

Making Sense of the Beginning: Teaching Early America in the U.S. History Survey



While many aspects of early American life were bound by geography, many others transcended it.

Dancing the “Republican Two-Step” with Copyrights, Patents, and Corporations



The backlash against these American laws and their increasingly global reach raises a question: does this regime of intellectual property law represent something intrinsic about the United States—not just its economy, but its culture and society?

A Drunkard’s Story: The market for suffering in antebellum America

The Literary Paradises of Hurston and Bartram in a High School Curriculum

Early American literature is not commonly taught at the high school level. There are many reasons for this: diction is florid, page counts are high, novels are nonexistent, and a more painless nod to the colonial period is easily managed with a study of *The Scarlet Letter* or *The Crucible*. If the typical goal of high school literature classes is to inculcate a love of reading in students and to expose students to writing worth mimicking, then the most prudent course is to cleave to the latter half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During my years teaching some of the most popular curriculum standards, though, I have found that opportunities abound to incorporate earlier texts. *The Great Gatsby* cries out for excerpts from Ben Franklin's journals, and the references that Anne Petry makes to the Junto in her novel *The Street* do as well. Study of Ralph Ellison requires supplementary readings in the Transcendentalists to help unpack allusions to Emerson and the Golden Ball. Even one Brit Lit high school stand-by, *Jude the Obscure*, requires reference to an early American antecedent: Thomas Hardy's model for the Bible altered and improved by the iconoclastic Sue Brideshead was surely modeled on Thomas Jefferson's *Life of Jesus of Nazareth*.

But none of the pairings I list above complement each other as well as the works of two Florida writers, one of the eighteenth and one of the twentieth century: William Bartram's *Travels* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. To begin with, the biographies of these two writers make for a fascinating comparison. Both approach their highly poetic and philosophical depictions of Florida with concrete backgrounds in the sciences: Hurston with her anthropology background and Bartram with his familial background in botany and naturalism. Both were single minded and wary of aligning themselves with grander political projects: Hurston was famously rebuffed by contemporary novelists like Richard Wright for refusing to take up the race issue, while Bartram turned down Jefferson's invitation to join the Lewis and Clark expedition. Both were avid travelers, explorers, writers, gardeners, thinkers, and Florida enthusiasts.

Both authors write about nature as a lens to think metaphysically about human life. In other words, both Bartram and Hurston appear to be "watching God" through nature.

As a student of anthropology under Franz Boas and a lover of her home state of Florida, Hurston probably read Bartram's *Travels*. Although no direct reference to these early American travelogues appears in her writing, she was certainly conscious of the tradition. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on the Road*, Hurston tells an anecdote she frames as the turning point of her education, when a teacher recited for the class the poem "Kubla Khan." Her affection for that teacher, the drama of the reading, and the stunning imagery of the poem cemented her love of learning. This is the only specific reference that Hurston

makes to the curriculum of her formal schooling, and one can only wonder if she recognized her native state of Florida in the imagery of the poem. The fact that Coleridge, in writing "Kubla Khan" (among other poems) took inspiration from Bartram's travels down the St. John's River is well documented in the poet's notebooks.

Since Hurston was an innovator in bringing Southern black dialect into her fictional dialogue, diction is a natural focal point for literary study of her works. The same holds true for the study of William Bartram, not because of regional idiom so much as the pure foreignness of elevated eighteenth-century writing to the ears of contemporary adolescents. Look at how these two descriptive passages, because of their similar attitudes toward a storm, throw one another's language nicely into relief. Hurston writes:

Ten feet higher and as far as they could see the muttering wall advanced before the braced-up waters like a roadcrusher on a cosmic scale. The monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed its chains. He seized hold of his dikes and ran forward until he met the quarters; uprooted them like grass and rushed on after his supposed to be conquerors, rolling the dikes, rolling the houses, rolling the people in houses along with other timbers. The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel.



"Mico Chluccho the Long Warrior or King of the Siminoles," frontispiece from *Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida ... William Bartram* (Philadelphia, 1791). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.



"Portrait of William Bartram," engraved by T.B. Welch from an original painting by C.W. Peale, date unknown. Courtesy of the Portrait and Print Collection, the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Bartram uses many of the same devices in his description:

But yet, how awfully great and sublime the majestic scene eastward! the solemn sound of the beating surf strikes our ears; the dashing liquid of yon liquid mountains, like mighty giants, in vain assail the skies; they are beaten back, and fall prostrate upon the shores of the trembling island.

Although the styles of these two writers are drastically different, the techniques they use—personification, sensory imagery, hyperbole—and their goals are surprisingly similar. The two texts are replete with passages that might be juxtaposed for close study of language.

Excerpts from Bartram are also useful in contextualizing many of Hurston's themes. One of the central symbols in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a bee pollinating a pear tree, echoes Bartram's philosophical musings about mosquitoes, or swamp ephemera, "inimitably bedecked in their new nuptial robes." When Bartram steps back to compare the very short period for which these insects leave their muddy homes of their lowly grub stage and live as flying insects to the ephemeral nature of human happiness, we also see an opportune comparison to Hurston's philosophy of happiness. When her character Janie speaks to her lover, Teacake, about the hard times they are suffering, she says "If you kin see the light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de light at all. Ah was fumblin' around and God opened de door." Both authors write about nature as a lens to think metaphysically about human life. In other words, both Bartram and Hurston appear to be "watching God" through nature.

Animal motifs are another important element of study in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and students generally are interested in examining and discussing the novel's menagerie. In one passage depicting an incipient hurricane, animals have lost their fear of people and of each other under the threat of the natural disaster's "common danger." Hurston depicts this temporarily peaceable kingdom when she writes that "A baby rabbit, terror ridden, squirmed through a hole in the floor and squatted there in the shadows against the wall, seeming to know that nobody wanted its flesh at such a time." She concludes that "Common danger made common friends. Nothing sought a conquest over the other." Bartram likewise devotes some of his most beautiful passages to the transcendence of the fleeting peace of the wilderness. Coming upon a "chrysal fountain" or a spring, he observes that the clear waters and resulting unobstructed vision causes loss of predatory instinct among the animals:

Yet when those different tribes of fish are in the transparent channel, their nature seems absolutely changed; for here is neither desire to destroy nor persecute, but all seems peace and friendship. Do they agree on a truce, a suspension of hostilities? or by some secret divine influence, is desire taken away? or are they otherwise rendered incapable of pursuing each other to destruction?

Both authors seek from nature these moments of extreme unity that link them both to the deist tradition of belief. While Bartram frequently detects his "supreme protector" in the natural dangers that bypass him peacefully, Hurston seeks God in the inscrutability of the elements that surround her. In her autobiography she writes, "The ever-sleepless sea in its bed, crying out 'how long?' to Time; million-formed and never motionless flame; the contemplation of these two aspects alone, affords ... sufficient food for ten spans of ... expected lifetime."

To juxtapose the work of these two authors pedagogically is to enrich both of their legacies. Hurston was a writer who railed against the politicization of her work and the demands on her to be a "race writer." This universality of

themes that she insisted upon and her pure enthusiasm for the land shine especially when studied in the context of early America, its deists and naturalists. Bartram, too, is burnished: from the obscure place of a long-winded botanist he becomes more easily recognizable as the sensitive observer, recorder, and thinker he truly was. It is an interesting exercise to look with students across generations to see their fruit trees, their magnolias, wild beasts and beasts of burden, their Seminoles, their insects and their hurricanes both startlingly lucid.



“A Map of the Coast of East Florida from the River St. John Southward near to Cape Canaveral,” between page xxxiv and page one of Chapter One from *Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida ...* William Bartram (Philadelphia, 1791). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Further Reading

Hurston’s biography *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942) contains reflection about the author’s education, early life in Florida, spirituality, and many other interesting strands that justify a reading together with Bartram. Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston’s masterpiece, is the most appropriate choice for the high school literature classroom, Hurston also writes about Florida in some of her other works. In *Mules and Men* (1935), she records the folktales of the region. She also worked on the *WPA Guide to Florida* (1939), and her contributions are not those of a typical guidebook: rather than tourist sites, she describes sites of old folklore, places of sacred significance to the African American and Native American communities.

For more on Bartram’s wide ranging influence see N. Bryllion Fagin’s *William Bartram: Interpreter of the American Landscape* (1933). This text includes some biographical background on Bartram, as well as close textual study of his style. Among the most interesting observations about Bartram’s writing is the shifting diction that Fagin attributes to his lack of formal education. Although Bartram was certainly tutored in botany and the Linnaean system by his famous father, the remainder of young Bartram’s education resulted from self-directed reading.

Sadly, no searchable e-book of Bartram’s *Travels*, or *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and 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* (1792), exists, only facsimile editions, so the hunt for passages that complement those found in Hurston must be done the old-fashioned way.

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[Old School: Glenn Roberts restores Carolina grains](#)



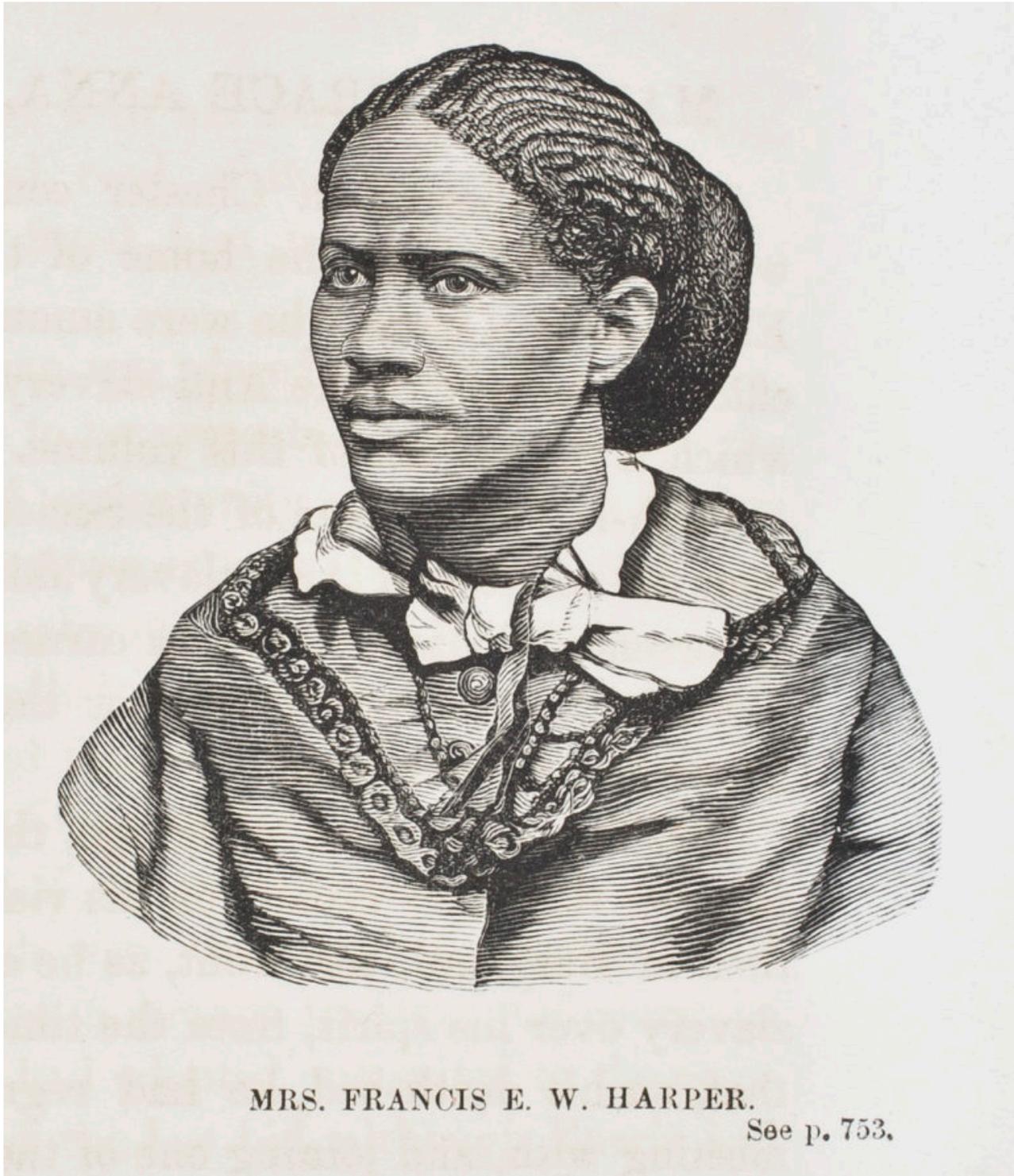
I set out to make something totally arcane relevant.

[Secrecy and Manhood](#)



The secrecy of brotherhood made brothers; men achieved their highest emotional possibility in republican secrecy.

[Leaves, Trees, and Forests: Frances Ellen Watkins's Forest Leaves and Recovery](#)



MRS. FRANCIS E. W. HARPER.

See p. 753.

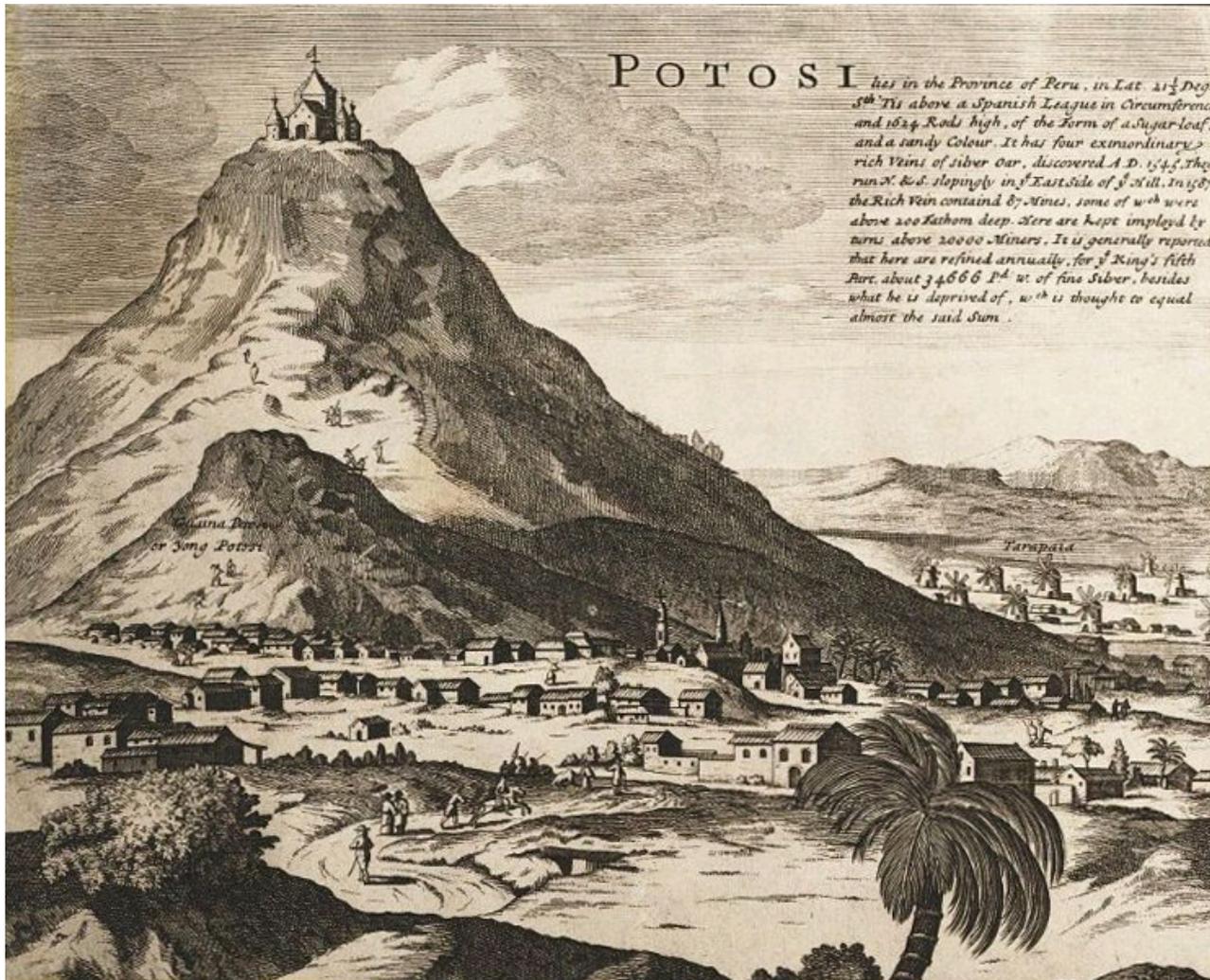
American literature, culture, and ideals stand wounded because America has regularly asserted that some lives and literatures—especially Black lives and literatures—matter less than others.

On High: A Child's Chair and Mather Family Legacy



If Mather's portrait inspires reverence, another object associated with him helps bring him down a bit from his lofty position: his childhood highchair

The High Place: Potosi



“[S]ilver was the magnet, the engine, the driving passion, the dazzling reward.”

What is Evans-TCP?



The Common-place Web Library reviews and lists online resources and Websites likely to be of interest to our viewers. Each quarterly issue will feature one or more brief site reviews. The library itself will be an ongoing enterprise with regular new additions and amendments. So we encourage you to check it frequently. At the moment, the library is small, but with your help we expect it to grow rapidly. If you have suggestions for the Web Library, or for site reviews, please forward them to the [Administrative Editor](#).

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Molly O'Hagan Hardy
What is Evans-TCP?



Evans-TCP was a partnership among the Text Creation Partnership (TCP),

NewsBank/Readex Co., and the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) that, between 2003 and 2009, created almost 5,000 accurately keyed and fully searchable [SGML/XML](#) text editions of early American printed books and pamphlets. The impetuses behind this collaboration were manifold: to increase the readability of early American texts, to make full and corrected texts available for digital projects, and to make searching more accurate because the texts have been corrected. In other words, actual people have typed every word of the selected texts, rendering a much higher degree of accuracy than the optical character recognition (OCR) software that Readex relies on to transform the scans of pages into words. Not only are searches of such texts more reliable, but through Evans-TCP, a user can see the keyed-in text that she searches. When working in the Readex database, a user sees only the image of the original text that has gone through OCR software, but not the text that is being searched. In contrast, the views of the page images are lost in Evans-TCP, but the text is all there. Moreover, in Evans-TCP, a user has access to the XML file, the keyed and encoded texts. Evans-TCP offers [a full explanation of its encoding practices](#), which for the most part are light and invite additions for scholarly digital editions. One caveat about Evans-TCP encoding: for those interested in illustrations of early American texts, it is worth noting that the encoding of images has been minimal. Editor Sarah Winger explains, "This is essentially a compromise: the primary objective for TCP is to create searchable texts. However, we recognize that illustrations, too, are important to a text and can add meaning. The editors account for this by notifying viewers that an illustration is present by capturing useful text associated with it, and by describing it when feasible."

How can I find out which early American texts are included in the TCP?

In consultation with a number of interested parties, AAS selected which titles within the date range of 1640-1800 would be chosen for Evans-TCP. Needless to say, this selection process was a tricky one. In 2004, a group of ten professors from across the country; eight librarians from AAS, Yale University, the University of Minnesota, and the Boston Library Consortium; two members of the TCP staff; and two Readex staff met to discuss how the selection process would work. The group decided that Evans-TCP would include only first editions unless there was a reason to do otherwise, and that certain categories of imprints would be excluded (e.g., almanacs, heavily illustrated works, music, and non-English language imprints). Works were drawn from selective bibliographies, including Charles Evans's *American Bibliography* and Clifford Shipton and James Mooney's *Short-Title Evans*, and Jacob Blanck's *Bibliography of American Literature*. The following subject headings were also used to select titles from the AAS catalog: Blacks as Authors, Currency/Money/Banking, Indians, Preaching, Salvation, Slavery, Society of Friends, Trials, and Women as Authors. And the following genre headings were used to select titles from the AAS catalog: Anthologies, Broad-sides, Captivity Narratives, Memoirs,

Novels, Sermons, Songsters, Travel Literature, and Treatises.

The [Evans-TCP](#) page offers a number of search options to navigate through these titles: simple, Boolean, proximity, citation, and browsing. The searching is fairly intuitive, but if you need help, check out [these instructional videos](#) (though they were created for EEBO-TCP, the interface is pretty much the same). The browse function is an especially useful way to navigate the collection; browsing can be organized by author's last name or by title of the work, and it is a good way to get a sense of what is there.

[The AAS general catalog](#) is another way to find texts in Evans-TCP. On the upper right side of the screen in an AAS catalog record a user will see a link to any title included in Evans-TCP. When conducting a keyword search in the AAS General Catalog, include "Evans TCP" as a phrase to generate a complete list of records with such a link in it. Or, include other search terms to find out if imprints you are interested in are included in Evans TCP.

Who can access the TCP and how does access work?

This is the really great news: as of June 30, 2014, anyone anywhere has access to the Evans-TCP texts. As was mentioned above, TCP [welcomes requests](#) for source files for individual texts, or the whole corpus of its titles. After the June release date, anyone will be free to access and make use of these raw files through an online directory where they can be downloaded. Rebecca Welzenbach, TCP outreach librarian at the University of Michigan, explains, "Our intention is to make them available in such a way that people can find and download them without having to come through us." Welzenbach does offer one reminder: although TCP includes links to the Readex/Newsbank page images, these will not be publicly available. The TCP makes XML encoded transcriptions, not the whole database, available. It is, however, transcriptions such as these upon which so much digital humanities work from the early modern period to the nineteenth century relies.

What can I do with Evans-TCP texts?

Because the Evans-TCP texts include only about 5,000 imprints before 1820, its corpus is less than ideal for large-scale text mining projects, but it could still be used for single text or author data analysis, or the building of digital scholarly editions, or for pedagogical purposes (many of the titles in Evans-TCP have not been republished in modern editions for the classroom). But we assume that there are ways for early Americanists to make use of this incredible resource that we haven't even thought of yet.