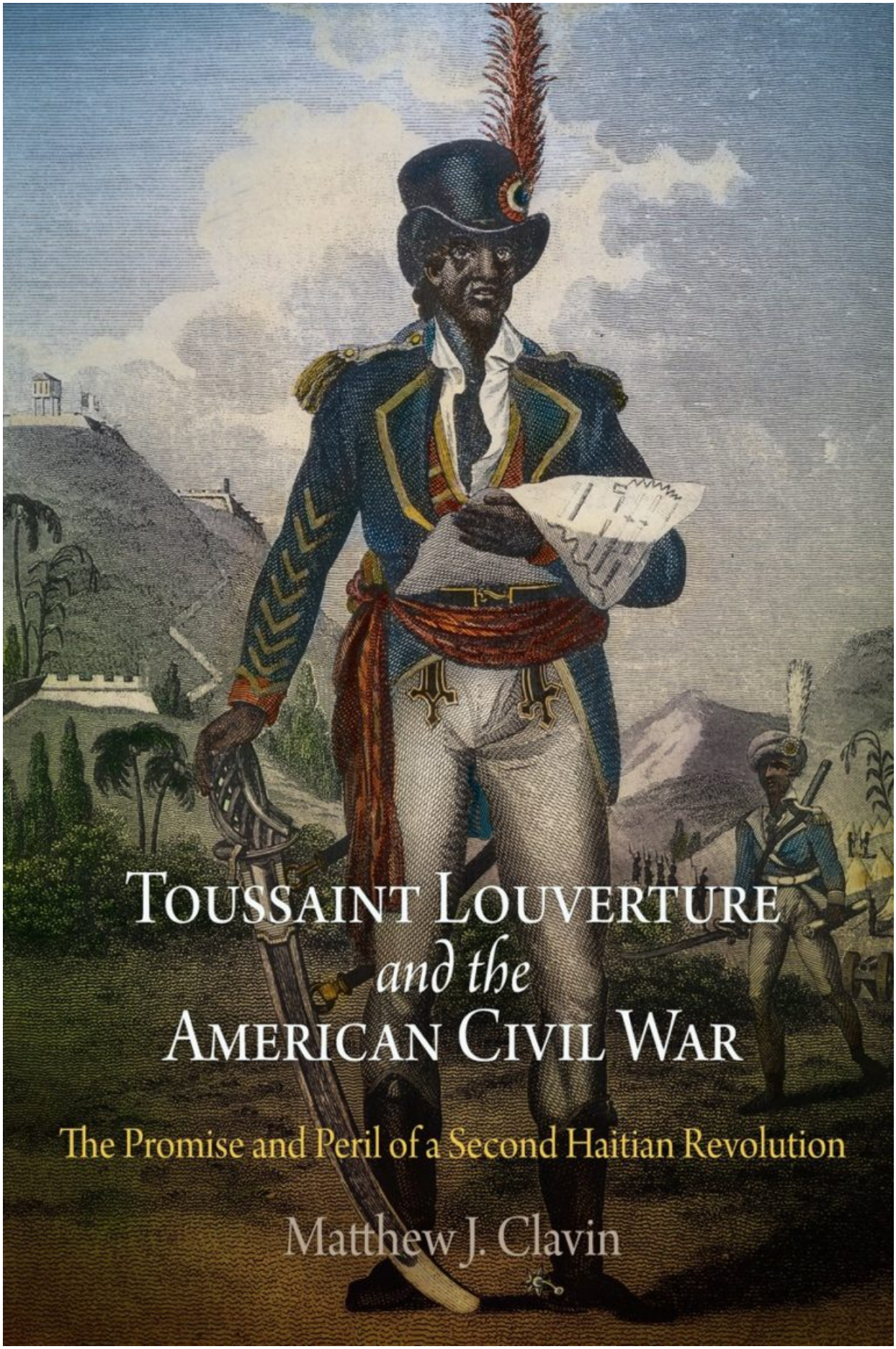
Atlantic Thermidor


TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE
and the
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution
Matthew J. Clavin

In recovering the vibrant presence of Saint Domingue/Haiti in these American moments, both books exemplify the power and promise of adopting an Atlantic lens in telling a national story…each offers a new view onto the familiar landscape of American political development between the Revolution and Reconstruction.

Stitching Empire: Cecilia Lewis's Map of the United States, 1809



Sponsored by the Chipstone Foundation

A delicately woven ivory silk map, embroidered in the first years of the nineteenth century, offers lessons about how early Americans envisioned the future of the new nation. The fabric bears a map of the United States outlined in couched chenille, its margins only slightly torn and frayed (fig. 1). Though slightly stained and bearing minor holes, the fabric is clean and intact, as are most of the stitches upon it. In the lower right, an oval cartouche embraced by a richly embroidered tree identifies the maker as one Cecilia Lewis, and gives the year in which she stitched the map: 1809. One of the rarest extant American cartographic samplers, this map of the United States was embroidered by eighteen-year-old Cecilia Goold Lewis, a pupil at the Pleasant Valley boarding school on the banks of the Hudson River near Poughkeepsie, New York. The map is significant not only for its primary subject—the young United States—but also for its inclusion of Native American tribes (figs. 1a and 1b). And unlike other map samplers that are now held in collections on the eastern seaboard, where they were made, this map eventually made the long journey with its maker to the land of the "Outigamis" and "Chipawas" west of the Great

Lakes. What can the sampler tell us about nineteenth-century culture and life in the United States, and, conversely, in what ways might historical records illuminate the object and the life of its maker?

Embodying a rich and storied history, Lewis's map transcends its own physical materiality beyond her skill with a needle. Government census and genealogical records can help us flesh out the temporal and geographic context of the embroiderer, granddaughter of Francis Lewis, a uniform supplier and signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Elizabeth Annesley Lewis, who was held captive by the British during the Revolutionary War. Cecilia was born in the village of Flushing, Long Island, in New York on January 12, 1791, to Elizabeth Ludlow and Francis Lewis Jr., a businessman like his father. In the crucible of burgeoning revolution, her Tory maternal grandparents had vigorously objected to the marriage of their daughter to a young man whose father "would certainly be hung," according to one history of Flushing. Given the family's active political participation in the birth of the new nation, a sampler bearing an image of the United States might have had particular familial meaning above and beyond its value as a geography exercise.

> What can the sampler tell us about nineteenth-century culture and life in the United States?

A tint of blue paint along the raised, embroidered shorelines enhances the low relief of the landmass, diffusing out to greater depths into the Atlantic and within each of the Great Lakes. Hair-fine black silk thread spells out the names of places and peoples. Guidelines in ink peek out below loosened or missing stitches and delineate the finely gridded graticule that subtly undergirds the picture plane. Couched silk chenille lines in earthen tones invite the viewer to touch, to feel one's way into the far reaches of the continental interior along the courses of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and to follow the horizontally cast boundaries of the central states. The visual logic of engraved maps directs the eye to enter and travel by way of printed lines—or, in the case of the embroidered map, by what path the needle might next pursue. Though the masthead-like form of Maine pushes northeasterly, the ribbon of words loosely paralleling the national form—Atlantic Ocean, Lower Canada, Upper Canada—reins the eye back into the body of the landmass. The seamstress penetrated the surface of her imagined silken countryside to reconstruct a nation in miniature, not unlike the farmers whose plows cut lines into unturned earth at the local level, each a participatory exercise in patriotism. Like other American maps, Lewis's embroidery encouraged viewers to read cartographic pictures of their nation from right to left, or east to west, the direction in which the country would expand. Embedded within the map lay a perceptual friction between text read from left to right, as habituated by European writing systems, and the visual scanning of westward-bound cartographic expansion.


1. “Map Sampler of the United States,” Cecilia Lewis, United States. Silk, chenille, paint, and ink on silk (1809). Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. Click image to enlarge in new window.

1a. Detail, cartouche, Cecilia Lewis map sampler.

1b. Detail, Cecilia Lewis map sampler. Region encompassing the present day states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota with named Native American tribes: “Nadowessis,” “Chipawas,” “Outigamis,” and “Utawas.”

School

Needle arts historian Betty Ring has linked the map stylistically to others made by students at the Pleasant Valley School, an establishment operated by three Quaker women, two of whom had recently migrated from England. Founders Ann Shipley and her niece Agnes Dean brought to America their knowledge of embroidering maps, already a common practice in eighteenth-century imperial Britain. The map samplers made at their school resembled those made at Esther Tuke’s boarding school in York, England, which were similarly worked “upon white silk … in chenille.” (Ann Shipley likely knew the headmistress and her school, which listed two other Shipley girls in attendance in 1802.) The cartouche embroidery in the Lewis sampler exemplifies the style and form found in other Pleasant Valley embroidered maps, as does the stitching of boundaries and tinted coastlines. Pupil Mary M. Franklin, for example, constructed a larger and more elaborate map of the western hemisphere (held at the Winterthur Museum), employing the same colors and types of stitches on an off-white silk background (fig. 2). The lushly articulated trees and flowers surrounding both cartouches are of the same technique and form, and each embroiderer paid careful attention to lines of longitude and latitude. With extra-heavy embroidery Franklin highlighted the configuration of the United States within the North American continent, the same national boundaries appearing in the Lewis sampler. Both maps reflect the visual acuity and dexterity of youthful seamstresses who were already advanced in needlework.

The new Pleasant Valley School advertised in the June 7, 1803, issue of *The Poughkeepsie Journal, & Constitutional Republican,* offering instruction in "most kinds of Needle Work …" including "working maps" (fig. 3):

Boarding School at
Pleasant Valley
Ann Shipley, Agnes Dean, and
Phebe Shipley
Respectfully inform their friends and the public, that they
have this day opened a BOARDING SCHOOL for Female
Education, at Pleasant-Valley, near Poughkeepsie; where
GIRLS from six of age and upwards, will be boarded
and instructed in different branches of learning, on the fol-
lowing terms, viz.
Reading and Plain Sewing at 20 Dols. Per Quarter
Grammar, Writing, Arithmetic, and most
kinds of Needle Work… 25 " "
Geography, Working Maps, the
Use of the Globes &c. 30 " "
One quarter's advance with each scholar will be expected.
Strict attention will be paid, not only to the education, but
to the morals and behavior of those pupils who may be
placed under their care.
N. B. Books and Stationery will be provided free of expense.
Pleasant-Valley, 6th mo. 1St, 1803.

2. "Map Sampler of North and South America," Mary M. Franklin. Silk, chenille, paint, and ink on silk, 20 1/3 x 23 3/4 in. Pleasant Valley, New York (1808). Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware (bequest of Henry Francis Du Pont, 1957.0552). Click image to enlarge in new window.

Furthermore, the announcement explicitly emphasized geography as essential to the well-rounded education of young women who might someday nurture into adulthood a society of moral American citizens. As Martin Brückner has written, geographic literacy and map skills in the early republic came to be understood as vital to the education of young Americans in a new democratic nation where territorial expansion and the cohesion of distinct states were imperative to national success. Through the creative configuration of lines and shapes upon a two-dimensional surface, maps of the United States instilled—visually and aesthetically—the notion of a collective national identity.

3. Advertisement for the Pleasant Valley Boarding School from The Poughkeepsie Journal, and Constitutional Republican (June 7, 1803). Image reproduced by

permission of ProQuest, www.proquest.com.

4. “An Accurate Map of the United States of America, according to the Treaty of Peace of 1783,” Smith, Reid, and Wayland, from the American Atlas, ink on paper, 16 ½ x 10 2/3 in (New York, 1796). Courtesy of the David Rumsey Historic Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

Embroidered maps and globes were among the first cartographic objects to be made and used in the classroom in the United States, though only a limited number of establishments offered such instruction. Those families who were fortunate enough to have a daughter attending such a school typically displayed map samplers as decorative household items alongside other fancy needlework to showcase a young lady’s educational and cultural accomplishments, sometimes for the benefit of potential suitors. Female education in the American colonies and early republic customarily included instruction in needlework, from plain sewing to more elaborate needle arts; even when girls and boys studied side by side in the same schools, girls typically received sewing and embroidery lessons while boys learned surveying, a skill understood as indispensable in a nation of new landowners and expanding territories.

4a. Detail, Smith, Reid, and Wayland atlas map of the United States. Region encompassing the present-day states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

After students had spent long hours constructing their maps—having carefully fingered every textured line—the names and shapes of each political unit would remain entrenched in both mental and muscle memory. As the nineteenth century progressed, American youth increasingly learned their geographies experientially through three-dimensional cartographic objects that capitalized upon a multi-pronged engagement of the students’ senses, unlike the nearly exclusive reliance on memorization of the written word in previous centuries (more of these pedagogical objects can be seen in the accompanying image gallery. The practice of sewing maps waned by the 1840s with the normalization of female education, as girls joined their male counterparts in drawing maps on paper.

Far less common than in England, where eighteenth and early nineteenth-century map publishers circulated patterns in magazines and sold pre-printed fabric to be worked by fashionable ladies, nineteenth-century schoolgirl maps in the United States were largely copied onto fabric either by the student or instructor. Lewis’s map does not, in fact, reflect the state of the union in 1809, but instead matches a historic map drawn according to the Treaty of Peace of 1783, which later appeared in an atlas published in 1796 (fig. 4). Distortions in the atlas map, such as the shapes of Michigan and Lake Superior, are replicated in the Lewis map, and the spellings of Indian and place names

are also copied letter for letter. East and West Florida are divided, and Alabama and Mississippi have not yet been defined (fig. 4a). Organized states do not yet appear north and west of Pennsylvania on either map. Perhaps more remarkably, the embroiderer has strictly adhered to the curvature and placement of the longitudinal and latitudinal lines along the numbered border, which demonstrates a comprehension of cartography that transcended the merely decorative. That Lewis or her teacher chose a map of the newly independent United States suggests that the exercise may have been part of a history lesson, or perhaps influenced by her own family's illustrious participation in that history.

The Journey West

As is often the case in the lifespan of objects, the sampler survived long beyond its maker, passing from the hands of one daughter to the next through the next three generations. In 1813, Lewis had married Samuel Carman, a physician whose family lived near her boarding school. In the early 1850s—four decades after making the sampler—Lewis and her family moved to Madison, Wisconsin, a fledgling town in a region identified on her sampler as the domain of the "Outigamis" and "Chipawas." The map ostensibly made the westward journey to Wisconsin with Lewis sometime between 1850, when the Carmans were recorded as living in Ridgeway, New York, and 1854, when the family appeared on the member list of Madison's First Congregational Church. The object materially traced Lewis's own cross-country emigration: like its maker, the silken rectangle bearing an obsolete image of the early republic had weathered four long decades and over a thousand miles of travel when it arrived in the Old Northwest Territory.

5. On the Road, Thomas Proudley Otter, oil on canvas, 22 1/8 x 45 3/8 in. (1860). Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

At the time Lewis executed her map, Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery had only recently returned from the search for a Pacific route to Asia, and national lawmakers remained skeptical about the feasibility of stretching and maintaining federal oversight over a vast and distant continental interior (a territory largely absent from Lewis's map). Whereas the openness of the territory east of the "Mississipi" River invites the eye westward, the heavily embroidered river functions visually and tangibly as a vertical border, bringing the viewer's eyes back into the space of the map. Only at the most northwesterly source of the river, signaled by the pointed western tip of Lake Superior, does one find a visual outlet and the possibility, perhaps a lure, to venture further into an unarticulated and largely unknown interior.

The Lewis sampler, based on a 1783 map, did not include the vast lands acquired

in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, which had doubled the size of the nation—here the letters of the word “Louisiana” lie vertically parallel to the Mississippi River, thereby constructing another, yet more porous, visual boundary. Indian names sprawled across the region north and west of the Ohio River spell out a vast but vague and unorganized native presence. The absence of engraved political borders between indigenous nations suggests to the viewer a lack of knowledge on the part of the cartographer from whom the embroiderer received the information, but it might also be read as a silent mediation that erases actual British, French, and Indian presence. Furthermore, the space also communicates a kind of geographic emptiness that might be filled by the reader’s imagination, as well as the notion that indigenous peoples had little official claim over this uncharted territory—territory that Native people had occupied for millennia and about which they had sophisticated geographic knowledge.

As the nation rapidly expanded in the following decades, many Americans came to perceive the continent itself as a vast fabric upon which the technologies of steam power, telegraph, and rail lines constituted the threads that bound the nation together. Contemporaneous writers observed that the iron rails and wooden ties connecting distant populations “stitched” one region to another, as did the printed hatched lines of rail routes on maps. By compositionally correlating the right and left picture borders with the east and west coordinates of the American map, artists who imaged westward emigration after mid-century routinely treated the picture plane as a cartographic surface upon which to inscribe the ideologies of Manifest Destiny, the Euro-American imperative to populate the continent. This compositional trope coincided with a golden era in United States cartography and the corresponding mass democratic dissemination of printed maps that encouraged many citizens to think of the nation and the picture plane as a map. For example, in his 1860 painting *On the Road,* Pennsylvania artist Thomas P. Otter contrasted the streamlined, sun-kissed trajectory of rail travel with the dirt-lined, winding route taken by a lumbering Conestoga wagon (fig. 5). (The painting was likely commissioned by Matthias W. Baldwin and Joseph H. Harrison, locomotive manufacturers for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, who would have had a vested interest in showcasing the sleek efficiency of modern railroad technology.) In the context of the American cartographic boom, Otter’s small slice of road might be understood as a fragmentary piece of a longer itinerary on contemporaneous railroad maps, some of which featured small train icons crawling along the engraved routes. Similarly, the stone mile marker in the foreground identifies Otter as the image’s maker, not wholly unlike the role played by a cartouche on a map.

6. Cover and title page to The Western Tourist and Emigrant’s Guide Through the States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin … J.H. Colton and J. Calvin Smith, ink on paper, gilding on cloth, board, 6 1/3 x 4 1/3 in. (New York, 1851). David Rumsey Historic Map Collection,

www.davidrumsey.com.

At mid-century the nation possessed contiguous land extending westward to the Pacific Ocean, and romantic tales of the Oregon Trail and the California Gold Rush dominated the American imaginary. But in actuality more people—in the tens of thousands—were moving into and taking up residence in the Mississippi Valley. Like so many other Yankees, the extended Carman family moved westward in search of new possibilities, and similarly, may have used one of the many portable pocket guides, such as *Colton's Western Tourist and Emigrant's Guide,* which offered geographical statistics, travel advice, large fold-out maps, and appealing inducements in the form of cheap land and agricultural promise (fig. 6).

Most emigrants came to Wisconsin through the port of Milwaukee by way of Great Lakes steamers and the Erie Canal, but the Carmans may have opted for rail travel. It would not have been so straightforward as suggested by Otter's picture, however, given that there were no direct rail lines to Chicago—only a rhizomatic web of shorter connections averaging nineteen miles between hinterland towns on non-standardized gauges. One young man arriving in Milwaukee from Cleveland at the time, for example, transferred through four different railroads, with extended intermediary stretches by stage coach. An 1851 railroad map illustrates the tangled arteries of main lines and their "tributaries" that emigrants had to navigate (figs. 7 and 7a). The horizontality of the map, nevertheless, pulls the eye visually along linear branches that reach left/westward. Wisconsin first introduced rail travel in 1850 along an unassuming ten-mile stretch from Milwaukee toward Waukesha; therefore, the Carmans would have had to traverse many miles by stage, a jolting affair over rough "newborn" roads that, in the words of Frederika Bremer en route to Madison in 1849, were "no roads at all." The family, however, would have found a growing town of about 3,000—as well as many of the amenities they needed for living—where only eighteen log cabins had stood the decade before.

Wisconsin

On Lewis's map, bare ivory silk fills the empty spaces between boundaries, but by the time the Carmans emigrated, new maps reflected the work of thousands of surveyors who had dissected and subdivided Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and the southern part of Wisconsin into rectilinear counties, townships, and sections according to the Land Ordinance of 1785, the Jeffersonian mandate for organizing unmeasured land for new property ownership. The result was a filled-in geometric pattern that represented to many Euro-Americans the rich potential for further growth and opportunity in an already organized, well-ordered land. Maps of these young states, like the large fold-out version that accompanied the J. H. Colton emigrant's guide, resembled patchwork quilts in four colors that easily accommodated the addition of ever more rectangles (figs. 8 and 8a). Wisconsin won statehood in 1848 and, like other Midwestern states, witnessed

explosive population growth—from 31,000 in 1840 to 305,000 by 1850. The stark contrast between these officially printed maps from the 1850s and the one made by Lewis reveals the massive changes taking place in the land of the "Outigamis" and "Chipawas" in just four decades. One might imagine that an expansive gridded blanket had been laid over the open spaces of the Lewis sampler.

7. "Map Of The Western Railroads Tributary to Philadelphia, With Their Rival Lines," Charles Ellet, ink and hand-coloring on paper, 15 ¾ x 31 ½ in. (Philadelphia, 1851). David Rumsey Historic Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

7a. Detail, W. Williams, "Map Of The Western Railroads Tributary to Philadelphia, With Their Rival Lines."

Identified in the upper section of the sampler, the Chippewas ("Chipawas")—also known as the Ojibwe peoples of the upper Great Lakes—formed an Anishinaabe alliance that included the Odawas ("Utawas" or Ottawas). The Meskwaki or Fox peoples, called the Outagamies in the Anishinaabe language, allied themselves with the Sauks farther south. (The obsolete name survives on maps of Wisconsin in the form of Outagamie County.) But the Dakota, Ho-Chunk, and Menominee peoples also claimed large portions of the region as their homes. Lewis had placed the "Nadowessis," a Dakota tribe, in the far north. Indigenous presence in Wisconsin was never static and, in fact, constituted a complex, fluid web of intercultural alliances, interactions, and negotiations as large numbers of refugees from eastern tribes had flooded the region earlier, pushed westward by Euro-American settlement and the powerful Iroquois. In other words, change marked the lands west of Lake Michigan long before surveyors' gridded maps made visible the influx of white American settlers. Lewis's map does not address this complexity, nor does it mark the presence of thousands of indigenous peoples who, despite mounting pressures to move westward, continued to make their homes in the eastern states. Native Wisconsin villages often counted among their residents people from several different tribes, and intermarriage with itinerant and transplanted French traders since the mid-seventeenth century had also contributed to the multicultural presence throughout the Great Lakes region. Despite these changing geographic and sociopolitical circumstances, a number of tribes nevertheless maintained cultural and ethnic sovereignty. Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, however, many native residents faced displacement to territories west of the Mississippi, and in a succession of treaties to make way for white emigrants like the Carmans, the large Ojibwe population was forced to concede nearly two-thirds of northern Wisconsin by 1842, leaving them with a much reduced land base. The diminishment of sovereign territory was a pattern experienced, likewise, by many other tribal peoples and native villagers in Wisconsin during these decades.

It is unknown whether Lewis's death in 1855 was caused by illness or perhaps

the toll of the thousand-mile odyssey across the national map, but the schoolgirl sampler survived remarkably intact. With forethought to the object's preservation and recognition of its historical significance, Lewis's great-granddaughter Alice Palmer Washington entrusted the family heirloom to the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1984, yet another resting place on the map's own passage through time and space from the moment when a young lady put needle to silk along the Hudson River.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express thanks and appreciation to the staff at the American Antiquarian Society and the Wisconsin Historical Society for their assistance in making this article possible, and to column editors Ellery Foutch and Sarah Carter for their inspiration and thoughtful editorial guidance. Much gratitude also goes to David Rumsey for the generous provision of images from his esteemed historical map collection.

Further Reading:

The Cecilia Lewis map has been displayed for public view at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and in a 2007 Chicago exhibit sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution. It has also appeared in Betty Ring's comprehensive text, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Needlework, 1650-1850*, vol. II (New York, 1993). Ring's books are an excellent resource for further reading on Quaker and other historic needlework in the United States. The accompanying image gallery features additional examples of schoolgirl embroidered maps, as well as other nineteenth-century objects used in teaching geography. As the century progressed, American-made map puzzles, geographic board games, and portable globes responded to new pedagogical philosophies and needs, and geography lessons continued to serve as vehicles for teaching patriotism, United States history, and concepts about space and place from an American perspective.

To read more about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century schoolgirl embroidery in the United States, see Gloria Seaman Allen, *Columbia's Daughters: Girlhood Embroidery from the District of Columbia* (Baltimore, 2012), *A Maryland Sampling: Girlhood Embroidery, 1738-1860* (Baltimore, 2007), and Mary Jaene Edmonds, *Samplers and Samplermakers: An American Schoolgirl Art, 1700-1850* (New York and Los Angeles, 1991). Geographer Judith Tyner has written a number of articles on embroidered maps and globes: "Geography Through the Needle's Eye," *The Map Collector* 66 (Spring 1994): 3-7; "The World in Silk: Embroidered Globes of Westtown School," *The Map Collector* 74 (Spring 1996): 11-14; and "Following the Thread: The Origins and Diffusion of Embroidered Maps," *Mercator's World* 6:2 (March/April 2001): 36-41.



8. Foldout map from The Western Tourist and Emigrant’s Guide Through the States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin… J.H. Colton and J. Calvin Smith, ink and hand coloring on paper, 21 1/2 x 29 1/2 in.(New York, 1851). David Rumsey Historic Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

For a thorough, insightful analysis of geographic education in the early republic, see Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (2006). Susan Schulten examined Emma Willard’s influential role in nineteenth-century geographic education in “Emma Willard and the graphic foundations of American history,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 542-564. For a history of nineteenth-century female education, see Margaret A. Nash,*Women’s Education in the United States* (New York, 2005). Historian Richard White unraveled the complex threads of Indian and European occupation and interaction in the upper Midwest in his groundbreaking text, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge and New York, 1991). To learn more about Wisconsin, see Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison, Wis., 1989).



8a. Detail, Colton and Smith, foldout map from The Western Tourist and Emigrant’s Guide Through the States of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin…

To read more about themes of progress and westward emigration in American landscape art, see Patricia Hills, “Picturing Progress in the Era of Manifest Destiny,” in William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington and London, 1991) and Roger Cushing Aikin, “Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation,” *American Art* 14 (Autumn, 2000): 78-89.

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Pilgrims in Print: Indigenous Readers Encounter John Bunyan



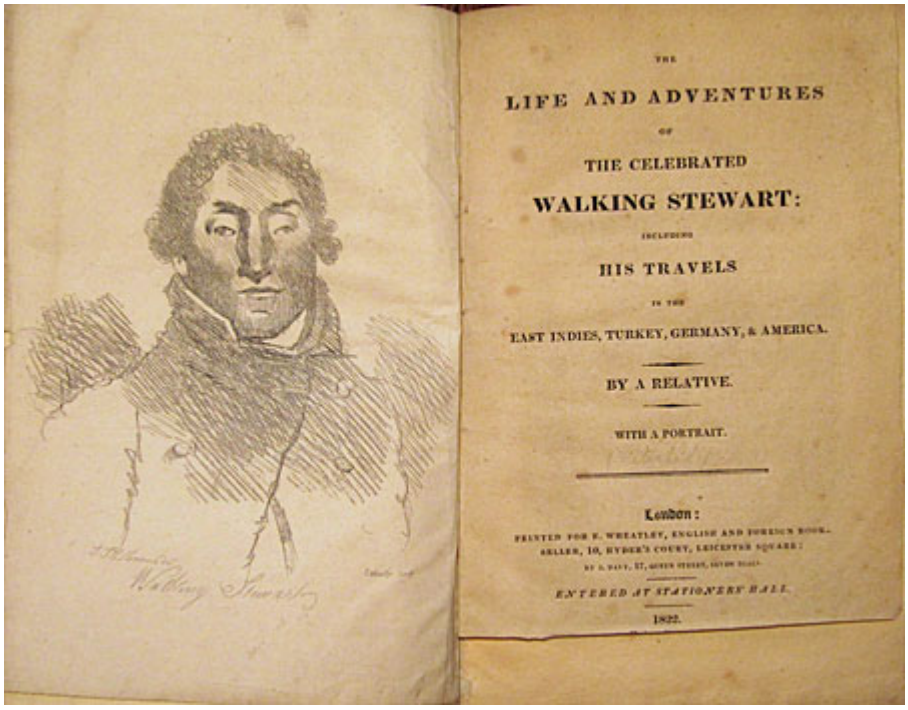
For all its virtues, something was lost in translation.

A Passion for Places: The geographic turn in early American history



Why are early Americanists so obsessed with region—with geography, in short—rather than with chronology?

[Cosmic Kinship: John Stewart's "Sensate Matter" in the Early Republic]



John Stewart sat hunched in the wooden cage that swung from the ship's horizontal mainyard, riding out a storm off the coast of India. The rough weather went on for "a considerable time," but Stewart was content with his

mode of travel, given the alternative. The Muslim captain blamed the storm on Stewart and had threatened to throw the infidel traveler into the waves. Stewart could thank his lucky stars and his quick wit: he had persuaded the captain to raise him off the deck instead, technically removing the offending passenger from the ship while avoiding murder at the same time. As Stewart's cage swayed back and forth above the pitching boat, he used the time to work out his philosophy. For these ideas he would have been drowned, had he not quickly agreed to fold his six-foot frame into a chicken coop.

Stewart's understanding of the cosmos, shaped by his encounter with Hinduism in India in the 1760s and '70s, would later intrigue and sometimes offend his American listeners as well. In the early republic Stewart's cosmology did not usually frighten people, but neither did it gain widespread support. Rather, his unconventional notions became part of the transatlantic swirl of heterodox ideas that engaged people who were living through a time of immense political upheaval. Drastic political and social change called for new ways of thinking about the human condition, and some people were willing to consider unfamiliar approaches. Stewart's own rethinking of the universe was an idiosyncratic blend of what he learned from English freethinkers, Hindu yogis, and French revolutionaries. His compilation of ideas was eclectic, but no less earnest for all that. Given everything he'd seen, he hoped for a fundamental and peaceful change in the way human beings relate to one another and to all living things. Stewart believed he held the key to universal contentment, and he felt compelled to share this important message with anyone who would listen.

Stewart's cosmology began with a fundamental monism: the entire cosmos is made of a singular substance composed of the tiniest particles in constant motion. These moving particles, in endless recombination, form all that exists in the universe. When an organism dies, its constituent particles are reorganized to form something else. This motion of matter goes on eternally; particles are never lost, just recombined. Stewart found the idea of a single, shared substance immensely exciting. It meant everything is connected, everything is related, everything is *kin*.

> Stewart's urgent message was therefore a pacifist one: stop immediately all killing of humans and other animals, end slavery, and live peacefully, or everything in the universe will eventually pay the price.

But there was more. During his sojourn in India, Stewart had come to believe that the tiniest particles register the sensations experienced by the larger organism they constitute. These sensations are not fleeting. They remain within the individual particles as these morph from one life form into the next, so that feelings of pleasure and pain accrue over time in the matter that makes up all things. The important lesson for Stewart was this: the happiness and sorrow that people cause themselves and other beings are not ephemeral feelings. These

sensations are retained on the level of atoms and continue to affect all other living things into the future, including future versions of oneself. The eternal recombination of matter ensures that pain experienced by one living being will eventually be experienced by every other organism. To inflict pain of any kind increases the suffering of the universe.

Stewart's urgent message was therefore a pacifist one: stop immediately all killing of humans and other animals, end slavery, and live peacefully, or everything in the universe will eventually pay the price. Stewart saw gentleness and generosity as matters of obvious self-interest, a gift to one's own future forms. Meanwhile, religiously based norms of moral conduct were not only misguided, they were entirely unnecessary. No sentient deity figured in Stewart's cosmology of eternally existent matter, no Creator-God observed human conduct, certainly no divine judge sent souls to heaven or cast them into a fiery pit. Immaterial souls did not exist, and neither did heaven or hell. No wonder a frightened ship captain praying for mercy in a storm wanted the proponent of such heresy removed from the deck of his endangered boat.

Stewart's airborne voyage over the waves was only one of many harrowing experiences during decades of travel that would eventually bring him to the United States. As a youth, the London-born son of a Scottish linen draper flamboyantly thwarted school discipline and flunked out of two prestigious boarding schools in England. The teenaged drop-out cheerfully relocated to Madras, India, in 1763, to work as a writer for the British East India Company. Shocked by the corruption he witnessed, Stewart wrote to the company's court of directors describing the extortion and abuse routinely done in the company's name. He also expressed his boredom, writing that he "was born for nobler pursuits, and higher attainments, than to be a copier of invoices and bills of lading to a company of grocers, haberdashers, and cheesemongers." Stewart left the company in 1765 and set out to explore his surroundings. When he wandered into territory governed by the anti-British ruler of Mysore, Hyder Ali, Stewart found himself essentially a captive. Out of these lemons he made lemonade, becoming first an interpreter and then a military commander under Ali. Stewart took part in battles that left him wounded in one arm and with a visible dent in his skull. When Stewart requested permission to seek out a European surgeon, Ali granted this request but, suspecting Stewart of treason, ordered his escorts to murder him at the border. Only a swift swim across a river saved Stewart from being killed.

Clever and charismatic, Stewart next became an aid and then personal secretary to Muhammed Ali Khan Wallajah, the (pro-British) Nawab of Arcot. Proving himself capable, Stewart rose to the rank of prime minister. By the late 1770s, the twenty-something Stewart had saved £3,000 and felt it was time to move on. He began the tour on foot that gave him the nickname "Walking" Stewart, traversing India, Africa, and many countries on the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas before arriving in London in about 1783. Still restless, he set out again the following year to walk through much of Europe and central Asia before returning to London by 1790. His next voyage took him to Canada and the United

States, where he spent a number of months in 1791.

William Thomas Brande, a professor of chemistry at the Royal Institution in London who was related to Stewart by marriage, anonymously published this commemorative pamphlet shortly after Stewart's death. The Life and Adventures of the Celebrated Walking Stewart: Including his Travels in the East Indies, Turkey, Germany, & America. By a relative. (London: Printed for E. Wheatley, English and Foreign Bookseller … by J. Davy, 1822). Photograph courtesy of the author.

Stewart was a talker as well as a walker, and everywhere he went he held lectures, planned and impromptu, about sensate matter. Tall and of striking appearance, sporting an increasingly threadbare Armenian coat, and polyglot (he was said to be fluent in eight languages), Stewart was a conspicuous missionary for his cause. Even so, his first visit to North America left few traces in the written record. One mention comes from Benjamin Rush, the eminent Philadelphia physician, who spoke with Stewart on three consecutive days in October 1791. After the first meeting, Rush wrote in his Commonplace book that Stewart "appears to be a man of strong powers, of great eloquence, much observation; but to have started without fixed principles on any subject." On the second day, over breakfast and again at tea time, Stewart regaled the physician with stories from his travels, and Rush recorded some of the details. Stewart told Rush he had been called eccentric, and Rush noted Stewart's response: "while the centre of ordinary conduct was Error, he wished to be in a state of eccentricity from it for ever." On the third day, Rush wrote, Stewart "visited me this morning and for 15 minutes talked unintelligibly. I discovered that he was a materialist and an Atheist. He said 'he was in search of the origin of moral motion.'" Rush found the gregarious Stewart intriguing, perplexing, and perhaps somewhat disappointing.

In general, Stewart's first trip to the United States was a bust. His relative, the English chemist William Thomas Brande, later recounted that a few Americans who were "acquainted with the writings of the celebrated European free-thinkers, received him with the utmost respect" and helped him promote his cause. But "the major part of the population heard him with apathy, and even dislike." Brande attributed this cold reception to the "innumerable" religious sects that "observed a strict union amongst themselves" and shunned those of unlike mind. Especially in the country's interior, Brande wrote, Stewart encountered little philanthropy and "utter ignorance." This vexing experience led Stewart to shorten his stay and return to England.

Back in London, Stewart came in with a group of radical freethinkers and social reformers, most notably Thomas Paine, his fellow lodger at the White Bear in Piccadilly and soon his fast friend. William Godwin, by contrast, thought Stewart quite a bore. The self-impressed Stewart, who considered himself "the paragon of his species, and the acme of intellectual energy," returned the

favor, rating his own thinking far bolder than Godwin's. His conceit notwithstanding, Stewart was part of a loose circle of freethinkers that included Godwin and his equally infamous wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, the bookseller Thomas Clio Rickman, the American poet and diplomat Joel Barlow, and the Scottish radical John Oswald.

Oswald and Stewart had much to talk about, since Oswald had unwittingly followed in John Stewart's footsteps to India. Yet Oswald's political development provides a stark contrast to Stewart as well. Oswald arrived in Bombay in 1782 as the officer of a Scottish infantry regiment sent to fight Hyder Ali (the Mysore ruler for whom Stewart had fought in the 1770s). Like Stewart, Oswald soon became disgusted with British colonial oppression. He deserted the army, lived with Brahmins, and adopted some of their practices, including vegetarianism. A professed atheist and critic of Christianity, Oswald loved the Hindu concept of universal sympathy for all living creatures. He eventually traveled through Persia and back to England, everywhere advocating vegetarianism and animal rights.


Prospectus of a Series of Lectures, or a New Practical System of Human Reason, by John Stewart (Philadelphia, 1796). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Oswald combined his concern for all living beings with radical democratic politics. In his pieces for the *London Mercury*, Oswald lambasted the corruptions of Parliament and called for universal enfranchisement. Even the system of electing representatives to conduct political business seemed to Oswald inferior to direct democracy. He believed people in every region should gather to discuss important issues, and every person should cast a vote. Laws should pass only with ninety percent of popular approval. Oswald's egalitarian politics found expression in his vegetarianism, which he saw as an act of solidarity with other species as well as with people who could not afford to eat meat. Meat producers who enclosed land for livestock displaced the tenants who had lived there. Inordinate amounts of grass and grain went into making meat for well-to-do carnivores. To eat meat was to participate in a system of economic oppression and social injustice. The same year his close friend Thomas Paine published *Rights of Man*, Oswald made his views known in *The cry of Nature, or, an Appeal to mercy and to justice on behalf of the persecuted animals* (1791). He deplored the callousness and cruelty with which humans slaughtered, cut, chewed, and swallowed their fellow creatures, perversely overriding the natural law of universal sympathy.

While Stewart shared Oswald's passion for avoiding meat, the two differed in their political radicalism. Oswald moved to revolutionary France and became a member of the Jacobin Club, the *Cercle Social*, and a close collaborator with the leader of the Girondins, Jacques-Pierre Brissot. (It was Brissot who nominated Oswald and Paine for honorary French citizenship.) In his fervor to

create an egalitarian society, Oswald called for the deaths of traitors to this revolutionary vision. Killing was certainly evil, Oswald knew, but before peace could be assured, the oppressors must be removed … by killing them. Thomas Paine was remembered to have put it this way to Oswald: “you have lived so long without tasting flesh, that you now have a most voracious appetite for blood.” Oswald did indeed have a strange way of calling for the deaths of people while eating his tenderly prepared roots and herbs. He secretly helped plan a French invasion of England, and in 1793 he organized and led the First Battalion of Volunteer Pikemen (the Picquiers), who sought to quell royalist sympathizers in the Vendée region. The use of pikes in hand-to-hand combat meant killing in its most immediate and raw form. Where was the cry of nature for sympathy with fellow creatures? Oswald died in battle for the revolutionary cause.

John Stewart had a very different experience in Paris. He enjoyed the company of French philosophers and the poet William Wordsworth, who was, in turn, impressed with Stewart’s eloquence. At first Stewart supported the political changes afoot, but his initial enthusiasm soon gave way to alarm about the surge in popular violence. Then revolutionaries confiscated his money. Stewart left precipitously in 1792, repulsed by “the most dreadful symptoms of mob government” and skeptical about the prospects for political revolution. By the time Oswald died in battle and Paine sat in a Paris jail, Stewart was safely back in London. He remained critical of political corruption and of imperialism, but he felt affirmed in his elitist distrust of street-level democratic action. He would ever after advise against too much democracy, and he would never advocate sudden change, even about matters of egregious immorality, such as slavery.

The transformation Stewart sought would come about entirely without violence and through the simple act of adopting his cosmology. When human beings grasp the concept—and, Stewart would say, the reality—of sensate matter, when they understand that every act of charity or cruelty is, in a sense, “paid forward” to future versions of themselves, then bare self-interest will inevitably bring pacifism, vegetarianism, and universal sympathy with all living things. Universal benevolence will spread as the natural result of the insight of “homo-ousia,” that all of nature is made up of one, shared substance. This was Stewart’s message to everyone he encountered. It was his response to the promise and the paranoia of this revolutionary age, his own attempt to promote fundamental change while avoiding the terrifying anarchy and violence he had witnessed in revolutionary France. Intellectually radical and socially and politically conservative, Stewart hoped his ideas would remake the world without shedding a drop of blood.

When most Londoners showed only uncomprehending condescension for his vision of a gently radical “homo-ousia,” Stewart turned his sights once more to North America. Perhaps this time Americans would give his cosmology a better hearing. Ever the optimist, Stewart harbored great hopes for the United States as the seedbed for gradual and peaceful transformation. The physical size of the nation, Stewart thought, and its commitment to “absolute liberty of the press,”

gave room for disagreements of any kind. Stewart had his doubts about a democratic republic in which every male citizen had a political voice, and he openly preferred leadership by the educated classes. But he believed that in America political disagreements could occur “without annihilating the domestic peace.” He also appreciated the many utopian communities under way: “quakers, moravians, dunkers, etc. etc. have all established new institutions of domestic life.” Some groups even held property in common. These religious communities could never fully succeed, Stewart thought, because they were based on “superstition.” But at least such experiments could thrive without suppression or persecution. In a country that allowed a broad range of expression, Stewart’s lectures would, he trusted, far surpass religious sects in moving humanity toward perfectability.

When John Stewart arrived in New York in 1795, he received a warm welcome. In the years since his last visit, freethinkers in places like New York and Philadelphia had created societies and newspapers that fostered openly skeptical discussion of organized religion and supernatural beliefs. Some booksellers carried the latest heretical works from France. Maybe the time was right for Stewart to make a big splash. He opened by publishing a thirty-five-page poem about his cosmology, *The Revelation of Nature*. By December, Stewart was in Philadelphia for a series of twelve weekly “Conversations,” held on Saturday evenings in the large assembly room of Oellers hotel, with 300 tickets available for purchase ($1 each) at Mr. Dobson’s book store. In 1796, Stewart issued a sixteen-page pamphlet that sketched out the lectures he had on offer for any audience, anywhere. That same year, James Sharples, the successful portraitist of many leading political figures in the early republic, made a pastel likeness of Stewart, and reprints appeared in bookstores. In some circles, “John Stewart, the Traveller,” became a minor celebrity, and he stepped into the role with gusto.

By all accounts, Stewart had an impressive talent for extemporaneous speech. His lengthy lectures are not recorded, but we can get a sense of his message from his poem, *The Revelation of Nature*. The poem opens with “nature’s voice” describing the universe as matter in motion:

Hear nature’s voice, the universe I am,
One whole of matter indistructible
All modes of being my constituent parts;
Connected links on matters circled chain.
Exchanging modes, by death renewing life.

Stewart had some quirky and possibly original ideas, but the notion of matter’s endless rotation through myriad forms was not one of them. This idea had roots in ancient India and Greece, and a modern version of it—in the form of a well-worn edition of Pope’s *Essay on Man*—accompanied Stewart on all his travels. More surprising was Stewart’s description of *how* matter moved. Stewart maintained that all organisms continuously and involuntarily emit particles into their surroundings, and instantly those particles merge with other forms

they encounter. Stewart remained vague about the process of “emission” and “absorption,” but he described how a writer who takes a stroll unwittingly exudes atoms that become part of the air, part of the grass, part of the sheep grazing nearby. The transference is swift and ongoing. Soon one’s particle might be part of another planet:

The human atom that this moment writes,
The next perhaps is bleating on the plain,
Thence enters herb, or earth, or air,
Or moves thro’ planets in the solar sphere…

Stewart may have returned to the United States to deliver these advertized lectures. “The Lyceum, or, School of Philosophy; by John Stewart, the Traveller. A Course of Lectures on the Human Understanding …” (ca. 1804). Broadsides Collection, Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The truly transformative idea, the one Stewart thought would change the world, was the notion that individual atoms register sensation, including pain. When an atom jumps from one creature to the next, the atom experiences the sensations of the being it just joined. To explain what this means, Stewart asked his audience to imagine a person beating another creature. When atoms from the perpetrator jump to the victim, the perpetrator is inflicting violence upon part of himself. Stewart put it this way:

Think not O man! my dear coequal part,
That change awaits a slow dissolving death;
O no! that arm that dares uplift the goad
On brute or man, some wretched atom flies
(In flux emissive and absorptive changed)
Ere falls the stroke, incorporate with brute…

We might call this instant karma that occurs on the level of atoms. Stewart’s cosmology was radically equalizing, as—at least on the level of atoms—the oppressor instantly becomes the victim:

See matter transmute in the present life,
The tyrant atom that prepares the rod,
Next moment slave to feel the stroke it will’d,
Whirl’d in emission and absorption’s tides,
The matter forcing turn to matter forc’d;
Now jockey riding and now steed bestrode,
Now Lord imposing and now Hind impos’d.

Many questions about this process remained unanswered, but Stewart found the very idea of shared and sensate matter so compelling, so persuasive on its

face, that it required no empirical evidence. The lack of corroboration from natural philosophers concerned Stewart not at all. In general, he was persuaded by his own thinking more than by anything to be learned in books. (He did read Locke, Rousseau, Mirabeau, and Bolingbroke, if only to enjoy pointing out their limitations.) A self-proclaimed autodidact, Stewart disdained the scholarship "spun out in musty volumes of recorded error." He deplored the memorization of a "rubbish of detail, which oppresses the judgment, and renders learned ignorance incurable." He especially disdained analytical philosophy and all manner of logical propositions that lead down rabbit holes of error. Precious few intellectual forerunners received his praise: Spinoza, the first human who "got a glimpse of the totality," and Helvétius, who "pushed on Spinosa's doctrines." But Stewart's approval of these men was not the admiration of a follower, because "long before their voices reached me, I had acquired a comprehensive view of the tree of existence."

Instead of book-learning, Stewart advocated a form of meditation: using one's imagination while contemplating the unified cosmos. Focused contemplation could "open a new source of mental powers." The mind "dwells upon its object, till every possible relation is discovered, not in a particular and separate series, but in its universality of relation or unity, with all existence." Contemplation brings a holistic understanding of nature, an awareness of the unified whole.

Stewart would have been pleased to see his work included in a nineteenth-century compendium of radical thinkers. Table of contents from The Bible of Nature, and Substance of Virtue. Condensed from the Scripture of Eminent Cosmians, Pantheists and Physiphilanthropists, of Various Ages and Climes (Albany, 1842). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Stewart's fundamental conviction was this: recognition of sensate matter leads naturally to compassionate conduct toward even the most humble life forms. Take the example of a man plagued by gout. When he eats, the exchange of atoms in his stomach transfers his physical pain to the food he imbibes. While creatures must eat to survive, every unnecessary mouthful the sick man swallows "is gratuitous anguish, transferred to brute matter, his fellow being." To torture even a single atom in a leaf of lettuce increases the pain in all of nature. Those who understand this have a sense of cosmic kinship, a sensibility we can see in the "homo-ousiast" or "man of nature" who "fears to communicate pain to the crust he eats." Stewart lauded the tenderness such a person feels for every "sensitive fellow being; he would lift the worm from the path, lest some heedless fool might crush it, and save the drowning fly from his tea cup; he never could be the tyrant of his species, or a torpid link upon the chain of being." Through all-encompassing compassion and the careful avoidance of violence in everyday life, the enlightened man becomes "the universal self, or

man-god."

Stewart's materialist cosmology required—then and now—a mind-bending reconsideration of who and what matters. For him, human society was hardly the sole focus of reform. Any and all living organisms have an equal stake in the project of universal improvement. In this regard, Stewart anticipated by two centuries modern-day post-humanist theories. Consider the work of theorist Cary Wolfe, who discusses this "new reality: that the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects." For Wolfe, post-humanism means "an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited." Stewart's focus on compassion ("universal benevolence")—rather than "rights"—as the motivation for the ethical treatment of other living things, anticipates the objection of philosopher Cora Diamond to moral theories that base justice on rights alone and separate it from "mere" kindness. Jane Bennett rethinks "vibrant matter and lively things" that have agency and effect without necessarily having sentience or purpose. Like Stewart before her, Bennett reasons that accepting the vitality of matter logically leads to a different kind of politics of human interaction with the material world of which humans are one—but not a privileged—part. To be sure, Stewart understood that humans would continue to identify most with their own species. But he believed people around the world must learn to conceive in broader and less species-centric terms the great impact and hence responsibility of human actions. Only then would pain and suffering be reduced for the whole.

This shift in perception made Stewart's work, in his own opinion, the "most important discovery and instruction, that ever was offered to human nature." It would take time, of course, but ever since the violence of the French revolution, Stewart condoned only gradual change. The "speculative philosopher," wrote Stewart, "is no revolutionist in action, but a reformer of sentiment." The "reform of the mind will prepare the change of government, custom, and opinion, without the anarchy of revolution." Politically conservative, Stewart expressed surprise that his friend Thomas Paine still "idolizes the discretion of the multitude, in that very country, where experience has fully evinced their folly, cruelty, and incapacity of popular government." In Stewart's opinion, contemplative men of strong moral sense should lead the way, gently coaxing others to understand the truth of nature. Once people grasp the concept of sensate matter, the rest will take care of itself.

Stewart toured the United States for four years, lecturing on sensate matter and pleading for a supra-species allegiance to all living things. He may have had only one convert, a former Presbyterian minister gone freethinker. Elihu Palmer had given up his pulpit in New York in exchange for free-thought, and he found Stewart's ideas fascinating. After hearing John Stewart, Palmer explained a singular substance and shared sensation in his book, *Principles of Nature* (1801). Palmer also promoted Stewart in his newspaper, *Prospect: Or View of the Moral World* (1803-1805).

But even without many converts, Stewart gained a certain notoriety. Benjamin Rush met Stewart at least twice during this second visit. Rush noted in his Commonplace book what Stewart had to say about the plague in Turkey, but he made no mention this time of Stewart's views on matter. Rush likely rejected outright Stewart's materialist cosmology; certainly it lay on the outermost fringes of radical thought. And yet, for all their strangeness, Stewart's ideas became part of the spectrum of available opinion in the early republic. In an era that required a fundamental rethinking of politics and the social order, Stewart promoted a form of radical egalitarianism that would not produce social and political chaos. He did not persuade many, but his effort, at least, continued to meet with curiosity.



This reprint of Stewart's work added a vividly illustrated title page. "Opus Maximum, an Essay on Materialism," by John Stewart (New York, 1841) within The Bible of Nature, and Substance of Virtue. Condensed from the Scripture of Eminent Cosmians, Pantheists and Physiphilanthropists, of Various Ages and Climes. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Known as "the celebrated traveller," Stewart could always draw a crowd, although not without some controversy. In 1798, the Philadelphia *Gazette of the United States* reprinted a complaint that Stewart "goes from town to town, reading philosophical romances, *for money*." The writer attacked the contents of Stewart's lectures, warning that Stewart was akin to the demagogues of revolutionary France, those "travelling mountebank quacks who under pretext of enlightening the human mind, inspire it with fanaticism." The innocent listener gets caught up in the talk of doing good, and soon he becomes a violent "demoniac," ready to "smote his father, the throne, or the altar." Stewart, an Anglophile who approved of Federalists and their politics, would have scoffed at this description of himself as a rabid Jacobin. Still, the critic had rightly perceived Stewart's egalitarian materialism as, at least in theory, antithetical to the social order.

Controversy never stopped Stewart. In April of 1799, he got into a small scuffle with "A Serious Christian" in the *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, which may only have stoked public interest in him. In May, "the well known traveller" was in Baltimore delivering lectures on "the Human Mind." Newspapers in Philadelphia and New York noted that Stewart's "principles have been warmly and ably attacked in the public papers there, without the appearance of having produced conviction on either side." In August he lectured to audiences in Newport, Rhode Island. By the end of the year, however, Stewart decided to return to London. In four years of itinerant lecturing, he had made a name for himself in America, but not many converts. When a London newspaper announced on February 1, 1800, that "The celebrated walking Stewart has returned to this country after traversing various parts of America," the notice made its way into at least eight American newspapers from Rhode Island to South

Carolina. Of the readers who cared, probably a majority were glad to know Stewart was safely on the other side of the Atlantic.

Safely, but maybe not for good. Stewart still had high hopes for the United States. His conviction that Europe would succumb first to revolutionary anarchy and then to the dictatorship of military despots led him to see in America "the last asylum of civil liberty." His 1803 publication of *Opus Maximum* in London was dedicated to America, that "exalted and transcendent nation" which enjoys not only freedom of the press but also "the separation of religion from state policy." Stewart quite possibly returned to the United States a third time. Nicholas Low, owner of the Sans Souci hotel in upper state New York, wrote on a leaflet advertising Stewart's "School of Philosophy" that "Mr. Stewart proposes delivering his Lectures at the Hotel, Ballston Springs in July & August 1804." Another hint that Stewart returned to the United States appears in the introduction to a reprint of his work, which mentions that his pamphlet *The Conquest of the Moral World* was "written and printed in America, 1806." But more striking is the scant number of traces Stewart left in America after his return to London in 1800. The greatest fan of his work on sensate matter seems to have been Elihu Palmer in New York, who continued to promote Stewart's ideas.

Stewart spent the last decades of his life holding salons in his London home. At some point the East India Company settled the debts of the Nawab of Arcot and gave Stewart £10,000 in back-pay for his work in India. With this veritable fortune Stewart moved into a house at Charing Cross, decorated it with mirrors and chandeliers, and put on lavish salons. He hired professional musicians, ordered plentiful food and drink, and, of course, enlightened his guests with his signature lectures. Stewart also continued to travel and publish pamphlets, for example the *Roll of a Tennis Ball, Through the Moral World* (1812). He became a ubiquitous presence on the streets of London, and for a time his color-tinted portrait adorned shop windows. He walked five hours a day and could readily be found in St. James's Park or on Westminster Bridge discussing the unity of nature.

When he reached his seventies, Stewart began to suffer poor health. He strongly felt people should not long endure extreme suffering; it was good neither for them as individuals nor for the entirety of matter. Stewart had repeatedly said that should his life become painful "without hope of remedy," he would end it. He always found "this prospect of euthanasia" liberating: "it casts a cheerful light" over life. After some months of ill health, which a visit to the seaside town of Margate did not relieve, Stewart died at home. Some said it was the day after his birthday, others that an empty laudanum bottle was found in his room.

Stewart's younger friend, Thomas De Quincey (famous for his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*) remembered him fondly. Of course one must read Stewart's works "with some indulgence," De Quincey admitted. The titles were pretentious, the composition "lax and imprecise," the doctrines "incautiously stated," and the metaphysical speculations perhaps "untenable." All this might suggest that

Stewart had been a bit unhinged. But De Quincey found that “if Walking Stewart were at all crazy, he was so in a way which did not affect his natural genius and eloquence—but rather exalted them.” De Quincey considered Stewart “a sublime visionary,” a man of “great genius … and eloquence.” Sadly, Stewart was not “a man of talents; or at least his genius was all out of proportion to his talents.” Stewart’s most original thoughts remained “in a crude state—imperfect, obscure, half developed, and not producible to a popular audience. He was aware of this himself.”

Stewart had keenly felt his ideas were ahead of their time, and that he was unable to give them adequate expression. He once wrote that he “never found above ten individuals, over all the world, whose contemplative minds could take a comprehensive view of the tree of existence, or homo-ousia life.” He therefore hoped his works would survive many generations into a future that would better understand—and could better express—the truth he had grasped but could not properly convey. Stewart worried that rulers would forever seek to destroy his books and the radically egalitarian message they contained. He wanted his works translated into Latin, the language he thought most likely to last, and then buried seven or eight feet underground. The location of the books should be kept a closely guarded secret, handed down from one generation of freethinkers to the next, until humankind had developed enough to make proper use of them. He imagined this would take a thousand years.

Stewart might have been pleased to know that his ideas found expression much sooner. Historian Gregory Claeys has argued that Stewart represents a transition to secular social reform of the kind Robert Owen made famous just a few decades later. Perhaps even more to Stewart’s liking would have been his inclusion in a compendium of radical thinkers published in Albany, New York, in 1842. The table of contents lists him alongside some of his favourite authors: Spinoza, Helvétius, Pope, Paine, and Bolingbroke. On sale in bookstores in New York, New Jersey, Boston, and Philadelphia, his writings were preserved, ready to be discovered by an American public of the future. Maybe those future readers would contemplate anew the shared nature of all things and promote a radical egalitarianism through gradual and peaceful means.

Stewart was among the thinkers and social commentators who tried to come to terms with, and also to restrain, the radical impulses of the age. His voice was among the many seeking a transition into a new way of being. Shaped by his travels around the world, Stewart’s ideas of sensate matter and cosmic kinship mingled with those of other freethinkers in America and elsewhere who hoped for a better future. His vision involved neither the radically democratic politics of a Paine or an Oswald, nor the social radicalism found in some utopian Protestant communities. Stewart offered something else entirely: a completely heretical form of materialism with social and political consequences that were potentially egalitarian in the extreme. All living things deserved the same consideration for their well-being. Universal benevolence must have no bounds. Stewart hoped the social repercussions of this radical premise might be contained, as he greatly feared violence of any kind. In his mind’s eye,

America was a place where conversion to his cosmology might bring about this peaceful and yet ultimately complete transformation of the way people live in the world.

Acknowledgments:

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Further Reading:

John Stewart wrote about his ideas, not his adventures, but his stories were noted by others who published bits on his fascinating life. See especially William Thomas Brande's *The Life and Adventures of the Celebrated Walking Stewart: Including his Travels in the East Indies, Turkey, Germany, & America. By a relative.* (London, 1822); Thomas de Quincey, "Walking Stewart," in *The Works of Thomas de Quincey*, ed. Frederick Burwick, vol. 3 (London, 2000): 132-142; John Taylor, *Records of My Life*, vol. 1 (London, 1832); the obituaries in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 92:1 (March 1822): 279-280 and *The Annual Biography and Obituary* (London, 1823). Modern-day scholarship on Stewart is sparse but includes Bertrand Harris Bronson, "Walking Stewart," in *Facets of the Enlightenment: Studies in English Literature and its Contexts* (Oakland, Calif., 1968): 266-297; Tristram Stuart, "John 'Walking' Stewart and the Utility of Death," in *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York, 2006); Gregory Claeys, "'The Only Man of Nature that Ever Appeared in the World': John Stewart and the Trajectories of Social Radicalism, 1790-1822," *Journal of British Studies* 53:3 (July 2014): 636-59. My discussion of John Oswald leans heavily on Stuart.

The quotes by John Stewart are from three of his works: *The revelation of nature, with The prophesy of reason*, printed by Mott & Lyon, for the author. In the fifth year of intellectual existence, or the publication of The apocalypse of nature, 3000 years from the Grecian olympiads, and 4800 from recorded knowledge in the Chinese tables of eclipses, beyond which chronology is lost in fable (New York, 1795); *Prospectus of a series of lectures, or A new practical system of human reason, calculated to discharge the mind from a great mass of error, and to facilitate its labour in the approximation of moral truth, divested of all metaphysical perplexities and nullities; accommodated to the most ordinary capacities, in a simple method, which dispenses equally with the study of the college, or the lecture of musty libraries* (Philadelphia, 1796); *Opus maximum; or, the great essay to reduce the world from contingency to system, in the following new sciences: Psyconomy; or, the science of the moral powers … Mathemanomy; or, the laws of knowledge: Logonomy; or, the science of language: Anagognomy; or, the science of education: Ontonomy; or, the science*

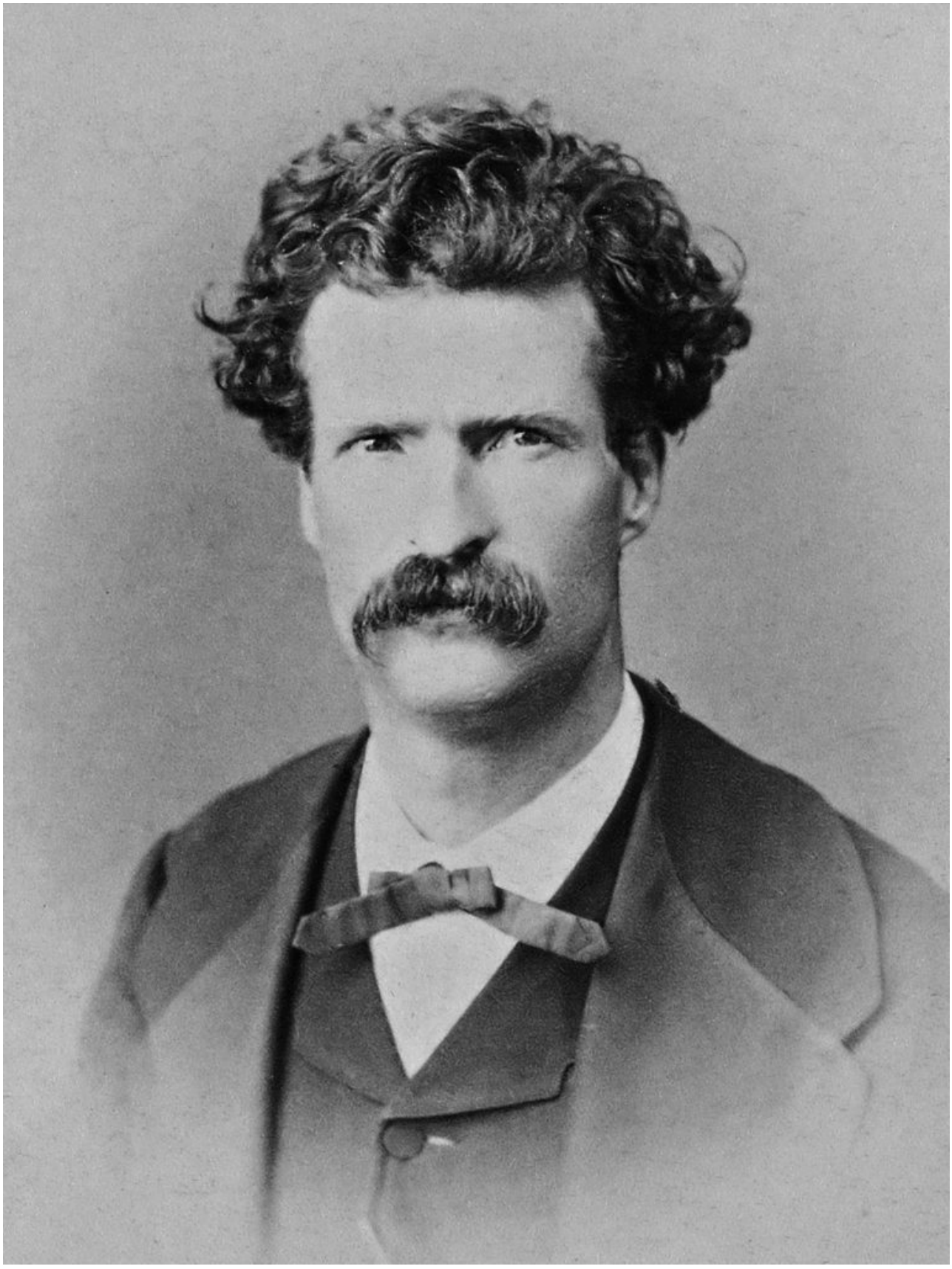
of being (London, 1803).

The post-humanist theories referenced here are from Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis, 2010); Cora Diamond, “Injustice and Animals,” in *Slow Cures and Bad Philosophers: Essays on Wittgenstein, Medicine, and Bioethics*, ed. Carl Elliott (Durham, N.C., 2001); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C., 2010).

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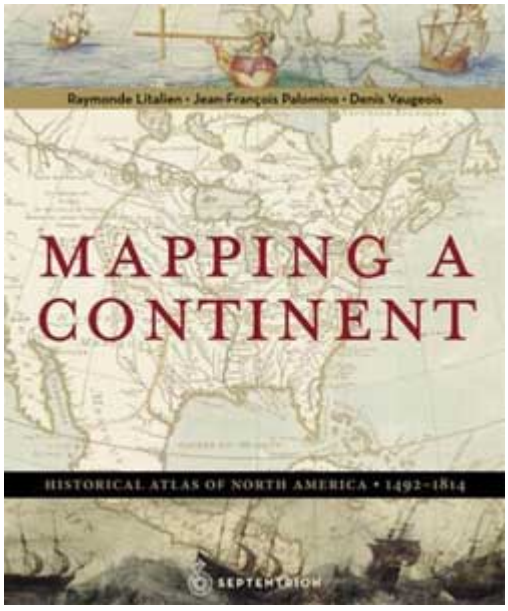
Kirsten Fischer is associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota and the author of *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (2002). She is writing a book on freethinkers in the early American republic.

Traveling with Twain in an Age of Simulations: Rereading and reliving The Innocents Abroad



There was something refreshing about reading a book like this, which I came to completely unburdened by expectations. There was no need to ponder, as I read, whether The Wonderful World of Disney had handled the material well.

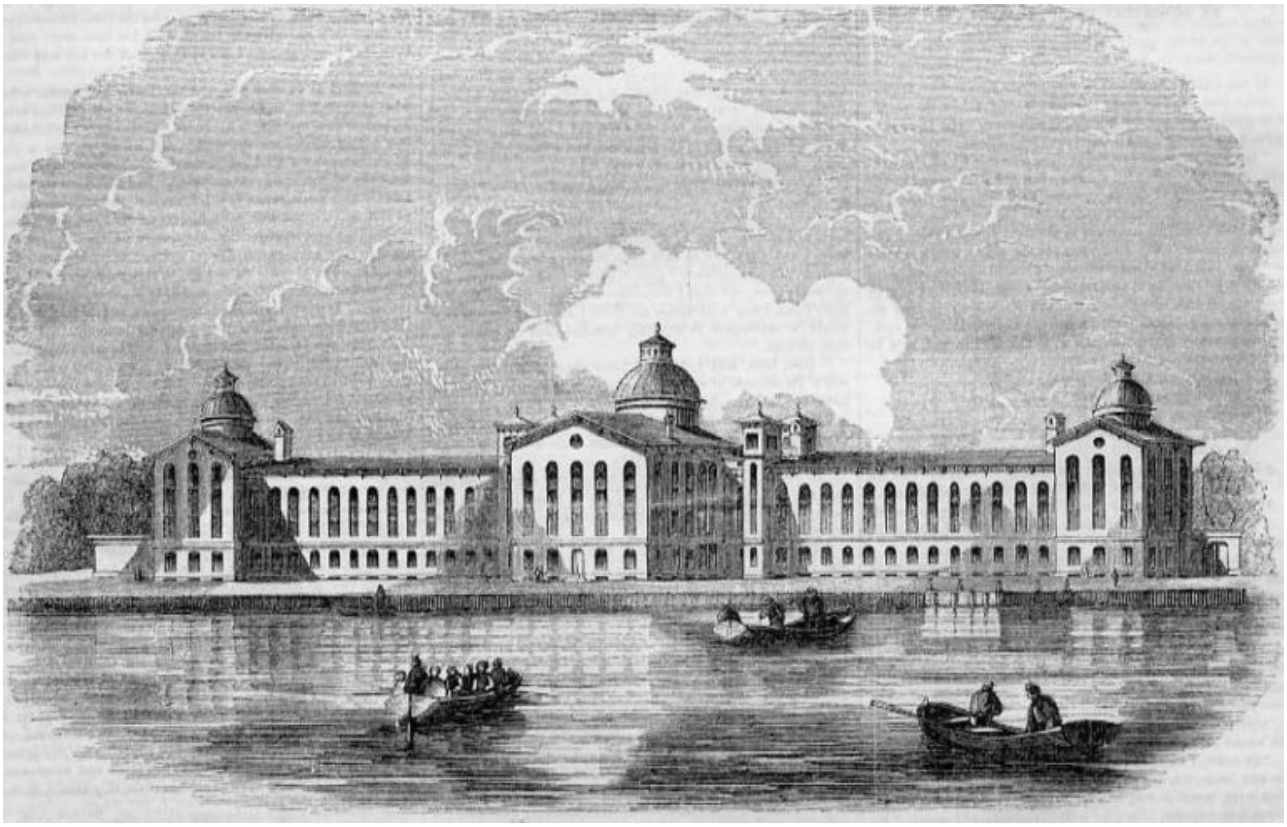
A French-Canadian View of North American Cartography



The ways that maps and boundaries failed to match actual landforms often had momentous historical consequences

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Incarcerating Children in the Age of Emancipation



In 1872, a small group of juvenile inmates challenged the terms of their incarceration, but even their modest success suggests the hazards of imagining children’s rights outside of human rights.

The First Decades of the Massachusetts Bay; or Idleness, Wolves, and a Man Who Shall No Longer Be Called Mister



The Puritan freemen may have the loudest voices in the archive; but theirs are not the only narratives being told.

This “Miserable African”: Race, crime, and disease in colonial Boston



Mather, like most other Christians of the time, also believed that racial equality before God did not demand equality on Earth—and, in particular, that it was wholly compatible with the institution of slavery.