartram first enters Cherokee territory in the wake of the New Purchase Cession—a context with obvious imperial implications. In Part One, he rides up the Savannah River and arrives at Augusta in time to witness the conference between the Creeks, the Cherokees, and Governor Wright of Georgia, and at two points in the *Travels*, he

describes the negotiations in detail. His first account emphasizes two key conflicts: that between the Creeks and the white traders of Georgia and that between the young warriors and old chiefs of the Creek nation itself. Not only does Bartram display the new racial antagonism brewing in the southern backcountry, but he also illustrates how the pressure on native lands had created internal divisions and generational conflicts among the Indians themselves. The younger Creeks, says Bartram, “betrayed a disposition to dispute the ground by force of arms, and they could not at first be brought to listen to reason and amicable terms” (22). Eventually, however, “the cool and deliberate counsels of the ancient venerable chiefs” overruled the younger generation (22). Meanwhile, by offering “liberal presents of suitable goods,” the white traders utilized the gift economy of traditional Indian diplomacy to compel the older chiefs to sign the treaty (22).

In Part Four of the *Travels*, Bartram returns to the events of the Augusta Conference in order to set up an ethnographic comparison between the Creeks and the Cherokees. He explains how Georgia had arranged a side deal with the Cherokees to cede a parcel of land on the Tugaloo River, but when the Creeks discovered the secret, they vigorously asserted their own right over the territory in question. “[N]ettled and incensed at this,” writes Bartram, “a [Creek] chief and warrior started up, and with an agitated and terrific countenance, frowning menaces and disdain, fixed his eyes on the Cherokee chiefs, asked them what right they had to give away their lands, calling them old women, and saying that they long ago obliged them to wear the petticoat; a most humiliating and degrading stroke” (308). By pursuing a policy of divide and conquer, Bartram implies, the colony of Georgia has transformed the Augusta Conference into a powder keg of competing land claims. The hot-headed treaty negotiations have inspired resentment not only between whites and Indians but also between the different Indian nations as well. The Creeks, the Cherokees, white settlers, speculators, and government officials contend with one another for

both territorial and ideological control of the backcountry, and this “grand landed contest,” as Crèvecoeur called a similar situation in the Susquehanna Valley, will soon spill over into the violence of the American Revolution.

In Bartram’s account, the Augusta Conference also closes with a tribute to the noble enterprise of natural history. Apparently, near the end of the negotiations, John Stuart made a special point of introducing Bartram to the Indian chiefs in order to secure permission for his botanical studies. Thereafter, to clarify the boundaries of the land cession, a party of surveyors and land speculators prepares to travel up the Savannah, along with a dozen Indian delegates, and Bartram decides to accompany them. Thus, Bartram’s first access to Cherokee territory is predicated upon a coercive land deal, and his botanical pursuits are immediately associated with the aggressive colonial acts of surveying and land speculation.

A few days into the journey, however, Bartram tells the story of “a remarkable instance of Indian sagacity” that symbolically undermines the legitimacy of the land cession (26). To determine the boundary of the New Purchase, the surveyor Philip Yonge fixes his compass on his staff and runs a line toward the confluence of a particular river, some seventy miles away. Immediately, the Creek chief Young Warrior challenges the direction of the line, intuitively pointing out the proper course. The surveyor insists on the accuracy of his compass, declaring that such technology never fails. According to Bartram, “The Indian answered, he knew better, and that the little wicked instrument was a liar; and he would not acquiesce in its decisions, since it would wrong the Indians out of their lands” (26). An argument ensues, during which Young Warrior’s sense of direction prevails. Flexing their political muscle, the Creeks threaten to call off the deal, and eventually the government party consents to their demands. From here on, the Indians set new conditions for the expedition: “[T]he compass must be discarded...[and] the

Chief himself should lead the survey” (26). It is worth noting that Bartram did not include this anecdote in his field report to John Fothergill, which he completed in 1774. Its later appearance in the *Travels*—even if fictional or sensational—indicates that Bartram occasionally questioned the veracity of western science and technology, while also expressing a certain respect for the Indians’ geographic literacy.

Critics often cite this “wicked instrument” scene as proof that Bartram traveled through a contested country and that his text dramatizes its territorial conflicts. Reading the episode as a parable of colonial conquest and Indian resistance, for example, Joshua David Bellin argues that Bartram “questions the primacy of white claims.” In other words, the *Travels* functions as a kind of complex dialogue between white and Indian agendas, between recognition and dispossession of native sovereignty. “By hosting an alternative—an Indian—relationship to the land,” Bellin suggests, “Bartram’s text registers doubts about the absoluteness of Euro-American conceptions of, and claims to, the continent.” Similarly, Thomas Hallock regards Bartram’s account of the New Purchase survey, and his subsequent description of the Deep South, as an “anti-conquest” narrative, a term derived from Mary Louise Pratt. According to Pratt, even natural history writers who cast themselves as benign or benevolent, like Bartram, still advanced an imperial project by exploring the “contact zone,” mapping its boundaries, and conducting scientific research.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, despite Bartram’s best intentions, and despite the seemingly neutral tone of his natural history, we must view his representation of the New Purchase Cession from multiple angles. On the one hand, he accompanied a colonial survey team that ran the lines for one of the most controversial land deals in the late eighteenth century; he rode out ahead of the party to search for new plants, which he intended to ship abroad for botanical classification and sale in a European market; and in this sense, he served as a vanguard for the conquest of Indian country.

On the other hand, Bartram constructed a written narrative of the survey that challenged the right of white Americans to usurp Indian land claims. Between the lines of his romantic wilderness, then, we find a vision of the southern backcountry as a contested zone. While the *Travels* often hides (or elides) the existence of such frontier violence, Bartram's field report to John Fothergill displays a more visible degree of political anxiety about the increasing hostility between white settlers and the Indians of the Southern Appalachians.<sup>18</sup>

Because Bartram drafted "A Report to Dr. John Fothergill" in the immediate aftermath of his first trip into Cherokee territory, the text is more open and direct about the danger of traveling through Indian country. After briefly describing the Augusta Conference, for example, Bartram admits that "The Superintendant told me he thought it not altogether safe to go then into the Indian Countries" (439). Later, during the New Purchase survey, Bartram witnesses multiple conflicts arising between the white surveyors and the Indians. One day, he says, "I Returned to our camp at the great lick, where I found Our People and the Indians in a wharm contraversy concerning the direction of the Lines of the Lands to be marked out" (445). Of course, this scene might simply overlap with the "wicked instrument" dispute in the *Travels*, but the "Report to Fothergill" also indicates that such conflicts continued even after the Creek delegation left the surveying party. Along the Broad River, for example, Bartram later reports, "This morning was taken up with contraversies between the Indians & the Whites concerning the courses of the Line, the Indians intimating that the Surveyers incroach't on their rights" (451). Thus, Bartram gestures toward the "right of soil" that U.S. Indian policy would later acknowledge.

"A Report to Fothergill" often advances a vision of agricultural improvement only to frustrate that vision by introducing the obstacle of Indian-white hostility. Near the end of the New Purchase survey, for example, Bartram frames a revealing—though perhaps unwitting—

juxtaposition between two possible futures. In a choppy passage bursting with the unbridled syntax of republican optimism, he declares,

This new ceded country promises plenty & felicity. The Lands on the River are generally Rich, & those of its almost innumerable branches agreeable & healthy situations, especially for small Farms, every where little Mounts & Hills to build on & beneath them rich levell land fit for Corn & any grain with delightfull glittering streams of water running through Cain bottoms, proper for Meadows, with abundance of water brooks for Mills. the Hills suit extreemly well for Vineyards & Olives as Nature points out by the abundant produce of fruitefull grape Vine, Native Mulberry Trees of an excellent quality for silk. And any of This Land would produce Indigo, & no Country more proper for the culture of almost all kinds of Fruits. (455)

In the very next paragraph, however, Bartram tightens the reins on the republican dream by acknowledging the racial tensions then threatening to unsettle the southern backcountry. “Soon after my return from the Tugilo journey to Savanah,” he recalls, “the country was alarmed by an express from Augusta, that the Indians were for war, & had actually murdered Several Families not far from Augusta; upon this I was advised not to venture amongst them” (455). As his first tour of Indian country concludes, then, Bartram’s ideal of agricultural improvement crashes into the reality of Indian-white violence sweeping through the southern frontier.

Shortly after Bartram returned to Augusta, two young Cherokees who had accompanied the New Purchase survey stopped at a white settler’s house to ask for a drink. A woman invited them inside and began to serve them, but when her husband, Hezekiah Collins, returned home, he shot and bludgeoned the Indians without provocation. With the help of his father, Collins scalped and sank their bodies in a nearby river. Eventually, Georgia officials discovered the

killing and a wave of outrage swept through Cherokee territory. Meanwhile, a deep sense of anger over the land cession had infected the Creeks as well, and on Christmas Day of 1773, a party of warriors raided the settlement of Wrightsborough, taking the life of William White and his family. Two weeks later, another band of Creeks killed a settler named William Sherrill and six others at his home near Wrightsborough. These events, known as the White-Sherrill murders, threatened to spark a general Indian war on the southern frontier, and they certainly raised Bartram's alarm. Retreating to the coast, he postponed his plans to travel in Cherokee country, and instead, the following year, he set out for an excursion through Florida.<sup>19</sup>

In October of 1774, James Wright and John Stuart finally pacified the anger over the White-Sherrill murders by negotiating a new treaty between Georgia and the Creeks, and the ensuing detente opened the road for Bartram to resume his botanical studies in the Southern Appalachians. Yet this treaty also inspired a popular backlash among white Americans who had hoped to acquire another land cession in reparation for the Indian attacks on Wrightsborough. Many backcountry settlers concluded that Britain had no interest in appeasing their appetite for land, so as the Revolution approached, they sided with the Patriots in the expectation that an American victory would once and for all open the Appalachians to agricultural improvement.<sup>20</sup>

Bartram returned to Charleston in late March of 1775 to find the city infected with the fever of political dissent. As a first order of business, he called on John Stuart, whom he had not seen since the Augusta Conference, to take the pulse of Indian affairs and assess the safety of traveling into Cherokee country. Stuart wrote Bartram a letter of recommendation to his deputy agent, Alexander Cameron, then residing at a plantation northwest of Augusta. Bartram left Charleston in late April, crossed overland to the Savannah River, and made his way to Silver Bluff, the estate of George Galphin, who furnished the botanist with another set of letters. In

Augusta, Bartram collected more letters from Galphin's traders, then proceeded to Alexander Cameron's Lochaber plantation, where he packed his knapsack with yet another bundle of letters for the traders stationed among the Cherokees. These letters of introduction served as a passport, allowing Bartram to navigate the political landscape of Indian-white relations and to cloak himself, when necessary, in the authority of either the British Indian superintendent or the prominent traders of Augusta. But there was a liability to this patronage as well, for even as Bartram toted his textual knapsack into Cherokee country, Charleston abounded with rumors that Stuart and Cameron were conspiring to foment an Indian war on the frontier. Stuart would soon take flight to Florida, and Cameron would later seek shelter among the Cherokees. Had the wrong people discovered that Bartram carried letters from Stuart and Cameron, they may have chased the wandering Quaker into his own exile. Fortunately, by taking to the mountains, he skirted the danger—at least for the moment.<sup>21</sup>

Bartram recorded his second tour of Cherokee territory in Part Three of the *Travels*, folding the account into four chapters. By tracking these textual steps—by considering what the narrative includes or excludes, amplifies or obscures—we can see how Bartram negotiated the tensions of the Appalachian backcountry on the eve of the American Revolution. In Chapter I, Bartram reconstructs the trip from Charleston to Silver Bluff, but before arriving at Galphin's estate, he stops at a livestock farm along the Savannah River, where he spends a day conversing with the owner. Resembling an agricultural survey, the chapter describes in detail a cattle pen, the milking process, a logging operation, and the river landing where commodities flow to the coast. Ironically, then, this second tour of Cherokee territory begins with an account of the plantation economy. Embracing the agrarian ideal, Bartram praises the culture of improvement and marvels at the scale of commercial production possible on the frontier. Indeed, this farmer is

no backcountry squatter scratching for survival. His labor force consists of “a number of slaves, women, boys and girls” (196); he owns “about fifteen hundred head” of cattle (197); he ships both meat and lumber as far as the West Indies; and he behaves like a southern planter. While celebrating “this good man’s system of economy” (197), Bartram also presents a naïve and idyllic image of slavery. “[C]ontented and joyful,” he says, “the sooty sons of Afric forgetting their bondage, in chorus sing the virtues and beneficence of their master” (198).

The following day, Bartram visits George Galphin’s estate, where he delivers yet another ode to the southern plantation. Surveying both the geological and cultural history of Silver Bluff, he predicts its future greatness and exalts it as a model for the new republic. Later, at Augusta, Bartram continues to rave about the commercial potential of the piedmont region. He waxes poetic about the location of Augusta—namely its position at the fall line, below which the river is navigable to the coast—a geographic situation that promises to transform the town into a hub of commerce. Finally, Chapter I concludes with a detailed analysis of a curious mineral deposit along the Savannah River, a bed of fossilized oyster shells that, Bartram believes, might serve as a future source of lime. Thus, the road to Cherokee country takes a symbolic detour through the commercial geography of the emerging market revolution. What’s more, Bartram’s account of the lime deposit actually anticipates a later scheme of agricultural improvement, in the years before the Civil War, when Edmund Ruffin sought to replenish the old fields of South Carolina by using calcareous minerals (manufactured from sea shells) as a soil amendment.<sup>22</sup>

In Chapter II, Bartram departs Augusta and travels in a northerly direction along the Savannah River, crossing the New Purchase Cession. After pausing at Fort James, he continues to Alexander Cameron’s Lochaber plantation, where he delivers the correspondence from Stuart and waits out a rainy spell. On May 15, Bartram leaves for Seneca, the gateway to Cherokee

territory, and from there, he follows the trading path to Keowee, an Indian village devastated in the British raids of 1759-61. Importantly, at both towns, Bartram recalls the events of the Cherokee War, reminding his reader that the ghost of racial antagonism still haunts the Southern Appalachians. Near Keowee, he finds several Indian ruins but no Indian dwellings, for recent events had cleared the village of its former inhabitants, and only the white traders remained. Here, at the entrance to the mountains, on the borders of Indian country, for the first time Bartram begins to feel lonely, alienated, and alarmed at his vulnerability. He knows the history of this land, the atrocities committed against the native peoples by the same colonial forces whose letters fill his knapsack, and these affiliations deeply trouble him. Describing his situation as “all alone in a wild Indian country, a thousand miles from my native land, and a vast distance from any settlements of white people” (210), Bartram portrays his journey as a solitary pilgrimage through a spiritual wilderness. He continues, however, by clarifying the actual condition of this symbolic landscape:

It is true, here were some of my own colour, yet they were strangers, and though friendly and hospitable, their manners and customs of living so different from what I had been accustomed to, administered but little to my consolation: some hundred miles yet to travel, the savage vindictive inhabitants lately ill-treated by the frontier Virginians, blood being spilt between them and the injury not yet wiped away by formal treaty; the Cherokees extremely jealous of white people travelling about their mountains, especially if they should be seen peeping in amongst the rocks or digging up their earth. (210)

Perhaps Bartram embellished his anxiety to enhance the sublime quality of his travels. Indeed, his Euro-American readers would have delighted in the romantic trope of fear, in the potential danger of an Indian attack. Yet Bartram knew enough of Indian-white relations—he witnessed

the resentment of the New Purchase Cession and later heard about the White-Sherrill murders—to recognize the real risk of his journey. We ought to beware, then, of dismissing these lines as literary romance or dramatic hyperbole, for such a reading slights both Bartram’s understanding of Indian affairs and the actual violence that had recently swept through the southern frontier.

In Chapter III, Bartram takes the road through Cherokee territory from Keowee to Cowee. After waiting a few days for “a protector and guide,” who never shows, he decides “to set off alone and run all risks” (211). Carrying a sack of letters and a burden of loneliness, he climbs up Station Mountain, through Rocky Gap, and over Pinnacle Knob. Proceeding on the path, he ponders the ancient ruins of Sticoe, looks down upon the vale of Cowee, observes a sublime waterfall, and spends the night at a white trader’s cabin, whose Cherokee wife serves a breakfast of coffee, barbecued venison, corn cakes, butter, and cheese. While connecting the backcountry to the coastal market, the trail cuts through a landscape of scattered settlements and abandoned villages, and at one point, it passes an Indian graveyard dating to the Cherokee War. Rarely does Bartram include a footnote in the *Travels*, but here he inserts one as a gloss on the graves: “At this place was fought a bloody and decisive battle between these Indians and the Carolinians...when a great number of Cherokee warriors were slain, which shook their power, terrified and humbled them, insomuch that they deserted most of their settlements in the low countries, and betook themselves to the mountains as less accessible to the regular forces of the white people” (220). Thus, the fraught history of Indian-white warfare serves as a subtext to the *Travels*, a subtle reminder that Bartram’s botanical survey had a taproot in the imperial past.

While crossing this contested ground, Bartram continues to amplify his solitude, but of course, he is not always alone. At Watauga, he shares a meal and a pipe with a Cherokee chief. At Cowee, he lodges with the principal trader, Patrick Galahan, and in the company of another

young trader, he hikes through the surrounding mountains, where the two men discover a scene that smacks of a sexual fantasy. In a field of ripe strawberries, they surprise a group of “young, innocent Cherokee virgins,” who, “disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze” (225), have spent the day picking the fruit, painting each other with its red juices, and bathing in a nearby stream. For the two white men, this sensual display excites a primitive ideal, inviting them to imagine the masculine conquest of the feminine wilderness. But even as the *Travels* tantalizes the reader with suggestive imagery, it mixes the language of lust with that of military invasion and surrender. “Now,” Bartram recalls, “we shall leave it to the person of feeling and sensibility to form an idea to what lengths our passions might have hurried us, thus warmed and excited, had it not been for the vigilance and care of some envious matrons who lay in ambush, and espying us gave the alarm” (226). According to critic Annette Kolodny, frontier narratives written by Euro-American men often employ such metaphorical imagery in order to disguise the more aggressive impulses of masculine and colonial conquest. By depicting his encounter with Cherokee women as both an innocent sexual rendezvous and a set of military maneuvers, then, Bartram at once conceals and exposes the imperial implications of his botanical tour.<sup>23</sup>

In Chapter IV, Bartram leaves Cowee and heads west through the Nantahalas, intent on visiting the Cherokee Overhill towns. The trader, Patrick Galahan, accompanies the botanist for fifteen miles, then allows him to proceed alone, whereupon Bartram ascends both Wayah Bald and Wine Spring Bald, meets a young Cherokee man who greets him affably, and makes camp at Wayah Gap. The following day, after crossing Junaluska Creek, Bartram notices a company of Indians, on horseback, riding towards him. As they approach, he recognizes Attakullakulla, the famous Cherokee chief who had traveled to England in 1730, befriended John Stuart during the Cherokee War, and saved him at the Battle of Fort Loudoun in 1760. Stepping off the trail in a

gesture of respect, Bartram heaves a string of heroic compliments at the Cherokee leader. Soon, however, this puffed-up prelude transitions into practical diplomacy when Attakullakulla seeks news from Charleston and John Stuart. The ensuing dialogue reveals much about the political context of Bartram's botanical survey, as he confirms his "personal acquaintance" with Stuart, who "recommended me to the friendship and protection of the Cherokees" (231). It is possible that Stuart had introduced Bartram to Attakullakulla at the Augusta Conference, but even if he had not, their mutual affiliation with the superintendent created a relationship of trust, thus opening Indian country to Bartram's botanical pursuits.<sup>24</sup>

There is, however, a bit of a slip in this trailside diplomacy, for when Attakullakulla says that he plans to meet Stuart in Charleston, Bartram does not mention the superintendent's exile, though he must have heard about it before setting out for the mountains. Because such a report would have further ignited Attakullakulla's already increasing anger with white America, the omission was prudent, if not entirely honest. Regardless, as Attakullakulla continued east, he likely caught wind of the situation and redirected his steps toward Seneca, where Alexander Cameron had just called an impromptu conference to discuss recent events in the Cherokee Overhill towns—and perhaps to secure a British-Indian alliance in the coming war between the king and his colonies. Soon, Bartram would attend this conference as well.<sup>25</sup>

After meeting Attakullakulla, Bartram abruptly decides to turn back on the trail, retrace his route to Cowee and Keowee, and depart from Cherokee territory. Critics have often debated the reason for this about-face, concluding that the botanist felt lost or lonely in the wilderness, alienated in a foreign land, or threatened by the violence of the backcountry. Robert Arner, for example, calls this section of the *Travels* "the psychological turning point," after which Bartram never traveled alone and began to see the wilderness as a more hostile terrain. Complicating this

position, Ian Marshall connects Bartram's emerging ecological understanding to his growing multicultural appreciation and suggests that he may have turned back out of respect for Indian sovereignty. "Might not Bartram's yielding of all the country west of the Nantahalas have been the natural product of his respect for the Cherokee?" asks Marshall. "Alone among his kind, perhaps Bartram recognized the obtrusiveness of his presence—and he decided not to violate the territorial prerogative of a native people." Following his encounter with Attakullakulla, in other words, Bartram chose to suspend his botanical tour and reverse the imperial trajectory of his travels through Cherokee territory.<sup>26</sup>

This theory is appealing because it offers a logic for the frequent transition between botany and cultural ethnography in the text of the *Travels* while also drawing a link between Bartram's respect for the natural world, his defense of Indian lifeways, and his later critique of slavery. But as an explanation for retreat, it too readily dismisses the more immediate and obvious evidence of Indian-white antagonism on the eve of the Revolution. After all, despite Bartram's artistic effort to paint an idyllic portrait of the mountains—complete with scenic vistas, sublime waterfalls, native "nymphs" and "Elysian fields" (226)—he drops enough hints to reveal the true peril of his travels. For example, at the beginning of Chapter IV, he writes, "After waiting two days at Cowe expecting a guide and protector to the Overhill towns, and at last being disappointed, I resolved to pursue the journey alone, though against the advice of the traders; the Overhill Indians being in an ill humour with the whites, in consequence of some late skirmishes between them and the frontier Virginians" (227). Later, while wandering through the Nantahalas, he cannot escape the nagging counsel of his Charleston friends, whose "attentive admonitions and persuasive [*sic*] arguments of reason" (228) warned him to avoid unnecessary risks in Indian country. Finally, after Attakullakulla leaves Bartram alone in the mountains, the reality of his

situation hits home: “upon serious consideration, it appeared very plainly that I could not, with entire safety, range the Overhill settlements until the treaty was over” (231).

Such reflections imply that Bartram understood the purpose of Attakullakulla’s mission: the chief was traveling to Charleston to seek redress for a recent conflict between the Overhill towns and white settlers from Virginia who had invaded Cherokee territory. Because Bartram concealed the fact that American Patriots had chased John Stuart into exile, he may have turned back, quite simply, to take refuge before the Overhill leaders discovered the news. By preventing the Cherokees from airing their grievances to a sympathetic ear, Stuart’s exile promised to send waves of frustration rippling through Indian country. Thus, the encounter with Attakullakulla certainly marks a critical juncture in the *Travels*, after which the botanist turned back, but rather than reading this about-face as a symbolic gesture of respect, we should probably take Bartram’s word and see it instead as an “uh-oh” moment, an understated but no less alarming “please-God-get-me-out-of-here.” The fact is, he was right to fear for his life and foolish for traveling alone in the backcountry just a month after the dramatic events at Lexington and Concord. The American Revolution, he then realized, had passed its own point of no-return.<sup>27</sup>

When Bartram returned to Cowee, he heard of the conference that Alexander Cameron had called in Seneca, and along with the trader Patrick Galahan, he made haste to attend. He may have suspected that Attakullakulla had also turned toward Seneca, and by attending the meeting, he could observe the chief’s reaction to Stuart’s exile while enhancing his own understanding of Indian-white relations. In this way, he could continue to witness, from a safer vantage, the drama unfolding in the Appalachian backcountry. Artistically, this turn of events also helped Bartram to fulfill the pastoral plot of the spiritual pilgrimage. He had gone to the mountains to escape the society of the coast, retreating from the chaos of political events, fleeing from civilization into

the wilderness; he had traveled through Indian country and tested himself against the elements; and eventually, in the classic pattern of the pastoral design, he would return to society and share his wisdom. But again, we cannot fully appreciate the complexity of Bartram's pastoral odyssey until we situate his two journeys through Cherokee country in the context of political events.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the Seven Years' War, John Stuart had restored British relations with the Cherokees by negotiating a treaty with leaders like Attakullakulla and Oconostota. Preferring peace at all costs, these older chiefs adopted a policy of accommodation and hoped to maintain neutrality in the War of Independence, even if they had to pay for it with land cessions. During the 1760s, such leaders had often agreed to forfeit lands to the British in order to create a buffer zone between the colonies and Cherokee territory, but white settlers continued to cross illegally into Indian country, squat on empty lands, and clear the forest to make new farms. Aside from the Proclamation of 1763, the British made few attempts to curb these encroachments. When the Revolution began, some Appalachian Indians seized the moment to push these illegal squatters back to the Atlantic seaboard. Despite the rumors, John Stuart and Alexander Cameron worked to dissuade the Cherokees from entering the war, at least until the British military could decide how to deploy their Indian allies. Such overtures for peace, however, could not silence those younger, louder Cherokees who voiced a popular outrage against the white invasion of Indian country. Their calls for armed resistance would eventually fracture Cherokee society along the lines of a generational conflict.<sup>29</sup>

On 17 March 1775, two months before Bartram took his second tour through Cherokee country, a group of North Carolina land speculators made matters worse by arranging an illegal land cession that swindled the Cherokees out of 27,000 square miles of territory in exchange for a cabin full of trade goods. Known as the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, this deal not only violated

British policy by transferring Indian lands directly to private citizens, it also exasperated those young chiefs hoping to slow the tide of white settlement. Thereafter, seeking to purge Cherokee country of illegal squatters, Attakullakulla's son, Dragging Canoe, organized a resistance movement that split his people into two factions, one of which relocated to the Chickamauga region and launched several raids in early 1776 against white Americans who had settled on Cherokee lands. According to Colin Calloway, Dragging Canoe and his followers saw the Revolution as an opportunity to recover some of the territory they had lost in shady deals since the Seven Years' War. While admirable in principle, perhaps, the Chickamauga resistance also gave the Patriots an excuse to invade Cherokee country in retaliation for Indian hostility.<sup>30</sup>

In the summer of 1776, troops from Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas marched into Cherokee territory, burned fields and villages, and drew no distinction between those who sided with the Chickamaugas and those who remained neutral. By the time this campaign occurred, Bartram had returned to the coast of Georgia, where he served briefly in a Patriot militia before making plans, later that fall, to return to Philadelphia. The following year, the Cherokees signed new treaties with the United States, which promised peace in exchange for five million acres of land cessions. Still, because the Chickamauga region continued its resistance movement, Patriot forces repeatedly invaded Cherokee country throughout the Revolution. Meanwhile, when John Stuart died in 1779, the Cherokees lost their closest Euro-American ally and their last real hope for British assistance. After the War of Independence, the United States forced the Cherokees to sign yet another treaty, which on paper protected the boundaries of the Cherokee nation but in practice laid the foundation for additional land cessions.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, within the text of the *Travels*, Bartram dated his second tour of Cherokee territory as occurring in 1776, which would have placed him in the heart of the Nantahalas when

Patriot forces swept through the mountains on a mission of retribution. Yet Bartram's second trip had ended a year earlier, in June of 1775. One wonders, did he misdate the account by mistake? Did the slip emerge from some deep psychological well, perhaps a sense of Quaker guilt for his allegiance to the war effort? Did the printer simply commit an error? Or did Bartram intend to make a subtle commentary on the Revolution and the Indian War of 1776? We may never know, but regardless of authorial intent, the misdating has the *effect* of producing a commentary. After all, in the memorable year of 1776, two roads diverged in the Appalachians, and thereafter, the Cherokee nation and the United States, despite the best efforts of leaders on either side, would follow those "dividing paths," as historian Tom Hatley has called them, in opposite directions. In short, when the founders signed the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, the Cherokees fell under the shadow of a rising nation-state with a brutal agenda of Indian removal cloaked in the flowery rhetoric of republican freedom.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately, Bartram's two trips into Cherokee territory—in 1773 and 1775—demonstrate a significant link between the study of natural history and the state of Indian affairs. Because his travels were *always* facilitated by Indian agents or Indian traders, we must situate his botanical survey—like it or not—in the context of imperial conquest. Indeed, Bartram navigated both the physical geography of the Nantahalas and the political geography of his relationships with John Stuart, George Galphin, Alexander Cameron, and Attakullakulla. While traveling this terrain of Indian-white relations, however, he also formed a deeper understanding of Creek and Cherokee culture, and when the time came, he began to promote a more humane U.S. Indian policy. As we shall see, although Bartram's travels began as an apolitical mission to discover and classify new botanical species, they ended in the overtly political mission of influencing public opinion about the state of Indian affairs.

*Toward a Benevolent Program: Bartram on Indian Policy*

When Bartram returned home in 1777, he set to work writing and revising his botanical study, but he did not publish the *Travels* until much later, in 1791. The book evolved so slowly because Bartram devoted his time to tending the family garden, because he suffered severe eye pain from an affliction contracted along the Mississippi, and because he waited years to recover the notes and specimens misplaced after Fothergill's death. Even before the publication of the *Travels*, however, several prominent statesmen and scientists had begun to recognize Bartram's expertise in the field of botany. In 1787, for example, a few delegates to the Constitutional Convention, including George Washington and James Madison, suspended their deliberations for a day to visit Bartram's garden. Between 1787 and 1790, Bartram also wrote two ethnographic essays about the Creek and Cherokee Indians that established his reputation as an authority on Indian affairs. And in the 1790s, when Philadelphia served as the occasional U.S. capital, Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State, took up residence across the Schuylkill River and consulted Bartram on matters of natural and cultural history. Thus, Bartram continued to navigate the political landscape well after his trip to the South.

Following the War of Independence, most Americans assumed that victory over Britain entailed the conquest of Indian lands, that the Treaty of Paris had ceded native claims east of the Mississippi, and that white settlers could move into the Appalachian backcountry at their leisure. The United States, however, lacked the military strength (and money) to enforce this vision of conquest, so from 1783 to 1789, U.S.-Indian affairs proceeded in an incoherent and impractical fashion. Not until the Constitution enhanced the powers of the federal government did Indian policy gain an effective shape. In 1785, Henry Knox was appointed Secretary at War under the Articles of Confederation, and after the Constitution was ratified, he continued to serve as

Secretary of War under George Washington, a post he held until 1794. Knox was primarily responsible for redesigning U.S. Indian policy and implementing a more practical agenda. By 1789, he had proposed two major reforms. First, he advised the federal government to recognize the Indians' territorial sovereignty, negotiate new treaties, and make way for white settlement by purchasing new lands under the shadow of legal transactions. Second, insisting that the Indians could survive as a people only if they became "civilized" in the white manner—if they adopted Euro-American cultural and economic patterns—he outlined a plan of acculturation.<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, Knox fully intended for white settlers to advance across the Appalachians and colonize Indian country, but unlike postwar zealots who sought to seize this region by right of conquest, he believed the U.S. should acquire Indian lands by lawful purchase and formal treaty. Yet even as Knox paid lip service to the Indians' right of soil and pledged a diplomatic approach to land deals, his goal of dispossession was fundamentally the same. Likewise, Knox disguised the ethnocentric agenda of U.S. Indian policy by dressing his arguments in the moral philosophy of Enlightenment thought. Embracing the stadial theory of civilization, he imagined a supposedly benevolent trajectory of acculturation whereby all Indians wishing to remain east of the Mississippi would convert to Christianity, adopt a private property system, and participate in commercial agriculture. This so-called "civilization program," which reached its peak during Jefferson's presidency, cloaked itself in a costume of philanthropy when in fact it aimed at nothing less than the cultural extinction of Indian lifeways.<sup>34</sup>

Among the papers of Henry Knox at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York is a manuscript titled "Some Hints & Observations, concerning the civilization, of the Indians, or Aborigines of America." Both the date and authorship of the text are a bit of a mystery, but the document includes the initials "WB," and scholars now believe that William Bartram wrote it

sometime between 1787 and 1790. Gregory Waselkov and Kathryn Holland Braund speculate that perhaps Knox solicited Bartram's input when gathering information to revise Indian policy, or, more likely, Bartram may have composed the piece for members of the Philadelphia Quaker community who were planning missionary work among the Indians, and these Quakers then sent a copy to the Secretary of War. Although the text is not in Bartram's hand, scholars have based their attribution on the tone, style, and internal evidence. The question remains, however, if such circumstantial clues can stand up to serious scrutiny. In other words, when we set "Some Hints" against the text of Bartram's other Indian writings, does the content remain consistent? Or does he contradict himself? And if so, how might we reconcile these contradictions?<sup>35</sup>

In general, "Some Hints" develops an argument for a benevolent Indian policy, often invoking the language of philanthropy to promote an agenda of acculturation. The author praises the Indians' hospitality and their supposed loyalty to British-Americans, calling for reciprocal kindness to repay their "magnanimity & friendship...generosity & compassion" (194). As its first premise, the text claims that, during the colonial era, the Spanish did more than the British to honor Indian sovereignty, and following the Revolution, the Spanish, French, and British have maintained better Indian relations than the U.S. because they enforce a policy of acculturation. Of course, this premise lacks a foothold in fact, for these eighteenth-century imperial powers were often more inclined toward accommodation, but the author employs the comparison to scare his readers into supporting the "civilization program." "Some Hints" also downplays the role of the Southeastern Indians in the War of Independence and sugar-coats their resistance to white lifeways. At one point, the author refutes the common belief that the Indians had allied with the British and murdered white settlers, asserting that such propaganda grossly distorts the complexity of Indian participation in the war. But he swiftly takes the argument to the opposite

extreme, concluding that almost all of the Creeks, for example, pledged their loyalty to George Galphin and the Patriot cause—a claim that is, at best, wishful thinking.

After rejecting the conquest theory, “Some Hints” goes on to defend Indian sovereignty by declaring that none have a stronger claim to American lands than the indigenous inhabitants. “Surely it is very absurd to suppose they would give all their Country away,” the author reasons, because “they have a right, infinitely superior to any other claims” (197). Thus, the essay agrees with, perhaps even anticipates, Knox’s belief that the U.S. ought to honor the Indians’ right of soil and negotiate land transfers through official purchase. Likewise, “Some Hints” endorses the “civilization program” by contending that the Indians have a strong appetite for acculturation. “With respect to the universal objection that they will never become civilized,” the author writes, “I must acknowledge that I am of a different opinion from my Countrymen” (197). Not only are the Indians capable of such change, he says, but “they [are] strongly inclined to our modes of civilization” (197). In the end, the author advises, the most benevolent approach to restoring Indian-white relations must involve the introduction of Euro-American lifeways into Indian communities. Thus, the essay closes with an optimistic vision of agricultural improvement that imagines the Southeastern Indians raising sheep, cattle, and horses; cultivating cotton for domestic and foreign markets; and learning to spin and weave their own clothes. Not only are the Indians capable of such agricultural acculturation, the author boasts, but they actually desire it: “They admire our Religion.... They wish to learn our arts of spinning.... They want Sheep & horned Cattle & would be happy with our arts, and improvements in Agriculture” (198).

When Bartram wrote “Some Hints”—allegedly—he was also drafting a document with a somewhat different conclusion intended for a more scientific audience. In 1788, a young scholar, Benjamin Smith Barton, wrote a letter to Bartram soliciting information for a planned history of

American Indians. A fellow Philadelphian, Barton had read the journal of Bartram's southern tour and now asked the traveler to elaborate on several ethnographic points, such as the ancient origin and history of the Southeastern Indians; their customs and manners; and their religious, social, and political practices. In other words, he requested an anthropological survey of the Creek and Cherokee peoples. Bartram finished his response in 1789 and mailed a manuscript to Barton, which later fell into the hands of the nineteenth-century anthropologists Ephraim George Squier and Edwin Hamilton Davis. Excerpts from the manuscript appeared in Squier and Davis's *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* (1848) and Squier's *Aboriginal Monuments of the State of New York* (1850), and thereafter, in 1853, Squier printed an edited version of Bartram's work in Volume 3 of the *Transactions* of the American Ethnological Society, where the piece was given its present title, "Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians."<sup>36</sup>

In this essay, Bartram addresses Barton's seventeen queries with a balanced, qualified knowledge of the Southeastern Indians that draws directly upon his first-hand observations, avoids excessive speculation, and dismisses Barton's more ignorant suggestions (namely, that the Creeks had descended from the Aztecs or Incas, that they colored their skin with copper dye, and that a strange breed of "spotted" Indians resided in the American South). In sum, Bartram represents the Creek and Cherokee people as culturally advanced yet different from Europeans. He praises their simplicity of government, their hospitality, and their cooperative agricultural system while challenging the assumption that "civilization" necessarily means acculturation to white lifeways. For example, replying to Query 8, which inquired about the Indians' progress toward "civilization," Bartram draws a distinction between Cherokee acculturation and Creek cultural advancement. "If adopting or imitating the manners & customs of the white people is to be termed civilization," he writes with a wry skepticism, "perhaps the Cherokees have made the

greater advance” (145). But then, altering the criteria for civilization, he turns to celebrate the complex social and religious practices of the Creeks. What’s more, Bartram suggests that the Indians’ form of government has already realized Montesquieu’s ideal of republican simplicity, and before the deerskin economy made the Southeastern Indians dependent upon European trade goods, they also possessed an advanced system of domestic manufactures.

In response to Query 12, Bartram describes the gendered division of labor among the Creeks and Cherokees but counters the common perception that Indian women live in a constant state of drudgery while their men frolic through the forests hunting game. Instead, Bartram notes that both men and women cooperate in the labor of planting and harvesting, working their fields in a collective fashion. “[T]he condition of the women are as happy, compared to that of the men, as any women in any part of the world,” he declares, “& the Indians are by no means that lazy slothful sleepy people so commonly reported to be” (152). Bartram goes on to observe that the Southeastern Indians maintain a mixed economy of hunting and farming, a balance that allows them to preserve traditional cultural practices. He profiles one Creek farmer who owns a large plantation and participates in commercial agriculture, but this operation represents an exception to the rule, for most Creeks, says Bartram, rely upon a system of subsistence agriculture.

This agricultural survey of Creek and Cherokee economies continues throughout the text of “Observations.” In Query 14, for example, when analyzing the Indians’ concept of property, Bartram explains that all Creeks enjoy a common right to hunt, fish, and farm on tribal lands, but a form of private property takes precedent within their villages. Drawing upon his own range of cultural reference, Bartram compares the Indians’ agricultural system to the open-field traditions of medieval Europe. They work the land as a collective unit but harvest individual crops; a town crier announces rules, regulations, and seasonal schedules; and a percentage of each harvest goes

to a common store controlled by the village chief. In Query 16, Bartram also describes how and why the Creeks have rejected the plough, the tool and symbol of a more intensive agriculture. They prefer to work with the hoe, he says, even if it fails to maximize their labor and production, because they wish to avoid the economic entanglements of commercial agriculture. During the early nineteenth century, the U.S. Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins would encourage the Creeks to adopt the more intensive methods of cash-crop and livestock production, but his efforts drove a wedge through Indian society and led to the Creek War of 1813-14. Bartram, in contrast, was more willing to accept and respect the Indians' choice of scale, subsistence, and seasonal ritual, for these land-use patterns allowed them to maintain cultural traditions and a balance of labor that would have otherwise disappeared.<sup>37</sup>

Occasionally, Bartram slips out of the detached, ethnographic tone of the customs-and-manners account, and his personal opinion pierces the façade of objectivity. In Query 14, for instance, he voices his frustration with racial prejudice by delivering a scathing critique of those whites who insist that Indians can never become "civilized." After describing in detail a Creek plantation, Bartram explains his logic: "I have dwelt so long on this subject which may be called a digression, because I presume it may...serve to convince those prejudiced, ignorant, obstinate people, that assert it is impossible for the Cricks to be brought over to our modes of civil society (tho' so contrary to their notions of civilisation, & perhaps in some degree irreconcilable to right reason)" (157-58). Thus, Bartram defends the capacity of the Southeastern Indians to adopt white lifeways while also contending that such acculturation should not be forced upon them. In fact, he wagers that white society has more to learn from the Indians than the other way around. With an uncharacteristic dash of sarcasm, Bartram concludes, "I may be allowed to conjecture that we might possibly better our condition in civil society by paying some more respect to, and

impartially examining the system of Legislation, Morality, & Economy of those despised, persecuted, Wild People, or as they are very learnedly called Bipedes, I suppose meaning a creature differing from Quadrupeds” (158). If the *Travels* sometimes seems absurd for lapsing into long lists of botanical species, here Bartram subtly scoffs at the absurdities to which his scientific method is prone. In other words, the Linnaean system of classification and the stadial theory of civilization carry dangerous tendencies of racial and cultural discrimination. When such theories prevail over natural reason and humanity, Bartram implies, then science violates our better instincts of benevolence. And that, perhaps, is the root cause of the racist nationalism that took hold of the early Republic after 1800.

While “Some Hints” promotes acculturation, Bartram’s “Observations” challenges the fundamental Enlightenment principle at the heart of the “civilization program.” In other words, Bartram did not necessarily embrace the moral teleology of the stadial theory of civilization; rather, he advanced a remarkably radical philosophy of cultural relativism. Whereas Knox and Jefferson believed that Indians and whites were equal in nature but not in culture, and therefore U.S. policy should “improve” the Indians, Bartram maintained that the two cultures were already equal but simply different. Pushing the argument a step further, he also blamed Euro-Americans for bringing many vices into Indian communities; he asserted the Indians’ right to preserve their traditional practices; he insisted that their lifeways warranted respect; and he argued that white Americans could actually learn much of value from Indian society, if only they would open their eyes.

Given the opposing claims of “Some Hints” and “Observations,” one wonders if we should fully accept Bartram’s authorship of the first document until conclusive evidence is discovered. If nothing else, the disingenuous tone and obvious distortion of fact must give us

pause, for Bartram's other writings rarely involve such a degree of misrepresentation. Setting aside the problem of authorship, what are we to make of the significant discrepancies between these different texts? Whereas "Some Hints" clearly supports the acculturation agenda of the "civilization program," "Observations" articulates a more progressive cultural relativism. Given that stark contrast, we might say that the difference between these two documents boils down to the difference between *acculturation* and *accommodation*. These alternatives also represented two possible directions for U.S. Indian policy in the early Republic, but Knox and Jefferson, driven by their ethnocentric assumptions, were incapable of perceiving accommodation as a valid option. By the end of the eighteenth century, as Richard White has demonstrated, the old colonial practice of preserving a "middle ground" between white and Indian peoples had given way to a more aggressive program of assimilation dictated by federal policy-makers. Thus, we might also say that Bartram's "Observations" looked back to the colonial era of accommodation whereas "Some Hints" looked forward to the U.S. Indian policy of the 1790s to 1820s.<sup>38</sup>

Such contradictions resurface in the text of the *Travels*, which embodies both alternatives of accommodation and acculturation. In the introduction, for example, Bartram connects the study of natural history to the politics of Indian affairs by shifting his attention from plants and animals to "the manners of the Indian nations" (lx). While traveling through the American South in pursuit of botanical species, Bartram made a special point of visiting with the Indians in order to "judge for myself whether they were deserving of the severe censure, which prevailed against them among the white people, that they were incapable of civilization" (lx). After countering this prevailing prejudice, Bartram goes on to contemplate the possibility of a "revolution" bringing about a more congenial "union" between whites and Indians (lxi). Like the Constitution that had recently taken shape in his home city of Philadelphia, Bartram's vision of Indian policy aimed to

create a more perfect union without resorting to “coercive or violent means” (lxi). To end the introduction, he advises the federal government to send “men of ability and virtue” into Indian country “as friendly visitors,” and only after these agents have learned the language and culture should the government decide upon a direction for Indian policy. “These men thus enlightened and instructed,” writes Bartram, “would be qualified to judge equitably, and when returned to us, to make true and just reports, which might assist the legislature of the United States to form, and offer to them a judicious plan, for their civilization and union with us” (lxi). Thus, the *Travels* seems to support the acculturation agenda, but Bartram cautions against aggressive enforcement. He insists that careful study, diplomacy, and sympathy must inform U.S. Indian policy, and in the conclusion to *Travels*, he again condemns white society for corrupting Indian culture. “As moral men,” he declares, “they certainly stand in no need of European civilization” (310). Within the text of the *Travels*, then, Bartram arrived at different conclusions. While brainstorming benevolent options, that is, he contradicted himself—and these internal contradictions also capture the fundamental ambivalence of U.S. Indian policy from the 1790s to the 1820s.

Although Bartram never held public office, he used the platform of natural history to advocate cultural tolerance and political unification between the United States and the Indian nations of the American South. George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson all purchased copies of Bartram’s book, but none of these leaders found a way to fulfill the vision of accommodation expressed in the *Travels*. Instead, the U.S. pursued an aggressive, ethnocentric policy of land acquisition and Indian assimilation, and under Jefferson’s supervision, the federal government began to side more often with the interests of white frontier settlers who encroached on Indian lands. Following the War of 1812, a more racist ideology replaced the Enlightenment philosophy of equality that had given rise to Knox’s Indian policy. Thereafter, the U.S. slowly

abandoned the agenda of acculturation as southern and western states made it clear they would not tolerate any Indian presence within their territory. White settlers became increasingly hostile to Indian peoples, they gained representation in Congress, and long before Andrew Jackson took office, they laid the political foundation for Indian removal.<sup>39</sup>

Bartram died in 1823, seven years before Congress passed the Indian Removal Act and fifteen years before the Cherokees set forth on their march to the West. He never saw that tragic episode, but for a brief moment he envisioned the possibility of a more peaceful future, a policy of accommodation, appreciation, and cultural relativism. He saw the study of natural history and anthropology as the prerequisite to a truly benevolent Indian policy, and he imagined a place for Indian peoples in the new American Republic.

#### *Cherokee Surveys: Agricultural Improvement and Indian Removal*

Elias Boudinot was born and raised at Oothcaloga in northwestern Georgia, a region of scattered farms and individual homesteads that differed from the traditional village-centered settlement patterns of Cherokee country. Named Buck Watie at birth (1802-04), he attended a missionary school in Georgia before leaving the South, in 1817, for Cornwall, Connecticut, where he soon enrolled in the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions school. Along the way, he stopped to visit the president of the American Bible Society, Elias Boudinot, and changed his name in honor of the white missionary. In 1826, the young Cherokee married a white woman, Harriet Ruggles Gold, and their marriage caused a controversy in Cornwall that eventually led the mission school to close its doors. Receiving such a strong dose of racial animosity within the supposedly tolerant region of New England, Boudinot concluded that whites and Indians could never fully integrate into the same society. Thereafter, he accepted a doctrine of racial separatism

that defined the Indians as equal but ultimately apart from white Americans, and he argued that the Cherokees should pursue the work of acculturation in order to advance their own interests as a separate Indian nation. He did not believe the Cherokees should fully abandon their cultural identity and assimilate into the United States; rather, he advised them to adopt the trappings of white “civilization” while remaining a distinct nation within a nation.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1820s, the Cherokee project of political development accelerated rapidly. This decade consisted of reforms that established a Cherokee government replicating the republican structures of the U.S. Constitution. Meanwhile, a rising class of land-owning, entrepreneurial Cherokees began to pursue profits in the cash-crop economy, fully embracing the acquisitive, capitalist mentality of their white neighbors. This growing spirit of self interest, however, had a profound impact on matters of race, class, and gender. By the 1820s, the Cherokees had become an economically stratified nation, with ten to twenty percent of the people possessing the vast majority of the nation’s wealth. Seeking to instill capitalist values in Indian culture, this wealthy elite hoped to replace the matrilineal kinship system with a paternalistic form of property rights, a radical revision to traditional gender relations. Meanwhile, Cherokee planters often emulated white attitudes toward blacks, and although ninety percent of Cherokees owned no slaves, those who did elevated their status by denying political rights to other ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup>

Such was the Cherokee society to which Boudinot returned after his schooling in the North. In 1826, the Cherokee National Council commissioned Boudinot to embark on a speaking tour of the eastern United States intended to raise funds for the foundation of a national academy and the acquisition of a printing press to begin a national newspaper. In several cities along the eastern seaboard, Boudinot delivered a speech, later published as “An Address to the Whites,” that displays his classical education in missionary schools by adapting the rhetorical techniques

of Euro-American political discourse to the cause of Indian advocacy. The speech follows a classic proposal structure, moving from a statement of the present situation to a prediction of the future through problem-solution reasoning. Overall, Boudinot argues that the Cherokee nation has made great strides toward “civilization” but the burden of responsibility for its future success depends upon the generosity and philanthropy of his white audience. If you make a donation to the Cherokee nation, Boudinot assures his listeners, your contribution will support a noble enterprise: the progress of a people from savagery to civilization.<sup>42</sup>

“An Address to the Whites” proceeds through three main parts. To begin, Boudinot introduces the debate over Indian civilization and refutes racist assumptions, first, by appealing to the Enlightenment principle of equality, and second, by presenting himself as a successful example of acculturation. “What is an Indian? Is he not formed of the same materials with yourself?” asks Boudinot. “You here behold an *Indian*, my kindred are *Indians*, and my fathers sleeping in the wilderness grave—they too were *Indians*. But I am not as my fathers were—broader means and nobler influences have fallen upon me” (69). Boudinot admits that, unlike most of his fellow countrymen, he has enjoyed the luxury of a missionary education, but his own good fortune simply proves the rule that Indians, when given the opportunity, can easily reap the fruits of civilization. The time has come, then, Boudinot asserts, to shed those foolish racist attitudes that deny the possibility of acculturation. To that end, the first part of “An Address” establishes both the feasibility and plausibility of the so-called “civilization program.” Before turning his attention to the Cherokees in particular, however, Boudinot invokes the myth of the vanishing Indian to suggest that those tribes who have historically resisted acculturation have become extinct. “They stand as monuments of the Indian’s fate,” Boudinot eulogizes, enhancing his call for philanthropic support by embedding an additional humanitarian concern in the cause

(70). The romantic image of a dying race, in other words, increases the ethical responsibility to save those Indians who remain.

The second part of “An Address to the Whites” conducts a detailed survey of Cherokee improvement, a move that supports the overall argument by providing evidence of the nation’s achievements to date. This section opens with a geographic description of Cherokee territory, a cartographic snapshot of physical boundaries emphasizing the link between cultural identity and a sense of place. Like other works of literary geography examined in this study, “An Address” constructs an ideal image of the writer’s home region in order to promote a particular form of land use. Referring to Cherokee territory as “one of the Garden spots of America,” Boudinot praises the agricultural potential of the Southern Appalachians, a region of “excellent land” with “free air and pure water” (71). He anticipates the agricultural improvement of his homeland even as he recalls the historical transition of his people from hunting to farming lifeways. Tapping into the stadial theory of civilization, “An Address” employs a narrative of the decline of the deerskin economy to chart an economic trajectory from *savage* hunting to *civilized* agriculture. “The rise of these people in their movement toward civilization,” declares Boudinot, “may be traced as far back as the relinquishment of their towns.” Facing a scarcity of game, the Cherokees, much like the fabled white pioneer, “betook themselves to the woods, commenced the openings of small clearings, and the raising of stock” (71). Thus, “An Address” suggests that settlement patterns can direct the process of culture change; that is, they can steer a people toward steer.

Boudinot proceeds to list several statistical proofs of Cherokee improvement, enlisting a survey technique to provide data for the number of mills, looms, spinning wheels, wagons, and ploughs operating in Cherokee country. He often overstates the case, however, fudging the facts in order to construct an agrarian ideal of Indian yeomen. For example, he insists that “the word

of God” and “a knowledge of the Bible” have spread rapidly among the Cherokee people, but according to historian Theda Perdue, at the time of Boudinot’s speech fewer than five percent of Cherokees practiced Christianity. Nevertheless, “An Address” does describe in detail three key accomplishments of the Cherokee cultural revival that are indisputable: the invention of a written syllabary by the Cherokee traditionalist George Guess (i.e., Sequoyah); the translation of the New Testament into the Cherokee language; and the reformation of the Cherokee government to include elected representatives, legal protections for private citizens, and a system of checks and balances between executive, legislative, and judicial branches.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, in the third part of “An Address,” Boudinot completes the proposal structure by shifting to predict the future and advocate a course of action. Again, he adopts a tripartite frame to solicit the audience’s support for three future improvements. The Cherokees, he announces, would like to acquire a printing press, establish a national newspaper, and open a seminary for the education of their children. These projects will cost money, of course, so their success depends upon the patronage of white society and the U.S. government. Indeed, the fate of the Indians, Boudinot insists, hinges upon the spirit of Christian charity, and thus he dresses his proposal in the language of sympathy and social reform. Near the end of the speech, for instance, he returns to the image of the vanishing Indian—“We have seen every where the poor aborigines melt away before the white population” (79)—invoking an apocalyptic vision of history in order to persuade his listeners to avoid another “sad story of extinction” by making a donation to the Cherokee nation.

For Boudinot, the 1820s marked a critical decade in which the Cherokees must decide, once and for all, between two alternative futures: acculturation or cultural extinction. Ascending upon the wings of optimism, he predicted that, if they chose the first option, “the Indian nations

must rise like the Phoenix” (78). Boudinot urged the Cherokees to blaze a trail for all Native Americans, and so, he believed, the survival of every tribe hung upon the hope of his people. But he did not understand—or did not care—that the very path of acculturation he preached could easily lead to the same destination as the alternative he abhorred: cultural extinction. In other words, “civilization” threatened to erase the traditional cultural identity of the Cherokee people, or at the very least, bury it beneath a deep layer of homogenous soil. Like Knox and Jefferson, Boudinot thought that accommodation (as opposed to acculturation) could not exist as a valid alternative, and thus he articulated a self-fulfilling prophecy. He asked his listeners to respond to the “Indian question” with “humanity,” but his own answer to his people’s problems lacked the cultural sensitivity that Bartram, for example, had expressed in his better moments. And that myopia, as we shall see, eventually led Boudinot to betray his duties to the Cherokee nation.<sup>44</sup>

Earlier in 1826, Boudinot’s cousin, John Ridge, anticipated many of the arguments found in “An Address to the Whites.” John Ridge was the son of Major Ridge, a prominent Cherokee leader who made an early choice to convert his labor from the hunting to the farming economy. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, Major Ridge had cleared a tract of land in northwestern Georgia and settled a plantation where he built a large house, purchased a labor force of African slaves, and grew corn and cotton for the commercial market. John Ridge was born in 1803, and during his childhood, he attended a variety of missionary schools before heading north to enroll in the American Board’s academy in Cornwall, Connecticut. While in New England, much like Boudinot, Ridge courted a young white woman, Sarah Northrup, and their interracial marriage, alongside Boudinot’s, inspired a backlash that led to the dissolution of the mission school. In the 1820s, Ridge worked as a secretary for the Creek Indians and traveled to Washington, D.C., to conduct tribal affairs. While there, he distinguished himself as an authority on the Southeastern

Indians, and at one point, Albert Gallatin, the former Secretary of Treasury in the Jefferson and Madison administrations, solicited the young Cherokee for information regarding the progress and practicality of the “civilization program.”<sup>45</sup>

In a letter to Gallatin, dated 27 February 1826, Ridge delivered an ethnographic survey of the Cherokee people and appealed to the federal government to resist the racist nationalism then driving efforts of Indian removal. Painting a picture of an advanced, acculturated Indian nation that would eventually merge with the population of the United States, Ridge outlined the many improvements of Cherokee society and indicated that his people had embraced the “civilization program” almost without exception. They had harnessed Euro-American agricultural practices, framed a republican government, drafted property laws, learned to read and write, and welcomed the presence of missionary schools and churches. They had also, albeit slowly, opened their eyes to Christianity while rejecting polygamy, revenge killing, and alcohol abuse. Like Boudinot’s “Address to the Whites,” Ridge’s letter promoted the foundation of a Cherokee academy, the acquisition of a printing press, and the creation of a national newspaper. Similarly, the letter included a panoramic survey of Cherokee territory that sketched the physical boundaries of the nation and linked cultural identity to a sense of place. Meanwhile, Ridge also made the same, somewhat unusual, assertion that the Cherokee population had “dispersed over the face of the Country on separate farms.” No longer did the people reside in small villages and depend on common lands; instead, said Ridge, scattered homesteads had become the new norm—a cultural geography that resembled the settlement patterns of white frontiersman in rural America.<sup>46</sup>

Ridge devoted much of his attention to the agricultural improvement of the Cherokee country. He listed the primary staple crops under production—wheat, rye, oats, Indian corn, and cotton—and described the steady accumulation of livestock, especially hogs, horses, cattle, and

sheep. As part of this transition to commercial agriculture, Ridge observed, the Cherokees had altered their traditional gendered division of labor. Whereas women had formerly managed the majority of farming operations, now the men bear the “hardest portion of manual labor” and the women “very contentedly perform the duties of the kitchen.” While the men became more adept at raising livestock and selling their staples to the market, said Ridge, the women learned to sew, weave, and spin cloth both for domestic use and sale. Indeed, Ridge implied that the majority of Cherokee farmers emulated the methods of white southern planters, a comparison he supported by referring, inaccurately, to the prevalence of slavery. Finally, Ridge predicted that, before long, cotton would become “the staple commodity of traffic for the Nation.” Thus, Ridge’s vision of Cherokee improvement imagined a trajectory of culture change that connected the Cherokee people directly to the economic development of the Cotton Kingdom in the American South.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, like Boudinot, Ridge distorted many of the facts in his portrayal of Cherokee improvement. Cherokee men, for instance, had always participated to an extent in agricultural production but it is likely that Cherokee women still performed much of the crop maintenance after the initial plowing of the fields and before the fall harvest. Likewise, Ridge insists that “there is not to my knowledge a solitary Cherokee to be found that depends upon the chase for subsistence and every head of a family has his house and farm.” Yet market hunting remained a viable and occasionally profitable economic enterprise well into the nineteenth century, and the evidence suggests that at least some Cherokees still depended upon the deerskin trade. Finally, Ridge overestimates the number of Cherokees who emulated southern planters—and owned slaves—perhaps because he himself belonged to this social class, but the vast majority continued to maintain their traditional patterns of subsistence agriculture. Nevertheless, as Timothy Sweet has argued, the representation of agricultural improvement among the Cherokees served a critical

political role by allowing Ridge and Boudinot to reject the racist assumptions of many white Americans while ideologically enhancing the Cherokees' claim to the land.<sup>48</sup>

In the fall of 1826, members of the Cherokee National Council called a convention for the creation of a constitution. The following spring, the Cherokee people elected delegates to attend the convention, which began later that summer, symbolically, on the Fourth of July. Most of the delegates, like the members of the National Council, came from the upper echelons of Cherokee society and supported the acculturation agenda. Accordingly, they framed a political document that resembled the form and content of the U.S. Constitution, officially establishing a republican government with powers divided among executive, legislative, and judicial branches. They created a bicameral legislature consisting of a National Council and Committee, a Supreme Court, a National Treasurer, and a position called the Principal Chief. They also included a bill of rights promising freedom of religion, due process of law, trial by jury, and protection against unlawful search and seizure, but they shamefully limited the rights of blacks within Cherokee territory. Article 1 articulated perhaps the most unique component of the Cherokee Constitution. First, the document painstakingly outlined the boundaries of Cherokee territory, thus establishing the geography of Indian sovereignty and directly connecting political identity to a sense of place. The Cherokee Constitution also declared that these boundaries "shall forever hereafter remain unalterably the same." Second, the document explicitly stated that the Cherokee nation held its lands in common and no individual could sell or cede any portion of Cherokee territory without the consent of the entire people. This clause would eventually come to haunt both Boudinot and Ridge during the removal crisis of the 1830s.<sup>49</sup>

After Boudinot returned to Cherokee country following his speaking tour in 1826, the National Council had appointed him editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Indian newspaper

in North America. In his prospectus for the new periodical, circulated in 1827, Boudinot echoed many of the arguments found in “An Address to the Whites.” He emphasized the philanthropic, humanitarian agenda of the newspaper, displaying a missionary mentality ingrained during his education in New England, and he closed the prospectus by soliciting additional “patronage” from “the friends of the Indians” (90). Over the next four years, in several editorials printed in the *Cherokee Phoenix*, Boudinot would continue to sound this note of benevolence, implying that the survival of the Indians depended upon the support of white society, a paternalistic attitude that, according to historian Francis Paul Prucha, defined U.S. Indian policy throughout the early national era.<sup>50</sup>

As Boudinot saw it, one of the primary purposes of the *Cherokee Phoenix* was to publish proofs of Indian improvement and progress toward “civilization.” For the newspaper’s first issue, 21 February 1828, Boudinot wrote a long editorial detailing the political agenda of the *Phoenix* and clarifying its central goal as the promotion of Indian acculturation. Much like “An Address to the Whites,” this editorial begins by rejecting the assumption that Indians lack the capacity for civilization, but this time Boudinot pushes the counter-argument a step further by insisting upon the preservation of Indian homelands and the continued right of occupation. He announces the Cherokees’ official opposition to removal and predicts their ongoing residence in Southern Appalachia, declaring defiantly that “improvement can be made, not only by the Cherokees, but by all Indians, *in their present locations*” (94). Thus does the *Phoenix* defend the Indians’ sense of place and function as an instrument of political resistance to removal.

Throughout his editorials, Boudinot charts a teleological narrative of Cherokee transition from hunting to farming lifeways. At one point, he conducts an agricultural survey of Cherokee country, enumerating the value of its many improvements, in order to estimate the potential cost

of a proposed removal and so dismiss the idea as impractical. After assessing houses, farms, fences, orchards, mills, and livestock, he arrives at a figure of \$1,783,730. When added to the cost of emigration—the price of provisions, wagons, and ferries on the trip west—the proposed removal, he concludes, would demand the huge sum of \$2,229,662 from the federal government. Why not put this money to better use, asks Boudinot, and invest in the education of Cherokee children to further advance the cause of “civilization” and so render removal unnecessary and undesirable? Meanwhile, throughout the *Phoenix*, Boudinot also rejects the definition of the Cherokees as hunters, reminding his readers time and again that his people “have in great measure become herdsmen and cultivators” (104). Drawing again upon the stadial theory of civilization at the heart of late-eighteenth century notions of political economy, Boudinot insists that “The Cherokees have been reclaimed from their wild habits—Instead of hunters they have become cultivators of the soil” (141-42). Despite persistent interference by the state of Georgia, he says, his people have achieved a growing agricultural prosperity. Thus does a basic belief in Enlightenment progress bolster Boudinot’s faith in the future of the Cherokee nation.<sup>51</sup>

A tone of biting sarcasm often pervades Boudinot’s editorials, and the content of his columns might cause the reader to crack a smile were the situation not so serious. For example, when reporting the events of his own harassment at the hands of Colonel Charles Nelson, the commander of the Georgia Guard who had accused the *Cherokee Phoenix* of libel, Boudinot humorously eviscerates Nelson’s faulty logic and foolish allegations. Likewise, in the same issue, Boudinot mocks the sloppy reasoning of Georgia Governor George Gilmer, turning the politician’s anti-Indian polemic into a defense of Cherokee sovereignty. In both cases, sarcasm functions as a potent weapon in the counter-attack against the advocates of Indian removal.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Boudinot often employs the rhetorical form of the political jeremiad to suggest that the United States has broken its social contract with the Cherokees. In an editorial printed 12 November 1831, for example, he counters the common charge that Indian “nature” served as an obstacle to culture change by appealing to the memory of George Washington, who held the opposite opinion. “With accomendable zeal,” writes Boudinot, “the first Chief magistrate of the United States undertook to bring the Cherokees into the pale of civilization, by establishing friendly relations with them by treaties, and introducing the mechanic arts among them” (141). In other words, Washington and his followers had forged a contract with the Indian nations that recognized their political sovereignty in exchange for acculturation to white lifeways. The Cherokees have fulfilled that agreement, says Boudinot, but the new president, Andrew Jackson, has flouted the original contract and replaced it with an un-American policy of Indian removal. “The promises of Washington and Jefferson have not been fulfilled” (142), declares Boudinot, invoking the names of these founding fathers to shame Jackson and his henchmen. “The policy of the United States on Indian affairs has taken a different direction,” he laments, concluding that “Cupidity and self-interest are at the bottom of all these difficulties” (142-43). Thus, Boudinot adopts the basic style of the Declaration of Independence to list his people’s grievances against the “republican tyranny” of U.S. Indian policy.<sup>53</sup>

In 1830, the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, a bill originally proposed by President Jackson, who subsequently ordered the federal agent to the Cherokees to halt payment of the tribe’s annuity, effectively cutting the funds necessary to operate the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The following year, as Boudinot prepared to leave home on a fundraising campaign, the state of Georgia passed a law requiring every white person residing in Indian territory to take an oath of loyalty to the state. When several missionaries, including Samuel Worcester and Elizur Butler,

refused the oath, they were arrested and eventually sentenced to four years hard labor. In turn, the missionaries appealed to the Supreme Court, bringing a case that challenged the jurisdiction of Georgia in Cherokee territory. In 1832, while Boudinot was traveling outside of the Cherokee nation, Chief Justice John Marshall delivered the decision in *Worcester v. Georgia*, which at first blush appeared a victory for the Cherokees. The court rejected the validity of the Georgia law, recommended the release of the missionaries, and most importantly, upheld the right of Indian sovereignty as established in the treaties that followed the American Revolution. The state of Georgia, however, refused to comply with the ruling, and Jackson is reported to have replied, defiantly, “Chief Justice Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it.” The Cherokees hoped that the court would force Jackson’s hand on constitutional grounds, but unfortunately, a tariff dispute between the federal government and the state of South Carolina interfered, placing additional pressure on Jackson and Georgia to avert the disaster of disunion. To avoid enforcing the court’s decision, the governor of Georgia issued a pardon for Worcester and Butler, and the Cherokees were left in the lurch with a symbolic statement of their sovereignty that everyone else chose to ignore.<sup>54</sup>

As these ignominious events unfolded, Boudinot became increasingly convinced that Georgians and Jacksonians alike intended to ratchet up pressure for Cherokee removal until the situation became unbearable. Not only did they blatantly reject a decision of the Supreme Court but they also encouraged white settlers to lay claim to Cherokee country. Adding insult to injury, when gold was discovered in the Southern Appalachians, a rush of miners and land speculators surged through the valleys in pursuit of quick profits, often physically dispossessing Indians of their property and, on one occasion, murdering a Cherokee man who resisted the harassment. Facing these injustices, Boudinot reversed his position on removal and began to advocate, in

1832-33, for a reluctant relocation to the West. Along with his uncle Major Ridge and his cousin John Ridge, Boudinot formed an opposition party that came into conflict with the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, John Ross. In 1835, Boudinot and the Ridges, among others, met with federal agents and signed the Treaty of New Echota, a scandalous agreement to cede Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi in exchange for cash payments, a grant of territory in present-day Oklahoma, and assistance in the wholesale emigration of the Cherokee nation. John Ross and the majority of the Cherokee people were outraged by the audacity and arrogance of this opposition group, which they regarded as traitors and labeled with shame the “Treaty Party.”<sup>55</sup>

In the aftermath of the Treaty of New Echota, a debate ensued between pro- and anti-removal factions within Cherokee society. Voicing a popular resistance to removal, John Ross wrote two pamphlets that accused the so-called “Treaty Party” of betraying the Cherokee nation and ignoring the will of the people. Despite assertions to the contrary, only a small minority of middle-class, often mixed-blood, highly acculturated Cherokees supported removal, and many of those individuals, like the Ridges, harbored political resentment toward Ross, or, like Boudinot, embraced a missionary zeal that manifested itself in pretentious paternalism. Along with several petitions sent to Congress, Ross’s pamphlets condemned the removal advocates and called upon the U.S. to abrogate the Treaty of New Echota. Resembling the Declaration of Independence, the Cherokee memorial sent to Congress on 22 June 1836 chronicled a history of injustice, listing the Cherokees’ grievances against state and federal governments. Much of the document set forth a narrative of dispossession, highlighting specific acts of property theft and confiscation.<sup>56</sup>

In one passage, this memorial of protest describes how John Ross and Joseph Vann, two of the wealthiest, most acculturated Cherokee planters, lost their homes to the voracious appetite of white land speculators. Harnessing the discourse of agricultural improvement, the Cherokee

writers flip the script of the “civilization program” by implying that Indian removal reverses the progress of economic development. After returning home from Washington, the story goes, Ross finds his home occupied by a “tenant of that mercenary band of Georgia speculators,” his family evicted, and his farm neglected. He spends the night as a visitor in his own home, and the next morning, “he arose early, and went out into the yard, and saw some straggling herds of his cattle and sheep browsing about the place. His crop of corn undisposed of.” In an especially poignant image, Ross glances up at a tree and spots “a flock of beautiful peafowls, once the matron’s care and delight, now left to destruction.” Likewise, the memorial describes the many improvements Joseph Vann had made to his land only to lose the fruits of his labor in an act of dispossession. Evicted from their plantation, Vann and his family wander through the winter and take shelter in “an open log cabin, upon a dirt floor,” thus backtracking along the path of improvement from civilization to a savage frontier situation.<sup>57</sup>

In response to accusations of betrayal, Boudinot published a collection of letters in 1837 defending the Treaty Party by waging a personal attack against the Principal Chief. Contending for control of the debate, Boudinot argued that the Cherokee people simply lacked the “proper information” to make a wise decision because Ross had “deluded them with expectations incompatible with, and injurious to, their interest” (161). In contrast, the Treaty Party had taken the difficult but necessary steps “to save a *nation* from political thralldom and moral degradation” (162). Boudinot accused Ross of self-interested politics, insinuating that the Principal Chief had rejected removal only to lobby for more money in compensation for his own property loss. Near the end of Boudinot’s rejoinder, then, in a remarkable, one might even say hypocritical, reversal of opinion, he disavowed his earlier account of Cherokee improvement and represented his people as uncivilized savages: “But look at the mass—look at the entire population as it now is,

and say, can you see any indication of a progressing improvement—anything that can encourage a philanthropist? You know that it is almost a dreary waste” (223). Finally, Boudinot returned to the image of the phoenix that had first taken flight in “An Address to the Whites,” but now, in his mind, removal had replaced acculturation as the path to cultural rebirth. “In another country,” he wrote, “and under other circumstances, there is a *better* prospect. Removal, then, is the only remedy—the only *practicable* remedy. By if there *may be* finally a renovation—our people *may* rise from their very ashes to become prosperous and happy” (225). Thus, by 1835, Boudinot had begun to believe that the alternatives for the Cherokee people had changed. No longer facing an obvious choice between civilization and savagery, they now faced an impossible choice between removal and extinction.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, white settlers swept into Cherokee country and continued to dispossess the Indians of their farms and houses. The Georgia guard, sent to keep peace, more often abused the Cherokees to the point of violence, sometimes inviting retaliation, which justified further acts of aggression. Eventually, in 1838, U.S. troops arrived and began herding the people into stockades, and thereafter, Ross and the majority of Cherokees were physically forced to follow Boudinot’s advice. Ross temporarily succeeded in gaining control of the relocation process, but a perfect storm of poor weather, sickness, and starvation plagued his efforts. In 1838-39, the Cherokees set out from the Southern Appalachians on a grueling, gruesome walk to the West, a mass migration we now refer to as the Trail of Tears. Before this tragic exodus, however, members of the Treaty Party had already emigrated and established homesteads among those Cherokees already living in Indian territory. When Ross and his refugees arrived, a spirit of mutual resentment shook the solidarity of the Cherokee people. On 22 June 1839, Boudinot and the Ridges were assassinated by Cherokee executioners carrying out a traditional sentence of blood justice and also enforcing

the Cherokee law that had forbid any individual from selling or ceding common lands without the consent of the whole people. In the end, by forcing the Cherokees from their homeland, Boudinot and the Ridges paid for their betrayal with their lives.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the members of the Treaty Party saw things differently. They firmly believed the Cherokee nation could survive as a political entity only if it consented to the demands of white society and relinquished its lands east of the Mississippi. They saw removal as yet another opportunity to reinvent Cherokee culture, to redeem the past and help their people rise from the ashes of displacement like the symbol of the phoenix. But they were blind to the true character of Cherokee society and they ignored the majority of their countrymen who preferred to maintain a more traditional lifestyle. As Theda Perdue argues, Boudinot's vision of Cherokee acculturation was a dream built upon the framework of his own colonized, Christianized ideology. It was also a vision of improvement that overlooked the vital role of place in his people's cultural identity. Unlike Boudinot, Cherokee traditionalists defined themselves in direct connection to the region of their birth. By dwelling on the land of their ancestors, they fostered a shared history of hope and inhabitation. By telling stories embedded in the mountains of Southern Appalachia, they performed a cultural mythology that tied them to the landscape of their people. And finally, by practicing subsistence agriculture, seasonal hunting, and the gathering of wild herbs and edibles, they cultivated a mixed economy that rooted them deeper in place. Boudinot and the Ridges rejected these traditions, detached their people from place, and unsettled a long history of dwelling on the land.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For these events in Cherokee history, I draw primarily upon Tom Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*. For more on the so-called doctrine of “separate creations,” see Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 189-236.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the American Revolution as a turning point for the Cherokees, see Colin Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 182-212; William McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 19-32; Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 191-228.

<sup>3</sup> According to Tom Hatley, those who joined Dragging Canoe in Chickamauga fought to preserve not only their hunting grounds, but also the political ties between the Cherokee people and other nations—both Indian and white. Cherokee diplomacy depended upon an open path to the outside world, but the Indian War of 1776 and the land cessions that followed persistently closed down routes of access. From the 1780s to the 1820s, white settlers continued to surround the Cherokees, threatening their ability to hunt, trade, and negotiate in an open, autonomous fashion—and forcing them to endure a perpetual cycle of removal crises. Nonetheless, as the Chickamauga resistance demonstrates, we ought not cast the Cherokees as passive victims of imperial powers, but we must acknowledge that their choices were extremely limited by the agendas of both the Patriots and the Loyalists. See Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 218-28.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of U.S. Indian policy in the 1790s, see Reginald Horsman, “The Indian Policy of an ‘Empire for Liberty’”; Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 161-205; McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, xv, 34-40.

<sup>5</sup> After 1800, says McLoughlin, a kind of “romantic nationalism” took hold of the United States, and in the process, non-whites were excluded from participation in political culture. See

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*Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, xv-xvi, 368. For statistics about the small number of Cherokees who embraced acculturation, see Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 232-33.

<sup>6</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, eds., *The Cherokee Removal*, 1-24.

<sup>7</sup> The full title of Bartram's book is *Travels Through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws; Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians*, published in Philadelphia in 1791. Quotations from this work, cited within the text, come from *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist's Edition*, edited by Francis Harper. Bartram's additional writings are available in the following collections: *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, edited by Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund; *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings*, edited by Thomas P. Slaughter; *William Bartram: The Search for Nature's Design*, edited by Thomas Hallock and Nancy E. Hoffman. I am specifically interested in Bartram's "Observations on the Creek and Cherokee Indians" (1787) and "Some Hints & Observations, concerning the civilization, of the Indians, or Aborigines" (1787-90?). Meanwhile, Boudinot's "Address to the Whites" (1826) and additional writings can be found in *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot*, edited by Theda Perdue.

<sup>8</sup> Details about Boudinot's betrayal can be found in Perdue, *Cherokee Editor*, 25-33.

<sup>9</sup> Bartram's writings have received a great deal of attention in recent years, yet most literary critics have focused on their botanical elements, their relation to eighteenth-century natural history, or their influence on the emerging field of ecology. For literary analysis that considers Bartram's relation to (and representation of) the Southeastern Indians, see Joshua David Bellin, "Wicked Instruments: William Bartram and the Dispossession of the Southern

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Indians” and *The Demon of the Continent*, 123-30; Thomas Hallock, ““On the Borders of a New World’: Ecology, Frontier Plots, and Imperial Elegy in William Bartram’s *Travels*” and *From the Fallen Tree*, 149-73; Pamela Regis, *Describing Early America*, 40-78; Ian Marshall, *Story Line*, 35-50. For additional political interpretations of Bartram’s *Travels*, see Douglas Anderson, “Bartram’s *Travels* and the Politics of Nature”; Christopher Looby, “The Constitution of Nature: Taxonomy as Politics in Jefferson, Peale, and Bartram”; Gordon Sayre, “The Mound Builders and the Imagination of American Antiquity in Jefferson, Bartram, and Chateaubriand”; Michael Branch, “Indexing American Possibilities: The Natural History Writing of Bartram, Wilson, and Audubon”; Monique Allewaert, “Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone.” For a recent review of Bartram scholarship, see Kathryn E. Holland Braund and Charlotte M. Porter, eds. *Fields of Vision: Essays on the Travels of William Bartram*. From the angle of literary analysis, Timothy Sweet’s *American Georgics* also includes a fine chapter describing the way in which Cherokee writers of the 1820s adopted improvement discourse to defend their territorial rights.

<sup>10</sup> For these details, I draw upon two main biographies of the Bartrams—Ernest Earnest, *John and William Bartram: Botanists and Explorers*, and Thomas Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram*—as well as the chronology of Bartram’s life in *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Slaughter. Throughout this chapter, I also rely heavily upon Edward Cashin’s *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*. This work provides an excellent elucidation of Bartram’s botanical tour by setting it in the context of contemporary political events. While my analysis often runs parallel to Cashin’s, our aims are ultimately different. Whereas Cashin fills in the historical details, I draw upon that history to develop a reading of Bartram’s *Travels* as a literary response to Indian-white relations.

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<sup>11</sup> For a description of the patronage network that supported both Bartrams, see Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History*, 13-55; Slaughter, *The Natures of John and William Bartram*, 78-102.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief summary of John Stuart's career, his conflict with Galphin, and his efforts to negotiate a British-Cherokee alliance during the Revolution, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 14-20, 162-63, 187-90, 214-16, 224-29. For a more thorough study of Stuart's career, see Russell J. Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier*, which also describes the tension with Galphin. According to Colin Calloway, Stuart and Cameron were actually more reluctant to see the Cherokees enter the American Revolution than Patriot propaganda implied. See Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 190-94.

<sup>13</sup> For a snapshot of George Galphin's career, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 43-46; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 45; Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier*, 17-19, 140-44, 184-88. Slaughter's notes to *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings* also provide helpful details about Stuart, Galphin, et. al.

<sup>14</sup> These details can be found in Bartram's "A Report to Dr. John Fothergill," in *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Slaughter, 429-39, as well as the *Travels*, ed. Harper, 1-20. To fill in the gaps of Bartram's narrative, I rely upon Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 5-75.

<sup>15</sup> For a history of the New Purchase Cession, see Louis De Vorsey, *The Indian Boundary in the Southern Colonies*, 157-80; Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 209-10; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 150-51; Waselkov and Braund, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, 12-14;

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Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier*, 116-46; and Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 20-21, 53-56.

<sup>16</sup> Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 53. Similarly, historian Louis De Vorsey observes, “It seems probable that the process of boundary advance illustrated by the New Purchase would have set a pattern to be followed in other parts of the frontier had not the American Revolution intervened so soon afterward.” See De Vorsey, *The Indian Boundary in the Southern Colonies*, 172.

<sup>17</sup> Bellin, “Wicked Instruments,” 3; Hallock, *From Fallen Tree*, 166, 169. Although Pratt does not directly mention Bartram, she implicates his botanical project by arguing that “natural history provided a means for narrating inland travel and exploration aimed not at the discovery of trade routes, but at territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources, and administrative control” (*Imperial Eyes* 38). Historians have also noticed the imperial context of Bartram’s travels. See, for example, Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire*, 177-79.

<sup>18</sup> “A Report to Dr. John Fothergill” is printed in *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Slaughter, 429-522. Subsequent citations, within the text, refer to this edition.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the murder of the two Cherokee men and the subsequent episode known as the White-Sherrill murders, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 66-75.

<sup>20</sup> For background on the October 1774 treaty, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 114-18.

<sup>21</sup> For a summary of Bartram’s second trip into Cherokee territory, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 125-59.

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<sup>22</sup> For more on Edmund Ruffin's soil improvement scheme, see Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 150-59, 190-95. See also the collection of Ruffin's writings edited by Jack Kirby, *Nature's Management*. Interestingly, Bartram later elaborated on these ideas in an essay he read in 1789 at a meeting of the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, "Observations on the Pea Fly or Beetle, and Fruit Curculio," which is printed in *William Bartram: Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Slaughter, 588-92.

<sup>23</sup> Although Kolodny (*The Lay of the Land*) does not discuss this scene in the *Travels*, her analysis of similar frontier narratives, such as Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and his additional sketches, might easily apply to Bartram's text.

<sup>24</sup> For more about Attakullakulla and his friendship with John Stuart, see James Kelly, "Notable Persons in Cherokee History: Attakullakulla," and Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier*, 56-57, 86-87.

<sup>25</sup> Bartram mentions the Seneca Conference in the *Travels*, 235. For additional details, see Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 156-59.

<sup>26</sup> Arner, "Pastoral Patterns in William Bartram's *Travels*," 138. Marshall, *Story Line*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> The Battles of Lexington and Concord occurred on 19 April 1775, and Bartram's trip through Cherokee territory lasted from May 15 to June 15. Incidentally, Bartram may have also abandoned the mountains because he planned to join a caravan of traders setting out for Creek territory at the end of June—a more secure, military mode of travel through Indian country. After returning from the Nantahalas, Bartram joined Captain George Whitfield's company of traders at Fort Charlotte, and the group left for Mobile on June 22. For details on this trip, see Bartram's *Travels*, 237-94, and Cashin, *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*, 160-207.

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<sup>28</sup> For critical interpretations of Bartram’s pastoral design, see Arner, “Pastoral Patterns in William Bartram’s *Travels*”; Hallock, ““On the Borders of a New World”” and *From the Fallen Tree*, 149-73.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of generational conflicts in Cherokee society in the midst of the Revolution, see Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 182-212.

<sup>30</sup> For background on the American Revolution in Cherokee territory, see Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 191-228; Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, 182-212.

<sup>31</sup> The Treaty of Hopewell (1785) was the first official agreement between the Cherokee nation and the independent United States. By 1800, the U.S. had thrust at least three new treaties upon the Cherokees, each of them forcing additional land cessions: the Treaty of Holston (1791), the Treaty of Philadelphia (1794), and the first Treaty of Tellico (1798).

<sup>32</sup> Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*. In the commentary to Bartram’s *Travels*, editor Francis Harper expresses his frustration with Bartram’s misdating. “From this point on,” he notes at the beginning of Bartram’s second tour of Cherokee territory, “Bartram apparently does not succeed in recording a single date correctly. The year dates are advanced from one to three years, and even the months are not invariably correct. His excursion to the Cherokee nation took place in the *spring and early summer of 1775*—not 1776” (380, Harper’s emphasis).

<sup>33</sup> For this overview of Henry Knox and U.S. Indian policy, I draw upon Horsman, “The Indian Policy of an ‘Empire for Liberty’”; and Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 161-240. For a history on Indian policy that extends into the nineteenth century, see Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the Indians*.

<sup>34</sup> Jefferson attempted to realize Knox’s vision during his presidency because it meshed so well with his own Enlightenment ideals. Indeed, Jefferson saw the rising republican empire of

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the United States as the great dream of the Enlightenment come to fruition, and he believed that the Indians would prove the principle of equality by advancing from savagery to civilization, by donning the garb of yeoman farmers. But of course, Jefferson ignored the fact that the Indians already engaged in agricultural production. For an analysis of how Jefferson willfully overlooked such evidence, see Daniel Usner, "Iroquois Livelihood and Jeffersonian Agrarianism." For the classic study of Jefferson's Indian policy as a precursor to removal, see Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indians*.

<sup>35</sup> Waselkov and Braund have provided a manuscript transcription of "Some Hints" in the carefully edited edition of *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, 187-98. All subsequent quotations from this work, cited parenthetically within the text, refer to this edition

<sup>36</sup> Waselkov and Braund also include a version of "Observations," which they have edited from a combination of copy-texts, in *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, 133-86. All subsequent quotations from this work, cited within the text, refer to this version of the text. For more on Squier and Davis, see Terry A. Barnhart, *Ephraim George Squier and the Development of American Anthropology*.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of Benjamin Hawkins and his efforts among the Creeks, see Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 7-21.

<sup>38</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, xv. For another discussion of how the "middle ground" eroded in the late eighteenth century, see Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 189-236.

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of Jefferson's Indian policy, see Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 206-240. For more on the rise of racist nationalism after the War of 1812, see McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, xv-xvi.

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<sup>40</sup> For details about Boudinot's biography and his position on acculturation, I draw upon Theda Perdue's introduction to *Cherokee Editor*, 3-38.

<sup>41</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 277-301, 326-49. For more on race, slavery, and gender relations within Cherokee culture, see Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society* and *Cherokee Women*.

<sup>42</sup> In 1826, the Philadelphia printer William F. Geddes published Boudinot's speech with the following title: "An Address to the Whites Delivered in the First Presbyterian Church, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 1826, by Elias Boudinot, A Cherokee Indian." Subsequent quotations from this text, cited parenthetically, refer to the version in *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Perdue, 65-83.

<sup>43</sup> Perdue, ed., *Cherokee Editor*, 80, note 9. For Sequoyah's syllabary, see McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 350-65.

<sup>44</sup> Boudinot's reputation continues to inspire debate among historians and contemporary Cherokees. In the introduction to *Cherokee Editor*, Theda Perdue provides a helpful analysis of Boudinot's missionary zeal, utopian mentality, and inability to honor his people's actual desires.

<sup>45</sup> For background on the Ridge family, see Thurman Wilkins, *Cherokee Tragedy: The Story of the Ridge Family and Decimation of a People*.

<sup>46</sup> A copy of Ridge's letter to Gallatin has been printed in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 35-44. For Ridge's description of the dispersion of Cherokee settlement, see page 35.

<sup>47</sup> John Ridge to Albert Gallatin, in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 36-37.

<sup>48</sup> John Ridge to Albert Gallatin, in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 36. See also Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics*, 122-52. I am indebted to Sweet for illuminating the function of agrarian ideology for the Cherokee writers of the 1820s and 1830s. Also, for more details about Cherokee gender relations, see Perdue, *Cherokee Women*.

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<sup>49</sup> A copy of the Cherokee Constitution of 1827 can be found in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 60-70. For a critical analysis of the constitution and the resistance to it among some Cherokees, see McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 388-410.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father*. A selection of Boudinot's editorials from the *Cherokee Phoenix*, along with his 1827 prospectus, are printed in *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Perdue, 85-153. Again, quotations from Boudinot's writings, cited parenthetically, refer to this edition.

<sup>51</sup> Boudinot's agricultural survey, 14 May 1828, appears in *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Perdue, 99-100. The other editorials to which this paragraph refers were printed on 28 January 1829, 16 July 1831, and 12 November 1831.

<sup>52</sup> This refutation of Nelson and Gilmer was printed 17 September 1831 and appears in *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Perdue, 135-40.

<sup>53</sup> Boudinot used the phrase "republican tyranny" while contemplating Jackson's election in the *Cherokee Phoenix* on 10 December 1828; quoted in McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 425.

<sup>54</sup> For more on *Worcester v. Georgia*, see McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic*, 428-47. Justice Marshall's decision is printed in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 81-84. The story about Jackson's famous reply to Marshall is probably apocryphal, but the words nevertheless capture the President's defiant response. For more on Jackson's effort to revise U.S. Indian policy, see Robert V. Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson*, 45-82; and Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians*.

<sup>55</sup> For the text of the Treaty of New Echota, see *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 145-53. When Boudinot declared his position in support of removal in 1832, Ross and the Cherokee National Council forced him to resign his post as editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*.

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<sup>56</sup> One of Ross's pamphlets is printed in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 154-59. Likewise, part of the Cherokee memorial of protest sent to Congress 22 June 1836, appears in *Cherokee Removal*, 87-92. For a biography of the life of John Ross, see Gary Moulton, *John Ross, Cherokee Chief*.

<sup>57</sup> These passages appear in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 89-91.

<sup>58</sup> Boudinot's packet of letters responding to Ross, titled "Letters and Other Papers Relating to Cherokee Affairs: Being a Reply to Sundry Publications Authorized by John Ross," is printed in *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Perdue, 155-233.

<sup>59</sup> Details about the Trail of Tears and the execution of Boudinot and the Ridges can be found in *Cherokee Removal*, eds. Perdue and Green, 167-68.

<sup>60</sup> See Theda Perdue's introduction to *Cherokee Editor*, 30-33. For a similar analysis of the political divisions within Cherokee society during the removal debates, see Hatley, *The Dividing Paths*, 239-41.

## Conclusion

### Revising the Revolution

From 1828 to 1832, the Cherokee writer Elias Boudinot engaged in a valiant effort to defend Indian sovereignty against the relentless aggression of land-hungry white Americans. As we have seen, Boudinot displayed a keen awareness of those rhetorical techniques that served as essential components of political propaganda in the early national era—such as the form of the jeremiad and the instrument of the agricultural survey. In the pages of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, he also employed the standard device of appealing to the legacy of the founding fathers, as when he invoked the memory of George Washington, praising this paragon of American benevolence for establishing the “civilization program” and pledging agricultural assistance to the Indians. “By his overruling providence,” Boudinot gushed, “a door was opened for the introduction of those implements of husbandry” (104). After constructing this ideal vision of U.S. Indian policy, he blamed the current President, Andrew Jackson, for abandoning the promise of the American Revolution—a cardinal sin for a politician in the early Republic. “It appears now,” complained Boudinot, “that the illustrious Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe were only tantalizing us, when they encouraged us in the pursuit of agriculture” (108). Thus did Boudinot play the time-honored game of wrestling over the memory and meaning of the Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, if we return to the summer of 1776, that storied American season with which we began, and if we face east from Indian country, we find a very different version of the American Revolution. In Southern Appalachia, on three separate occasions, Cherokee farmers took refuge in the mountains as troops from Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas stormed into their villages, burning crops and killing livestock, in an effort to snap the spirit of Indian resistance. Likewise,

in the Susquehanna Valley, multicultural communities of Iroquois Indians lost their homes and their harvests when the Continental Army, following orders from General Washington, marched through the region on a scorched-earth campaign in response to raids by Loyalist forces and Iroquois warriors. As these events unfolded, Thomas Jefferson, writing in the Declaration of Independence, disingenuously accused the British of inciting an Indian war on the frontier, and shortly thereafter, in a letter to Edmund Pendleton dated 13 August 1776, Jefferson planted a seed that would later grow into a policy of Indian removal.<sup>2</sup>

Jefferson opened his letter to Pendleton by articulating a vision of the agrarian ideal, expressing a belief that all white Americans possessed a God-given right to own property, to achieve personal independence and prosperity by working the land as freeholding farmers. Referring to the emigrants who would soon flood into the Appalachian backcountry, Jefferson predicted, “They will settle the lands in spite of everybody.” After celebrating the culture of improvement, he turned his attention to hostilities on the American frontier and explained the Patriot policy toward the Indians. “We directed a declaration to be made to the six nations,” he reported, “that if they did not take the most decisive measures for the preservation of neutrality we would never cease waging war with them while one was to be found on the face of the earth.” Meanwhile, looking to the South, Jefferson proclaimed, “I hope the Cherokees will now be driven beyond the Mississippi & that this in future will be declared to the Indians the invariable consequence of their beginning a war.” Thus, embedded in Jefferson’s letter to Pendleton, we find the two key legacies of the American Revolution that have formed the focus of this study: agricultural improvement and Indian removal.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, Jefferson’s dream of an agrarian republic extracted a terrible cost from the indigenous peoples of North America. His plans for frontier settlement ignored whole classes

and races of people who had their own land-use patterns, and his republican principles, often glorified in American history textbooks, perpetuated a shocking degree of injustice. Following the American Revolution, the process of western expansion that fulfilled Jefferson's vision involved a number of conflicts between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. In the Great Lakes region, a violent struggle known as Little Turtle's War spilled over from the Revolution into the early national era, concluding with a bloodbath at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. A decade later, a religious revival among the Shawnees renewed resistance to white settlement, leading to Tecumseh's Rebellion, which lasted through the War of 1812. In the American South, from 1776 to 1794, the Chickamauga Wars pitted various members of the Cherokee nation against white settlers, resulting in a multitude of land cessions that transferred vast tracts of country from Indian to U.S. sovereignty. Meanwhile, during the War of 1812, a cultural revival among the Creeks triggered the Red Stick War in which Andrew Jackson earned his stripes as an Indian fighter. During the next two decades, the strong arm of U.S. land policy left the Creeks and Cherokees with very few options. Some chose to resist white encroachment while others assimilated to white culture, but neither tactic slowed the momentum of displacement.<sup>4</sup>

We must remember such events if we are to confront the truly fraught history of environmental politics unleashed by the American Revolution. As we have seen, in an effort to address the conflicts between whites and Indians in the Appalachian backcountry, early national leaders like Washington and Jefferson formulated a policy of acculturation that urged the Indians to adopt new modes of agricultural production, embrace a system of private property, and fit the mold of the American freeholder. These men believed firmly in their own philanthropy, but they failed to recognize that their efforts to help the Indian nations often did great harm instead. As practitioners of the "civilization program," they were blinded by a self-righteous conviction in

their own benevolence, an ethnocentric agenda rooted in the stadial theory of civilization, and a nationalistic drive to establish a republican empire. By refusing to tolerate cultural difference, they ruled out the alternative of accommodation. Similarly, many of the agricultural reforms proposed by Washington and Jefferson led to unintended consequences. Some of their plans for agricultural improvement actually promoted a more capitalist system of land use and so prepared the American landscape for the industrial agriculture of the twentieth century. When celebrating Jefferson's ideal of the small American farmer, then, we must also recall the spirit of economic self-interest that propelled a market revolution from the 1790s to the 1820s, facilitating a boom-and-bust pattern of commodity production that we have yet to escape.<sup>5</sup>

Despite such failures, the “founding farmers” of the early Republic managed to frame a compelling vision of a more sustainable system of land management. From Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* to Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill*, from Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* to James Fenimore Cooper's *Pioneers*, from Bartram's *Travels* to Boudinot's editorials, these writers cultivated a sense of place and called upon their fellow citizens to adopt a better land ethic. In multiple genres of literary production—natural history and georgic poetry, travel narratives and agricultural addresses, private letters and public reports—they harnessed a range of rhetorical modes to advance a more durable model of agricultural production and a more environmentally responsible system of values. This grand experiment in dwelling on the land can still serve as a model for our own age, but as with any effort to harvest an ethical lesson from the past, we must separate the wheat from the chaff, carefully sifting through the archive for those grains of wisdom that offer the best fodder for our own agricultural future and discarding those elements that have threatened to unsettle both political and ecological stability.

In recent decades, the problem of industrial agriculture has become a major theme in works of environmental literature. Employing the form of the jeremiad, such writers as Wendell Berry and Bill McKibben have bemoaned the broken contract between American culture and the natural world, a failed marriage that has damaged the land base and displaced rural families from their native homes. Like Aldo Leopold, these writers have challenged the assumptions of the capitalist growth economy and lamented our failure to live within ecological limits. Most of us now recognize the major points of their argument. Industrial agriculture has exhausted the soil, ruined the small farmer, unsettled rural communities, and eroded a sense of place. Promoting monoculture production, it has flattened regional differences and transformed family farms into corporate conglomerates. Dependent upon chemical fertilizers and addicted to fossil fuels, it has contributed to climate change, desertification, and water pollution. Favoring short-term profit over long-term stability, it has empowered a dangerous alliance between science, technology, big business, and big government. In short, industrial agriculture has warped the agrarian ideal.<sup>6</sup>

Although responding to a modern dilemma, this critique harkens back to a set of agrarian values that shaped the identity of the early Republic. To restore the contract between nature and culture, Berry and McKibben have called for a revival of the land ethic rooted in a practice of “kindly use” and “the wealth of communities.” We ought to reject excessive luxury, they say, resist conspicuous consumption, and embrace the old republican values of simplicity, frugality, and humility. We should turn away from hyper-individualism and back toward local economies, away from postmodern rootlessness and back toward the permanence of place. We must break free from the boom-and-bust pattern of resource extraction and establish a more durable and sustainable system of food production. As agricultural reformer Wes Jackson puts it, we must re-learn the art of “becoming native to our places.” These are deeply conservative

arguments, insofar as they seek to conserve the land base and social stability, but they also pose a radical challenge to the prevailing mentality of capitalist growth. Fortunately, there is new hope on the horizon. In the years since Berry published *The Unsettling of America* (1977), the nation has experienced a resurgence of organic farming, the rise of a local foods movement, and the growing popularity of farmers' markets and community supported agriculture. These new trends have germinated, so to speak, from the persistent seeds of that old agrarian ideal.<sup>7</sup>

In the early Republic, we can uncover at least some of the roots of our current ecological crisis. We can see how market capitalism commodified North America, how it enlisted science and technology to control the natural world, and how it often displaced those very people who lived closest to the land. But in these years we can also find visions of possibility, dreams of sustainable agriculture, ecological ethics, and responsible citizenship. We can imagine with Thomas Jefferson an era when the republican values of simplicity, frugality, and self-sufficiency still posed a legitimate challenge to the imperatives of a growth economy, when the voting public had more than a monetary stake in the land. We can admire William Bartram for his belief that all members of the biotic community have an equal right to life, liberty, and legal protection. And we can discover in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper an incipient land ethic even amidst the vexed rhetoric of race and empire. But beneath these dreams of natural harmony we cannot overlook the prevailing trend of environmental exploitation. This is not just history; it is the story of the world today.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The editorials quoted in this paragraph appeared in the *Cherokee Phoenix* between 1828 and 1832. For a selection of Boudinot's writings, see *Cherokee Editor*, ed. Theda Perdue.

<sup>2</sup> For a general history of Indian-white conflicts during the American Revolution, see Colin Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*. For a convincing argument about the need to shift our historical perspective to consider the experiences of American Indians, see Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson insisted that King George III had "endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions," *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson, 238.

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson to Pendleton, 13 Aug. 1776, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Julian P. Boyd, et. al., 1:491-94.

<sup>4</sup> For more about Jefferson's politics and their influence on Indian affairs, see Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 18-52. For a detailed analysis of Jefferson's Indian policy, see Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, 206-240. Jefferson's republican ideology made him reluctant to exercise federal control over states and citizens, and for the most part, he directed his efforts at acquiring more Indian lands rather than regulating white settlement. He often gave free reign to racist frontier settlers who instigated violence between whites and Indians, and with a scandalous degree of duplicity, he propelled the acculturation agenda by forcing as many land cessions as possible, believing that, when confined to smaller tracts of territory, the Indians would have no choice but to adopt white lifeways and transform themselves into frontier farmers. Conveniently, this policy of land acquisition also freed up the trans-Appalachian West for white settlement.

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After obtaining new lands, the federal government could sell them to private citizens, thereby financing internal improvements and fulfilling the vision of a republican empire.

<sup>5</sup> In *Seeds of Extinction*, Bernard Sheehan elaborates on the way in which advocates of Indian acculturation were blinded by a faith in their own philanthropy. For an analysis of this pattern in Jefferson's thought, see also Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*. In *Larding the Lean Earth*, Steven Stoll considers the paradoxical possibility that proponents of agricultural reform in the early Republic actually took a step toward industrial agriculture.

<sup>6</sup> Since World War II, the emerging field of environmental journalism has produced several critiques of industrial agriculture and the growth economy. In *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Aldo Leopold scolded the capitalist mentality of agricultural science and voluntary conservation, while in *Silent Spring* (1962), the book that began the modern environmental movement, Rachel Carson challenged the military-industrial complex that made chemical pesticides a major feature of American agriculture. In recent decades, Berry and McKibben have led the charge, along with agricultural reformers Wes Jackson and Joel Salatin and food writers Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser. Berry has published a number of works promoting his agrarian vision, but the most famous remains *The Unsettling of America* (1977). McKibben is credited as the first writer to bring the issue of climate change to a mainstream audience; his first and most powerful book, *The End of Nature* (1989), also includes a potent critique of the genetic engineering of crops; more recently, his *Deep Economy* (2007) has called for a return to local economies, not only for food production but for media and entertainment as well.

<sup>7</sup> Berry, *The Unsettling of America*, 30; McKibben, *Deep Economy*, 129; Jackson, *Becoming Native to This Place*, 87.

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**VITA**  
Mark C. Sturges

EDUCATION

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>The Pennsylvania State University</b> , University Park, PA<br>Ph.D., English Literature              | Aug. 2013 |
| <b>The Pennsylvania State University</b> , University Park, PA<br>M.A., English Literature               | May 2008  |
| <b>University of Pittsburgh</b> , Pittsburgh, PA<br>B.A., English and Philosophy, <i>summa cum laude</i> | Dec. 2003 |

PUBLICATIONS

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“Text and Trail: Ecocriticism, Textual Criticism, and William Bartram’s *Travels*.” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 14.1 (2012): 1-20.

“Enclosing the Commons: Thomas Jefferson, Agrarian Independence, and Early American Land Policy, 1774-1789.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 119.1 (2011): 42-74.

“Kamikaze Moderation: A Ramble Through Disease in the Pennsylvania Wilds.” *Watershed: A Journal of the Susquehanna* 1.3 (2011): 24-34.

CONFERENCE PAPERS

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“A Deep Map of the South: Natural History, Cultural History, and William Bartram’s *Travels*.” The Biennial Conference of the Society of Early Americanists, Savannah, GA, 2013.

“Farming Virginia: Agrarian Ideals and Ecological Realities in the Old Dominion.” The Annual Virginia Forum, James Madison University, 2012.

“Text and Trail: Ecocriticism and Textual Criticism.” The Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Indiana University, 2011.

“‘Trickster in the city’: Urban Nature Writing and the Post-Pastoral Design.” The Annual Conference of the Modern Language Association, Philadelphia, PA, 2009.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

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- Center for American Literary Studies Dissertation Support Award (2013)
- Folger Institute Grant-in-Aid for the Seminar “Thinking the Revolution” (2012)
- Euwema Award for Graduate Research, Penn State English Department (2012)
- Rachal Award for Best Annual Article, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (2011)
- Graduate Student Teaching Award, Penn State English Department (2008)