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The American Columbus:  
Geography, Chronology and the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Literature

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Geography, Chronology and the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Literature

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M.A., Tulane University, 2006  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2002

Advisor: Benjamin Reiss, Ph.D.

An abstract of  
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University  
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2012

## Abstract

### The American Columbus: Geography, Chronology and the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Literature

By Jennifer Heil

“The American Columbus” argues for the centrality of Christopher Columbus in the spatial and temporal imagination of the United States—and demonstrates how that configuration of “America” continues to matter to this day. Although Columbus might not appear connected to the Anglo-American history of the United States, he was wildly popular during the U.S.’s early national and antebellum periods. This popularity stemmed from geography textbooks of the kind written by Susanna Rowson (1805), who viewed the U.S. as inheriting a continental history that she (and others) saw as initiated by Columbus in the New World. Such a hemispheric imagining of the U.S. underwrote national policy in the form of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), declaring the Old and New Worlds to be separate spheres of influence, which set the stage for the commercial success of Washington Irving’s *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828). With this publication, the first English-language biography of Columbus, Irving secured the navigator’s reputation as an Anglo-American hero and ingrained in readers a national history that began in the Caribbean in 1492. However, plotting American beginnings from the Caribbean potentially put the nation at risk. I claim the increased attention which Columbus histories brought to Hispaniola, re-named Haiti as a result of its successful slave revolution, made expansion ominous to an Anglo-American empire still sustained by a slave economy. Free African-American J. Dennis Harris (1860) took advantage of this relationship by interweaving its discovery history with that of the Haitian Revolution in the hope of founding an Anglo-African empire on the continent.

This dissertation contends that imaginative narratives about Columbus had—and continue to have—real implications for political belonging in the western hemisphere. The goals of this project are twofold. First, I aim to show that a sustained engagement with Spanish texts was central to the development of Anglo-American literary history from early republicanism through Manifest Destiny and beyond. More importantly, my analysis of this engagement demonstrates the paradoxical dependence of U.S. nationalism on transnational flows of culture.

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In reflecting upon the many people I would like to thank for their help and encouragement of this project about how our understanding of American geography and chronology has been affected by interpretations of Columbus's "discovery" in 1492, I cannot help but wonder about the ways in which the geography and chronology of my native city, New Orleans, have been deeply marked by the natural disaster of 2005. I did not know whether or not to mention Hurricane Katrina in this space, but having begun graduate school at Tulane University the year before the storm in a program that was dissolved as a result of its impact, I found I could not avoid reference to it. As we have come to refer to the city as pre- or post-Katrina, so too I have come to think of my graduate studies, and I am indebted to so many people for seeing me through the transition from pre- to post-storm life—particularly fellow members of the "Tulane diaspora," Jean Cannon and Sean McCarthy, whose good humor and friendship I am blessed to continue to enjoy. Another member of this community that I must thank at the outset is my adviser Ben Reiss, without whose excellent and exacting guidance, I would not have accomplished so much. Ben's exceptional courses and constructive feedback on my work not only encouraged me to push myself to rise to the challenges of scholarly research and writing but also provided me with a model for teaching my own students, who I hope to inspire to reach their potential as Ben has helped me to reach mine.

Before the storm, my passion for reading, writing and history was born of classes I took particularly with Vickie Kennedy, Mr. Rickerfor, Gerald Kennedy, Gaines Foster, Devoney Looser, Pat McGee and Elsie Michie; they provided me early on with the tools I would need to succeed in graduate school, and I am grateful that they made their own passion for literature and history so contagious. Seminars and conversations with faculty and friends at Tulane, particularly with Felipe Smith, Terry Toulouse, Emily Clark and Gaurav Desai, helped to ignite the fire for this project, and I thank them for their excellent teaching and mentoring. When Tulane cancelled the fall semester of 2005, Michael Elliott helped buoy my spirits tremendously by permitting me to matriculate to Emory where my enrollment in his course on history, race and fantasy allowed me to continue my studies relatively uninterrupted. That course set ablaze research interests that had been smoldering since I can remember, and I am not only profoundly appreciative of his fine teaching but also his understanding, flexibility, and warmth during a time of great upheaval. I thank Dave Toledano, who in addition to having provided me with unending emotional support also gave me a safe place to live during the time of my displacement. Thank you to Mark Ristroph, the chair of Augusta Tech's English department, who offered me a job that helped sustain me through the first post-Katrina months. And my appreciation to Duane Shotwell, who opened his home to me and my family in the weeks following Katrina, his wife Olga, who secured for me the coolest temporary job I have ever had (teaching English to Cosmonauts at NASA!) and not least, Jolie Parker in whose sunny apartment I was able to reconstruct my life in terms of where I would next live, work and go to school.

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I had believed that the completion of this dissertation would allow me to close the chapter on Katrina, but the storm in no small way led me back to a faith in God, who I thank above all. In this way, I hope the mark of the hurricane always remains.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Introducing Columbus**

Two days after the Fourth of July, Thomas Jefferson advised his son-in-law to take up the study of Spanish because “the antient part of American history is written chiefly in Spanish” (*Writings* vol. IV, 405). Jefferson’s view that American history began with Christopher Columbus’ “discovery” of the Caribbean in 1492 was widespread during the U.S.’s early national period. Caught up as Columbus was in a culture anxious to affect a physical separation from Great Britain, it is perhaps not surprising that Jefferson’s idea was promoted by some of the nation’s first bestsellers: geography textbooks. In his works, “father of geography” Jedidiah Morse (1784, 1789) foregrounded Columbus’ importance to American history by inverting the order of British geographies so that facts about the American continent preceded those about Europe.<sup>1</sup> By drawing the nation’s lineage from the navigator and thus connecting the new republic not to Old World but to New World history, Morse made Columbus the first among America’s founding fathers. As a result, authors living in the U.S. (even non-citizens due to gender, race or foreign birth) had to confront Columbus whether affirming Morse’s vision of American history, as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper did (see chapters two and three respectively), or challenging it to some degree, as Susanna Rowson and J. Dennis Harris did (see chapters one and four). These and other writers used Columbus to construct a chronology and geography in the western hemisphere that created a place for themselves in “America” as it was then conceived both as a nation and a continent. For a U.S. nationalist author like Cooper, such a construction meant suppressing continuity between his emergent nation and British

colonial history on the North Atlantic seaboard and proposing instead continuity between America and Columbian discovery in the Caribbean. A central claim of this dissertation is that imagining the U.S. as Columbian allowed early nationals to effectually map the nation onto more and more of the continent, thereby justifying proto-imperial policies and ideologies, such as the Monroe Doctrine (1823), Indian Removal (1830) and Manifest Destiny (1845). Ironically, even black nationalist writers like Harris had to develop their own affiliations in relation to this new national father.

In “The American Columbus,” I argue for the centrality of Columbus in the temporal and spatial imagination of the United States. This centrality should challenge Americanists’ conception of their field of study not only as bound by the political borders of the U.S. but also as descending mainly from Anglophone traditions. I aim to show that a sustained engagement with Spanish texts about Columbus (whether primary or secondary, in Spanish or in translation) profoundly influenced the development of Anglo-American literary history. Moreover, I believe this cultural engagement affected the shape of the nation in concrete ways by presenting early Americans with an alternate historical lineage. Specifically, early national geographies from the 1780s and 90s by such authors as Morse articulated a hemispheric American imaginary that borrowed from logic expressed in the papal bulls issued immediately after Columbus’ return from the West Indies. These bulls drew an imaginary line in the Atlantic that reserved lands to its west for conquest by Spain based on Columbian discovery—an act which set a New-World precedent for empires claiming title to land in the western hemisphere. When the Monroe Doctrine declared the Old and New Worlds to be separate spheres of influence in an attempt to free the U.S. of competitors for American territory,<sup>2</sup> it drew on the

precedent established by this papal reading of the Columbian past. Given the Columbian lineage the U.S. adopted to legitimate its expanding sphere of influence, antebellum American foreign policy might better be understood as an appropriation of the 1493 *Inter caetera*.<sup>3</sup> That such groups as the United Confederation of Taino People continue to appeal for the revocation of this bull indicates the ongoing influence of nineteenth-century renderings of Columbus in the dominant culture's ways of thinking about American space and time.<sup>4</sup>

“The American Columbus” shows how an expansionist foreign policy emerged out of an understanding of history that was developed by geographers, novelists and historians; in this way, I show that culture does not simply reflect but also influences politics. During the nineteenth century—when Columbus ascended in the Anglo-American historical imagination—the revolutions that swept across the continent sparked U.S. interest in the commercial potential of the new republics to the south now that they were free from Spanish rule. This interest took the form of a displacement, as James D. Fernández explains, “from Latin America to Spain and from language/politics/commerce to literature/history/culture” (124). I argue that this displacement was dependent on another: from the Pacific Northwest to the Caribbean. The significant rise in U.S. Hispanism during the 1820s should be understood in this context. With their enhanced capacity to blend fact and fiction beyond what politicians could openly do, early nineteenth-century genres—specifically the novel, romantic biography, historical romance, and travel narrative—helped readers imagine extra-national American territory as part of their polity; they did this in part through staking claim to the figure of Columbus. This study demonstrates how the most popular of early national authors,

including Rowson, Irving and Cooper, engaged the Columbian past by means of Spanish sources to endorse a hemispheric orientation of America that directed U.S. expansionism through the nineteenth century. In that sense, what we now consider the United States came into being through acts of literary imagination.

Though Columbus never made it to North America, his legacy was central in U.S. claims to the West. The U.S. officially incorporated Oregon in 1846, but it had been vying with other empires for the territory since 1792—the year of the Columbian tercentennial. It was during this year that best-selling author Susanna Haswell Rowson’s brother, fur trader Robert Haswell, helped “discover” the mouth of the Columbia River (so-named after his ship), which formed the basis of U.S. claims to the region. These, like all such claims, were buttressed by exploration and settlement. Jefferson had a hand in this, too. In addition to funding the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to chart this region (1804), he applauded the establishment of John Jacob Astor’s settlement on the Columbia River (1810). So pleased was Jefferson with the colony that he wrote to Astor congratulating him on planting the “germ of a great free and independent empire on that side of *our continent*,” for which he envisioned the magnate’s name being handed down to posterity “with that of Columbus and Raleigh as the father of the establishment and founder of such an empire” (*Writings* 248, vol. VI, emphasis mine). Pairing the agent of Spanish empire with that of the British, Jefferson naturalized both as founders of a continental future that Astor would bring into fruition for the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

Irving tried to extend Jefferson’s vision. The second book he published after a series of works on Spanish history beginning with his Columbus biography was *Astoria* (1836),<sup>6</sup> a history of the Columbia River settlement meant to highlight its “national

character and importance” (v). This character and importance mattered deeply to U.S. politicians because although Russia, Spain and France eventually abandoned designs on Oregon territory, England remained in the area and continued to advance claims to it. While the region remained under joint British and U.S. occupation for much of the first half of the nineteenth century, both nations met every few years to debate its sovereignty. Inevitably, these discussions invoked the tenets of the discovery doctrine. Among the doctrine’s principles of limited indigenous sovereignty and the contiguity of land discovered (meaning that claims to land extended around the area discovered), prior discovery and current possession figured prominently.<sup>7</sup> Although the U.S. claimed first discovery of Oregon via the expedition of Rowson’s brother, the young nation had to rely on extra-national histories in order to vie with British claims that they had been in the region since Sir Francis Drake sailed during the sixteenth century. A treaty negotiated with Spain in 1819 gave U.S. claimants the justification they needed to contend with England. In the agreement, known as the Adams-Onís Treaty, Spain ceded to the U.S. (in addition to Florida) all claims to the Pacific Northwest—which legitimated for the first time the extension of the U.S. past the Mississippi—in exchange for parts of Texas to which the U.S. had dubious claims.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. chose to ignore that Spain itself had dubious claims to the north Pacific coast: these dated back to the papal bull of 1493.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, when U.S. proponents of Oregon’s annexation wanted to contest British title to the region, they did so by invoking Columbian discovery through which they believed they inherited their right to the west coast of the continent.<sup>10</sup>

Indiana Congressman C.W. Cathcart, for example, alluded to this right in his 1846 speech to the U.S. House of Representatives on “the Oregon question” when he remarked

that “Great Britain founded her first pretensions to the northwest coast in an outrageous attack upon the rights of Spain and took advantage of her weakness.” Lewis Cass, a senator from Michigan and later Secretary of State under James Buchanan, expressed this same sentiment in a speech delivered to the U.S. Senate in March of the same year: “No such claim as this would have been advanced by Great Britain in the better days of the Spanish monarchy, in the days of Ferdinand or Charles or Philip.” Cathcart was particularly sensitive to how great a role the interpretation of historical events played in this debate when he acknowledged that “poetry and prose, history and fiction, have afforded their rich contributions, wherever they might ‘point a moral or adorn a tale,” and he concludes that “the British presence of title is like the baseless fabric of a dream.”

While I argue that U.S. writers penned Columbian histories to help settle questions about territorial sovereignty in terms of inter-/intra-national relations, such histories inadvertently unsettled the nation in terms of domestic politics regarding slavery. As the issue of slavery became increasingly inescapable and increasingly charged in the political arena into the nineteenth century, it became just as impossible for authors of Columbus narratives to ignore the temporal and spatial proximity of Columbus to the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade and one of its recent consequences: the Haitian Revolution. This uncertainty manifests in Columbian texts by Irving and Cooper in their inability to avoid mention of the Haitian Revolution, and it destabilizes their national histories to a degree by causing the authors to revise the text (in Irving’s case) or to temporarily break off the affiliations he was otherwise forging (in Cooper’s).<sup>11</sup> Rather than avoid the association between the results of Columbus’ actions and the Haitian Revolution, Harris (see chapter four) uses it to confront the Revolution openly by

appropriating it as the history at once threatening Anglo-American empire sustained by a slave economy traced back to the beginnings of the Spanish New World empire and legitimating the extension of a free Anglo-African empire.<sup>12</sup>

In seeking to understand how colonization projects were intertwined with nation-building and its literature, this study has been influenced by recent work in the field of colonial studies by such scholars as Ralph Bauer and Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, who have brought to American literary history a sensitivity not only to transatlantic (east-west) but also hemispheric (north-south) cultural and political relations. I have found that early nineteenth-century writers also understood that “from the point of view of a truly hemispheric literary history, the time and space rightfully occupied by the literature of the US would appear as rather insignificant” (Bauer 228). This apparent insignificance prompted early nationals to look beyond U.S. borders not only to augment the size and importance of the nation, but also to deepen its historical time. This study is delimited by the period of national formation of the U.S. from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century for two major reasons—one theoretical and one historically specific: to demonstrate the paradoxical dependence of U.S. nationalism on transnational flows of culture and to analyze Columbus’ dominance in the U.S. historical imagination during this period. That the nation quadrupled in size from the 1770s to the 1850s is a development attributable in part to the U.S. adoption of the mantle of Columbus, and it is in the pages of literary history where that adoption is transacted.

While it presaged the ideology of Manifest Destiny—a term first used regarding the Oregon debate—Jefferson’s view of Columbus as agent of the westward course of empire did not originate during the early national period. This concept dates back at least

to Columbus' own era, during which religion and profit motivated conquest and expansion.<sup>13</sup> Spain, for example, could justify the extension of its empire into already occupied lands if those lands were inhabited by "barbarians" destined for Christian conversion. During the sixteenth century, this model of colonization inspired Anglicans and Catholics alike.<sup>14</sup> It was only after a series of English failures to find gold on the east coast of North America that colonizers like John Smith began to implement alternative methods of reaping profit from the New World by turning instead to agriculture. Smith in fact promotes this method of colonization by comparing it to the Spanish, who "were never able to subsist by the Mines onely; for the greatest part of their Commodities are partly naturall ... as in their mighty wealth of Sugarcanes." As Virginia has many such natural commodities, Smith asks in *The Generall Historie* (1624) why should England not "by the same means" plant where they see fit? Again, taking a lesson from a page in Spanish history—specifically Columbus's experience upon returning to the New World to find the Spaniards he left at La Navidad slain—Smith argues that the success of British plantations is only assured by "vanquishing the salvages" (149).

Despite Smith's sympathetic portrayal of Columbus and his compatriots as victims of "treacherous" Native Americans, however, he does not concede prior discovery of the continent to Spain. The main difference between colonial and post-colonial treatments of Columbus by Anglo-Americans lay in this point. Whereas post-colonial Anglo-Americans celebrated Columbus precisely because he was not affiliated with British national history,<sup>15</sup> colonists like Smith had to sidestep Columbus to establish English precedence in the New World. The question of prior right was at issue because the papal bulls of the late fifteenth century apportioned territory based on claims of first



discovery. Although it was contested by other European empires, the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) reserved most of America as available for conquest by Spain, and Spaniards (and later post-colonial Anglo-Americans) appealed to it into the nineteenth century. Because the treaty's legality was founded on written eyewitness accounts of discoveries in the western hemisphere, British writers contested Spanish right in two ways: by turning from written to oral tradition to legitimize their nation's claims or by arguing for geographical discontinuity in the hemisphere between the Caribbean islands and the American continent.

While Smith embraced the former by asserting the truth of oral accounts about the Welsh Prince Madoc's discovery in 1170,<sup>16</sup> Cotton Mather took the latter position in the *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702). Although Mather also believed "that this New World was known and partly inhabited by Britains or by Saxons from England, three or four hundred years before the Spaniards coming thither," he neither denies that "the affairs of the whole world have been affected by the finding of it" by Columbus (42). Because Mather maintains the significance of Columbian discovery, Prince Madoc's voyage matters less to him than does the discovery of John Cabot, who in 1497 landed on terra firma in Newfoundland—one year before Columbus landed on the mainland of South America. Although this voyage occurred five years after Columbus's first voyage west, Mather used it to advocate for British precedence on the continent by arguing that the Caribbean islands were separate from "America." That the islands were even geographically associated with the mainland to begin with was, in part, a result of the *Inter Caetera* lines in the Atlantic that divided the globe into east and west, Old and New.<sup>17</sup>

Preferring to localize discovery to a particular region in the *Magnalia*, Mather moves from the discovery of the continent to that of New England or the “New-English Israel” whose “*sole end* upon which it was erected” was to “plant the gospel in these dark regions of America” (44, 45). Herein lay Mather’s real interest in discovery, which forces him to confront Columbus even though Mather does not assign him the primacy that others grant. Prefacing his introduction of Columbus with an assertion that Spaniards found linguistic evidence among the Mexicans that the British had already been in the hemisphere, “nevertheless, mankind generally agree to give unto Christopher Columbus, a Genoese, the honour of being the first European that opened a way into these parts of the world.” Mather devotes only one page of the *Magnalia* to Columbian discovery, moving quickly from it to the discovery of the continent by Cabot to underscore that not the Roman Catholic, but “the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, well compared unto a *ship*, is now *victoriously* sailing round the *globe* after Sir Francis Drake's renowned ship, called, *The Victory*.” In a missionary zeal that his Puritan contemporary Samuel Sewall similarly expressed, Mather concludes that “if this New World were not found out first by the English; yet in those regards that are of all the *greatest*, it seems to be found out more *for* them than any other.”

The British exploration of the “dark regions” in what Mather terms the “American hemisphere” has not only enabled the spread of Christianity, it has directly thwarted the devil’s best laid plans. As a result, Mather demands that “the *Church* of God must no longer be wrapped up in Strabo's cloak; *Geography* must now find work for a *Christiano-geography* in regions far enough beyond the bounds wherein the *Church* of God had, through all former ages, been circumscribed” (42). Madoc, Columbus and Cabot matter to Mather

only insofar as the bearers of the Reformation have followed in their wake. The empire for which Mather composes his foundational history is Puritan before it is British, but above all, it is Christ's:

This at last is the spot of *earth*, which the God of heaven *spied out* for the seat of such *evangelical*, and *ecclesiastical*, and very remarkable transactions, as require to be made an history; here t'was that our blessed JESUS intended a *resting place*, must I say? or only an *hiding place* for those *reformed* CHURCHES, which have given him a little accomplishment of his eternal Father's promise unto him; to be, we hope, yet further accomplished, *of having the utmost parts of the earth for his possession?* (46)

Mather's construction of the Puritans as foundational to New English history would lend itself to early nationals looking for a separatist history that legitimated the continuing occupation of the rebelling American colonists, who assumed Puritan history—if not always that of Madoc and Cabot—by identifying with their search for religious liberty in the New World.<sup>18</sup>

Like Mather, Sewall defended the New World from Old World accusations that it was the location of Hell by arguing the reverse—that it was, in fact, where the Reformation would be realized to its fullest potential.<sup>19</sup> Sewall explicitly advocates this position in *Phaenomena quaedam apocalyptica ad aspectum Novi Orbis configurata. Or, some few lines towards a description of the New Heaven* (1697).<sup>20</sup> However, unlike Mather who would credit (in addition to God) Cabot, the British generally or perhaps his ancestors specifically with New-English discovery, Sewall firmly believes “Columbus had opened the way” for the spread of Christianity by having “added this fourth to the

other three parts of the foreknown World” (3). Until the implications of Columbus’ voyage were understood,<sup>21</sup> medieval geographers considered the world to consist of three “parts” (“continents” in modern parlance): Europe, Asia and Africa. Thus Sewall interprets Columbus as the right foot of the angel who, in the Book of Revelations, set “his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land” due to the discovery of land in what had been mapped in Europe as the Ocean Sea. However, this millennial interpretation does not suspend Sewall’s anti-Catholicism. In Sewall’s argument that Columbus’ Spanish counterparts “planted Antichristianisme in the room of Heathenisme,” the Puritan mission of conversion takes form.

The uses to which English historiographers put the Black Legend—which posited that Spanish colonization was more nefarious in its mission of conquest than English colonization by settlement—have been well-documented.<sup>22</sup> Less understood have been the conflicting ways in which Columbus was figured alongside this tradition to advance divergent ideological agendas.<sup>23</sup> While Sewall and Mather thought of Columbus as opening the way for the Reformed Church in the New World, which the Puritan mission would crown as the New Heaven, he seems not to have occupied a significant place in the historical consciousness of their contemporaries.<sup>24</sup> Although Columbus is not as present in other Puritan writings, he did continue to appear in secularized British publications, such as Edmund Bohun’s *A Geographical Dictionary* (1688) and Nathaniel Wanley’s *The Wonders of the Little World; Or a General and Complete History of Man* (1678).<sup>25</sup> In America, it was not until the eighteenth century that Columbus took off in the historical imaginations of Anglophone Creoles.

The navigator's growing popularity resulted, at least indirectly, from the work of English translators and London publishers who made available texts by "the original historians of the discovery of America": Fernando Colón, whose biography of his father appeared in the second volume of Awnsham Churchill's *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1705),<sup>26</sup> and Antonio de Herrera y Tordesilla, whose *General History of America* was published twenty years later (Hedges 131).<sup>27</sup> The publication of Colón's biography, first translated into English as "The Life of Christopher Columbus, and the History of His Discoveries of the West Indies," greatly influenced subsequent American representations of Columbus.<sup>28</sup> Not only was it a source for William Robertson's *The History of America* (1777), which was a leading disseminator of the Columbus narrative until Irving's biography of the Admiral, Rowson referred to it (as well as to Robertson) to write *Reuben and Rachel* (1798).<sup>29</sup> Rowson, who considered herself an American citizen as well as a British subject, consulted these in addition to other sources to Anglicize Columbus in ways that reconciled the British with the American past by maintaining the importance to American history of Columbus along with early British explorers like Drake. In contrast, the Scottish historian Robertson—writing as he did amidst the tumult of the American Revolution—attempts to suspend judgment about the American present by avoiding the history of the British colonies past the seventeenth century.

American geography, in addition to Robertson's concept of American time, helps him to justify the apparent incompleteness of his *History*. On the one hand he considers America to be one geographical unit, that is—a single continent that calls for a history of Russia in relation to the northwest portion and a history of the Spanish in the central and southern portions and of England in the east. On the other, his view that the "unhappy

contest” between Creole and British subjects has interrupted the historical continuity of North America makes South American history, by contrast, “a perfect whole by itself.” Despite Robertson’s relegation of the Spanish presence in America to the past by conceptualizing it as “so much detached” from the continent’s present affairs, he does not deny its influence on the subsequent history of European colonization: “As the principles and maxims of the Spaniards in planting colonies, which have been adopted in some measure by every nation, are unfolded in this part of my work; it will serve as a proper introduction to the history of all the European establishments in America” (vi).

The effects of Robertson’s ambivalence about the geographical and chronological continuity of the Americas were felt in the epic poems by early nationals who used Columbus to imagine the emergent nation into space and time. Construing Spanish history as the introduction to the history of Europe in America helped such republican authors as Philip Freneau and Joel Barlow maneuver around the very discoverers and explorers their colonial forbears had claimed as the rightful possessors of American soil. However, as both Freneau and Barlow understood, acknowledging “the principles and maxims of the Spaniards in planting colonies” as the prehistory of the U.S. included conquest histories that Anglo-Americans had been demonizing in strains of the Black Legend since the sixteenth century. The question of how to adopt a Spanish-American foundation but not its legacy was resolved largely by the portrait of Columbus the poets got from his son (filtered, as it was, through Robertson). Privileged as a firsthand account of the navigator, Colón’s biography was often consulted to flesh out Columbus’ character. William Hedges has argued that writers’ reliance on this source—one of only a

few primary sources on Columbus—has produced a consistency in characterizations of Columbus relative to other historical figures.

Robertson's history particularly influenced Barlow's *Columbiads*; according to Eric Wertheimer, Barlow thought it "the only reliable source in English for New World History" (202).<sup>30</sup> Barlow's portrait of Columbus borrowed heavily from Robertson's who, in turn, relied heavily on Colón. Because Colón was motivated to pen his father's biography to support a suit he was bringing against the Spanish crown regarding the spoils of conquest that influenced later interpretations of Columbus' life, the circumstances of the initial publication of *The Life of the Admiral* should be taken into consideration when discussing its adaptations. When King Ferdinand and Queen Isabelle first funded Columbus's voyage, they agreed to name him viceroy of the territory he claimed in their name. Excellent though Columbus was as a seaman, he was a terrible manager.<sup>31</sup> The story of his being sent back to Spain in chains during his third voyage to the West Indies (1500) is almost as infamous as his first voyage there in 1492. Although the Spanish sovereigns eventually agreed to fund Columbus' fourth voyage west, they took away his administrative powers. The *pleitos colombinos*, or Columbian lawsuits, were filed several years after Columbus's death in 1506 over this issue of the right to govern in the New World, which was to pass to Columbus' heirs. Scholars believe that Colón began writing the biography of his father around 1527, at the time of the last lawsuit in a series of several decisions that had been adjudicated during the preceding twenty years.<sup>32</sup> Highlighting the injustice of his father's arrest in 1500 by juxtaposing it with the importance of his 1492 discovery to Spain, Colón frames Columbus' life as a

tragedy.<sup>33</sup> This emplotment lent itself to early nationals looking for a New World martyr to the corruption of European empire on the continent.<sup>34</sup>

In “The Rising Glory of America” (1786), Freneau writes “better these northern realms demand our song” to shift focus from the location of the history with which he begins the poem: Columbus, “the hero,” followed by Cortez, the “furious chief.” In order to maintain Columbus as the American hero while avoiding the stain of the Black Legend that Cortez represents, Freneau makes two moves in the poem that seem contradictory to his stated goal of singing the glory of the northern realms. First, he continues to look to the South; second, he maintains continuity with the European history he deems otherwise corrupt. These two moves are related. Both are caught up in tropes of discovery and the search for origins as Freneau uses them to construct a continental space and time that justifies the emergence of a new American empire—one that he and his fellow republicans will direct.

Concerned as the “poet of the Revolution” was with legitimate beginnings, the poem opens with a long debate about the origins of North and South American Indians.<sup>35</sup> While the descent of the former remains obscure,<sup>36</sup> Freneau suggests the latter may have descended from ancient shipwrecked Carthaginians. In contrast to “this northern dark domain” where “no towns were seen to rise,” Freneau appears to attribute the “vast empires” of the Mexicans and Peruvians to the *translatio imperii*,<sup>37</sup> or transfer of empire, from Europe to America (561). For Freneau, this European heritage makes the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru all the more devastating even as he uses Columbian discovery to cast the continent as a refuge “from Europe’s hostile shores” (562). Given this ambivalence, Wertheimer reads the poem as “a patriotic epic at odds with itself, a



telling embodiment of the strains within the British-American empire itself” and offers that “one way to be both colonist and colonialist, both native and invader, both constitutionalist in the best British tradition and dissenter from British rule, was to be, in a sense, Columbian” (22, 50).

According to this estimation, perhaps no writer of the revolutionary era was more Columbian than Barlow. The publication of his epic poem “Vision of Columbus” (1787)<sup>38</sup> was advertised and discussed in newspapers across the U.S. The poem—famously dedicated to Louis XVI and subscribed to by George Washington—opens with a long introduction in which Barlow defends his subject by offering a biographical sketch of Columbus. Although “Vision” moves from Incan to Revolutionary history throughout its nine books, Columbus remains an observer of it all. He, along with a ministering angel, mourns the loss of Peruvian civilization, yet post-Revolutionary peace and the promise of commerce in such areas as the fur trade, redeem imperial history in America, where Columbus once again at the poem’s end “stood sublime” (l. 59). Barlow’s view of Columbus’s role as restorative in this epic purification of the continent is clear from the start. Barlow’s Introduction begins:

Every circumstance relating to the discovery and settlement of America, is an interesting object of enquiry. Yet it is presumed, from the present state of literature in this country, that many persons, who might be entertained with an American production of this kind, are but slightly acquainted with the life and character of that great man, whose extraordinary genius led him to the discovery of the continent, and whose singular sufferings ought to excite the indignation of the world.

Barlow echoes Jefferson's sentiments that American history is Spanish history, but he locates that history more specifically in the person of Columbus.

Even though the feelings that Barlow tries to arouse in his audience were not appeased until Irving's biography of the navigator—the first full-length Columbian biography in English—"Vision" evoked strong reactions from its readers. Its lofty tone and utopic vision made it the subject of satire for some;<sup>39</sup> for others "Mr. Barlow's general merit" made his "bombast" excusable.<sup>40</sup> One contemporaneous reviewer believed "the author too often blends ancient manners with those that are modern," yet he/she allows Barlow a certain latitude with history given that his "enthusiasm is laudable both in a patriot and a poet" (6). That historical inaccuracy based on the enthusiasm of "a patriot and a poet" was excusable for this critic highlights a key tension surrounding the historicity of Columbian narratives—especially as into the nineteenth century Columbus assumed the more significant place in national history that Barlow imagines for him. Before Irving's biography secured for Columbus this place, which made him a figure more fit for histories than fiction, the navigator appeared in imaginative narratives by authors who took advantage of generic conventions to stretch the historical record.

When Freneau and Barlow turned to epic poetry in the 1770s and 80s to treat Columbus as a figure redeeming American futurity, they did so one half century before John O'Sullivan articulated the U.S. as "The Great Nation of Futurity" (1839).<sup>41</sup> In the essay, O'Sullivan describes the U.S. "in its magnificent domain of space and time" as "the nation of many nations ... destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles," which marks "the beginning of a new history ... which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only" (427, 426). Freneau and Barlow had been

equally insistent in their focus on the destiny of the U.S. to spread across the continent in their respective Columbiads,<sup>42</sup> but in many ways they did so—in contrast to O’Sullivan—by embracing the past. As poets of the Revolutionary era, they were later criticized for attempting to forge a national literature by borrowing a European form that had been declining in popularity toward the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> However, the epic—with its focus on national fate and demagogic heroes—must have seemed an apt form for writers seeking answers to difficult questions about the destiny of the rebelling colonists. Using Robertson to help answer those questions, Freneau and Barlow in effect finished his *History of America* by doing for North America what Robertson had done for the South.

While Barlow acknowledged taking some leeway in the poem’s history to heighten its dramatic effect, “the place to mix the fact and fiction necessary for Columbus was not the epic but the novel” (Spengemann 172). In her Columbus novel, *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), and in the textbooks she composed for her Young Ladies Academy (est. 1797), Rowson ensured that projects of exploration and expansion like her brother’s would not be limited to the masculine domain. In Chapter One, I argue that Rowson used her fiction as a supplement to her pedagogical practices by arranging chronology and geography—what she called the two eyes of history—to incorporate Anglo cultural practices into America’s Columbian beginnings. By cultivating the feminine mind to envision North and South America as ripe for colonization by settlement, Rowson abetted the commercial ambitions of men.

Colonization by settlement was also on Washington Irving’s mind. My second chapter recounts how shortly after publishing a series of volumes on Spanish history,

which began with his Columbus biography (1828), Irving chronicled the history of John Jacob Astor's colony on the Columbia River in a work titled *Astoria* (1836). Framing both projects as "national," Irving implicitly linked the Astoria settlement to the chronicling of Columbus's life—a chronicle that would not have been possible without Spain's own nation-building project. In particular, in composing his biography of Columbus, Irving drew on the publication of Martín Fernández de Navarrete's *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde el fin del siglo XV* (1825), a work that attempted to salvage Spain's relationship to the New World by attempting to restore honor to conquest history. Irving's work, the authoritative story of Columbus' life for most of the nineteenth century, secured the navigator's reputation as an Anglo-American hero and ingrained in readers an American history that began in the Caribbean in 1492. In co-opting Navarrete's conquest history without its Black Legend legacy, Irving helped contemporary expansionists justify their claims to the continent.

As much as plotting national beginnings from the Caribbean helped to justify the U.S. takeover of the Pacific Northwest, it potentially put the nation at risk. This risk stemmed from the increased attention that Columbian histories brought to the island of Hispaniola, which at the turn of the nineteenth century had been re-named Haiti as a result of its successful slave revolution. When the Caribbean past was linked to the U.S. present to naturalize expansion, this enterprise looked ominous to an Anglo-American empire still sustained by a slave economy. James Fenimore Cooper, the subject of my third chapter, was sensitive to this implication. Cooper initially turned to Columbus in his fiction at a time when the dispute over Oregon territory threatened a third war with England, which had jointly occupied the region and competed with the U.S. for title to it.

Although Cooper embraced the Columbian past in *Mercedes of Castile* (1840) as a means to separate the U.S. from British history and to imagine the hemisphere as rightfully belonging to Anglo-Americans, when he contemplates the Haitian Revolution, he denies the very continuity he tries to impose between Hispaniola and the U.S. In thus bracketing the Caribbean from his otherwise hemispheric history, Cooper is forced to reclaim the British colonial past he would repudiate.

The work of free African-American J. Dennis Harris exemplifies U.S. writers' vexed relation to the Caribbean. The Dred Scott decision (1857) that officially denied citizenship to African Americans disillusioned Harris about the possibility of a multiracial U.S. nationalism. In my fourth chapter, I discuss how in giving up on a black future in the nation, Harris exploited the link between American discovery and slavery that made historical claims legitimating expansion a precarious enterprise. Instead of writing a history of Caribbean discovery on behalf of Anglo-American expansion, Harris composed a history of the Haitian Revolution meant to found an Anglo-African empire on the continent. Referring to the U.S. push to settle the Pacific Northwest, Harris understands that "the Pike's Peak fever will ere long be exhausted," and so he looks not north but south as a future site of colonization. In his travel narrative, *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (1860), Columbus remains Harris' touchstone, but only so that he can supplant him with the black revolutionary history that he believes better legitimates emigration to the tropics. Harris' efforts to resolve problems of belonging for Americans of African descent were interrupted by the U.S. Civil War (1861-5), which tried to answer for itself how African Americans would be incorporated into the Union.

Today Columbus' name resonates in quite different ways from his early days in the U.S. historical imagination as the representative American,<sup>44</sup> but his longstanding symbolic role in the birth of the nation continues to inform current conceptions of American space and time. The number of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century narratives about Columbus—from popular histories such as Charles C. Mann's *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created* (2011) to postmodern historical romances such as Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris' *Crown of Columbus* (1991)—indicate how vitally this figure still mediates ongoing questions about American affiliations and the history that conditions these relationships. Erdrich and Dorris, for instance, rewrite the Puritan account of New World discovery from one of glory to one of long-suffering. The plot begins when scholar Vivian Twostar, who is “Coeur d'Alene-Navajo-Irish-Hispanic-Sioux-by-marriage,” stumbles upon Columbian artifacts in Dartmouth's library shortly before the quincentennial (11). The discovery leads Twostar and her Anglo-American lover, significantly named Roger Williams, to the Caribbean where they search for the crown Columbus was reported to have presented as a gift to the indigenous people he encountered there. When the couple finds the crown, they learn that it is not one of gold as they had expected but that rather it is the crown of thorns worn by Jesus on the day of his death. While the crown of Columbus symbolizes the suffering of indigenous peoples resulting from the spread of the Christian empire, the novel concludes on a hopeful note. The birth of Twostar's and Williams' daughter signifies the renewal of life made possible with forgiveness: Twostar “had been the one to receive the sea's mercy. She was also the one to give the mercy back again” (381).

Junot Diaz's interpretation of the Columbian encounter is somewhat less hopeful in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). He picks up threads of Cooper's interpretation of the expedition's responsibility for the slave trade in the "Fukú americanus" that affects the novel's Dominican and American characters. *Oscar Wao* begins with a preface describing how this fukú, or curse, "came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved," but Diaz adds that it also came from Columbus. Alluding to both Columbus's status as discoverer of the New World as well as his later fall from grace when he was arrested during his third voyage to the western hemisphere, Diaz notes that "the Curse and Doom of the New World" is "also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims." According to the narrator of *Oscar Wao*, even to utter Columbus's name, which remains conspicuously absent from the novel, "invites calamity on the head of you and yours," and he concludes that despite Santo Domingo's status as the "port of entry" for this curse, "we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not." Implicitly concurring with Diaz that Santo Domingo is the "Ground Zero of the New World" (Diaz), Orson Scott Card attempts to redeem the navigator's reputation (a la Barlow) by having Native American, African and Muslim characters in *Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus* (1996) travel back in time to avert the curse that Diaz chronicles. Card's alternative history ends not with Columbus sailing west to conquer the New World but with the people of Central America sailing east with him back to Europe to begin a peaceful trade. Regardless of how Americans interpret Columbus, he remains a profoundly significant historical figure for them.

This dissertation offers a literary history that accounts for the enduring presence of Columbus in American letters. In taking seriously how the recent hemispheric turn in American Studies enjoins scholars to look beyond the nation and toward the continent, I have found in this study of the continental figure of Columbus that the nation and continent cannot be disentangled. American nationalists depended on a relationship to the western hemisphere to conceptualize the U.S. in space and time. Given the status Columbus had begun to assume as early as the seventeenth century as the discoverer of the western hemisphere and his lack of affiliation with the British empire, he proved the perfect figure for early nationals to adopt in validating their continuation of the navigator's search for new trade routes to the east by going west.

Nearly 70 years after Morse's geographies arranged American geography and chronology such as we know them today, a mature Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay "Wealth" (1860) that Columbus's "successors inherited his map and inherited his fury to complete it" (80). This was not a compliment but a critique. In censuring the rise of consumer culture and proto-capitalism, the Transcendentalist called his audience's attention to the ethics of the new economy—one that takes into account an ecological awareness. Comparing Columbus to the "monomaniacs" of his time, Emerson applauds the public ends to which the "*speculative* madness" of private men are held in check—an equilibrium he equates with "the same law which keeps the proportion in the supply of carbon, of alum, and of hydrogen" (81). In seeking economic principles in the laws of physics, Emerson would recast such thinking as "the world is his, who has money to go over it" into a universal logic privileging "a true economy in a state or an individual" that shares the fruits of its explorations with all of humankind (82, 83). Utopic though



Emerson's vision is, his appeal for the global benefit of "wealth"<sup>45</sup> not only anticipates the ambivalent philanthropy of such late nineteenth-century industrialists as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, it offers ideas worth meditating on in our own era of global networks which now criss-cross the vectors first etched by the Niña, Pinta and Santa Maria. Columbus may no longer be for us, as he was for the Puritans, a sign of hope in the New World because we better understand his implication in imperial systems and the disastrous results of that system on, for instance, indigenous populations, people of African descent – as well as the environmental despoliation that Emerson glimpsed. But in such imaginative work by Dorris and Erdrich (1991), Card (1996) and Diaz (2007), he continues to signify into the twenty-first century the possibility that the blindnesses and errors of the American past do not have to be our own as we strive to make ethical sense of our place within new systems of information, technology and globalization.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike the authors of British textbooks, Morse's *Geography Made Easy* (1784) and *American Geography* (1789) did not begin with the history of the European continent, but like them, he did believe that Columbus initiated historical time in the western hemisphere. Morse's inversion—whereby the New World, or America, began to be understood as fundamentally separate from the Old World, or Europe—was “the most essential feature” of the idea of the western hemisphere in the nineteenth century (Whitaker 5).

<sup>2</sup> For more on the imperial implications of this policy and how it spatialized the U.S. nation, see Murphy.

<sup>3</sup> While not necessarily the focus of their studies, a number of legal scholars have begun to understand the influence of such papal bulls on nineteenth-century U.S. policy. See, for example, Robert A. Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), Sharon Korman, *The Right of Conquest: The Acquisition of Territory by Force in International Law and Practice* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), and Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006). Lindsay Gordon Robertson's *Conquest by Law: How the Discovery of America Dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of Their Lands* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005) charts in detail how the discovery doctrine was used in U.S. law to dispossess North American indigenous peoples although she does not mention its provenance in the papal bulls of the middle ages.

<sup>4</sup> According to the web site for the American Indian Council, [www.manataka.org](http://www.manataka.org), this movement began with the Indigenous Law Institute in the year of the Columbian quincentennial and was renewed four years later at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago—the site of the 1893 Columbian Exposition. The Declaration of Vision, signed by 60 Native representatives at the Parliament, connects the principles of the papal bull to those undergirding nineteenth-century U.S. Supreme Court decisions that justified the Indian Removal Act, which is a relationship that I discuss further in Chapter Three: “We call upon the people of conscience in the Roman Catholic hierarchy to persuade Pope John II to formally revoke the Inter Cetera Bull of May 4, 1493, which will restore our fundamental human rights. That Papal document called

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for our Nations and Peoples to be subjugated so the Christian Empire and its doctrines would be propagated. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Johnson v. McIntosh* 8 Wheat 543 (in 1823) adopted the same principle of subjugation expressed in the Inter Cetera Bull. This Papal Bull has been, and continues to be, devastating to our religions, our cultures, and the survival of our populations.” For the full text of the Declaration, see <http://ili.nativeweb.org/dovision.html>.

<sup>5</sup> While the full expression of the idea of the western hemisphere is taken to be articulated by the Monroe Doctrine (1823), Whitaker assigns Jefferson the responsibility for bringing the idea “to maturity” in the 1810s (29).

<sup>6</sup> The first U.S. book Irving published upon his return to his native country after living in Europe for 17 years (three of which he spent in Spain) was *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), an account of the expedition of Henry Leavitt Ellsworth who—at Andrew Jackson’s command—was to “establish order and justice” among indigenous groups in Arkansas and Oklahoma after the passage of the Indian Removal Act (qtd. in Vizenor 218).

<sup>7</sup> For a list of the elements of the discovery doctrine, see Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2006) 6-8.

<sup>8</sup> For thorough histories of the dispute between the U.K. and the U.S. over Oregon, see Frederick Merk, *The Oregon Question: Essays in Anglo-American Diplomacy and Politics* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967) and Donald A. Rakestraw, *For Honor or Destiny: The Anglo-American Crisis over the Oregon Territory* (New York: P. Lang, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> This bull, as well as a bust of its author Pope Alexander VI, was on display in Chicago during the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. See “Notes upon the World’s Fair,” *American Philosophical Society*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> See chapter three for a more thorough discussion of how Columbian narratives figured in this debate.

<sup>11</sup> Before publishing the first edition of *The Life and Voyages of Columbus*, Irving rewrote the section in which he mentions the Haitian Revolution to temper its language about how the evils of exploitative Spanish labor laws—known in the early colonial period as the *encomienda* system—have

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extended to the present-day U.S. To avoid this association, Cooper denies continuity between Spanish practices and Anglo-American ones in a historical romance that otherwise claims Spanish colonial history as the pre-history of the U.S.

<sup>12</sup> See chapter four of Harvey's *American Geographics* for a discussion of the growing interest among U.S. writers/explorers in the tropics where "after the Spanish sway in the New World had more or less eroded," they felt "more freely able to inscribe U.S. national topoi upon the regions south of the border" (157).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this history and how Columbus became identified as its progenitor, see Elise Bartosik-Vélez, "Translatio Imperii: Virgil and Peter Martyr's Columbus," *Comparative Literature Studies* 2009: 559-588.

<sup>14</sup> Americanist and Latin Americanist scholars of the colonial era have begun to document the enormous influence of Spain on British colonists (among others). For example, see Ralph Bauer's review essay "The Early-Modern Ibero-American World," *Latin American Research Review* 2008: 225-238, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), and Jonathan Locke Hart, *Representing the New World: The English and French Uses of the Example of Spain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) and "Spain, England and France," *Comparing Empires: European Colonialism from Portuguese Expansion to the Spanish American War* (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 79-108.

<sup>15</sup> Culturally speaking, British colonials did not consider Columbus to be British although he was considered a type or anti-type for others to emulate or reject as they colonized the western hemisphere.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the British colonial uses of the Madoc legend, see Derrick Spradlin, "'GOD ne'er brings to pass such Things for nought': Empire and Prince Madoc of Wales in Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature* Nov. 2009: 39-70.

<sup>17</sup> On the European tendency during the colonial era to view the New World as one congruous unit, see Whitaker 6.

<sup>18</sup> When U.S. expansionists looked beyond the Mississippi, they had to adopt an imperial figure who would not legitimize the colonization of the British in the American continent, which continued into the nineteenth century.

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<sup>19</sup> Both Mather and Sewall consulted New World historian Peter Martyr for their respective histories, and Mather was literate in Spanish. According to H. Bernstein, Sewall had asked to be sent a copy of Las Casas as well as a Spanish grammar and dictionary in 1691. See “Las primeras relaciones intelectuales entre New England y el mundo hispánico: 1700-1815” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 1939: 1-17.

<sup>20</sup> Special thanks to Kirsten Silva Gruesz who kindly pointed me to Sewall’s *Phænomena*.

<sup>21</sup> Until his death in 1506, Columbus believed that he had reached the Indies. One year later, Martin Waldseemüller produced the first map representing the western hemisphere as separate from Asia and, more famously, named the region after Amerigo Vespucci, who he believed had discovered the continent.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), Margaret Rich Greer, Walter Mignolo and Maureen Quilligan, eds., *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007) and Philip Wayne Powell, *Tree of Hate: Propaganda and Prejudices Affecting United States Relations With the Hispanic World* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

<sup>23</sup> Scholars certainly have studied Columbus in Anglo-American culture, but while recent studies like Bushman’s and Hart’s have been closely historical in that they document well some of the uses to which Columbus was put, they tend to lack fundamental claims about the implications of that usage. While I agree with Hart that the figure of Columbus is highly ambivalent, I believe that when put in the specific context of an emergent U.S. nationalism, the cross-purposes to which Columbus was used brings into focus his significance in constructions of American time and space. One notable exception to this trend is the work of Elise Bartosik-Vélez, who I would like to thank for generously sharing with me parts of her book manuscript on the relationship between Columbus and empire, particularly her third chapter “Columbus and the Republican Empire of the United States,” which traces the Columbian figure of empire as imagined by the early national epic poets to Irving to the 1893 Columbian Exposition. See also Bartosik-Vélez, “Globalization and Christopher Columbus in the Americas.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2006: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss4/2>.

<sup>24</sup> Bradford, for instance, does not mention Columbus in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, but he does quote Martyr’s *Decades* to contrast the suffering of Spanish colonists in the New World with the greater

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“miseries” of the Pilgrims. According to Bartosik-Vélez, the translation of the *Decades* into English by Richard Eden in 1555 introduced British colonials to Columbus “as a stock character in the Western narrative of colonization and empire building.” For an excellent contextualization of Bradford in the Atlantic World, see Hart, *Comparing Empires* 79-84.

<sup>25</sup> Bohun employs Mather’s regional imaginary by designating Columbus “the first discoverer of America” and Cabot the first discoverer of New England. For a more thorough treatment of British representations of Columbus during the colonial period, see Bushman, chapter two, and Spengemann.

<sup>26</sup> He was a politician in addition to being a bookseller. See Mark Knights, “Churchill, Awnsham (1658–1728),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford UP, 2004) 12 Sept. 2011.

<sup>27</sup> See also Spengemann 153.

<sup>28</sup> Colón wrote the biography in Spanish, but the earliest existing copy of it is an Italian translation, which was used for this publication.

<sup>29</sup> Rowson cites Colón, and I infer that she consulted Robertson because she reiterates the popular myth that Isabella sold her jewels to fund Columbus’s 1492 voyage, which is mentioned by Robertson but not Colón. In *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1995), Nina Baym avers that Rowson read Robertson, but she does not indicate where she finds evidence of this fact. For more on the impact Robertson had on Anglo-American writers, see Bernstein, Bushman and Frederick S. Stimson, “William Robertson’s Influence on Early American Literature,” *The Americas* July 1957: 37-43.

<sup>30</sup> See also Bushman 79.

<sup>31</sup> See the recent scholarly biography of Columbus by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Columbus* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> For more on this suit, see Ilaria Luzzana Caraci, Introduction, *The History of the Life and Deeds of the Admiral Christopher Columbus: Attributed to His Son Fernando Colón* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Karen Stolley, “Sins of the Father: Hernando Colon’s *Life of the Admiral*,” *Latin American Literary Review* Jan.-June 1993: 53-64.

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<sup>34</sup> On Irving's use of Colón's biography, see Rolena Adorno, "Americanist Visions: Stanley T. Williams, Washington Irving and Christopher Columbus," *The Yale Review* March 2011: 1-25, "Washington Irving's Romantic Hispanism and Its Columbian Legacies," *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, Ed. Richard Kagan (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002) 49-105, and Hedges.

<sup>35</sup> It is significant that this difference becomes more pronounced in Freneau's revision of the poem published after the U.S. War for Independence. See Wertheimer, chapter one.

<sup>36</sup> Even while acknowledging alternate ways of historical knowing, Freneau believes finally that "tradition lends no aid to unveil this secret to the human eye" (560).

<sup>37</sup> Bartosik-Vélez describes this idea about civilization's move from east to west as affecting Anglo- and Spanish-Americans alike in their understanding of themselves as continuing the legacy of Rome through which they believed themselves to be spreading civilization into the western hemisphere. As she convincingly argues, Columbus had been identified as an agent of this transfer of empire as early as 1511, when the first volume of *Decades de Orbe Novo* was published in Seville by Peter Martyr, who fashioned him as such. See "*Translatio Imperii*."

<sup>38</sup> Barlow later revised and published the poem as *The Columbiad* (1807).

<sup>39</sup> *Massachusetts Centinel* [Boston] 11 Oct. 1788: 32.

<sup>40</sup> *New-Haven Gazette* [New Haven, CT] 15 May 1788: 6.

<sup>41</sup> *The United States Democratic Review* Nov. 1839: 426-430.

<sup>42</sup> O'Sullivan expresses this desire when he imagines the U.S. as a temple whose "floor shall be a hemisphere" (427).

<sup>43</sup> See Steven Blakemore, *Joel Barlow's Columbiad: A Bicentennial Reading* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2007) 2.

<sup>44</sup> According to Schuman, Schwartz and D'Arcy, this shift in the public's perception of Columbus occurred after the publication of Alfred Crosby's *Columbian Exchange* (1972) in which he charts the consequences of the 1492 discovery on the ecology and peoples of the western hemisphere. No few examples may be cited of the relatively recent backlash against commemorations of Columbus. In addition to the revaluation of the Admiral in such reggae songs as Shadow's "Columbus Lied" (1989) and Burning

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Spear's "Christopher Columbus" (1991), both produced shortly before the quincentennial, a public service campaign calling the U.S. to Reconsider Columbus Day was launched as recently as 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Emerson defines "wealth" broadly in the essay as meaning not only monetary capital but also wealth in the arts and sciences.



## CHAPTER ONE

**Imperial Pedagogy:****Susanna Rowson's *Columbus for Young Ladies***

About a year before Captain James Cook's infamous death in the Hawaiian Islands in 1779, he sailed into the Pacific Northwest in the hopes of finding a passageway connecting the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. Cook believed his discovery would make trade routes between England and America more direct. Until the construction of the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century, merchants from England and New England had to sail around Cape Horn to reach the northwest—where they hoped to collect some of the wealth that Cook's published accounts suggested was available through the region's fur trade.

One such merchant was Robert Haswell,<sup>1</sup> the brother of Susanna Haswell Rowson—whose novel *Charlotte Temple* (London 1791) has gained her prominence in American literary histories in the past twenty years. During the tercentennial of Columbus's so-called discovery of America, in the year following the publication of Rowson's novel in London, first mate Haswell and the crew of the *Columbia Rediviva* came upon the mouth of the Columbia River, which they named for their ship. At the time traders and politicians, such as Thomas Jefferson, took interest in this discovery for its potential as a navigable trade route. Later this discovery of the Columbia River formed the basis for U.S. claims to territory in the Pacific Northwest, which was caught up in both real and imagined geographies.

The U.S. was able to venture such a claim during the 1840s due to a convention held in 1790 between the Spanish and British empires in the Nootka Sound,<sup>2</sup> where the

crew of the Columbia sailed the year before they reached the mouth of the eponymous river. Unable to rely on its ally France, which was in the midst of revolution, in the event of war against England, Spain could not defend its assertion to sovereignty in the Pacific Northwest, which had been based for the past three hundred years on Columbian discovery and justified by the *Inter caetera*—a papal bull that functionally divided the globe in two when issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493. The *Inter caetera* apportioned the land to the east, which would soon be known in Europe as America, to Spanish colonization by conquest. Lands to the west, mainly Africa, were preserved for colonization by the Portuguese according to the papal bull of 1452.<sup>3</sup> Although the Nootka Convention established that prior discovery remained a requirement for making territorial claims to non-Christian land, Spain conceded to British demands that discovery had to be followed not by conquest but rather by sustained settlement. In other words, a nation forfeited its sovereignty to discovered territories, such as Spanish California, if it did not actively colonize these regions.

British-born Rowson furthered her family's attempts to capitalize on the Columbian past by endorsing this policy in her only historical novel, *Reuben and Rachel; Or a Tale of Old Times* (1798), which she published one year after founding the Academy for Young Ladies in Boston. Using the novel as a supplement to her pedagogical practices, Rowson arranged chronology and geography—what she called the “two eyes of history”—to incorporate Anglo cultural practices into America's Columbian beginnings (Rowson, *Universal Geography* 285). By cultivating the feminine mind to envision North and South America as ripe for colonization by settlement and cultivation, didactic author and teacher Rowson abetted the commercial ambitions of Anglo-

American men like her brother Haswell. Both discoverers of sorts, Haswell in his own voyages and Rowson in her fictional geographies adopted Columbus, if mostly in name, to imagine the continent as exploitable territory for Anglo-Americans.

The transhemispheric struggles over American land among the empires of Spain, England and the U.S., in which Columbus prominently and variously figures, are key to understanding not only Rowson's novel but also her literary career. Although less renowned in the annals than Columbus, Rowson is just as slippery a historical figure. Coming into prominence as a writer at the same time as the U.S. was emerging as a nation, her importance to literary history is usually figured within a national context.<sup>4</sup> Yet her British nationality (she did not gain U.S. citizenship until 1802),<sup>5</sup> her subordinate position in society as a woman, and her participation in what she herself recognized as an underdeveloped national literary tradition all make her difficult to understand within a U.S. frame<sup>6</sup>—despite scholars' placement of *Charlotte Temple* at the beginnings of an American (meaning U.S.) novelistic tradition.<sup>7</sup> In asking what is American about Rowson's Columbus, then, I am questioning what is American about the territory to which she returned in 1793, after being deported from Massachusetts during the Revolutionary War for her family's Loyalist sympathies. Given that Rowson experienced the anxieties of a tumultuous and rapidly shifting political scene at the vulnerable age of 16, it is perhaps not surprising that *Reuben and Rachel* exhibits traces of nostalgia for royalist England.

While Rowson's American literary career has in recent years increasingly been understood within the context of her transatlantic life in scholarship that emphasizes New World-Old World relations, the turn toward hemispheric studies—with its focus on inter-

American, New World relations—asks how we might situate Rowson within the cultures and literatures not of America the U.S. nation but of America the continent.<sup>8</sup> However, Rowson’s subtle resistance to “the free and independent condition which [the American continents] have assumed and maintained,” requires that readings of the “American” scenes of *Reuben and Rachel* show sensitivity to how Rowson constructs this space and time, which I will argue depends on both a (transatlantic) relation to British aristocracy and a (hemispheric) relation to Incan royalty that form branches of an Anglicized Columbus’ family tree.<sup>9</sup> In demonstrating how the space of the western hemisphere was construed to emerge in 1492 with Columbus, this essay contributes to work begun by scholars, such as Gretchen Murphy, who have interrogated the hemispheric frame for what are taken to be American cultural productions.<sup>10</sup>

Just as Rowson’s American literary career should not be separated from her transatlantic life, neither should the U.S. during its early national period be conceived of apart from its ever-shifting transhemispheric relations through which it appropriated much of the Spanish-claimed and indigenously populated North America. While the U.S. encouraged these relations via “friendly” trade with European empires and Native Americans,<sup>11</sup> such relationships also helped shore up national feelings by allowing descendants of Europeans in America to trace their lineage to the same founding father. Using Columbus, Euro-Americans could stake claims to territory anywhere in the hemisphere based on the right of discovery. By shaking Columbus free of his association with a culture deemed foreign to Anglo-America, such as the colonial practice of conquest or the Roman Catholic religion, writers in the expanding U.S. could insert him into an amorphous American history that in the years between the conclusion of the U.S.

War for Independence (1783) and the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine (1823) was taking both national and continental shape.

But before America became indistinguishable from the U.S. nation and empire, it denoted in turn-of-the-century textbooks continental territory conceived of as historically descended from Columbus. In modifying this use of Columbus to plot the transhemispheric action of *Reuben and Rachel*, Rowson not only defied feminine conventions of historical writing but also the historical record itself to inspire and support Anglo designs on the American continent.<sup>12</sup> These designs relied on navigating factual passageways and fanciful ones—that is, those yet to be found—by which one could discover and settle “new” lands. Although remembered as the “foremother of American sentimental fiction,” Rowson—in her dual role as preceptress of her own academy and author of historical narratives from *Reuben and Rachel* to the textbooks she published following that novel—encouraged young ladies to feel right by imagining right (Rust 3). As such, she gave ideological and emotional weight to claims for territory believed to be American through Columbus. While claiming rights depended on directing history so that descendants of Europeans in America became inheritors of the Columbian legacy, imagining right relied on fictional unions between Europeans and Native Americans. At best, such unions have led critics to laud the racial progressivism of the first volume of *Reuben and Rachel*.<sup>13</sup> At worst, critics dismiss the historical romance as “really nothing more than pure fiction” (Spengemann 176). In contrast to both readings, I argue that Rowson’s representations of race in both volumes read consistently as an articulation of the Black Legend. The novel also exhibits Rowson’s awareness and preservation of elements of the Spanish colonial record. More broadly, my reading of *Reuben and Rachel*

will show that at the turn of the nineteenth century, Anglophone notions of American chronology and geography were cohering in imaginative narratives about Columbus in ways that had real implications for the ongoing colonization of the hemisphere, particularly of the Pacific Northwest. In order to set up how the Columbus of textbooks informed Rowson's fictional Columbus and how her Columbus, in turn, maps American space and time, I begin with a discussion of the most popular disseminators of the Columbus myth in the English language during the late eighteenth century: geographies.

### **Textbook Columbus**

The chronology of the hemisphere was intimately linked to its spatialization during the turn of the nineteenth century. This is because narratives about the past were most often given in schoolbooks such as geographies, not history textbooks, which were not published in significant numbers until the 1820s.<sup>14</sup> Because the structuring logic of these geographies was the division of physical space, it preceded and determined which historical events an author foregrounded. Re-imagining physical geographies, as Rowson did in her own geography textbook, *An Abridgement of Universal Geography* (1805), and in *Reuben and Rachel*, necessarily changed a region's chronology and its function in historical narratives. The nationalist geographies by New England-born Jedidiah Morse—bestsellers in the U.S. during its early national period second only to the Bible and Noah Webster's spellers—offer a clear example of how narrative space constituted historical time.<sup>15</sup> Discontent with Europeans who “have too often suffered fancy to supply the place of facts” in writing American geography, Morse claims to fill this deficit with the “authentic information” of his own books (*American Geography* iii). However, rather than substantially revise the content he derives from his European sources, Morse merely

inverts the order of the information so that America precedes Europe in his geography's layout. Because authors proceeded to describe geography from larger to smaller units, a continent's history superseded a nation's, and because they considered Columbus to be the first historical actor in the continent, he assumes monumental significance in American geographies.

The admiral's discovery in 1492, which functioned in the *Inter caetera* to split the globe into western and eastern hemispheres, marked for Enlightenment thinkers the beginning of authentic historical time in the western hemisphere and made it new when compared to the eastern hemisphere. In the period's geography books, the single landmass America (joined by the Isthmus of Darien, site of the present-day Panama Canal) signified not the U.S. but one quarter of the globe, with Africa, Asia and Europe making up the other three quarters.<sup>16</sup> These quarters were grouped into two larger units by geographers, such as Morse, who called the space we now conceive of as a hemisphere the eastern and western continents. These continents were believed to have entered historical time in different epochs. Repeating the geographic divisions naturalized by the *Inter caetera* (and not formalized until the Prime Meridian officially divided the globe in 1884), Morse thought the western continent did not enter history until Columbus landed in the Caribbean: "The eastern continent was the only theatre of history from the creation of the world to the year of our Lord 1492" (*American Geography* 12). Although the theatre of history, playing according to Christian time, expands into the western continent of America with what Morse considers authentic evidence of the past, 1492 also drives a temporal wedge between east and west that leads Morse to call the latter the "*New World* or *New Hemisphere*, a title, which, perhaps, it may justly claim, when we

consider ... its unquestionable superiority.” The superiority of the hemisphere derives from its size and produce, but what makes America exceptional above all is its novelty, specifically “the interesting consequences it has already produced, and is still producing, with respect to the nations of the world” (*American Geography* 53). While the “consequences” contributing to this superiority occur both in the present (“[America] is still producing them”) and the past (“[America] has already produced them”), it is their newness that makes them “interesting.” By using the present perfect tense (“has produced”), Morse implicitly links the consequences of Columbus’s past actions—traceable to the year of his first documented presence in the Caribbean—to a continuous present still unfolding in the New Hemisphere. As a result, the date 1492 becomes of utmost consequence to world history, which was unprecedented in textbooks by European writers, including Rowson, who foregrounded the geography and chronology of the Old World.

Historians had begun to instantiate this divide between ancient and modern, American time since at least the seventeenth century using the documents of Columbus’s exploration.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the past began to be interpreted less according to the sacred canon of biblical scripture and more according to a secular canon, or archive, of written testimony beginning with Spanish discovery and exploration.<sup>18</sup> Early national geographers continued to negotiate the overlap between sacred and secular time by, for instance, fitting historical events into a divine frame.<sup>19</sup> In an 1804 edition of *Geography Made Easy*, Morse, a Congregationalist minister, appends a chronology that begins in 4004 B.C. with Adam and Eve, highlights Columbus’s discovery of America, and ends with the doubling of U.S. territory by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Among the stories



from ancient history and the Bible that inform this providential timeline, the notable absence of events from Native American history indicates a third layer of time that Morse navigates in his geography by pushing it to the fringes of a chronology with an acknowledged start date (i.e., 4004 B.C. or 1492 A.D.): geologic or natural time. Because no document accounts for its beginnings, natural time—in its stretching farther back into the past than the written record—stands outside of historical time. By virtue of their inhabitation in America before Columbus and their lack of “authentic” forms of historical evidence, the indigenous people of Morse’s geography belong to this ahistorical, non-Christian time.

This lack of historical legitimacy remains true even for those indigenous peoples whom Anglo-Americans viewed as being more advanced than North American Indians, such as the Inca of Peru. Because the Inca were believed to have a semblance of civilization as a result of their cultivation of the land, they stood in Anglo-American history as martyrs to the greed and rapacity of the Spanish conquistadors. North American Indians, on the other hand, did not enter into Anglo-American histories of civilization because their peripatetic lives made their origins indeterminate.<sup>20</sup> Yet Morse’s Peruvians also possess a genesis that “probably can never satisfactorily be decided” (*Geography Made Easy* 58). He still considers them superior among the first peoples, but they have “no authentic documents to enable us to bring down the history of Peru to the present time,” and so their history begins and ends with Pizarro’s conquest—a fact that Rowson alters in *Reuben and Rachel* by displacing Columbus’s continental landfall in Guyana onto Peru (*Geography Made Easy* 55; *American Geography* 804).

Columbus would not have been able to sail to Peru in the early sixteenth century since the Isthmus of Darien made crossing into the country by sea impossible. (The Spaniards who accompanied Pizarro to Peru in the 1520s trekked there across land from Panama.) Rowson's displacement of Columbus's continental landfall by implicitly imagining a canal across the Isthmus of Darien is important for how, if only in fantasy at the time, it not only opens a more direct route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean—making the Pacific Northwest more accessible from the east—the waterway also exposes South America to a nation eager to capitalize off its resources in a logic that anticipates the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>21</sup> The doctrine, in fact, expressly linked the Pacific Northwest and South America by promoting hemispheric solidarity against European interest in colonizing the northwest of the continent. Although Rowson too wishes to express an exploitable hemispheric solidarity, these North-South relations do not come at the expense of a connection to Europe and, more specifically, England. England takes precedence for Rowson both symbolically and literally as it is where her novel about the Columbus family begins.

### **Novel Columbus**

*Reuben and Rachel* follows the order of Rowson's geography textbook by opening not in America—as Morse's geographies did—but in Europe with an English story preceding a Spanish one. The story begins well after Columbus's death in a British household of women that includes Columbus's granddaughter Isabelle, her daughter Columbia, and their South American servant Cora, who are all living in England after Isabelle converted to Anglicanism to marry the historically inspired Sir Thomas Arundel. The story of Columbus, which occupies the bulk of the first 100 pages of the novel,

begins in the second chapter after Columbia asks her mother why she weeps over the portrait of an Inca princess. Isabelle responds that the Indian maid is Columbia's grandmother, "by birth a *queen*, the only child of a monarch whose wealth had no bounds, and who, far from the haunts of those who call themselves civilized people, reigned unmolested, till the adventurous spirit of your great ancestor Columbus prompted him to seek in distant seas for unknown worlds" (50). While Columbus's arrival in "unknown worlds" occurred on an island in 1492, Rowson foreshadows Columbus's landfall on the continent at Peru (where he never actually set foot) by suggesting the indigenous island people are not Arawak but Inca. In addition to worshipping the sun in temples built for such adoration, Columbus remarks that the local people's wealth comes from gold and silver, which might be extracted from mines that Rowson describes in the Peru section of her geography textbook. Most of Rowson's Columbus narrative in *Reuben and Rachel* recounts his fictionalized third voyage to Peru where his son Ferdinando meets and weds Orrabella. This narrative follows a trajectory reminiscent of Fernando Colon, whose sixteenth-century biography of his father has served as the source text for most histories of Columbus and whom Rowson cites in the body of *Reuben and Rachel* (113).<sup>22</sup> The awe and wonder of the first voyage give way to the horrors of the third when Columbus's compatriots assume the guise of rapacious conquistadors who challenge his authority and drive the Peruvians out of their native land (69, 82). Rowson suggests that crimes against nature occurred as a result not only of the Spanish disregard for Columbus's governance but also in the furtherance of private property. Repeating a well-known aspect of the Columbus story, Rowson sends him back to Spain in chains, but in another revision to the historical record, Queen Isabelle restores to Columbus the

West Indian viceroyalty, which he never actually recovered. The Columbus narrative effectually ends with the death of his son, Ferdinando, who dies killing the heir to the Ottoman empire in Spain's war against the Moors, which causes his mother to "glor[y] in his faith, valour and constancy to the Christian cause" (95). It is significant that Rowson uses the term "Christian" here (as opposed to Catholic or Reconquista) because it allows her to manage the cultural differences that she brings together in the first two generations of Reuben and Rachel's family history.

Columbus's captivity portends a series of captivities in the novel that introduce an element of hybridity into Rowson's history.<sup>23</sup> Prefiguring even the capture of Columbus is that of his Protestant granddaughter Isabelle whom the reader meets in the novel's opening pages on the borders of Wales where she is hiding from the "furious zeal" of the Catholic Queen Mary (119). While in hiding, Isabelle and her servant Cora inform Columbia of her descent from Columbus and Peruvian royalty by recounting the fall of the Incan empire, during which many Peruvians were themselves taken captive by the conquistadors. Shortly thereafter, a courtier in the service of Queen Mary, Sir James Howard, stumbles upon the castle in which Isabelle is protecting the son of the Protestant Lady Jane Grey, who—historically—was executed after a brief accession to the throne. Howard coerces Isabelle to answer in court for her duplicity to the state in hiding Lady Jane's son. Inexplicably "convinced of the errors of the Catholic persuasion" despite being of that persuasion until her conversion to Anglicanism to marry Arundel, Isabelle resists Queen Mary's threats of torture to extract a confession on what she has done with Grey's child, and she advises her daughter to do the same: "Suffer no temptation, however great, to draw thee from thy duty to thy Creator. No, Columbia, not even to save

the life of thy mother, let thy faith be shaken” (129, 131). Isabelle and Columbia are saved from the religious persecution of Queen Mary by her death and Elizabeth’s accession, but I will return to the implications of their suffering to preserve English virtue, which Rowson’s characters continue to undergo in captivity as the novel progresses. For now, it is more important to observe that in spite of the “fusion that emerges as essential in Rowson’s conception of American character,” this hybrid character functions to reinforce the superiority of Anglo culture over its indigenous or Hispanic counterparts (Bartolomeo 15).<sup>24</sup>

In portraying the Peruvians as once superior, as well as in depicting Columbus as an enterprising man who stood above the Spanish colonizers blamed for destroying such civilizations, Rowson’s *Reuben and Rachel* exhibits the influence both of Morse, from whose geography books she borrowed heavily to write her own textbooks, and of conjectural historian William Robertson, whose *The History of the Discovery and Settlement of America* (1777) was for early nationals “the chief source for all things pertaining to the Spanish in the New World” (Stimson 37).<sup>25</sup> Despite a historical record presumed to be incomplete since the descent of indigenous peoples could not be determined according to European conventions, historians of the Scottish Enlightenment, such as Robertson, did not ignore the Native American past. Rather, they formulated a universal theory of history by which they could speculate how time moved to incorporate all peoples. Known as the conjectural or stadial model of history, this theory held that all human societies progressed through four stages of existence based on their mode of subsistence: hunter, herder, farmer, and manufacturer. These historians believed that a society achieved civilization only in the latter stages, which had the danger of becoming

overcivilized and devolving back through the course of history as indicated, for example, by the title to Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776). In addition to their "stately temples" and palaces, the Peruvian country was known by Robertson, for one, to be "cultivated with an appearance of regular industry," which led him and his colleagues to believe that the Indians of South America had achieved a level of civilization unmatched by the hunting groups of North America who, according to the stadial theory, remained in a state of savagery (*History of the Discovery* 183). The civilized state of the Inca made their destruction ready material for the deployment of the Black Legend—a trend in Anglophone historiography that favored the supposedly more benign form of Anglo colonization by cultivation over the Spanish colonization by conquest that had been demonized since Indian rights advocate Bartolomé de las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552). In contrast to the lustful Spanish colonists, Las Casas considered Columbus to have stood above his men in his divine mission of converting the native population to Roman Catholicism. This characterization of Columbus as an exceptional man, which Rowson reiterates, was repeated down through the centuries.<sup>26</sup>

Although Rowson may have blurred the boundary between authenticity and fancy in claiming that she blends instruction with amusement in *Reuben and Rachel*, she wants to keep some distinction intact between her own tales of "real wonders" and those she rejects as "wonderful and indeed impossible" (39). Thus, Rowson's interventions into the historical record in *Reuben and Rachel* occur more by rearranging the facts and filling in gaps in the acknowledged record. For example, she manipulates evidence reprinted in Robertson's *History* that Columbus wrote a still-missing letter to the Catholic Kings by

having Queen Isabelle discover this letter in the novel. In the fictional letter, Columbus requests that the New World be named Columbia after himself and his fictional wife Beatina. This expansion of the historical record, while purely fictional, actually takes the shape of facticity as Morse had begun to formulate it for American history by making documentary evidence the basis for truth claims about the past.

In using her novel to rename the continent Columbia, Rowson was not merely amusing herself and her readers, as she stated in her preface was one purpose of writing the novel; she was also making a historical correction. Because authenticity emanated from written accounts, the western continent's name America after Amerigo Vespucci, whose discovery followed Columbus's by several years, had rankled colonial, early national and antebellum writers from Cotton Mather, who claimed "this vast hemisphere ... might more justly ... have received its name from [Columbus]," to Morse and Rowson, who called Vespucci a "fortunate imposter," to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who dubbed him a "false pickle dealer" (43; 61; 296; 86). While the continent had been known poetically as Columbia, its designation on maps as America since the sixteenth century made a change in the late eighteenth unlikely.<sup>27</sup> Unsatisfied by Vespucci's having "robbed Columbus of a distinction which undoubtedly belonged to him," Rowson used *Reuben and Rachel* to rename the continent and restore distinction to its proper discoverer (*Universal Geography* 296).

Proper names were of utmost importance in early geography textbooks because most of them lacked maps until the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, authors had to construct geopolitical space on the page "as an inherently antvisual memory, as a verbal construct grounded in the names" (Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution* 151). These

names served as mnemonic devices for students whom Rowson tested using the catechetical method—the most common pedagogical exercise until the 1840s. Textbooks, such as Rowson's, which were written according to this method presented information in a question-and-answer format that students were to copy and memorize. In privileging this learning by rote, Rowson encouraged her students to think associatively over more linear forms of thinking that, for example, established causal relationships.<sup>28</sup>

In employing this method, Rowson was not forfeiting control over how students interpreted relationships among the elements they were to associate by name. On the contrary, she repeats time and again that “the hand of education might impress whatever characters the instructor please[s]” on youthful minds (*Reuben and Rachel* 196). In *Reuben and Rachel*, Rowson impresses upon her readers the characters she pleases in a dual sense: both as fictional people meant to represent a particular type, such as the Spanish conquistador or the noble savage, and as written names meant to evoke particular geographies.<sup>29</sup> While the character types Rowson presents in her novel are reflective of regional types in geography textbooks, the names for these characters, which recur throughout the generations, break down regional distinctions. In recycling the character names Columbus/Columbia, Orrabella/Arrabella, Isabelle, Reuben and Rachel, Rowson not only reinforces their Biblical and historical resonance for readers who more easily recall them than the plot that spans the hundreds of years that *Reuben and Rachel* covers, she also creates an Anglo-Protestant counterpart to the most consequential Hispano-Catholic or Native American characters. Instead of reading the somewhat convoluted plot and repetition of character names as a narrative failure or evidence of Rowson's lack of imagination, I believe they operate as a rather imaginative extension of her pedagogy



whereby readers learned to associate Spanish, South American, British and North American characters with an Anglicized past and future.

Anglicizing the Columbian past and projecting it into the future of the continent was something Rowson managed in her geography textbook by altering American space and time. Her Columbus, unlike Morse's, does not neatly divide world geography into Old and New Hemispheres but rather puts Spain/South America at a distance from England/North America. Rowson redistributes space by interchanging land and water, which authors of eighteenth-century textbooks considered to be the two basic units of geography. Indeed, Morse determines land and water to be the "first grand division of the earth" and the continents those tracts of land that are separated by water (*Geography Made Easy* 30). In exchanging land for water or vice versa, Rowson could conjoin or divide territory as she desired. In the following two examples, Rowson employs the historical figure of Columbus to perform such a geographical reconfiguration. Imagining that Columbus sees land where there is water (specifically, in the Atlantic Ocean) or that he sails through terra firma (the Isthmus of Darien), Rowson uses him to both remove North from South America and adjoin the Old World and New.

Rowson fantasizes that Columbus joins the Old and New continents in *An Abridgment of Universal Geography* (1805), which she composed for her all-girls academy. In the textbook, she imagines that in crossing the Atlantic, Columbus could "see the forests of this fair western world rise as it were from the bottom of the ocean" (258). Rowson could have bridged the ocean between Europe and America with any land form, but in imagining forests arising from the sea floor, her metaphoric anticipates Thomas Jefferson's policy on Indian relations in 1803. Addressing Congress to request

funds for Lewis and Clark, who were to explore “the only line of easy communication across the continent” in the primary “interests of commerce,” Jefferson begins his speech by indexing how Native Americans might be persuaded to resume selling their territory to the U.S. government. Both measures involve encouraging the dependence of native groups on “those things which will contribute more to their domestic comfort” over the “possession of extensive but uncultivated wilds.” Jefferson believes this task accomplishable through convincing indigenous populations to change their mode of subsistence from hunting to farming so “the extensive forests necessary in the hunting life will then become useless.” Populating the Atlantic Ocean with trees ready for razing (rather than with landforms conducive to mining, for example), Rowson impresses her reader to imagine the gap between Europe and America closed by a geography conducive to colonization by settlement in what we might consider an early picture of Manifest Destiny.<sup>30</sup>

Conversely, Rowson converts land to water to disconnect South from North America by displacing Columbus’ landing on terra firma in 1498 to Peru in *Reuben and Rachel*, a feat that would have been possible only by sailing through a then-nonexistent Panama Canal. A chronological rearrangement attends this geographic one. Although the narrative stretches back in time to 1490, Rowson removes the Columbus story from the novel’s temporal and geographic frame, which begins in mid-sixteenth century Wales and ends in mid-eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Despite this distancing, Rowson adumbrates South America as a site for the future course of Anglo-American empire by marrying Inca royalty into the Columbus family, whose ten generations of descendants the novel traces. These descendants become Anglicized when Columbus’s granddaughter Isabelle

converts to marry an Anglican thereby relinquishing her inheritance by defying her mother's stipulation that she marry within the Catholic faith. Writing to her daughter Isabelle, a convert to the reformed religion, Beatina nevertheless reminds her that the marriage of their son Ferdinando to the Peruvian princess Orrabella will "prove your right to the sovereignty of Quito, and the surrounding territories, if hereafter you should think it worth contending for" (76). This move presages another milestone in U.S. hemispheric policy in which President James Monroe similarly imagined America not as one but two continents nevertheless united as "brethren" by the threat of an enemy externalized from the hemisphere. Intermarrying the exceptional Columbus family with indigenous South Americans, Rowson naturalizes European colonial rule in the continent by "family compact" in contrast to the external threat of Spain, represented by Columbus's rapacious compatriots, who would colonize by "right of conquest" (80). In thus "cultivating the minds and expanding the ideas of the female part of the rising generation," Rowson and the girls she instructed in her academy helped to formulate the ostensibly masculine project of cultivating the land and expanding the territory of Anglo-Americans (*Reuben and Rachel* 38). In imagining regions of the American continent that were either indigenously populated or Spanish-claimed as culturally Anglo, Rowson helped naturalize territories that would become more accessible via a Northwest Passage or Central American canal as a potential market for citizens of Anglo descent. As she was less concerned with maintaining an American connection to Spain than to England, one wonders why Rowson bothered to use Columbus at all in these spatial rearrangements, yet his omnipresence in geographies as marking the beginning of valid forms of historical knowledge about America made him unavoidable in American chronologies.

Rowson thus sketches American time and space to educate her readers to trace and commit to memory the “rout pursued by the author,” an exercise she used in her textbooks and her school to teach her pupils to see the American continent as a commercial site brought into being and protected by navigation through passageways such as the one Cook sought (*Universal Geography* 256). Rowson links geographical knowledge specifically to navigation in the section “New Discoveries,” which follows the one on the United States of America in *Universal Geography*. She portrays Cook as a modern Columbus for his “important discoveries,” including the territories of the Pacific Northwest, and she encourages the continued exploration into regions “absolutely unknown or very superficially surveyed,” such as the Amazon and Patagonia (256). Various informing navigational routes and being informed by them, Rowson does not lament but lauds how “by the art of navigation, the treasures of Peru and Mexico were poured into the lap of Europe.” Moreover, she believes that by that art:

Commerce with her constant attendants, industry and wealth, have enriched, beautified, and populated this once savage quarter of the globe; and as the children of this new world, have encircled her with the balwarks of independence, and planted on her walls the banners of freedom, by the art of navigation shall her commerce be protected, its rights asserted, and its wrongs avenged. (258)

According to Lucinda Joy Herrick, it was. After the U.S. broke away from the British mercantile system, Boston relied on trade in the Pacific to keep the New England economy going (158). In fact, Herrick credits the owners of the *Columbia Rediviva* with establishing Massachusetts’ future economic base (17). Unable to navigate the ships on which her brother sailed, Rowson nevertheless directed her students to imagine such

ventures as necessary to the survival of Protestant values on the continent, which they did through attentive study of her geography (*Universal Geography* iv).

Rowson's Columbus formulates his own plans to voyage into the west "from an attentive study of geography," but in another revision to the historical record, this study leads him not to seek a new route to the Indies but rather to "imagine there must be a continent on the other side of the globe" (*Universal Geography* 295). According to historians today, Columbus suspected there might have been a landmass to the west, which was known to his contemporaries as the Antipodes, but he died believing he had reached the east.<sup>31</sup> Rowson, Morse, and others invested in making Columbus the forefather of a history beginning with the discovery of a new continent, twisted that fact by turning his knowledge that he landed on terra firma in 1498 into a prescience that he would discover a new hemisphere. Rowson suggests that without powerful imaginations that led men like Columbus to venture "beyond certain boundaries which their confined knowledge has marked out," new discoveries arising from navigation are impossible (*Reuben and Rachel* 54).

Pushing beyond the boundaries of confined knowledge in her own imaginative geographies, Rowson believes them best taught to those in "extreme youth" who easily succumb to the "strongest impulse in the human mind"—curiosity, whose "power is irresistible" (*Reuben and Rachel* 198). Written before she composed her own textbooks for her Academy for Young Ladies, Rowson states in her preface to *Reuben and Rachel* that she intends the novel to "awaken in the minds of my young readers a curiosity that might lead them to an attentive perusal of history" (38). The entire novel might be read as Rowson's sermon against the belief, professed by a minor character named Tabitha, that

literature is not meaningful to young women: “History was of no use; for what consequence was it to her what was done in the world before she was born? And works of fancy ... were all a pack of nonsense, and served only to fill young people’s heads with proclamations” (237). Rowson suggests in her preface, however, that when “instruction is blended with amusement” in historical narratives such as *Reuben and Rachel*, history becomes useful to “the youthful mind,” which “receives and retains it almost involuntarily.” This might be read as a common disclaimer for the late eighteenth-century novel, a genre that republicans viewed with suspicion for its potential to excite the imagination and lead to social disarray; however, Rowson uses the preface primarily to prepare her audience to read *Reuben and Rachel* as a historical fiction for girls. In writing for “my own sex only” and against assumptions by the Tabithas of the world that “works of fancy ... were all a pack of nonsense,” Rowson’s fanciful *Reuben and Rachel* reveals the consequences of Columbus’s discovery “in the world before *she* was born” by making the Anglo-Protestant female characters the most consequential to the plot and its transhemispheric geography (emphasis mine).

Despite their divergent geographies, both Rowson’s and Morse’s Columbus are exceptional by virtue of his American discovery through which he initiates a new, ongoing time in the New Hemisphere. Morse marks the difference between this historical time, or a past that infuses the present with immediacy, and natural time, immanent in the continent’s inhabitants whom he splits into two groups: “1. The Aboriginal inhabitants ... or those who *descended* from the first settlers of the continent. 2. Those who *have migrated, or been transported* to America, since its discovery by Columbus, and their descendants” (*Geography Made Easy* 55, emphasis mine). Morse’s temporal distinction

between the past simple of the Indians and the present perfect of Columbus's descendants is not merely racial. His notion of what constitutes fact or fancy undergirds this construct whereby written eyewitness accounts by Columbus and his descendants qualify as historical fact while other forms of information by the aboriginal inhabitants are fanciful. Although Rowson incorporates Peru into her transhemispheric history by marrying Inca royalty into the Columbus family in *Reuben and Rachel*, she does not discard the ethno-temporal divide that Morse institutes among American inhabitants. Indeed, the ten generations the novel charts begin with Columbus. However, rather than placing Morse's temporal divide between Native Americans and Columbus's descendants, Rowson shifts it by distancing the Columbus narrative from the novel's time.

Although the earliest action of the novel occurs in 1490 by way of a letter Columbus writes to his wife Beatina in Spain, the novel opens during the 1550s in England. After the Columbus narrative, the action shifts permanently to the present tense with the introduction of the Protestant character Sir Egbert Gorges, who stumbles upon the castle in which Isabelle, Cora and Columbia live. Columbia's eventual marriage to Egbert begets five children, among them Ferdinando (named after Columbus's son) and Elizabeth (named after Mary's successor to the throne of England). The marriage of Ferdinando and Elizabeth's children brings the action to "New England, North America" when in 1645 their son moves to New Hampshire with his wife, noblewoman Arrabella Ruthven (154, 192).<sup>32</sup> Their son's marriage to an Indian princess, the novel's second such union, produces Reuben, the father of twins Reuben and Rachel, who grow up in England when the elder Reuben returns there in 1680. The final 175 pages, which make up the second volume, recount how the title characters move from England to Philadelphia in

the mid-eighteenth century, where the second volume ends with the discovery of Reuben and Rachel's title to land there and the suggestion that they will settle there, be fruitful and multiply.

Rowson prefigures the importance of a matrilineal descent achieved through politic unions with women outside of the Columbus family early in the novel by naming the Peruvian princess whom Columbus's son Ferdinando weds Orrabella, a variation on the name of the ship *Arbella* that brought John Winthrop and his company of Puritans to America in 1630. This marriage to Orrabella anticipates the most important marriage to a woman outside of the Columbus family—Arrabella Ruthven, whose titles and estates Reuben and Rachel inherit at the novel's conclusion in Pennsylvania. Although the action of *Reuben and Rachel* leaves South America after its first third, Rowson suggests that the sovereignty of Quito remains available for the claiming by future generations of Columbus's descendants who have secured their titles to American land through marriages to powerful women. In remapping the geography of Columbus's voyages, then, Rowson obliquely amends the chronology of European colonization in America so that an English presence is felt from its Spanish beginnings. In setting Columbus's third voyage to the western hemisphere in Peru, Rowson merges the tragedy of Columbus's death in obscurity with the tragic fall of the Inca empire. This conflation authorizes what she casts as his humane form of colonization in the cultivation of affiliative networks through "family compact" and the cultivation of land through agriculture over the colonization by conquest performed by his dishonorable Spanish compatriots (*Reuben and Rachel* 80). In this revision of the foundation of the Euro-American colonization of America, Rowson not only incorporates into South American history the governing



structure of the Pilgrims' colony in North America—which formed “into a civill body politick” through the Mayflower Compact (1620)—but she also anticipates turn-of-the-century policies by statesmen such as Jefferson who advocated amity among colonists and Native Americans so the latter could be brought into civilization by surrendering the hunter's life for the settler's.

Arrabella, more than the better developed Columbus, is the character on whom the novel's plot hinges for several reasons, not the least of which is the importance to the ending of the novel of the descent of her estate to Reuben and Rachel. Named after Winthrop's ship, Arrabella allows Rowson to invoke the Puritan past without endorsing it as the foundation of the “western continent” so that she can maintain the legitimacy of the foundational event of Columbian discovery (*Reuben and Rachel* 228). Rather than founding the new history of the American continent, early nationals believed the Puritans to have laid the groundwork for the U.S. For example, in recounting the history of the United States in her *Universal Geography*, Rowson's narrative progresses from a metaphorical bondage in seventeenth-century England due to religious discrimination to a freedom achieved in New England, which “changed from a wild, uncultivated waste into flourishing colonies” (*Universal Geography* 299). In *Reuben and Rachel*, Columbus's descendant, the dissenter Edward Dudley, and his wife Arrabella help effect this change by moving in the mid-seventeenth century from the increasingly oppressive England to New Hampshire where Dudley “purchased a large tract of uncultivated land” (*Reuben and Rachel* 167). Dudley and his wife work to clear and farm the land, which affords Rowson the opportunity to wax nostalgic about gender roles in days of yore. In addition to cultivating the land “with her own hands,” Arrabella “labored to cultivate [her

children's] understanding," an act that Rowson herself performs in a republican culture that, in spite of encouraging mothers to instruct their children in the virtues of good citizenship, was yet suspicious of highly educated women.<sup>33</sup>

Rowson further privileges the novel's Anglo characters while inscribing Columbus as foundational to her transhemispheric American story by suggesting through the repetition of names that the novel be read typologically. Thus, Columbus functions as a type of his Anglo-Protestant great-granddaughter Columbia, the Catholic Queen Isabelle as a type of Columbus's converted granddaughter Isabelle, Columbus's son Ferdinand as Columbia's son Ferdinando, etc. In making Orrabella a type for Arrabella, who labors amidst affluence, Rowson intimates that the Peruvian princess's temporal crown remains available to Reuben and Rachel, who themselves are named after members of the tribes of Israel whose history the Old Testament recounts. Even in her conversion to her husband's Catholic religion, Orrabella maintains this crown because both her father, Orrozombo, and Columbus approve of the marriage. While Orrozombo hoped to learn more of the "useful arts" from the Spanish, Columbus and his men reap most of the advantages of the union: "Upon their marriage, Orrozombo gave up part of his territories to Columbus, as a portion for his daughter; and a colony was begun, where everything was regulated according to the Spanish form of government" (63).

In depicting a Spanish colony founded by a family compact that brings Native Americans under the civilizing influence of Columbus, who remarks upon "the improvement agriculture had made on the face of this beautiful fertile continent," Rowson does not forgo the Black Legend (68). She depicts the Spanish conquistadors as intemperate, insubordinate and untrustworthy. Scholars have argued that early national

depictions of the Spanish conquest of South America allowed them to funnel their anti-British sentiment by identifying with the oppressed Peruvians.<sup>34</sup> Although Rowson depicts the Peruvians sympathetically, her avowals of dual allegiance to both the U.S. and Britain throughout her life make a straightforward anti-British reading implausible. If we read the novel's more domestic second volume not as a radical departure from the historical romance of the first—as critics often do—but as a typological reiteration of Volume One,<sup>35</sup> it becomes clear that Rowson's conquistadors do not represent colonial oppression at the hands of the British, but rather women who do not cultivate the tenets of Christianity in their hearts. The lascivious conquistadors of Volume One become in Volume Two Hispanicized coquettes who do not practice sexual restraint. The villainesses of the second volume, Madame LaVarone and Mrs. Varnice, possess dark features, and the narrator frequently refers to their coy behavior, designed to secure marriages to wealthy men, as conquests (245, 309). By contrast, Rachel's friend Jessy, who refers to Rachel's bosom as “the sacred temple of purity,” rejects marriage to a titled man because her affections belong to Reuben (264). Rowson suggests that one might be properly educated to both imagine and feel right, as Jessy and Rachel do, by reading the “most instructive authors” (247).<sup>36</sup>

Education reformer Benjamin Rush agreed in principle with Rowson about the didactic potential of fiction although he differed with her about which authors wrote most instructively. In his address to an audience at the first Young Ladies Academy, which opened in Philadelphia in 1787, Rush spoke to the need for women to gain instruction not only in geography and chronology but also in religion. For Rush, actively encouraging the religious instruction of females, whose “breast is the natural soil of Christianity,”

would discourage the effect that “the wit of Voltaire and the style of Bolingbroke” had on U.S. citizens. While Rush here reflects the preoccupation in this period with the adverse effects of novel reading, he implies earlier in the address that these effects would be mitigated by reading more American novels, that is novels reflective of “life in America,” rather than British novels, which “are as foreign to our manners as the refinements of Asiatic vice.” Although Rush continues by defending “the reading of history, travels, poetry, and moral essays” over the reading of novels, his major reservation with fiction is that it “blunts the heart to that which is real.” Citing Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* as an example of the kind of character who distracts Anglo-American women from the utilitarian demands of life in the U.S., Rush attaches the “real” to literary styles that exhibit nationalistic traits.<sup>37</sup> After outlining other avenues of study, which Rush deemed appropriate for educating women “upon principles very different from what it is in Great Britain,” he concludes by linking a woman’s influence in the home to its effects outside of the domestic space. Rowson does not differ from Rush in her approach to female education within her own academy, but outside of it, she advances republican and nationalist pedagogy through a fiction that, as Philip Gould has argued for Rowson’s play “Slaves in Algiers,” she also endows with “transatlantic meanings.” In “linking commerce with familial feeling,” Rowson not only reconciles the British to the American family, she suggests that this family, then extending into the Pacific Northwest, might also extend southward into Peru (Gould, *Barbaric Traffic* 109).

In order to cultivate this transhemispheric imaginary by rewriting well-known elements of the Columbian past, Rowson had to turn to the novel which, above the epic poem and the nonfiction genres of geography textbooks and narrative histories, offered

“the necessary equipoise of history and invention” (Spengemann 172). Because scholars construed the historical record to be blank where they considered authentic evidence lacking, it is perhaps not surprising that Rowson takes the most latitude with her Columbus narrative in Peru. The parts of the Columbus narrative that Rowson does not deliver through epistles are narrated by the Incan character Cora, who was present at Columbus’s continental landfall in 1498. In her sixties when the novel opens, Cora nonetheless vividly recalls when Columbus arrived in Peru because “Those things which either frightened or surprised us when we were young, are the last which we forget” (51). Using Cora’s first-person narrative, Rowson fills her account of Columbus’s third voyage across the Atlantic with frightening and surprising events that she adapts freely from the histories of Morse and Robertson as well as from contemporary reports on Peru in regional newspapers.<sup>38</sup> It was believed that such a violent history could better promote memorization than the less tumultuous female biographies that were deemed safer ground for women historians.

Instructing readers to see the influence on the present of the Columbian past within the genre of history posed a challenge to Rowson because its sanguinary scenes were seen as unfeminine territory for women authors.<sup>39</sup> Aware that one writes history with a “pen dipped in the blood of millions,” Rowson thus says in a textbook she published subsequently to *Reuben and Rachel* that she prefers female biography to history for its instructive power (*A Present for Young Ladies* 83). Consequently, Rowson narrates her story of Columbus (1490-1506) through a combination of the reminiscences of female characters and the trope of the found manuscript. These plot devices at once remove Columbus from the novel’s temporal frame (1550s-1750s) and give his story the

illusion of immediacy that only the epistolary form could.<sup>40</sup> While Rowson thus structures her novel to make Anglo-Protestant women the ultimate protagonists of American history, she could also have resorted to this organization to bend without breaking gendered conventions of historiography.<sup>41</sup>

In *A Present for Young Ladies*, written for the students in her Academy, Rowson expresses little interest in recounting imperial history “wet with the widow’s and orphan’s tears” (83). She suggests the hidden costs of such sanguinary history—specifically its threat to virtue—in the captivities suffered by her female characters in the novel’s second volume, particularly that of the title character Rachel. Both orphaned when their father dies on a return voyage to England from America, Reuben travels to Pennsylvania to look after his father’s estate and Rachel moves in with her aunt Rachel. Already weakened by the news of her brother’s death, her nephew’s “departure for America was the finishing blow,” and Aunt Rachel dies, leaving her niece Rachel “an unconnected being” at the mercy of the wide, wide world (275, 229). Rachel soon after meets and weds Hamden Auberry, who asks that she keep their marriage a secret so he might not be disinherited by his aunt for marrying a woman beneath his station. Rachel agrees, asserting that to the “censures of the world I am invulnerable; they too often misjudge and condemn the innocent unheard” (275). Misjudge and condemn the world does, including Hamden, and although nearly crushed by the injustice of it all, Rachel never wavers in her faith.<sup>42</sup> This vulnerability is what Rowson suggests imperial histories usually cover over while it “decks the conqueror with such gorgeous robes as hide the sanguinary stains which stain his polluted soul” (*A Present for Young Ladies* 83). Although captivity narratives help Rowson expose such attacks on virtue, they are no less

important than the discoveries that restore to Reuben and Rachel their proper place in America.

Rowson delivers these discoveries through female biography—“equally authentic, equally instructive, and in general, more interesting than history” (*A Present for Young Ladies* 83). Other than distantly relating to a fictional branch of Columbus’ descendants, Protestant Lady Jane Grey does not figure into the novel’s plot, but her story affords Rowson the opportunity to distinguish between earthly and transcendental power, which corresponds respectively to how she characterizes Catholicism and Protestantism in the novel (107, 368). Jane, who assumed the English throne for less than two weeks before being deposed by the Catholic Queen Mary, becomes a heroine in Cora’s retelling of this Reformation history precisely because she resists politics. In her reluctance to accede the throne after Edward IV, Jane reportedly said she “would seek an eternal, not a temporal crown” (107). This crown, bestowed by the “God of the Protestants,” is one that Rowson suggests Reuben and Rachel inherit when the conclusion of the novel reveals them to be descendants of Jane. The siblings learn this news at the same time they discover their right to the titles and estate of their great, great grandmother Arrabella Ruthven who married into the family descended from both Columbus and Jane (368). The earthly power that emanates from these titles is justified by the higher power that imbued Jane and which, in turn, showers “blessings on the heads of Reuben, Rachel, and their posterity” (369).

The suggestion that Reuben and Rachel may trace their lineage from the foundational Columbus to English aristocracy exhibits Rowson’s Federalist leanings, which Marion Rust says became more pronounced as the author advanced in age. Despite

an ending that decries distinctions made by means other than “virtue, genius and education,” Rowson does not discard social hierarchy in *Reuben and Rachel* (368). The title characters may forgo the titles they inherit through Arrabella, but they retain enough of their newfound “immense property” to securely establish themselves and their extended family in Pennsylvania (369). Favoring a class structure revealed through discovered titles and estates above a complete democratic leveling achieved through colonization by settlement alone, Rowson offers Anglo-Americans echoes of a Tory past through which they might not fear “overgrown estates” as being “opposed to every principle of democracy” (Morse, *American Geography* 250).

### **Coda**

Decades after Rowson’s death, a nation caught up in the discourse of Manifest Destiny elected President James Polk in 1844 on a platform that Oregon territory would become part of the U.S. In taking up the Oregon Question, politicians took up the question of title to American land, a matter that Rowson and her (intimate) contemporaries in the expanding U.S. had been asking about the nation since its beginnings. In keeping with the terms of the Nootka Convention, the U.S.’s claim to Oregon territory derived from discovery (1792), exploration (1805) and settlement (1811), a series of events that began with figures like Rowson’s brother.<sup>43</sup> Echoing Columbus in more than name, this discovery led politicians to justify the Oregon territory’s exploration by Lewis and Clark and its settlement by John Jacob Astor and company. In arguing for the U.S.’s title to Oregon territory in 1846—when a compromise between the British and the U.S. settled the border where it currently exists between the U.S. and Canada—Democratic congressman William Sawyer traced the nation’s right to



the land from time immemorial to Columbus in a series of events that mimic much of the action of *Reuben and Rachel*. Combining the language of the Bible with the language of the Declaration, Sawyer conflates sacred and secular time to naturalize a U.S.-American geography that extends from sea to shining sea:

In the course of events ... Columbus was sent across the ocean to this country, and he found that it was good for man to dwell upon. By-and-by, our fathers followed and took possession; here they established the seat of empire; here they sowed the seeds of democracy which sprang up and brought forth abundance of excellent fruit. But the prosperity of this country soon excited the jealousy and fears of another people, and they sent armies to subjugate it to their own will and control. Then arose one Washington who drove the invaders from the land, and located his family upon it. Columbus and Washington were but agents Heaven employed to place us in possession of our own. This is our claim of title and I can see no defect in it. I contend it is good and sufficient against all other claimants. This island—or if you prefer to call it so, this continent—was made and set apart for our especial benefit. (3)

Sawyer's displacement of Columbus's first western landfall in the Caribbean islands to the "island or continent" of a northwestward expanding U.S. reflects the history lessons of geography textbooks. Until Irving's 1828 biography of Columbus, these textbooks were the main vehicle for disseminating the Columbus myth by propounding that the historical authenticity of the American continent began in 1492 with Columbus's first island landfall. Authors, such as Morse, could make this leap from island to continent because Columbus's landing on South America during his third voyage in 1498

constituted for them the discovery of the continent. Because documentary evidence showed Columbus's landing preceded Amerigo Vespucci's, his name would better legitimate a European paternity in the Americas. Morse promoted this patrilineal descent in his 1786 *Geography Made Easy*, which by 1846 Sawyer had internalized. As the new American Adam, Columbus stands as the first of "our fathers," who are distinct from the British "invaders."

But before the British became "another people" to U.S.-Americans like Sawyer, Rowson used Columbus in *Reuben and Rachel* to reconcile the British to the American family. In this reconciliation, Anglo-Americans inherit more than a Columbian past. Rowson connects them back to a history whose authority the British Crown reinforces. Constituting the American subject as such, Rowson does not reject its European underpinnings as Morse and other early national writers would do. Rather she emphasizes that the New World's lineage begins in the Old in a novel where place and plot are inseparable. Securely in the bosom of a royalist culture, Rowson intimates that Reuben and Rachel thrive in British-controlled, pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia. *Reuben and Rachel* might then be read as demonstrating Rowson's nostalgia for her native England not in spite of but because of her avowed patriotism for the United States of America. Indeed, the novel reveals that her loyalty to the "Sons of Columbia," whose praises she sings in an 1804 poem of the same name, merges the space and time of a Federalist-governed U.S. with an aristocratic Britain through the founding figure of Columbus, a historical personage who has been caught up in the nationalistic and imperialistic enterprises of Anglo-America from its beginnings. Reading Rowson's construction of American time and space through her Columbus for young ladies allows the inter-

American relations of *Reuben and Rachel* to come into focus while also revealing her America to be chronologically and geographically dependent on a relationship to England. The publication history of *Reuben and Rachel* symbolically mimics this move back to the Old World as Rowson published the novel in England the year after its U.S. publication.<sup>44</sup> Following the War of 1812, Rowson celebrated President Monroe's potential ability "to unite all parties"—English and American—not by an Atlantic that separates the two hemispheres but rather by one that bridges them with uncultivated forests readymade for changing into flourishing Anglo colonies and states (*Exercises in History, Chronology, and Biography*, 169).

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> For more on Haswell, who undertook his trading voyages after reading Cook, see Herrick.
- <sup>2</sup> The British used Cook's presence in the Pacific Northwest to make their claims to this territory.
- <sup>3</sup> On the history of discovery and territorial sovereignty, see Korman.
- <sup>4</sup> Recent exceptions include Homestead and Hansen, Bartolomeo, Gould, Dillon, Mazzeo, and Doyle. In his edited edition of *Reuben and Rachel*, Bartolomeo reads Rowson's novel as a "transatlantic 'history' of America in which national identity is both fluid and hybrid" (12). The purpose of this essay is to understand and explain the ends to which Rowson constructs this fluid, transatlantic national identity and how Columbus figures instrumentally in such a construction.
- <sup>5</sup> See Davidson 167.
- <sup>6</sup> See Rust 2-3.
- <sup>7</sup> See, for example, Homestead, who reads Rowson's career with attention to her transatlantic life but characterizes *Reuben and Rachel* as "national." For a compelling discussion of Rowson's transatlantic publishing history, see Homestead and Hansen.
- <sup>8</sup> For more on this inter-American approach, see Bauer.
- <sup>9</sup> *Monroe Doctrine* (December 2, 1823).
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, Murphy, Fox, Levander and Levine, and Adams.
- <sup>11</sup> See Jay's Treaty with the English (1794) and Pickney's Treaty with the Spanish (1795). Conversely, the U.S. discouraged friendly relations depending on what was politically or economically advantageous at the time (i.e., the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 against France).
- <sup>12</sup> Person, Jr. names *Reuben and Rachel* the second American novel by a woman to use Indian captivity after Ann Eliza Bleeker's *Maria Kittle* (1797). For more on gendered conventions of historiography, see Baym and Kornfeld.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Castiglia.
- <sup>14</sup> See Nietz 234.
- <sup>15</sup> See Harvey, especially chapter one, and Brückner.

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<sup>16</sup> According to Adams, the idea of dividing the globe into seven continents only became widely accepted as of the mid-twentieth century and by the second half of the century, the notion of a hemispheric America gave way to a concept of the continent as split between the North and South. See *Continental Divide* 12.

<sup>17</sup> For an engaging discussion of this process, see Spengemann.

<sup>18</sup> Spain founded the Archive of the Indies in the 1780s. For more on how the historiography of America figured in eighteenth-century politics, see Cañizares-Esguerra.

<sup>19</sup> Brückner discusses this phenomenon in *The Geographic Revolution* 148.

<sup>20</sup> For how South American Indians became differentiated from North American Indians in response to the demands of U.S. nationalism, see Wertheimer 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> Salvatore describes the Panama Canal as a “material expression of the original Monroe Doctrine, and a validation of the wisdom of that doctrine” (671).

<sup>22</sup> Hedges attributes the consistency among Columbus narratives to their authors’ dependence on the same source texts, including Colon’s.

<sup>23</sup> Whereas Bartolomeo sees the cross-cultural ancestry of Rowson’s title characters as a “fusion that emerges as essential in Rowson’s conception of American character,” which is no doubt true, I contend that such a hybridity functions ultimately to reinforce the superiority of Anglo culture over its indigenous or Hispanic counterpart (15).

<sup>24</sup> Bartolomeo is sensitive to this tendency in the novel: “To be sure, the novel implies a preference for European sophistication over native simplicity and for Protestant rationality over Catholic extremism”; nevertheless, he reads the religious, national and racial differences in *Reuben and Rachel* as less important to Rowson than personal integrity (15). Bartolomeo argues that at least Rowson “grants Catholics the sincerity of their convictions,” but the textual evidence he presents to support this point reveal, I believe, the degree to which religious, national and racial differences not only remain crucial to but are also intertwined for Rowson. For instance, in noting how Isabelle’s Peruvian servant Cora opts to remain a Catholic after Isabelle converts to Anglicanism in order to marry Arundel, Bartolomeo implicitly praises Rowson because Isabelle does not condemn Cora for this choice (16). I would argue, however, that in

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Cora's refusal to convert (again), Rowson is using religious difference to reassert national and racial difference, thus distancing Cora further from the Anglican heroines of American history.

<sup>25</sup> Textual evidence in *Reuben and Rachel* suggests that Rowson was familiar with Robertson because she repeats the myth that Queen Isabelle sold her jewels to fund Columbus's voyages, which Morse does not mention.

<sup>26</sup> See Pagden 7.

<sup>27</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century, more than 10 cities and counties had been designated Columbia or Columbus. For more on the naming of the continent or countries in it, see Bushman and Alemán.

<sup>28</sup> See Nietz 209, 233 and Davidson 134.

<sup>29</sup> According to Brückner, geography books naturalized the idea of national character by merging maps, encyclopedic delineations of space, and geographical personifications or types. Thus, he argues geographies resembled belletristic writing and "were geared toward creating a strong affective bond between reader and the fragile new nation" (*Geographic Revolution* 157). Rowson did not ignore this fragile bond but neither was it of first concern. Rather, she intended to strengthen the bond between England and the U.S. even as she used Spain to mediate that bond. For more on Spain as a mediatory figure in American literature, see DeGuzmán.

<sup>30</sup> Whereas the notion of a providentially-sanctioned expansion into American territory by the U.S., known by 1845 as Manifest Destiny, grew out of a rejection of Europe and its past, Rowson's idea of Anglo-American expansion relies on a geographical and historical continuity with Europe. For more on Manifest Destiny, see Widmer.

<sup>31</sup> See Fernández-Armesto 21.

<sup>32</sup> Among Ferdinando and Elizabeth's progeny is a character named Edward about whom we learn only that he sailed with the English explorer Sir Francis Drake (152). Although it seems a minor enough detail to ignore, it becomes important in light of future debates that will occur between the British and U.S. governments over Oregon territory. Whereas U.S. advocates of annexing the Pacific Northwest claimed prior right to the region based on the discovery of the Columbia River by Captain Gray and his crew, which included Rowson's brother, British claimants argued for their precedence by recounting how Drake

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discovered the region centuries before Gray. Implicated in each side of the debate, Rowson challenges assertions of her life and career as either British or American.

<sup>33</sup> See Kerber 10. The idea emerging from Second Wave Feminism that female industry outside of the home was an anomaly for republican mothers, meaning “women” as a category uncomplicated by questions of class, race or sexuality, has been critiqued during the past thirty years among scholars whom Davidson and Hatcher refer to as post-separate spheres critics. For more on how private and public spaces were gendered in conflicting and complicated ways, see *No More Separate Spheres!*, esp. Kerber’s essay in this collection.

<sup>34</sup> See Wertheimer 26.

<sup>35</sup> See Castiglia, Kornfeld and Smith-Rosenberg.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the relationship between Jessy and Rachel, see Epley.

<sup>37</sup> See Rust 293 and Desiderio, chapter four.

<sup>38</sup> In recounting the history of Peru in *Universal Geography*, Rowson notes a mid-eighteenth-century earthquake, but another one struck the region in the 1790s, which was reported in New England newspapers that Rowson may have read.

<sup>39</sup> See Baym 222.

<sup>40</sup> For more on this real-time of the novel in epistolary form, see Watt.

<sup>41</sup> According to Gould, “Historical novels . . . offered a compromise to the dangers of idleness and moral dissipation associated with novel reading,” and they could be more flexible than the genre of nationalist historiography, “especially for women, who manipulated literary conventions to critique the contemporary republic” (*Covenant and Republic* 11, 13). In bending the conventions of particular genres of historical narratives, women authors could approach subjects typically deemed unfeminine (Baym 222).

<sup>42</sup> While Rachel’s faith is ultimately rewarded, Eumea—the daughter of a sachem who has captured Reuben—is not so lucky. Risking her life to help Reuben escape when she discovers that he will be put to death, she kills herself when she finds that he has married another woman. The trope of captivity, as Castiglia and others have argued, figures prominently in the novel, embracing both genders and cultures.

<sup>43</sup> See Herrick 157.

<sup>44</sup> See Homestead and Hansen 643.

## CHAPTER TWO

**Conquering Biography:****Washington Irving's Frontier Columbus**

The reputation of Washington Irving's *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828) during the nineteenth century was almost as mythic as Columbus himself.<sup>1</sup> *Columbus*, which the *New York Mirror* predicted would make Irving immortal, was the biography most commonly owned in U.S. libraries during the first half of the 1800s.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the century, it had gone through 175 editions, serving as the standard biography of Columbus in English until the fourth centennial of Columbus's first voyage into the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup> Although Irving first turned to Columbus ostensibly for pragmatic reasons, the subject is somewhat surprising for an author who had been known for over-relying on British source material. While this helps to explain why Columbus, who was not culturally British, must have appealed to Irving initially, it does not account for Irving's sustained interest in Spanish history, which he continued to recount in several volumes following *Columbus: A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829), *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus* (1831) and *The Alhambra* (1832).<sup>4</sup> Neither does Irving's nationalistic interest in Columbus explain the welcome reception of Irving's work outside of the U.S., particularly in Spain. Spanish historian Martín Fernández de Navarrete, upon whose archival work Irving depended for *Columbus*, declared the work "muy superior á las de los escritores que le precedieron" ("much superior to that of the writers who preceded him"), and Spain's Real Academia de la Historia—with Navarrete as its head—inducted Irving into its society shortly after the biography's publication.<sup>5</sup> The story of Irving's interest in Columbus—and its popularity



within US culture—cannot be told exclusive of the context of nation building in Spain, where Irving was U.S. minister from 1842 to 1845. Without Spain’s own efforts to control the interpretation of New World history in ways I discuss further below, Irving might never have embarked on his own voyage through that past. In addition to Spanish history, this story is also affected by a black national past that Irving and his readers less readily acknowledged but which, nevertheless, marks *Columbus* profoundly.

Irving had a career that begs to be understood transnationally. He is considered to be among the first professional U.S. authors, but Irving was writing at a time when no one knew quite what being an American author meant. Having successfully thrown off British rule, U.S.-Americans were anxious to define their politics and culture in opposition to things British. Early in his career, Irving was criticized for not rejecting English literary forms and styles whole-heartedly. In his emulation of British essay-writing (which led to his popularity among British audiences), U.S. critics accused Irving of being too much the Anglophile and therefore not producing a badly needed “American” literature.<sup>6</sup> Caught as he was between British culture and what nationalists were construing as American culture, Irving turned to Spanish culture at a time when literary nationalists were becoming more and more convinced of Columbus’ importance to U.S. history (see introduction and chapter one). Moreover, Irving spent a significant part of his career—17 years—living outside of the United States. After returning to the country of his birth in 1832, and penning the above-mentioned publications on Spanish culture and history, Irving went on to write three works about the western frontier: “A Tour of the Prairies” in *A Crayon Miscellany* (1835), *Astoria* (1836) and *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* (1837). The author’s first book was an anonymously published co-

translation he did with his brother Peter of François de Pons' *Voyage à la partie orientale de la Terre-Ferme* into *A Voyage to the Eastern Part of Terra Firma, or the Spanish Main* (1806).<sup>7</sup> This confluence of interest in Spain and the American "frontier"<sup>8</sup> is not incidental.

In this chapter, I argue that Irving's *Columbus* enjoyed such popularity in the U.S. not only because readers had been calling for American biographies but more importantly because literary nationalists had primed audiences to understand the emerging U.S. nation as a phoenix rising from the ashes of the Spanish empire whose colonial legacy they believed it was destined to continue across the American continent. Irving's *Columbus* satisfied the demand for American biography by encouraging the association of the Spanish imperial past with the present American push to extend its borders. This association is exemplified by the October 1828 edition of the *North American Review*. The same issue in which the publication of Irving's biography was announced, included an article titled "Our Relations with Great Britain," which details the boundary disputes between the two nations over the Pacific Northwest. In the article—which Edward Everett quoted 10 years later to justify U.S. title to Oregon in his review of Irving's *Astoria* (1836)—the author defends Spanish claims to the region that the nation had ceded to the U.S. in 1819. While Irving appears enthusiastic about bringing Columbus into U.S. history for the ways in which he could underwrite this kind of national expansion, he seems less eager to engage with the history of slavery. In recounting the four voyages of Columbus to the Caribbean spanning 1492-1504, Irving was forced to grapple with the transatlantic slave trade, which began in 1503 and which causes him to consider the historical meaning of the Haitian Revolution.

On the one hand, Irving silenced critics clamoring for a nationalist literature by making Columbus the foremost U.S. founding father, but on the other, his investments in South American economies and Spanish politics meant that he could not too forcefully appeal to the Black Legend to distance Spanish imperialism from that of the U.S. As a result, Irving implicates the U.S. in the history of slavery in ways that other authors of Columbian histories tried to avoid by ignoring African slavery (i.e., Rowson) or by contradicting the affiliations they attempted to forge through their histories (see chapter three). John Hazlett has claimed that “by taking upon himself the role of national myth-maker, Irving seems also to have taken on the national bad conscience” (568). He argues that the anticolonial sentiment which Irving expresses at times in his otherwise laudatory biography of Columbus produces an ambivalence that makes *Columbus* resistant to readings of it as a straightforward nationalist story. While I agree with Hazlett’s assessment of the ambivalence of Irving’s *Columbus*, I believe that it stems less from Irving’s inability to reconcile his “two portraits of Columbus”—as American hero and representative of the Black Legend—and more from his inability to avoid the implication of imperial commerce and politics in the violence of slavery (Hazlett 564). In offering a Columbian history that stretches back to the origins of the slave trade and forward to the imperial present, Irving fails to negotiate around the Haitian Revolution, but that does not mean he produces a less nationalistic biography. Ever the literary diplomat, Irving tries in *Columbus* not to offend competing views about slavery as he pushes forward his attempt to legitimize seizing the mantle of discovery from Spain.

### Irving Discovers the New World

By the time Irving was ready to publish his Columbus biography, audiences across the Atlantic were hungry for it. This appetite was affected in part by the appearance of Martín Fernández de Navarrete's *Colección de los viages y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde fines del siglo XV* (Madrid 1825), which published for the first time Columbus's account of his first and third voyages west.<sup>9</sup> In Spain, the printing of these volumes coincided with a concerted effort the government had been making since the late eighteenth century to control the interpretation of New World history and counter the "anti-Spanish biases" of such popular works as William Robertson's *History of the Discovery of America* (1777).<sup>10</sup> As Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra explains, "Spanish authors privileged 'primary' sources (which they called 'public') over printed ones because they thought the latter were biased, written with the intention of moving the audience to support specific agendas" (133). Columbus' writings form a significant part of the *Colección*, and Navarrete says he collected these documents for "la prosperidad pública" ("public prosperity"), which he believed was built on the primary documents of early New World voyages (10). In Navarrete's dedication to King Ferdinand VII at the beginning of the *Colección*, he makes clear the connection he seeks to make between the early Spanish discoveries and the present state of the Spanish nation:

La coleccion de los célebres é importantísimos viages y descubrimientos que los Españoles hicieron por mar desde fines del siglo XV, es una obra que concilia y enlaza de tal modo los derechos del Trono augusto de V.M. con las glorias de la Nación Española que conociéndolo así VM se dignó, no solo aprobar el plan que

yo habia propuesto para su publicacion y honrarme con su Soberana confianza para ejecutarlo sino tambien mandar se imprimiese por cuenta de V.M. en su Real Imprenta.

The collection of the celebrated and extremely important voyages and discoveries made by the Spanish by sea since the late fifteenth century, is a work that links and combines the rights of the august Throne of Your Majesty with the glories of the Spanish Nation that deigned to approve not only the plan that I had proposed for its publication and to honor me by entrusting me to oversee it, but also to mandate that it be printed on behalf of Your Majesty and the Royal Press.<sup>11</sup>

In the U.S., these circumstances of the publication of Navarrete's work may have been viewed suspiciously, but his work was received there with no less enthusiasm than in Spain. In 1826, 1827 and 1839, *The North American Review* reviewed the volumes of the *Colección* after they had been released for publication. Under the title "New Documents concerning Columbus" of the 1827 review, one critic remarked that

[the *Colección*] is published under the patronage of king Ferdinand; and in this respect, if in no other, would deserve to be considered a remarkable book. We are not prone to expect from that unhappy prince at any time, and least of all, in the present distracted state of his kingdom, any very enlightened acts for the promotion of learning. The occurrence of a prominent exception to the illiberal policy,<sup>12</sup> which is accustomed to sway his counsels, is therefore in itself a political phenomenon of considerable interest. And the exception was most wisely chosen, as constituting a truly acceptable addition to our literary treasures, a durable

monument of Spanish greatness and power, and a work containing attractive instruction for the inhabitants of both hemispheres. (265)

Continuing that the publication of Navarrete's volumes seems a "melancholy gratification" for Spain "amid the ruins of her magnificent empire," the writer concludes that nevertheless, "under the auspices of that proud and bigoted, but chivalrous and highminded nation, it was the destiny of Columbus to discover the New World; and its history is therefore inseparably associated with her language and literature. We must look to that language for the only original and perfectly authentic records of the splendid achievements of the great navigator, as well as for the knowledge of later events in the history of this continent" (266). In addition to understanding Navarrete's volumes as a contribution to the canon of American literature because it is one of "our literary treasures," the *NAR* reviewer also interprets the publication as a "political phenomenon" that affects "the inhabitants of both hemispheres" by offering "attractive instruction" on exploration and by shedding light on more recent American history or "later events in the history of this continent."

It was because American Minister to Spain, Alexander Everett, was looking to Spanish language and literature in its "inseparable association" with the U.S. that Irving first came to the *Columbus* project. This association was one that Irving understood from a commercial point of view. He had been suffering financially since the loss of his investment in Bolivian copper mines in 1825, when the South American bubble burst.<sup>13</sup> It was, in fact, the collapse of speculation in American countries south of the U.S. border that prompted Irving to support himself as a professional writer.<sup>14</sup> Everett was aware that Irving was in need of work, and he suggested that Irving accept an attachment to the

embassy while working on a translation of the first two volumes of Navarrete's *Colección*. According to Irving's account of this invitation, Everett thought that a translation into English of "documents relative to the voyages of Columbus ... by one of our own country, would be peculiarly desirable" (*Columbus* 3). Irving initially approached the translation project with eagerness, but he abandoned the plan within a month of arriving to Madrid, scholars suppose, due to the enormity of the project and his publisher's unwillingness to invest in a work of translation. In his preface to *Columbus*, Irving offers a more idealistic account: he writes that he felt he would better serve his country not by reproducing more Columbian documents but rather by writing his own narrative because the subject of the Admiral's life was "so interesting and national" (3). Like other early nationals, "Irving saw Columbus as the first type of the new 'American' man: practical, scientific, and empirical" (Hazlett 569). The resulting *Life and Voyages of Columbus* would not only be the first biography of the infamous navigator written in English, but it would also stand as the authoritative account of Columbus' life for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Decades before the publication of Navarrete's *Colección* and Irving's *Columbus*, Thomas Jefferson—both a proponent and agent of expansion in terms of his involvement with the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition (1803)—expressed a similar interest in Spain that was intertwined with his understanding of the American frontier. As early as 1788, Jefferson proposed that "every inhabitant who means to look beyond the limits of his farm" should learn the Spanish language as both it and English "cover nearly the whole face of America" (*Writings* vol. II, 409). He encouraged learning Spanish by including it in the University of Virginia's curriculum at its founding in

1819.<sup>16</sup> Like Irving, Jefferson also suffered from charges that he depended too heavily on British authors for the philosophies expressed, for example, in the Declaration of Independence, which one U.S. critic said “contained no new ideas” (qtd. in Rayner 125). Jefferson responded to such attacks by problematizing the idea of originality itself: “The fact is that one new idea leads to another, that to a third, and so on through a course of time until some one with whom no one of these ideas was original combines all together and produces what is justly called a new invention” (*Writings* vol. VII, 100). Although urbanite Irving initially disagreed with Jefferson’s agrarian economic policies and lampooned his populism in such works as *Salmagundi* (1807-8),<sup>17</sup> he appears quite Jeffersonian in his literary output during the 1820s and 30s when he turned his focus from the Spanish colonial past to the present American frontier.

Historical precedents that re-routed ancestral lines and made discovery of utmost importance influenced expansionist tendencies in U.S. foreign and domestic policy, which tended to link rather than oppose England and Spain in the historical imagination. For example, in Justice John Marshall’s 1823 Supreme Court decision in *Johnson v. McIntosh*, which formed a justificatory cornerstone of Jackson’s Indian Removal policy (crafted while he was military governor of Florida), he declared that Indians had no idea of individual property in the land and thus could not “prevent their being appropriated by a people of cultivators. All the proprietary rights of civilized nations on this continent are founded on this principle. The right derived from discovery and conquest, can rest on no other basis.” In a concise pair of sentences, Marshall collapses the clichéd differences between Anglo and Spanish colonial practices, as cultivators and discoverers/conquistadors respectively. Not only does this rhetorical move erase



distinctions among Euro-descended American histories, it also Anglicizes this past by casting its descendants as a “people of cultivators.” This historical revision served to extend back the date and the borders of Anglo-American beginnings from the east coast of North America during the early seventeenth-century to the Caribbean during the late fifteenth-century in an attempt to legitimate U.S. land claims by making them coincidental with the popularly-acknowledged originator of European “discovery,” Columbus. In this decision, Marshall expresses the logic on which land claims had been made in the New World since the late fifteenth century by the Spanish empire, which declared regions *terra nullius*, or land belonging to no one, if the local population did not conform to the culture of the discoverer.

Although Marshall does not mention Columbus by name in his Supreme Court decision, he did write about the “daring, and skillful navigator” in a work that he produced twenty years prior to hearing *Johnson v. McIntosh: The Life of George Washington* (1804-7) (1). In this biography of the first U.S. President, whose life Marshall believed to be “so much [the history] of his country,” Marshall begins his narrative with an account of how “the discovery of America by Columbus, gave a new impulse ... to that bold spirit of adventure which characterized the hardy age in which he lived” (xi, 1). It appears a point of pride with Marshall that notwithstanding this spirit, England “did not then furnish a single individual, well enough acquainted with navigation, to be trusted with the direction of such an expedition.” Nevertheless it remains important for him to note that the “Venetian adventurer” John Cabot received “less than two years after the return of Columbus from America,” a commission from the British monarch empowering him and his heirs to “discover countries then unknown to

all christian people” (3). Implicitly linking the lives of Columbus, Cabot and Washington in his biography, Marshall repeats the essential elements of this narrative’s beginning in *Johnson v. McIntosh*:

On the discovery of this immense continent, the great nations of Europe were eager to appropriate to themselves so much of it as they could respectively acquire. Its vast extent offered an ample field to the ambition and enterprise of all; and the character and religion of its inhabitants afforded an apology for considering them as a people over whom the superior genius of Europe might claim an ascendancy.

This brief historical narrative justifies the discovery doctrine, which Marshall claims developed out of the need for European colonists “to avoid conflicting settlements, and consequent war with each other.” The “right of acquisition, which they all asserted ... was, that discovery gave title to the government by whose subjects, or by whose authority, it was made, against all other European governments, which title might be consummated by possession.” Marshall links discovery history and U.S. title to land in the western hemisphere when he claims that “the history of America, from its discovery to the present day, proves, we think, the universal recognition of these principles.”

### **Irving Conquers Columbus**

During the turn of the nineteenth century, when postcolonial Americans felt most urgently the need to replace their origin stories, American history often appeared under the guise of biography. According to Scott Casper, biographies appeared in periodicals of the period only less frequently than poetry and book reviews. Most biographies appeared in collections, such as Joseph Delaplaine’s mammoth *Repository of the Lives and*

*Portraits of Distinguished American Characters* (1815-17), and most of these collections included, if not began, with an account of Columbus' life.<sup>18</sup> Authors of these biographies emphasized how the lives they narrated were reflections not just of an individual but of a nation. In highlighting such virtues as patriotism, moderation, and common sense of the people they viewed as connected to the history of the U.S., biographers hoped their republican readers would emulate their virtues and become good citizens. Irving is no exception.

As a young Federalist, albeit a moderate one, Irving was suspicious of Democratic-Republicans. He believed they gave too much credit to the masses whom he thought were best led by the educated elite of a strong central government. Thus, Irving casts his Columbus as a "moderate Federalist ... lofty in spirit because he was naturally superior and conscious of the hazards inherent in society lacking proper regulation of the 'rabble,' those unworthy men who blindly groped for more power" (Burstein 204). While on the one hand, Irving offers Columbus as an illustration "of what human genius and enterprise can accomplish," on the other, he does not cleanse him entirely from the Black Legend (*Columbus* 31). As Casper shows in *Constructing American Lives* (1999), it was common practice for biographers during the early national period to include imperfections in people's characters when recounting their lives because authors believed readers could learn better "from characters they could recognize as human than from oversimplified caricatures" (34). Irving believed Columbus exempt from all flaws but one: a piety "mingled with superstition, and darkened by the bigotry of the age," which justified for Irving's Columbus enslaving the indigenous people of the Caribbean. But even this flaw Irving attempts to excuse by displacing the blame for Indian slavery from

Columbus onto “the mercenary impatience of the crown” and “the sneers of his enemies at the unprofitable result of [Columbus’] enterprises” (273). Even though Columbus’ voyages coincided also with the beginnings of the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean, Irving does not implicate Columbus in this slave trade. As a reflection of national history, this aspect of Columbus’s life potentially proved too volatile for Irving and his U.S. readers.

Since at least the Missouri Compromise of 1820, U.S. residents understood well the delicate balance the nation tried to strike between “free-labor” and “slave-labor” states, which was challenged every time discoveries led to the annexation of new territories.<sup>19</sup> Politicians at the federal level tried to avoid this fraught issue by hoisting it upon politicians at the state level and vice versa. The strategy for dealing with the divisive issue of slavery was one of avoidance. Charles Wade Mills has described the inability of nineteenth-century historians to come to terms with the legacy of slavery as “structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity” (19). Absent though slavery may have been from U.S. histories, fears of slave revolts were not. These fears were expressed famously by Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781-2). Throughout *Notes*, Jefferson is consistent in his belief that African Americans are inferior to Anglo-Americans but not when it comes to their memory. “In memory,” he writes, “they are equal to the whites” (266).<sup>20</sup> Jefferson does not grant African Americans this equality to whites out of a sense of egalitarianism. Rather, he fears the “ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained” will inevitably lead to the “extermination” of one race by the other and so he objects to keeping a freed black population in the U.S. (264). Fearing this same vengeance, Irving

responds to the implications of the Haitian Revolution on the contemporary U.S. structurally in *Columbus*.

Unlike other authors of New World history who portrayed Columbus as intuiting the discovery of America long before he set sail in 1492, Irving depicted Columbus' discovery as accidental.<sup>21</sup> I read this departure from previous Columbian histories as Irving's effort to distance the Admiral, and by extension the U.S., from the darker implications of discovery on American history—a distancing Irving impresses further in *Astoria*, his account of the John Jacob Astor settlement in the Pacific Northwest, by adjoining this past with the history of the North American fur trade, which required a labor force that Irving viewed as less threatening to the stability of the U.S. nation. In Irving's depiction of New World discovery as unintended, he departs from Fernando Colón's sixteenth-century biography of his father, *Historia del Almirante Don Cristobal Colón*—an important source text for Irving, who otherwise uses Colón as the model for his own biography. Irving partitions *Columbus* into six major episodes consisting of the Admiral's four voyages to the New World, which are preceded by a prelude to the first “discovery” and are followed by Columbus's ignominious death.<sup>22</sup> Irving divides this story across 18 books consisting of between three and 12 chapters each in a narrative that, following Colón, takes an undoubtedly devastating turn around Columbus's second voyage when the Caribbean colony's mismanagement led to the admiral's now-infamous arrest during his third voyage. Sent back to Spain in chains, Columbus was released to make a fourth and final voyage before returning to the continent where he applied to King Ferdinand for his monetary and administrative due until his dying day in 1506 at age 55.<sup>23</sup> Columbus's heirs continued their father's fight for the titles he was promised

before his first voyage to the Caribbean in a series of lawsuits against the Spanish sovereign, and historians and literary critics have argued that Colón's biography should be read in this context.<sup>24</sup> As such, Colón's depiction of a heroic Columbus who suffers a martyr's death amidst the greed and negligence of his fellow countrymen and the crown communicates the injustice of Colón's disinheritance. This historically particular reading does well to explain Colón's motivation to tell the life of his father as tragedy, but it does little to account for why Irving co-opted this narrative form. Nineteenth-century Hispanist William H. Prescott was equally puzzled by historians' decisions to conclude Columbus's life with his death rather than the romantic triumph of his first landfall in the Atlantic.<sup>25</sup> However, modern scholars attribute the formal consistency among Irving's and other historians' Columbus narratives to their reliance on the same source texts, which in addition to Colón's narrative includes Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas' *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano* (1601-1615).<sup>26</sup> *Historia general de las Indias*, which Bartolomé de las Casas completed in 1561, was another important source for Irving, but others' access to the manuscript was limited until 1875 when it was published for the first time in Madrid.

Given this parallel, Irving's narrative departures from Colón are as visible as they are telling. Even though Irving thought a narrative of Columbus' life a better substitution of the translation he had at first contemplated, the problems a text poses to its translator were still present to him. Many of Irving's sources had been written in Spanish, and when recounting where Columbus had been in the Caribbean, he had to make decisions about whether to retain the Spanish geographic names given by Colón, whether to translate them into their Anglicized versions, or whether to use their indigenous names. Irving

negotiates this difficulty by interrupting his narrative to underscore for readers the navigator's sheer confusion about his location. Vacillating between finding evidence that Columbus had reached his desired foreign destination (the Indies) and recognizing in the landscape the familiar features of Spain (La Española, or Hispaniola, translates as "little Spain"), Irving depicts Columbus as suffering from a "riot of the imagination" (105). To convey not certainty but the "tissue of errors and misconceptions" that Columbus wove into a "web of false conclusions," Irving rejects Colón's singular names for particular regions by holding them in tension with the multiple indigenous names for these regions.<sup>27</sup>

Irving's translation practice is best and most significantly illustrated by a comparison between his and Colón's chapter on Columbus's travel to "Hispaniola." Whereas the title to Colón's chapter reads "Cómo el Almirante volvió a seguir su camino hacia Oriente para ir a La Española y separóse de su compañía uno de los navíos" ("How the admiral turned to follow his route eastward toward Hispaniola, and how one of his ships separated from his company"), Irving translates Colón's chapter title as "Search after the supposed island of Babeque—Desertion of the Pinta" (81, 113).<sup>28</sup> Several substitutions indicate that Irving's departure from Colón does not signify that he is offering what Lawrence Venuti would deem a domesticating translation, or one that familiarizes the strange, but rather a foreignizing one.<sup>29</sup> Replacing Colón's "La Española" with "Babeque," Irving highlights not only a linguistic presence prior to the Spanish, but also an inability to read the indigenous term ("the *supposed* island of Babeque") and thus to properly map space (he adapts "seguir su camino"/"follow his route" into the more ambiguous "search"). Irving foregrounds this linguistic uncertainty in the previous

chapter by mentioning no fewer than six names for this island: Hispaniola, Babeque and Bohio (“which [Columbus] as usual supposed to be the proper names of islands or countries”), Caritaba (“the coast of Terra Firma”), Quisqueya (“the whole”) and, a name never mentioned by Colón, Hayti (“high land”) (111). Although Irving narrates most of the English-language *Columbus* in his mother tongue, he discards English when naming the foreign regions that both the explorers and his readers traverse, thus de-naturalizing the Caribbean both as Hispano- and Anglo-American space.

While Irving’s translation here foreignizes the past, it also serves to make it more immediate to contemporary readers by hindering their knowledge about the trajectory of that history. Using analogy and counterfactual statements, Irving locates these indeterminate places in a contingent time to lead readers to believe that little is predestined about Columbus’s first voyage. He describes the Atlantic as a chaotic, trackless and boundless abyss into which he compares Columbus’s sailing to one flying into the unknown regions of outer space in a hot air balloon (9, 35, 82, 33). He adds that the navigator’s return to Spain was as “at the mercy of a thousand contingencies” (142). Irving imagines, for example, that had the “timid and factious” crew encountered bad weather on their voyage to the Caribbean, they would have mutinied, and “[Columbus] never would have discovered the new world” (142, 147). While on the one hand this conditional sentence reinforces what the historian and his reader know to be otherwise (i.e., that the weather was relatively calm, the crew did not mutiny, and Columbus was the “first discoverer” 121), on the other, it unsettles readers’ expectations about the causal chain of events.



This unsettling causes Irving to displace the beginning of American history from its naturalized origin of October 12, 1492—the date of Columbus’s first landfall in the Caribbean—onto a date several years later: the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Although Irving does not introduce the subject of African slavery until the near end of the biography, and even then his reference to it is fleeting, he foreshadows its beginnings early in *Columbus* in the “Discovery of Hispaniola” chapter, which immediately follows “Search after the supposed island of Babeque—Desertion of the Pinta.” Whereas Irving adopts Columbus’s language for the island in the title, in the body of the chapter, he calls the island Hayti, which “rose before them in all the splendor of tropical vegetation, one of the most beautiful islands in the world, and doomed to be one of the most unfortunate” (116). The contingent time and place of Columbus’s discoveries become teleological at the mention of the Arawak name, which introduces into the narrative a series of violent firsts (81): “the first time native blood was shed by the white men in the new world” (140), “the first European establishment in the new world [at La Navidad] ... an epitome of the gross vices which degrade civilization, and the grand political errors which sometimes subvert the mightiest empires” (200), “the first time that Columbus exercised the right of punishing delinquents ... [which] awakened the most violent animadversions”(215), “the first instance of the use of dogs against the natives” (244), and finally “the first trace of negro slavery in the new world” (443). Moving the antecedent of American history from 1492 to 1503, when Africans were traded as slaves for the first time in the New World, makes Irving’s chain of history curve into a vicious circle precisely at the moment of “negro slavery” (443). The discovery of America could

easily not have been, but Hispaniola/Hayti are profoundly fated—a historical unfolding he subsequently refers to as “destiny.”

Irving’s use of Hayti for the island, the name which revolutionaries on Saint-Domingue restored in 1804, signals his recognition of an event that his government would continue to officially deny for another thirty years after the publication of *Columbus*. He references the Haitian Revolution in barely veiled language in a brief paragraph that falls in the midst of a chapter on Nicholas de Ovando’s appointment to govern the island in 1501:

But while the sovereigns were making regulations for the relief of the Indians, with that inconsistency frequent in human judgment, they encouraged a gross invasion of the rights and the welfare of another race of human beings. Among their various decrees on this occasion, we find the first trace of negro slavery in the New World. It was permitted to carry to the colonies negro slaves, born among Christians, that is to say slaves born in Seville and other parts of Spain, the children and descendants of natives brought from the Atlantic coast of Africa, with which a traffic of the kind had for some time been carried on by the Spaniards and Portuguese. There are signal events in the course of history, which sometimes bear the appearance of temporal judgments. It is a fact worthy of observation, that Hispaniola, the place where this flagrant sin against nature and humanity was first introduced into the New World, has been the first to exhibit an awful retribution.<sup>30</sup>

The “awful,” yet justified, retribution of the Haitian Revolution exists in a historical time akin to the American Revolution’s. In the Declaration of Independence, the “course of

human events” dissolves along with the affiliative bands between Great Britain and U.S. revolutionaries at “[King George’s] invasions on the rights of the people.”<sup>31</sup> In *Columbus* the once-indeterminate “course of history” (i.e., Columbus and crew on the chaotic Atlantic) becomes intelligible at the “gross invasion of the rights and welfare of another race of human beings,” which itself becomes clear only as a result of a race revolution three hundred years after this invasion of rights (*Columbus* 443). In both the Declaration and *Columbus*, the abuse of natural rights winds the timebomb of history, the explosion of which is not exactly predictable but whose future is assured nonetheless. Although the “temporal judgement” to which Irving ostensibly alludes in this paragraph had passed by 1828, a passage he excised from the manuscript of the biography before its publication indicates that the revolution he really had in mind was yet to occur.<sup>32</sup>

The omitted passage originally appeared in the narrative not at the year 1501, where the published passage appears, but at the year 1503 when the Catholic Kings approved the African slave trade in the Caribbean. The conclusion of the published chapter reads, “Twelve years had not elapsed since the discovery of the island, and several hundred thousand of its native inhabitants had perished, miserable victims to the grasping avarice of the white men” (529). While statements such as these indicate Irving’s absorption of the Black Legend from historical sources such as Las Casas and Robertson, in the manuscript of the biography, Irving had attached to this statement an epilogue that began, “About this time we meet with the first trace of negro slavery in the newworld, that foul blot, destined to spread so widely over it, and darken its fame and fortunes” (588). This destiny manifests itself as no glorious expansion of U.S. borders, but is rather like a disease that Irving would have readers remedy. The paragraph

continues by recounting how the “extinction of the natives” led even the defender of natural rights, Las Casas, to advocate for the importation of Africans “on a mistaken principle of benevolence, to spare the sufferings of the natives” (589). Irving then protests in the omitted passage:

If ever we were permitted to read the will of heaven in temporal dispensations, and to point out judgements upon earth for the transgressions of mankind, we might look with awe to the History of Hispaniola as furnishing a signal instance of retribution. It is the first place in the newworld into which Negro slavery was introduced, it has been the first to avenge the wrongs of africa upon her despoilers. The laws of nature whether physical or moral, are mighty and irresistible, and though they may be long in exerting their power, they are not to be violated with impunity; there is no crime committed against them that will not sooner or later produce its commensurate punishment. Let us hope that the terrible reaction here instanced may be obviated in time by just and judicious preventives, lest it become as wide in its extent and as desolating in its effects as the injustice by which it has been provoked. (589; sic)

The introduction of negro slavery into the New World ushers in another beginning, “the first [people] to avenge the wrongs of africa upon her despoilers.” This first begets another first, if yet unrealized event (widespread slave revolt across the Americas)<sup>33</sup> in an endless series of revolutions that the omitted passage says only “just and judicious preventives” might halt. Irving never specifies what these preventives might be, but a short story he published several years prior to *Columbus*, suggests that one measure might have been a stop to the transatlantic slave trade. In “The Devil and Tom Walker”

(1824), a Faustian story in which a man named Tom sells his soul to the devil to become a broker, Tom must do the bidding of the devil, who calls himself “the great patron and prompter of slave dealers” (581). However, the one thing Tom “resolutely refused” not to do was “to turn slave dealer” (583). Irving’s hope that “preventives” to slave revolt might be “obviated in time” could also read as an imperative for gradual emancipation (rather than as a demand for immediate abolition), which reflects the course of action taken by his home state.

New York officially abolished slavery on July 4, 1827, in the year that Irving spent most intently composing *Columbus*, but it was a law that had been on the books since 1817 as part of a statute on gradual emancipation. Although Irving’s stance predates the popular antislavery movement in the U.S. by several years, the omitted passage suggests not his anticipation of William Lloyd Garrison but rather his awareness of the American Colonization Society (ACS), which was the major funnel for antislavery sentiment prior to the 1830s. While no statement exists in Irving’s letters or journals about this society, he could not have been unfamiliar with the ACS as he had befriended two of its founding members in the early 1810s, southern politicians Henry Clay and John Randolph, the latter with whom he reunited in 1822, several years after the ACS’s founding in 1817.<sup>34</sup> New York’s 1817 statute allowed for slaves to be brought into the state for up to nine months, but it declared all people born in New York henceforward to be free, in effect necessitating that the question of nativity be settled before the law could be enforced.<sup>35</sup> A person’s status throughout the U.S. thereby depended not only upon whether he/she was born into a slave or free state, but whether or not that person could visibly be said to have descended from Africa—a continent with which the United States

could not legitimately affiliate historically speaking. Integrating African-descended peoples into U.S. history would force slave states to humanize the property upon which their economy relied, thus threatening the foundation of the institution, and it would mean that free states would have to extend civil rights to those whom scientific racism was finding reasons to believe were biologically inferior to people of “purely” European descent.<sup>36</sup> This inability to integrate Africa into narratives of U.S. history helped the ACS to justify moving free people of color from the U.S. to Africa—the land from which they were believed to be more naturally descended.

Recounting the first European presence in the Caribbean and the subsequent African slave trade in the region, Irving writes Africa into American history. However, its presence in the Caribbean beginning specifically with slavery keeps Irving from being able to incorporate it into a vision of the American future in which Euro- and African-descended peoples might peaceably intermix. In revising the omitted passage to temper the language in which he predicts a slave revolution in the U.S., Irving adopts the language of descent in the published passage that alludes to nineteenth-century Haiti. Because the “descendants of natives brought from the Atlantic coast of Africa” pass into the Caribbean historically through slavery, their presence in the western hemisphere during the nineteenth century remains unnatural—reflective of the “flagrant sin against nature and humanity” that is slavery—and thus threatening (443). Irving imagines that the history of slavery, and specifically Haiti, has set American history once more on an inevitable course and that only “just and judicious preventives” might keep the African presence in the U.S. from a revolutionary explosion into time.

While Irving thus demonstrates that the revolutionary uprising of slaves was thinkable,<sup>37</sup> he cannot imagine Africans as fully human. Their origin in the Americas as slaves—the history of whom is bound to cause another revolutionary break—limits Irving’s ability to integrate African Americans into a history that demonstrates U.S. inhabitants’ descent from a “*variety of fathers*” (*History of New York*; emphasis in original). Of the “five hundred different” theories that Irving considers about how America was peopled in *A History of New York*, in *Columbus* he cannot accept the idea that Africans were in the Americas before slavery (*History of New York* 65). Midway through the biography, Irving explains Columbus’s search for “black, or darkly coloured” people in the Caribbean by citing Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix’s hypothesis in *Histoire de Saint-Domingue* (1730) that people from the Canaries or West Africa could have arrived in the Americas prior to the Atlantic slave trade and Columbus himself. Irving quickly dismisses the theory, finding it “difficult to believe” that Africans could have voyaged across the Atlantic “in the frail and scantily provided barks they were accustomed to use” (326). He reinforces this characterization of Africans as primitive several pages later when he describes the people as “black, with crisped wool, ill-shapen in their forms and dull and brutal in their natures” (344). Irving’s conviction that an African presence in the Americas could not have preceded slavery in effect turns all descendants of Africans into enslaved avengers and thus a threat to the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. Antislavery though Irving’s sympathies may have been, his depiction of Africans as “dull and brutal” illustrates his belief that the African lineage of free people made them unfit for an American environment. The variety of fathers from whom American inhabitants descended according to Irving’s 1809 mock history of New

York, have by his 1828 biography become the singular Columbus whose sixteenth-century implication in slave systems produces an inevitability in the future of the slave-holding U.S.

The turn-of-the-century revolution in Haiti—a republic the U.S. would not officially recognize until 1862—appears in Irving’s biography as part of a New World history he cannot fully suppress. Irving thus suggests in *Columbus* that American exchanges occurred both west and east across the Atlantic as well as north and south across the Gulf of Mexico, which demonstrates the paradoxical dependence of U.S. nationalism on transnational flows of culture and commerce. The barely speakable significance that recent Haitian history assumed to Irving in his interpretation of Columbus’ life has not been acknowledged among critics of Irving’s biography. Scholars have concluded that when writing *Columbus* Irving “may have been unconscious of his approach to history,” that the biography offers “no theory of history” or that its ambivalence indicates Irving’s “naiveté about the function of historical writing” (Hedges 129, McElroy lxxxvi, Hazlett 563). In contrast to these scholars, I believe that Irving’s revision indicates his keen awareness of the function of biography. The progenitor of Irving’s American history may have been an Anglicized Columbus whose spirit would motivate the westward course of U.S. empire, but that history does not meaningfully begin until slavery does in a territory de-familiarized by the author to both the Genoan and the contemporary reader. Telling the Columbus story as a way both to legitimize American imperial activity and to purify it, Irving warns his compatriots that in inheriting the mantle of Spain, they could not repeat its errors.



### **Conclusion: Irving Settles Oregon**

Shortly before Irving began researching Columbus' life, a publisher of Sir Walter Scott's work, Archibald Constable, approached him about writing a biography of George Washington (*Columbus* 3). Declining at the time because he was in "too much awe" of the prospect, Irving later wrote in the preface to the *Life of George Washington* (1855-59) that he had "resolved to undertake it as soon as he should return to the United States," but that "various circumstances occurred to prevent him" from doing so (qtd. in McElroy xxxvi, *Irving Washington* v). One of these circumstances directly involved Irving with the fallout of Jackson's Indian Removal policy. Shortly after returning to the U.S. in 1832, he went on a surveying mission of Oklahoma with Henry Leavitt Ellsworth, who—at Andrew Jackson's command—was to "establish order and justice" among indigenous groups there after the passage of the Removal Act (qtd. in Vizenor 218). In "A Tour on the Prairies," Irving's narrative account of this mission, Irving obscures his role as an agent of removal by claiming to offer only "a simple statement of facts pretending to no high wrought effect" (v). This testimonial contrasts strikingly with the grand account Irving gives of himself as chronicler of discovery and settlement.

Telling a tale of intellectual travel from the "disconnected papers and official documents" to "clear and continued narrative" on behalf of the general reader, himself and his country, Irving frames *Columbus* with a conscious nationalism. Yet his primary interest in the preface to the biography is formal. Using adjectives associated with eating as metaphors for aesthetic taste, he rejects as unappetizing the "repulsive" sight of "incomplete accounts"—the source materials of history—for history itself, "faithfully digested" (*Columbus* 3). Although he engages a different metaphoric, Irving repeats this

idea in *Astoria or, Enterprise beyond the Rocky Mountains* (1836). In the prefaces to both *Columbus* and *Astoria*, Irving expresses a concern with “that unity always sought after in works of fiction and considered so important to the interest of every history” (*Astoria* viii). However, whereas in *Columbus* Irving believed himself to be providing that unity in how he collated the letters, journals and other documents of Columbus’ voyages, in *Astoria*, he believed the coherence of the narrative derived not from himself nor from the events he recounted but rather from “one grand scheme devised and conducted by a master spirit” that “linked and banded” together the facts of the Astoria settlement. Having captured that “lofty spirit” for his readers’ imaginations in *Columbus*, it could direct Irving’s story of the U.S. settlement of the Pacific Northwest in a narrative that was often cited by politicians on either side of the Atlantic seeking to answer the Oregon question by discrediting or commending *Astoria* (*Columbus* 266, 302).<sup>38</sup>

*NAR* contributor Edward Everett was among those who praised Irving’s account of the Astor settlement. In his review of *Astoria*, Everett laments that the settlement was lost during the War of 1812, and although he blames the greed of other nations for Astor’s failure to establish the community for more than a year, he views Astoria itself as “equally marked with sagacity and commercial courage ... had it proceeded as prosperously as it was happily conceived it would have laid the foundation of the settlement and colonization, under the auspices of the United States, of the mighty empire drained by the Columbia River and its tributaries.” Before Everett begins his appraisal of Irving’s work, he rants for several pages about the “ingenious avarice of civilization” during the Age of Discovery, which he calls instead “the age of plunder” (200). According to him, this plunder began not only in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil—countries

colonized by Spain and Portugal—but also in Africa where “men were stolen ... in the philanthropic purpose of mitigating the hardships inflicted by the gold stealers of America on the oppressed natives of the new world!” What seems to make the African slave trade particularly insidious to Everett is the fact that the devastating results of colonization have been felt on the continent as a result of the trade without Europeans’ explorations and settlements into the country’s interior. Everett bemoans that “this entire quarter of the globe [Africa] has been subjugated by nations that never set foot upon it,” but he does not seem to implicate the U.S. in this traffic. In a statement laden with irony given Irving’s and Everett’s propagation of the discovery doctrine, which began in the western hemisphere with Papal Bull of 1493, Everett decries as almost fantastical that “it is not in the Arabian Nights, but in the sober history of Europe, that we read of a proclamation of the Pope, giving to the Portuguese all on one side of a certain meridian, and to the Spaniards, all on the other” (201). Directly after acknowledging this history, Everett briefly recounts the British subjugation of India in rhetoric as filled with anger as when he alludes to the empires of Spain and Portugal. By way of transitioning from these histories to that of the American Revolution, Everett concludes, “We are not quite so far from Astoria in these discursive suggestions as might at first be thought” (203). In her analysis of Everett’s review, Stephanie LeMenager offers that “the relevance of this barbaric ‘traffic’ to the Astorian venture can only be surmised” (689). However, in the cursory history Everett gives at the outset of the review, his belief in two points becomes clear: U.S. empire is more benign than others’ that have come before but only if its involvement in the slave trade is forgotten.

Wary himself of the kinds of labor used to sustain the economies of equatorial America, economies in which he had invested, Irving attempted to adjoin this commercial history to that of the Pacific Northwest in *Astoria*. Although Irving writes that mining and the fur trade “have given birth to wide and daring enterprise in the early history of the Americans,” he locates these economies in the south and the north respectively in an attempt to distance one from too close an affiliation with the other (1). Both “the precious metals of the south and the rich peltries of the north” have been “the pioneers and precursors of civilization,” but Irving envisions that the miners and trappers of the past will eventually give way to fully civilized “industrious husbandmen,” who will farm lands “made to pour forth their agricultural treasure to contribute to the general wealth” (1-2, 260). Irving makes clear that this goal is only achievable if the U.S. can incorporate the territory Astor set out to inhabit. He concludes the narrative with a warning that if the border dispute over Oregon is not settled soon between the U.S. and the U.K., then “Astoria [will] become the watchword in a contest for dominion on the shores of the Pacific” (263).

During the mid-1840s, Irving tried to keep this from being the case. In the midst of stepping down as the American minister to Spain after having served for three years, Irving delayed a return to Madrid to settle business there when in 1845, the American minister to London asked him to come to England instead. Irving wrote to his nephew Pierre that there “my friends think I may be of more service, during the present crisis, than in Spain” (103). The crisis to which Irving referred was over the joint British and U.S. occupation of Oregon, which James K. Polk had promised to settle in the U.S.’s favor after his election to the Presidency in 1844. Polk had campaigned on the platform

of gaining for the U.S. the “whole of Oregon” or all territory south of the 54<sup>th</sup> parallel, where the U.S. had settled the boundary with Spain in the Adams–Onís treaty (1819). These claims depended upon Spain’s “good title, as against Great Britain, to the whole of Oregon” prior to its cession of this title to the U.S. in 1819—a title that Spain believed it derived from the Papal Bull of 1493 (qtd. in Pakenham). However, fearing war with England should the U.S. push for this boundary, Polk compromised by proposing the line between the two nations be drawn at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. Irving thought that

the President's Message, though firm and unflinching on the subject of the Oregon question, has not been of a tone to create any *flare-up* in England. I think he is justifiable in the view he takes of that question, and believe that the present Cabinet of Great Britain would be well disposed to entertain the proposition [of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel] which was so haughtily rejected by Mr. Pakenham [the British Plenipotentiary]. I still hope the matter may be settled by negotiation; but, should England provoke a war upon the question as it stands, I am clearly of opinion that we have the right on our side, and that the world will ultimately think so. (103)

After a month in England, Irving wrote again to Pierre: “I think I have been of service through old habits of intimacy with people connected with the government, and through the confidence they have in me in inspiring more correct notions of the disposition and intentions of our Government, and in facilitating the diplomatic intercourse of Mr. McLane [American minister to London].” Abandoning his diplomatic post in Madrid to assist in the U.S.’s diplomatic efforts with England, Irving had contemplated publishing an article to support this effort. After his research on the subject of the Oregon Question, Irving reports that it “convinced me of the superiority of our title to the whole of the

territory, and of the fairness of the offers we have made for the sake of peace” (104). Feeling frustrated with the stalemate that negotiations had come to, which Irving felt would encourage “the malignancy of the British press and the blustering of our candidates for popularity,” he felt his diplomatic efforts would no longer be effectual and so he planned to return to Madrid where he wrote to Pierre that he longed “to throw off diplomacy and to return to my independent literary pursuits” (105).

When Irving did return to his independent literary pursuits, he decided at last to take up the subject of Washington’s life. The “unsettling possibility” that imperial trade might challenge the establishment of U.S. national culture in the Pacific Northwest was no longer quite as unsettled when the Oregon boundary was agreed upon in 1846 to be at the compromise line of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel (LeMenager 689). With the Spanish no longer “making inroads on the South” and the British no longer “pushing their stations into the very heart of our territory,” Irving could turn from responding to the challenges of mapping a tenuously held U.S. territory to celebrating the Revolutionary War figure who could now become a national hero also to those in the far west (Leonard 192-3).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to George H. Callcott, Irving made the greatest income from historical writing among nineteenth-century authors. See *History in the United States, 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> *New York Mirror* 22 March 1828. See Casper 351, n. 4

<sup>3</sup> See McElroy lxxxvi and Phillips.

<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the 1820s, the negative image of Spain that U.S.-Americans had imbibed from British historians “merged with another, more romantic vision of the country and is commonly associated with Washington Irving” (Kagan 23). However Irving’s romantic Hispanism, Adorno argues, was likely first derived from British sources. Robert Southey began writing on Spain and Portugal in the late 1790s and the first part of Lord Byron’s narrative poem “Don Juan” was published in 1819. Nevertheless, the impetus behind U.S. interest in Spain derived from “a mixture of hemispheric politics and history” (Kagan 4). The increased attention that the Latin American revolutions brought to their markets as they were freed from Spanish control post-independence became displaced, as James D. Fernández has argued, onto the culture and history of continental Spain. This interest was encouraged by such diplomats as Obadiah Rich, whose extensive library on Spanish colonial history Irving relied upon to write his Columbus biography while in Madrid (Kagan 7).

<sup>5</sup> *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde el fin del siglo XV* (Madrid: La Imprenta Real, 1829). Irving’s biography was translated into Spanish for the first time a little less than a decade later. See Adorno.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Buell, “American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon,” *American Literary History* 1992: 411-42.

<sup>7</sup> The text is about De Pons’ travels throughout Venezuela during the first years of the nineteenth century, when the territory was still a Spanish colony. In addition to ethnographic sketches about the Spaniards and Indians, De Pons includes in the text historical narratives about Venezuela’s “discovery and conquest.”

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<sup>8</sup> By “frontier,” I mean those parts of the continent the U.S. desired to penetrate politically or economically both to the northwest and to the south.

<sup>9</sup> Adorno 60.

<sup>10</sup> Cañizares-Esguerra 170.

<sup>11</sup> Special thanks to Kathleen Heil for her assistance with this translation.

<sup>12</sup> According to Kagan, “writers of the romantic school seemingly believed that absolute monarchy had irreparably damaged the Spanish spirit” (27).

<sup>13</sup> Burstein 190.

<sup>14</sup> McElroy xix.

<sup>15</sup> The popularity of Irving’s biography waned at the close of the nineteenth century when Justin Winsor’s succeeded it in 1891. Winsor was a founder of the American Historical Association, and his Columbus biography marks a transition from romantic to scientific historiography, which devalued narrative renditions of the past that speculated beyond what could be claimed from the primary document. According to Casper, nineteenth-century critics thought the excessive footnotes a pompous show of erudition and found it less accessible than more romantic biographies.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the history of the Spanish language in the U.S., see Helman, Fernández and Mar Vilar, *El español, segunda lengua en los Estados Unidos: de su enseñanza como idioma extranjero en Norteamérica al bilingüismo* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2003). The web site for the Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese at the University of Virginia quotes Jefferson to support its claim for the continuing importance of Spanish “as the language of one of the most influential and complex cultures of the Old and New Worlds,” which makes it a “valuable acquisition” for students. While Spanish in the U.S. retains its value as a foreign language, its status as a native language in the U.S. remains hotly contested and is often denied. The U.S. has never declared a national language, but most individual states have passed legislation making English their official language.

<sup>17</sup> Burstein 19.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to Delaplaine see, for example, William Allen, *An American Biographical and Historical Dictionary* (Boston: William Hyde, 1809), Jeremy Belknap, *American Biography* (Boston:



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Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer Andrews, 1794 and 1798) and Thomas Woodward, *The Columbian Plutarch* (Philadelphia: Clark and Raser, 1819).

<sup>19</sup> The U.S. had been divided on the slavery question from its beginnings, but it did not threaten the stability of the nation until 1820, when the balance of free-labor and slave-labor states would be offset by the admission of Missouri as a slave state. Although the Missouri Compromise settled the question of expanding slavery into new territory by fixing a line beyond which slavery would not be permitted, this line was revoked in the Compromise of 1850.

<sup>20</sup> Jefferson calls the memory the “most susceptible and tenacious of impressions,” which suggests the extent to which he worried about how memories belonging to African Americans might be harmful to a supposedly democratically minded, nationally united society (*Notes* 273).

<sup>21</sup> Adorno 61.

<sup>22</sup> McElroy notes this structural consistency among Columbus narratives, which Hedges attributes to their dependence on the same source texts.

<sup>23</sup> In his modern-day Columbus biography, Armesto demystifies the image of Columbus in chains by arguing that getting arrested went with the territory of early colonial Spanish administration—it was not an unusual, infrequent event.

<sup>24</sup> See Caraci and Stolley.

<sup>25</sup> See his preface to *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1843).

<sup>26</sup> Both Herrera and Colón were translated into English in the early eighteenth century. See Hedges and Bartosik-Vélez, who in “Translatio Imperii” argues that Peter Martyr’s *Decades de Orbe Novo* (1516, 1530) was an important source text for Columbus narratives as well as both Colón and Las Casas drew on it.

<sup>27</sup> Both Adorno and Hedges note that Irving departs significantly from Colón in his attention to naming.

<sup>28</sup> English translation from Caraci.

<sup>29</sup> See *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, Vol III (Philadelphia: G and C Carvill, 1828).

<sup>31</sup> Declaration of Independence, *U.S. National Archives*, Web, 5 March 2012.

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<sup>32</sup> According to McElroy, Irving may have scrapped the stronger antislavery statement when taking into account his friendship with proslavery sympathizers, especially James Kirke Paulding with whom he published *Salmagundi* twenty years earlier.

<sup>33</sup> Nat Turner's well-known "rebellion" occurred in Virginia four years after Irving's *Columbus*, but this squelched revolution was preceded by Gabriel Prosser's in 1800 (which also took place in Jefferson's home state of Virginia) and Denmark Vesey's in 1822 in South Carolina, the first state to secede from the Union in 1860.

<sup>34</sup> Burstein makes no mention of the abolitionist movement in his recent biography of Irving, although he recounts his acquaintanceship with Clay and Randolph (93, 167-8).

<sup>35</sup> *The Statutes of the State of New York* (Albany 1836).

<sup>36</sup> See Horsman.

<sup>37</sup> In *Silencing the Past*—his monograph about how the Haitian Revolution is remembered, or rather repressed as memory—Trouillot describes the Haitian Revolution as having the "peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened" (73).

<sup>38</sup> See, among others, Aaron Venable Brown, "Oregon Territory" (12 March 1844), Greenhow, Thomas Jefferson Farnham, *History of Oregon Territory* (New York: New World Press, 1844), Simpson and Travers Twiss, *The Oregon Question Examined: In Respect to Facts and the Law of Nations* (London: Longman et. al, 1846).

## CHAPTER THREE

**Boundary Questions:****The Oregon Debate, Cooper's Columbus and the Decline of the Historical Romance**

In early 1840, a Native American man of the Brotherton nation gave James Fenimore Cooper information that he thought “might be well to mention to the government” (*Letters and Journals* 4: 25).<sup>1</sup> According to Cooper's account of his conversation, the Brotherton man's brother in Green Bay had been approached by representatives of the British government and asked if his nation would ally itself with England in the event of war against the United States over border disputes. The issue of these “Boundary Questions,” so-called after the disputed line between U.K.- and U.S.-claimed territory in Maine, the Great Lakes region and the Pacific Northwest, had captured the attention of U.S. residents and legislators intermittently for the past thirty years. Not until the late 1830s, however, did these regions come to the fore of U.S. national consciousness. As they did, so too did Columbus, from whom writers imagined an ancestral descent in histories meant to legitimate claims to Oregon particularly.<sup>2</sup> Yet as the history of Columbus's landfall in Hispaniola re-emerged in political debates over annexation, the more recent history of this island (then named Haiti) also came into view. Unlike the former, however, the latter barely entered into imperial histories of discovery.<sup>3</sup>

When Cooper took up his pen in early 1840 to address the Boundary Question, he did so from two angles. One, more overtly political, was in the form of a letter to President Martin Van Buren recounting the conversation he had with the Brotherton man and urging the President to take action. The other, I will argue, was in the form of a romance about Columbus's first voyage to Hispaniola that Cooper titled *Mercedes of*

*Castile* (1840). Although his answer to the Boundary Question in this Columbus romance seems oblique compared to the more overtly ideological tracts on Oregon that treated the Columbian past, Cooper believed that he more directly confronted the history of discovery and its implications because he did so under the guise of fiction. *Mercedes* would thus be, Cooper hoped, “a high wrought and standard fiction—to rest my credit on it” (*Letters and Journals* 3: 443). The novel’s failure in terms of its critical reception must then have surprised Cooper given that only 10 years earlier Washington Irving had made his literary career by composing the first English-language biography of Columbus, which remained the authoritative story of the life for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Columbus loomed large in the historical imagination of early national writers. When Irving published *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), most readers would have been acquainted with the navigator from school textbooks as the inaugurator of American history.<sup>5</sup> Irving needed only exploit this relationship by painting a heroic and believable portrait of the man already considered to be America’s first founding father.<sup>6</sup> He accomplished both immediately in his preface by listing the rare documents to which he had privileged access in researching Columbus’s life, which itself he argued was “so interesting and national a kind” of subject (3). Cooper’s depiction of Columbus is neither less heroic nor less romantic, but in forgoing some of the authenticating devices of historians by framing his story as a romance, he sacrificed a credibility that he thought, in fact, was only available to writers of fiction. What marked Irving’s biography for success and Cooper’s romance for failure was not merely their differences in genre, which were slight given the flights of fancy to which early nineteenth-century romantic historians were prone, but rather the meanings surrounding

Columbus. The generic differences in Irving's and Cooper's Columbus texts did register with readers but only because in the years between *The Life and Voyages* and *Mercedes of Castile*, Columbus had become a highly charged historical figure in debates over the expansion of U.S. territory, particularly of Oregon.

As the nation reached for the first time from coast to coast, the problem of how to balance slave and free-labor powers became ever more vexed. Ironically, Columbian histories illuminated this problem. In focusing on the site of Columbus's first landing in the Caribbean to draw a lineage of discovery that would legitimate the U.S. occupation of the Pacific Northwest, attention was necessarily drawn to the region's more recent history—namely, the Haitian Revolution. Thus, the question of Columbus's role in the beginnings of the Atlantic slave trade was one that authors from Irving to Cooper felt they had to address.<sup>7</sup> Cooper does so rather circuitously in *Mercedes of Castile* because slavery did not, or rather could not, structure the historical imaginations of U.S.-Americans in the same way that Columbus could and did.<sup>8</sup> *Mercedes* includes no more than a footnote on the legacy of American slavery that began in the Caribbean, but this was enough, I believe, to hurt the romance's reception. This historical romance itself spurred critics to sound the death knell of the genre in general, perhaps because the temporal proximity that Cooper creates between Columbus's discovery and the beginnings of slavery failed to contain fears about the possibility of a race war in the way the historical romance had before when the subject was limited to pathfinders and Indians.

*Mercedes* does follow the usual arc of Cooper's romances in that the plot still hinges on the encounter between Europeans and indigenous groups. Most of the romance

closely follows the navigator's journal of his first voyage, although the plot moves forward as a result of the actions of invented characters. Taking a cue from the beginning of the journal in which Columbus frames his own venture in terms of the Reconquista by referencing the expulsion of the Moors in Granada, Cooper begins the novel with the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. They unite to join the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon with a pledge to drive the Muslims out of the Iberian Peninsula. The novel's title character is niece to Beatriz de Bobadilla—an attendant at court to Queen Isabella whose nephew, Luis de Bobadilla, takes a romantic interest in Mercedes. Discouraged by Beatriz from seeking Mercedes' hand in marriage until he can prove that he has left his rakish ways, Luis joins Columbus's crew to restore his reputation. Complicating the budding romance between Luis and Mercedes is the Haytien princess Ozema, whom Luis meets once the Spaniards make landfall in the Caribbean. Again following events narrated in Columbus's journal, Cooper mentions Pinzón's desertion and eventual reunion with the rest of the crew just before they depart back to Spain—a small but significant detail to which I will return. Ozema accompanies Columbus and crew back to Spain, and her likeness to Mercedes causes Luis to unintentionally mislead her into believing they are betrothed. She dies of a broken heart shortly thereafter. Although the historical romance ends with the deaths of Ozema and Pinzón, who dies before wresting credit for the discovery from Columbus, it concludes happily for the newlyweds and Columbus, who is preparing to return to the New World on his second voyage.

Cooper's Columbus allowed him to reject claims of British continuity with the continent of America, which he felt threatened the U.S.'s claims to the Pacific Northwest. On the other hand, the history of European colonization in the Caribbean that began in

1492 included a legacy of slave revolt that the author wished to avoid in claiming the Columbian past as the U.S.'s own. As a result, Cooper offers in *Mercedes* a highly ambivalent American past: he embraces (and variously denies) historical continuity with both the empires of Spain—in his Democratic desire for territorial expansion—and England—in his fear of the Democratic agenda to spread slavery into new territory. This ambivalence, which the form of the historical romance is designed to produce if not entirely resolve, rankled critics of *Mercedes* who preferred their Columbus to remain safely outside “the mongrel fact and fiction of the historical romance” (Duyckinck 90). According to Evert Duyckinck in his 1841 review of *Mercedes*, “the chief objection to the historical novel is its want of directness,” which is a criticism that takes on added significance when one considers the subject of this particular novel (91).<sup>9</sup> Duyckinck’s objection to the historical novel is, in effect, a critique of historiography of the kind practiced by romantic writers, such as Cooper, and is representative of a larger loss of public interest in history, which according to George Callcott, was declining by the 1850s.<sup>10</sup>

In this essay I argue that the critical rejection of *Mercedes of Castile* resulted from Cooper’s failure to treat Columbian history in a way that managed doubts about the legitimacy of expanding the U.S. into Oregon territory. By bringing into consciousness the historical legacy of the Haitian Revolution, which he views as beginning to a degree with the expansionist Columbus, Cooper fails to comfort readers expecting a historical drama that safely contains potential threats to the sovereignty of the United States. Literary critics using *Mercedes* to argue for the wholesale separation of literature and history attempted to manage doubts about national expansion by moving Columbus into

nonfiction genres, such as the pamphlets written in support of the annexation of Oregon. My essay will show how these imaginative Columbus narratives had real implications for both the expansion of U.S. territory and the decline of the historical romance during the 1840s; in particular I will show that Columbus had become so bound to American territory, and thus crucial to answering the Boundary Question, that he could no longer live comfortably in forms where truth claims were clearly suspect.<sup>11</sup> I proceed through this argument about the historical and literary development of the U.S. by first discussing the territorial boundaries under dispute and then how the genre of the historical romance, and *Mercedes* specifically, were implicated in those debates. Put simply, marking the boundary between history and literature helped Oregon annexationists mark boundaries in the Pacific Northwest.

### **Territorial Boundaries**

The heightened public awareness about the Boundary Question during the 1840s resulted both from an increase in publications about the region, such as Washington Irving's popular *Astoria* (1836), as well as from the newly established Oregon Trail, which began attracting those suffering from the Panic of 1837 to light out for the territory.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. had challenged Great Britain's presence in the area since the 1820s by appealing to the terms of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), a policy that John Quincy Adams had in fact drafted in response to criticism that he had not done enough to keep European empires out of the Pacific Northwest. According to the doctrine, the American continent was closed to European colonization. But this declaration was not made in earnest until U.S. settlers began setting up permanent colonies in the region in the late 1830s. Because the region was already occupied by the British Hudson Bay Company



(HBC), HBC representatives responded to this move in kind by beginning to cultivate the region.<sup>13</sup>

While British claimants to Oregon used the HBC presence to justify their possession of the Pacific Northwest, they supported these claims by appealing to prior discovery. They did not appropriate Columbus in the same way as U.S. annexationists, but he was still a touchstone for them. British writers used Columbus to mark the “flood-tide of discovery” that followed his opening of the New World to Englishmen like Sir Francis Drake, who sailed to parts of the Pacific Northwest in the sixteenth century, which was long before England began colonizing the east coast (Nicolay 21). U.S. writers who wanted to establish their young nation’s precedence in the region had to construct a slightly more complicated historical narrative—one that relied on a potentially threatening synecdochic logic of geography, which is a logic traceable to the Papal Bull of 1493. This bull, known as the *Inter Caetera*, imagined a line dividing the hemispheres: “barbarian” lands east of this line would be available for conquest by Portugal while all lands west were reserved for conquest by Spain due to Columbus’s landing in the Caribbean islands.<sup>14</sup> U.S. claimants to Oregon argued that they inherited their right to the continent through Columbus as well. They could make this argument because in 1819, Spain ceded to the U.S. any claims to territory in the Pacific Northwest. As such, the date when either Spanish or British explorers reached the Pacific Northwest was of little consequence because Columbus’s discovery in the Caribbean came to stand for any land west of the imaginary line drawn by the *Inter Caetera*.

According to an 1839 letter by the British administrator of the Northwest Territory, George Simpson, U.S. settlers were not “scrupulous as to the mode or means of

asserting their imaginary rights” in Oregon (qtd. in Rakestraw 41). Of course those rights were not imaginary to the U.S. residents moving into the region. While they construed it differently, both British and U.S. writers used Columbus’s 1492 discovery as an entry point into their historical narratives about the Oregon territory, which they published in increasing numbers into the 1840s. These narratives were meant to foreground each nation’s precedence in discovering, exploring and settling the northwestern portion of the continent and thus their rightful claim to it. Although the Boundary Question did not finally erupt into a war between England and the U.S., Cooper was not wrong in 1840 to anticipate its potential to lead to armed conflict. The Oregon debate reached fever pitch in the middle of the decade when “fifty-four forty or fight”—numbers that referred to the territory’s latitude—became the slogan among U.S. expansionists who wanted “the whole of Oregon” or war with Britain.<sup>15</sup> This call for the whole rather than part of Oregon, which the U.S. did not get when it settled the boundary at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, demonstrates the synecdochic logic of geography by which pro-Oregon annexationists in the U.S. displaced Columbus’s Caribbean discovery on to the whole of the Pacific Northwest. Using this same logic in *Mercedes* in ways I will discuss below, Cooper emplotted America’s multifaceted colonial past to configure U.S. space in a way that he hoped would ensure the future of the nation; instead this configuration refused to keep buried a threatening slave presence on the continent.

Such geographic arrangements gave former president John Quincy Adams pause. During an 1838 legislative session, when Adams was serving as a congressman of Massachusetts, he responded to a request from a fellow Massachusetts congressman, Democrat Caleb Cushing, who wanted a post erected on the Columbia River to fortify it

against potential Indian attacks provoked by the British—the kind of attacks feared by Cooper in his letter to Van Buren. The Columbia River, so-named in 1792 for the ship sailed by its “discoverer” U.S. Captain Robert Gray, formed a further basis for U.S. claims to the region. According to a report of the session, “Mr. Adams said, that he believed his colleague was perfectly right in his facts, as far as he recollected, but there might be differences of opinion upon the principles, and he was not prepared to concede that the discovery of part of an island carried the whole island.”<sup>16</sup> Adams then referred to the Papal Bull of 1493, which granted undiscovered lands to Spain and Portugal to the west and east respectively, but he did so to invoke the “various European controversies respecting title to this continent.” The issue remained unresolved in 1838, but Adams’s refusal to conflate Columbus and Oregon marks an interpretative difference between Whigs, such as Adams, and Democrats, such as Cooper, who would use Columbian discovery to justify the extension of U.S. territory not just east to west but also north to south.

An avowed Jacksonian Democrat by the time he wrote *Mercedes*, Cooper supported the annexation of Oregon and Mexico.<sup>17</sup> However, earlier in his career, he mocked the blurring of distinct regions in America into “one confused whole.” In what many scholars consider to be Cooper’s first work of nonfiction, *Notions of the Americans* (1828), the British narrator describes sailing into New York and expecting to see this entire America: “I threw aside my pen abruptly, dear Baron, in order to catch a first view of America. There is something so imposing in the sound of the word—*continent*, that I believe it had served to lead me into a delusion . . . that I confess the folly of having expected to see the land make its appearance *en masse* and with a dignity worthy of its

imposing name” (23, emphasis in original).<sup>18</sup> The narrator then expresses his disappointment at seeing no more than a “little, blue, cloud-like mound” but not before Cooper introduces a long footnote satirizing Europeans who “blend all his images of America into one confused whole” so that “countries which lie on different sides of the equator are strangely brought in contact, and people, between whom there is little affinity of manners, religion, government, language, or, indeed of any thing else, are strangely blended in one and the same image” (23). In emphasizing the differences over the similarities among all peoples taken to be “Americans,” this passage reads as an expression of Cooper’s nationalism. Yet Cooper’s image of America as made up of culturally diverse peoples scattered across the equator merges back into a unified picture later in *Notions* when the narrator remarks upon the beauty of “American women” by asking “if what I saw were true and if I really were standing on the continent of Columbus” (249). Despite his effort to deconstruct the part-whole relationship between countries in America and the American continent, Cooper too falls into the synecdochic trap set by America’s association with its supposed discoverer. This ambivalence about geography foreshadows a historical contradiction that emerges in *Mercedes* twenty years later when Cooper, in claiming the history of Santo Domingo as foundational to the U.S., first rejects and then claims the English colonial legacy in America. I discuss this contradiction further in the following section, but it is worth mentioning here because Cooper’s treatment of European colonization leads him to consider the plight of Native Americans whom he divides in *Mercedes* into the Caribbeans, oppressed by Spanish colonists, and “our own Indians,” whom he implies were better treated by English colonists (392).<sup>19</sup>

The U.S. took advantage of the association between America and its European discoverers during the 1820s and 30s to justify dispossessing Native Americans of land that the government wanted available for sale to republican farmers. In *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), the first of several Supreme Court cases that formed the legal cornerstone for Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Policy (1830), Justice John Marshall articulated this justification in what is known as the discovery doctrine to rule against a private citizen's right to buy land from Native Americans.<sup>20</sup> According to the doctrine, "discovery is the foundation of title, in European nations, and this overlooks all proprietary rights in the natives ... Even if it should be admitted that the Indians were originally an independent people, they have ceased to be so. A nation that has passed under the dominion of another, is no longer a sovereign state." While discovery was the foundation of European title to American land during the colonial period, which is how "all the nations of Europe ... have acquired territory on this continent," Justice Marshall poses the immediately relevant question, "Have the American States rejected or adopted this principle?" He rules that they have adopted it. As a result of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the U.S. War for Independence in favor of the former British colonists, Marshall states that "the powers of government, and the right to soil, which had previously been in Great Britain, passed definitively to these States."

U.S. writers invoked the terms of the discovery doctrine to argue for their government's right to the region over England's in the years following *Johnson v. M'Intosh*. Hall J. Kelley—called a father of Oregon by his biographer<sup>21</sup>—published *Geographical Sketch of that Part of North America, called Oregon* in the same year that the U.S. began to enforce Indian Removal. Both Kelley and the architects of the Removal

couched their agendas in terms of the discovery doctrine. After repeating the terms of Marshall's decision by establishing that the title to Oregon may have belonged to Native groups but more properly belongs to those who may bring them into "civilization," Kelley concedes that either England or America might rightfully claim sovereignty of the Pacific Northwest. However, "in determining ... to which belongs the preference," Kelley states that "regard must be paid to the circumstances of the first discovery," and so he begins the section "The First Discovery and Possession of the Oregon Territory" with Columbus (11). After Columbus made a "plain highway" to Spanish explorers who, Kelley contends, explored the Pacific Northwest before the British, America (by which he means the U.S.), "commenced her discoveries, explorations and possessions which gave her, aside of the [Louisiana] purchase from France and the [1819] deed of Spain, a clear right to the Oregon country" (13). These discoveries, Kelley wrote and others repeated, commenced with the finding of the Columbia River by Gray (1792), continued with explorations by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark (1804) and were reinforced with settlement by Astor and company (1810). The *North American Review* laid bare the link between Spanish documents of discovery and U.S. claims to the Pacific Northwest nine years later in its review of the final volume of Martín Fernández de Navarrete's *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde el fin del siglo XV* (1837), the first volume of which printed Columbus's journal for the first time in 1825 and which Irving had been asked to translate. Navarrete's publication is mentioned only in the first paragraph and merely as an "occasion to do justice to the character of Spain" as "a matter deeply important to the United States," meaning the

Boundary Question, which the rest of the review is given over to answering similarly to Kelley (109).<sup>22</sup>

The plain highway that Kelley imagines between Spain and America served to connect the two geographically, and it aided in determining the conditions under which American history was considered to unfold. In his chapter in *A New World of Words* on how a Hispanicized Colón entered the English language as Columbus, William Spengemann outlines how “rather than something done once and for all in 1492, the discovery of America by Columbus had merely begun an uninterrupted process that was still going on. Originally an isolated piece of news, then the first event in the history of America, discovery came to describe American history as a whole, and modern history came to be equated with continuous discovery” (144). Discovery could describe American history as a whole because another conflation had taken place that was geographic in nature: the site of Columbus’ first discovery, the Caribbean islands, with the American continent.<sup>23</sup>

The displacement of Columbus’s discovery in the Caribbean onto the whole of America had become an article of faith by the mid-1840s in the ideology of Manifest Destiny, a term coined in mid-1845 by John L. O’Sullivan who used it by the end of that year to discuss the annexation of Oregon.<sup>24</sup> In an article that Paul Giles asserts was more widely read than the one containing O’Sullivan’s first use of “manifest destiny” to refer to the annexation of Texas, O’Sullivan commands: “Away, away with all these cobweb tissues of rights of discovery, exploration, settlement, continuity, etc. ... Our claim to Oregon ... [is] best and strongest. That claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for

the development of the great experiment of Liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us” (qtd. in Giles 67). In brushing away the cobweb of logic by which U.S. proponents of Oregon’s annexation made their case for claiming the Pacific Northwest, O’Sullivan replaced historical narratives of discovery with the tautology of Manifest Destiny. Eschewing history for myth did not mean that Columbus was no longer foundational to claims of authenticity, but it did affect the narrative forms in which he could appear.

If the reception of Cooper’s *Mercedes of Castile* is an accurate indication, one of the narrative forms in which Columbus was considered an unfit subject by the mid-nineteenth century was the historical romance. Irving’s popular biography certainly helped to create the Columbus exhaustion that critics of Cooper’s novel expressed, but I contend there is a larger reason for the failure of *Mercedes of Castile* that has to do with territorial expansion—and its attendant issues of Native American sovereignty and slavery—as much as genre. In fact, questions of territory and genre were imbricated. The series of reform movements in the years surrounding the publication of Cooper’s Columbus novel, from the more ethereal Transcendentalists to the hardline Garrisonian abolitionists, illustrate this point in the number of texts about the nation’s questionable future that flooded the literary marketplace from the 1830s to 1840s.<sup>25</sup> Columbus’s discovery was an important historical marker for many of them. Despite evidence to the contrary in the title of Ohio native Benjamin Eggleston’s *The Wars of America: or, A General History of All the Important Tragic Events that have Occurred in the United States of North America since the Discovery of the Western Continent by Christopher Columbus* (1839), his Columbus is not the scapegoat for the tragic events that have



occurred since his discovery, most probably because Eggleston takes much of this history from Jedidiah Morse's laudatory representation of Columbus in *Universal Geography*.<sup>26</sup> However, Eggleston does maintain the date of Columbian discovery as a lamentable event initiating a series of other tragic events: "The awful view of all the horrid battles, sieges, and confusion that has attended this horrible of all horrors from 1492 to the present date—oh! reader, canst thou imagine the scene?" (40). Eggleston encourages readers to do so by listing atrocity after atrocity that has occurred in "the domain of this western hemisphere from the Atlantic ocean to the Pacific's rolling waves and tumultuous billows." The horrors occurring on all coasts that Eggleston catalogues in vague terms at first eventually take specific shape in the historical reality of slavery. That reality brings him to the year 1775, when he says the American colonists failed to free themselves of the institution as they began attempting to free themselves of the British. Rather than absolving the U.S. of its oppressive policies in linking 1492 to the American Revolution, as Marshall did in *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, Eggleston implicates the nation. Cooper tries to avoid such a condemnation, but in addressing slavery at all in his Columbus romance, he belies its entanglement with discovery and expansion, which the historical romance—in its focus on the disappearing Indian—had until the 1840s successfully obscured.

### **Genre Boundaries**

The genre question is, in many ways, at the heart of the Boundary Question. As the Oregon debate reached its height during the Presidency of James K. Polk (1845–1849), a change occurred in historiography away from a romantic mode characteristic of the New England historians toward *vraisemblance* or realism. Similarly, the heyday of the historical romance, which became popular in the 1820s through the novels of Sir

Walter Scott and the “American Scott” Cooper, would be over by the 1850s.<sup>27</sup> The opposition between literature and history that was increasingly instantiated into the latter half of the nineteenth century was problematized through the historical romance’s fictional treatment of facts. However, writers responded to readers who viewed the gap between literature and history as irresolvable by separating history out from other genres, including literature and geography as textbooks on history in its own right were published in increasing numbers.<sup>28</sup> The resulting historical narratives lent a veneer of transparency to the past that remained unavailable to romances where myth and history readily mixed and a reader unfamiliar with a particular historical event might easily confuse the two. Producing such confusion was the desiderata of historical romancers; they did not see the relationship between literature and history as conflicted.<sup>29</sup> Neither did they see formal unity as a narrative goal: “lively and exciting scenes were more important than their successful aesthetic integration into an overall pattern. These conditions of literary production can help put into perspective some features of historical novels that were later criticized as shortcomings” (Fluck “The Nineteenth-Century Historical Novel,” 120).

Winfried Fluck argues that to understand the historical novel, one must understand “the increased importance of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, when past events were no longer understood merely as illustrations of moral laws” (“The Nineteenth-Century Historical Novel” 121). Instead of studying history to understand moral laws, as one would from a didactic novel or catechetical textbook, one began studying history to understand and explain the historical process itself. Authors who described this process, they hoped, would then help determine the course the emerging nation would take. The process depicted in Cooper’s historical romances was

cyclical and portrayed civilization as potentially as damaging as remaining in a savage state. Nevertheless, historical events—usually a war between Native Americans and Europeans—were ultimately emplotted to privilege the restoration of order, meaning the survival of European civilization, and to lament what that order meant for the “uncivilized,” which to use Cooper’s language usually meant their “extermination.” The colonial history of *Mercedes* reveals, however, that the extermination Cooper fears in this romance is not of Native Americans but of whites who die at the hands of revolutionary slaves.

As the historical consciousness of nineteenth-century people grew, Columbus became more important to the historical claims that would profoundly affect the shape of the U.S. nation both literally and figuratively. The U.S. had been divided on the slavery question from its beginnings,<sup>30</sup> but it did not threaten the stability of the nation until 1820, when the balance of free labor and slave states would be offset by the admission of Missouri as a slave state. Although the Missouri Compromise settled the question of expanding slavery into new territory by fixing a line beyond which slavery would not be permitted, this line was revoked in the Compromise of 1850 shortly after the Boundary Question was settled with England. Slave states would only approve the free-state admission of California, newly acquired U.S. territory as a result of the Mexican-American War, if they received a compensatory measure. The federal government passed such a measure in the form of the Fugitive Slave Act, which compelled free states to return slaves to owners upon penalty of a fine. The Compromise of 1850 drew many, already disaffected with the U.S. government over the Mexican-American War, into the debate over slavery who before had kept their distance from politics. Although these

conflicts over territorial acquisition and slavery did not erupt into Civil War until 1861, the fragile compromises on which the new democracy had survived had been threatening the nation since at least the Missouri Compromise.

The extension of the U.S., which the issue of slavery threatened as another state was added to the Union, made truth claims that affected territorial politics particularly sensitive. Thus, when Cooper began composing *Mercedes of Castile*, playing with the line between literature and history had become more of a gamble when it came to the Columbus story. Thanks in large part to Irving's epic biography, the details of Columbus's voyages were not only familiar to most readers, but they had been relatively accepted as fact. Cooper must have anticipated the criticism he was inviting by toying with a story that had become foundational to U.S. imperial politics. His preface to the novel begins with the list of sources he consulted to compose *Mercedes* in an effort to illustrate to his readers how seriously he had researched the subject. This list includes Irving's biography, Prescott's *The History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* (1838), Cervantes, and "the Alpha and Omega of peninsular literature" Columbus's journal, which had been translated into English in the year preceding Irving's Columbus (*Mercedes* iii).<sup>31</sup> Cooper means for his consultation of these sources to silence naysayers who might search them for evidence of a love triangle among Spanish nobles and a Carib princess and "fancy that by establishing" that "there never were such persons as our hero and heroine ... they completely destroy the authenticity of the whole book" (iii). Cooper insists that the insertion of the part—the invented love triangle—into an account of the whole—Columbus's first voyage to the West Indies—does not make the story less than historical but rather more so, which is a point he reinforces by saying that "we state

truths, with a profession of fiction, while the great moral caterers of the age state fiction with the profession of truth” (iii).<sup>32</sup>

This inversion—whereby Cooper takes truth with a profession of fiction to be more honest than fiction with the profession of truth—explains why Cooper insisted to his publisher from the beginning that the novel *not* have Columbus’s name in the title but be named rather for the heroine whom the protagonist, Luis de Bobadilla, marries at the novel’s conclusion.<sup>33</sup> In thus titling the novel, Cooper seems to have convinced himself that his narrative was not in fact about Columbus. In the course of the one-year period in which he composed *Mercedes*, Cooper shifts from nicknaming the novel *Columbus*, so-called because he “intend[ed] that the voyage shall be a leading point in the work,” to *Mercedes* after the love interest of the novel in which Columbus merely “appears.”<sup>34</sup> Mercedes herself does not appear until 50 pages into the novel, and she follows closely on the heels of Columbus’s introduction at page 48, suggesting that Cooper’s first concern may not have been the love story, as he professed, nor even Columbus, as his critics supposed. Although the first forty pages are taken up with what Cooper calls “merely introductory matter,” meaning Columbus’s voyage as well as the love story, his beginning with the betrothal of Ferdinand and Isabella indicates an interest in the union of state their marriage represents (43).

Opening in 1469, the novel covers a 24-year period that begins with the wedding of the Catholic Kings, which unites the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, and ends in 1493 with the union of nobles Luis and Mercedes amidst Columbus’ preparation for his second voyage. In the novel, the wedding of Ferdinand and Isabella signifies the “success of the great cause of Christianity” as it culminates in the expulsion of the Moors from the

Iberian peninsula (23).<sup>35</sup> Using Prescott and Columbus's journal as inspiration for this scene, Cooper's Columbus makes his first appearance at the Conquest of Granada, which the narrator compares to the ousting of the English by the American colonists during the Revolutionary War: "the place submitted on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1491—twenty-two years after the date of the marriage [of the Catholic Kings] just mentioned, and it may not be amiss to observe, on the very day of the year that has become memorable in the annals of this country, as that on which the English, three centuries later, reluctantly yielded their last foothold on the coast of the Republic" (41-2). Cooper is referring to the day in 1783 when the last British troops left newly official U.S. soil after the Treaty of Paris was signed nearly three months prior. In this allusion to the American Revolution, Cooper's reference to the "coast of the Republic" might seem to signify the east coast of the U.S., but the context in which he presents this information (the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in addition to the Conquest of Granada and Columbus's voyage) indicates more pressing contemporaneous concerns about expansion.

When U.S. citizens in support of the annexation of Oregon wrote pamphlets and newspaper opinion pieces in increasing numbers in the years following the publication of *Mercedes*, the timelines they used to legitimate U.S. claims looked much like the one Cooper gives here. They first established the "primitive right to Oregon" belonging to Spain via Columbus and the Papal Bull of 1493. Before recounting how this right passed to U.S.-Americans in 1819 in negotiations with Spain over Florida and Oregon, these writers often mentioned the Treaty of Paris to foreclose debates about British claims to any territory on the continent. As one contributor to *The Ohio Statesman* put it: "whatever shadow of right the 'mother of nations' ever acquired was surrendered in

1783.”<sup>36</sup> The author offers a brief timeline of events to help make his case that Oregon belongs to the U.S. Beginning with the conclusion of the American Revolution and the date in which this author claims that England forfeited its rights to the continent—1783—the timeline continues with the familiar sequence of U.S.-founding events in the region: Capt. Gray’s entrance into the Columbia River, the exploration of the region by Lewis and Clark, the settlement of Oregon by John Jacob Astor and company, and the Adams–Onís treaty between Spain and the U.S. in which the former ceded rights to the Pacific Northwest to the latter. Like Cooper, this writer offers an alternate genealogy for U.S. ancestry—one that makes Spain, not England, the “mother” of Americans and thus the U.S., and not England, the proper inheritor of Oregon. It appears from such texts that in referencing 1783 as the date when the English “yielded their last foothold on the coast of the new Republic,” Cooper meant the west coast as much as the east.

In devoting the 450 pages of *Mercedes* that follow the Conquest of Granada to Columbus’s first voyage, Cooper—like the *North American Review* critics of Navarrete’s *Colección*—attempted to do justice to Spain as a matter deeply important to the United States. Cooper made Columbus’s journal the center of the novel by recounting events from it in nearly half of its 31 chapters, and the edition he used was an English translation of the version published in the *Colección*.<sup>37</sup> While the journal provides much of the structure for the novel, Cooper’s plot moves forward with the action of Luis de Bobadilla, a roguish nobleman who sails with Columbus to regain the esteem of his aunt Beatriz. This love plot is complicated by the introduction of the Haytien princess Ozema (named after the river that flows through the Dominican Republic), who falls in love with Luis and sails with him back to Spain to escape her betrothal to the cruel cacique Caonabo—a

personage that Cooper picks up from Irving's account of Columbus's second voyage. In a misunderstanding on the voyage back, Ozema thinks herself promised to Luis and dies upon witnessing his marriage to Mercedes, and so vanishes another Indian from Cooper's fiction. Although killed by love, Ozema is not entirely lost. Luis and Mercedes appear in the final chapter sailing not west with Columbus on his second voyage but east to Malaga on a boat they named for her. By transforming Ozema into the vessel that brings the Spanish nobles back to their estate in Spain, Cooper both sublimates her natural right into the instrument of the discovery doctrine, and he uses that instrument to move the explorers back to the mother country. Cooper thus maneuvers his characters so that the U.S. may continue the course of American history across the hemisphere.

Cooper's use of the plural pronoun "our" aids him in this construction. Several times in the novel he refers to "our own times" to connect the Spanish past to the American present. For example, Cooper concludes his character sketch of Isabella with an anticipatory note about her hand in Columbus's discoveries, which "were about to put their seal on her own future fortunes as well as on those of posterity even to our own times" (18). He repeats this phrase again after the discovery when recounting the Spaniards' first encounter with tobacco. Cooper expands Bartolomé de las Casas' footnote about the plant in Columbus's journal into a comic scene between an unnamed Cuban man and Columbus' quixotic crewman Sancho Mundo. He depicts the Cuban as offering the dried leaves to Mundo "as an American [would] his cake" (360). When Mundo finally understands that he is to light one end and puff, he stumbles backward lightheaded and nauseous from the smoke. "This little scene," the narrator informs readers, "might be termed the introduction of the well-known American weed into civilized society ... Thus did Sancho, of the shipyard gate, become the first Christian tobacco smoker, an



accomplishment in which he was so soon afterward rivaled by some of the greatest men of his age, and which has extended down to our own times” (31). In the first quotation, the “American” offering his cake denotes a civilized person from the present U.S.; in the second, “American” describes tobacco in a territory broader than, and including, the U.S. Cooper’s anachronistic naming of the tobacco weed “American” refers not only to Cuba since it derives from this territory, nor only to non-elite Spaniards. As his use of “our own times” indicates, Cooper incorporates contemporary U.S. readers into this meaning of “American.” In this way an interaction between a Cuban and Spaniard, which happens nearly 350 years before the romance’s publication, becomes part of the American past.

While Cooper’s use of “our own times” in his Columbus novel seems to indicate his endorsement of the pro-Oregon-annexation stance by basing claims to the continent on the U.S.’s inheritance of the Spanish colonial legacy, his use of “our” in the phrase “our own history” complicates such a reading. For instance, when Cooper portrays Columbus as “like our own Washington,” he both intends to bring Columbus into the pantheon of American heroes but also—in his use of simile—to keep him at some distance from them (268). Even while using Ozema to endorse the logic of the discovery doctrine, Cooper also tries to keep her at a remove from the American past and present. Notwithstanding his comparison of Spain’s conquest of Granada to the British-American colonists’ revolution against England, Cooper retrieves the British colonial past as the nation’s own by comparing Ozema to “the Pocahontas of our own history” when she rescues Luis from Caribs by throwing herself before him in a scene reminiscent of John Smith’s *Generall Historie of Virginia* (1624) (383).<sup>38</sup>

Cooper betrays his reasons for this ambivalence about the meaning of “our” in the last chapter that recounts events in the West Indian isles before the novel concludes in Spain. Cooper includes the desertion of Martín Alonso Pinzón, the captain of the *Pinta*, in the same chapter in which he uses Sancho Mundo’s discovery of tobacco as an opportunity to broaden national history out into the Caribbean. However, Cooper attempts to unchain the American present from the Caribbean past when Pinzón returns. In a paragraph that begins, “It is not necessary to the narrative to relate the details of the meeting that followed,” Cooper no more than mentions that Pinzón has come back to Columbus and crew who shortly after set their course due east from “Hayti, Española, or Little Spain, as the island had been named by Columbus.” At the conclusion of this sentence, which ends the paragraph on Pinzón’s insubordination, Cooper introduces a footnote—one of only a handful in the novel. It begins: “The fortunes of this beautiful island furnish a remarkable proof of the manner in which abuses were made, by the providence of God, to produce their own punishments.” Cooper then compares the size of Española to New York, the former which he notes is two-thirds smaller than the latter. He continues that the island

was the seat of Spanish authority, in the New World, for many years. The mild aborigines, who were numerous and happy when discovered, were literally exterminated by the cruelties of their new masters; and it was found necessary to import negroes from Africa to toil in the cane fields. Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, it is said that two hundred of the aborigines were not to be found in the island, although Ovando had decoyed no less than forty thousand from the Bahamas to supply the places of the dead as early as 1513! At a later

day, Española passed into the hands of the French, and all know the terrible events by which it has gone into the exclusive possession of the descendants of the children of Africa. All that has been said of the influence of the white population of this country, as connected with our own Indians, sinks into insignificance, as compared with these astounding facts. (392)

This last sentence, wedged as it is between handwritten lines in Cooper's manuscript of the novel, appears as an afterthought.<sup>39</sup> Sensitive to how readers might receive this brief history of Hispaniola, Cooper must have included it to distinguish between "our own Indians" and aboriginal peoples like Ozema for how their history might adumbrate black insurrection in the United States.

Cooper reinforces that distinction at the conclusion of the romance. After Luis's marriage to Mercedes, Ozema agrees to be baptized. She discovers that this rite will not make her marriageable to Luis because, as the archbishop who baptized her explains, "no Christian can have two wives at the same time" (499). As he chastises Ozema for her confusion and beseeches her to look upon the cross and do penance, she quietly expires. The chapter ends portentously with the narrator describing Queen Isabella's sad revelation that Ozema's death represented "a type of the manner in which the religion of the cross was to be abused and misunderstood" (499). Cooper here employs the anti-Catholic stance of his compatriots, who used the Black Legend to paint Spanish colonization as more nefarious than British colonization, to effectuate the difference between "our" past and "theirs" and thus distance the Caribbean isles from the American continent—a distancing in time and space that complicates claims to Oregon based on a conflation of Columbian discovery with the nineteenth-century Pacific Northwest.

If Cooper's misgivings about Catholicism and his comparison of Española to New York are not evidence enough of his fear that the "terrible events" of the Haitian Revolution could recur in the U.S., then a statement he makes in *The American Democrat*, published two years before *Mercedes*, is proof positive. In the extended essay on American politics and culture, Cooper includes a chapter on slavery. After remarking on the irony that one may be "an excellent christian and a slave holder," Cooper holds that slavery yet "leads to sin in its consequences" (173, 174). The specifically American brand of slavery, whereby the enslaved are considered chattel, Cooper states "is of the most unqualified kind" (175). But what makes American slavery most different from earlier forms of slavery in Europe is race. "Nature has made a stamp on the American slave" that prevents his/her easy assimilation into society after he/she obtains freedom, and so Cooper predicts that even after the abolition of slavery, a struggle will follow that "will necessarily be a war of extermination. The evil day may be delayed but can scarcely be averted" (175). In repeating the term "exterminate" when referring to the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean Indians, an extermination that in his condensed timeline leads to the island's possession by the "descendants of Africa," Cooper suggests that he cannot fully integrate the Spanish colonial past into American history for fear of other kinds of futures this history makes possible on the continent. Desiring not to see America in the hands of the English, Cooper desires even less so to see it in those of African Americans—a possibility he sees foreshadowed in the story of Hispaniola. It is evident in Cooper's footnote in *Mercedes* that in spite of his belief that Oregon belongs to the U.S., a belief founded on Spanish claims to the continent beginning with Columbus, he cannot fully divorce the English past from the foundation of U.S. history.<sup>40</sup>

Anna Brickhouse has discussed in “The Writing of Haiti” how nineteenth-century U.S. authors’ consideration of a Franco-African presence in the Caribbean threatened “contemporary racial ideologies [which] would be understood and addressed in international rather than purely domestic contexts,” as Cooper does, and “even to consider the issue of slavery within a transnational context was to render permeable the borders of the U.S.” (427, 428). In the case of *Mercedes*, the political borders that Cooper considers are more than permeable—they have not yet formed. Haiti’s history seems to make Cooper wish that they be drawn in favor of the English for how it might allow the U.S. to avert the “evil day” of racial extermination.<sup>41</sup> In a novel that reaches back to the Spanish colonial past to found a U.S. presence on the American continent in “our own times,” Cooper nevertheless integrates the English colonial past into “our own history” thus lending legitimacy, however inadvertently, to British claims to the western hemisphere.

What causes Cooper’s ambivalence about the American past is not the U.S. itself, but its place in a broader America—one spanning north and south, in addition to east and west, and including islands whose discovery by Columbus profoundly implicates them in constructions of American history. As it did for novelist Susanna Rowson, textbook author Jedidiah Morse as well as other early national geographers, the problem of space creates the problem of time.<sup>42</sup> In addition to both denying and claiming British ancestry in American historical time, Cooper expresses ambivalence about the spatial configuration of America. In *Mercedes*, Cooper works against standard geographic notions that water carved into land to separate its peoples naturally.<sup>43</sup> Upon Luis’s introduction to Columbus by Father Pedro, the latter states that Luis had been to foreign

countries because he has led a roving life on the ocean. Columbus responds that Luis should not be chastised for this inclination as “God separated different countries by vast bodies of water, not with any intent to render their people strangers to each other, but, doubtless, that they might meet amid the wonders with which he hath adorned the ocean, and glorify his name and power so much the more” (57). In contrast to viewing water as that which keeps people on opposite sides of its shores foreign to each other, Cooper’s Columbus sees the ocean much as Kelley’s Columbus does—as a highly populated highway. In Cooper’s view this highway dangerously joins both England, the former mother country, and the Caribbean, with its black revolutionaries, to the American continent.

The historical romance could express the ambivalence that Cooper felt about the ocean’s highway in ways that more polemical genres, such as Eggleston’s abolitionist tract, could not. For critics, that ambivalence was the novel’s major fault. They maligned Cooper for his inability to weave together the history and romance of *Mercedes*. Literary nationalist Evert Duyckinck, who would compile one of the first compendia of American literature, went so far as to use his review of Cooper’s novel to argue that “history and the novel should remain distinct” (91). Critics like Duyckinck could judge the novel’s fictional and nonfictional aspects separately because the history of Columbus was quite familiar to mid-century Americans. Most of this familiarity with the arc of Columbus’ life—from his decade-long search for funding, to his four voyages to the Caribbean and finally death amid attempts to restore the prestige he lost after being sent back to Spain in chains on his third voyage—came from Irving’s biography.<sup>44</sup> However, perhaps no aspect of the Columbus story was better known than his first voyage, which became popular

knowledge through its inclusion in school curricula and the translation of Columbus's journal into English in the late 1820s.<sup>45</sup> Cooper relies on his audience's awareness of this story in *Mercedes*. For instance, he glosses over his account of the first voyage—writing that certain events “are too familiar to any intelligent reader to need repetition here”—at times when he wants to move more quickly to invented scenes, such as the one between the Cuban and Sancho Mundo (358). Unfortunately for Cooper, this familiarity was the dull wind that kept the tide of popular opinion from turning in the novel's favor.

A rejection of Cooper's romance amounted to a rejection of his version of discovery. As one reviewer put it, “Mr. Cooper's study of the voyage to Cathay is far less interesting than the true story which we have in other works” (“Literary Notices” 137). While this critic seems to fault Cooper only for writing a rather dull account of Columbian discovery, he/she also paradoxically suggests that its dullness results from its fictionality. In other words, Cooper's romance was at once both too fictional (not a “true story”) and not fictional enough (“less interesting”). Herein lays a paradox for Cooper as well. Even while his fiction “both demands and conditions a continuing process of interpretation,” he also wants to retain an authorial control over that interpretation (Fluck “The American Romance,” 423). Fluck describes such a contradiction as inherent to the genre of the historical romance itself: “On the one side, it presents something like an attempt on the part of the gentry to put fiction in the service of its own agenda and values; on the other, it heats up the imagination with wild adventures and daring deeds in order to engage the reader for these goals” (“The American Romance” 427). Cooper's agenda is not easy to pin down. Robert Spiller has argued that, although he was antislavery in his values, Cooper “refused . . . to see slavery as a threat to secession” (“The American

Romance” 575). However, I believe that when Cooper began to feel “bristled at the growing tyranny of American popular opinion,” he was anxious about how that “tyranny” could threaten the future of his native country (Kennedy 92). Cooper tried to navigate the slipperiness between his antislavery agenda and frontier adventure by punishing Pinzón for his insubordination to Columbus.

In the chapter in which Cooper recounts Mundo’s first encounter with tobacco, the narrator describes Pinzón’s growing disillusionment with the heroic Columbus. Pinzón “began to envy Columbus a glory that he now fancied he might have secured for himself,” and in a detail that Cooper repeats from Columbus’s journal, Pinzón deserts Columbus by sailing off in the *Pinta* (358). Although they reunite just before Columbus sets sail back to Spain in the passage that includes Cooper’s footnote on post-revolutionary Haiti, Pinzón does not escape the consequences of his actions. According to the historical record, Pinzón died within months of his return to Spain, but in Cooper’s hands, this death results from Pinzón’s grief at failing to beat Columbus to court and thus losing the glory of claiming to be the first discoverer. When Luis hears the news of Pinzón’s death, he says to Mercedes that he believes it to have been issued by God: “So much for unlawful hopes and designs that God doth not favor! ... Providence hath, I think, been of the admiral’s side; and certainly, my love, it hath been of mine” (511). Providence may have been on Columbus’ and Mercedes’ side in Cooper’s romance, but in footnoting that it was also on the side of the Haitian revolutionaries, Cooper betrays an anxiety about basing claims to Oregon on the history of Santo Domingo. Ending *Mercedes* with the deaths of characters who may threaten American social order (Pinzón) or bloodlines (Ozema), the establishment of the Spanish nobles (Luis and Mercedes)



securely back in Spain, and Columbus headed west again to make new discoveries, Cooper would seriously engage the Spanish colonial past only to maintain the figure of Columbus while, he hoped, divesting Americans of the legacy of black revolution.

In contrast to the reviewer who thought Cooper's Columbus story dull, Edgar Allan Poe thought *Mercedes* a very readable history, but as a romance, he deemed it "the worst novel ever penned by Mr. Cooper" (96). Poe's judgment seems harsh coming from a writer who himself had become interested in blurring the line between fact and fiction in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and *The Journal of Julius Rodman* (1840), a serially published fictional account of the discovery and exploration of Oregon (96).<sup>46</sup> In thinly veiling these fictions as fantastical first-person travel accounts, Poe was satirizing his readers' penchant for narrative authenticity, something that Cooper—as a historical romancer—also approached with skepticism. But because Cooper believed that resting claims on the authority of one's statements was the general practice for any writer offering truth to the American public, he thought it more honest to admit the fictionality of his narrative from the outset. This admission is one that Poe did not make. According to the truth-fiction schema that Cooper had laid out in the preface to *Mercedes*, Poe's *Pym* and *Rodman* would fall into the second category of fiction with a profession of truth—a category in which Cooper would include his historical source material for *Mercedes*. The difference between Poe and the romantic historians, however, is that Poe wanted to deconstruct the notion of authenticity entirely whereas Irving, Prescott and (from a slightly different angle) Cooper were still invested in historical truth. This difference makes the inclusion of Poe's *Rodman* into Statesman Robert Greenhow's "Memoir, Historical and Political, on the Northwest Coast of North America" (1840) all

the more ironic. Greenhow, who submitted this memoir to Congress, mentions explorations recounted in *The Journal of Julius Rodman* to prove that U.S. citizens may have been in the region even before Capt. Robert Gray's discovery of the Columbia River.<sup>47</sup> Although he admits that "it is impossible to form a definitive opinion ... as to the value of the statements if they are true," he concludes that at least nothing in the journal appears "calculated to excite suspicions with regard to its authenticity" (141). According to Brickhouse in her essay on Greenhow's use of Poe, the former knowingly included Poe's fiction with a profession of truth into his memoir. As Brickhouse argues, Greenhow insisted "upon the difference between the history and fiction precisely in order to dissimulate the difference between them"—a dissimulation on which claims to Oregon depended and which Cooper, in his insistence on fiction with a profession of truth, refused to perform.

Cooper was aware of the division between literature and history that readers seemed to demand increasingly into the mid-nineteenth century,<sup>48</sup> and *Mercedes of Castile* may be read as both his effort to keep them from being opposed and as his inability to reconcile the two. While all writers of accounts of Oregon were selective about which historical events they included in their timelines of discovery, exploration and settlement, their force was felt only if their manipulation of historical detail could recede—like Greenhow's—behind claims to authenticity. Cooper's submersion of his reference to the Haitian Revolution to a footnote beneath the narrative proper was not enough to keep the hackles of readers from rising. In acknowledging the fictionality of his Columbus narrative, Cooper failed to treat the foundational history of the Caribbean, and by extension U.S.-claimed America, in a way that kept fears about slave insurrection

confined to the borders of the Caribbean. He thus underestimated the degree to which this historical figure had become off-limits to self-consciously treated fiction whose ambivalence did not serve to tighten geographic boundaries. What Cooper took to be the strength of his Columbus narrative—its self-professed fictionality—served instead as its coup de grace.<sup>49</sup>

The suspicion not just of *Mercedes* but more generally of the historical romance coincided with the emergence of what Jonathan Arac has called “literary narrative.” According to his account, “literature” had narrowed in scope by mid-century so that it encompassed not all written works but fiction and fiction alone. As opposed to the earlier, broader sense, this new definition meant that literature “answered only to the requirements of its own coherent fantasy rather than engaged in concerned dialogue with the life of the times” (12). This turn toward internal coherence meant a turn away from the public issues that had threatened the nation’s existence, which was especially challenged in the 1850s with the passing of the controversial Fugitive Slave Act and the eruption of violence in Kansas (1854), the U.S. Senate (1856) and Harper’s Ferry (1859).<sup>50</sup> This is not to say that social criticism did not continue to appear in novels into the 1850s—Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) is an obvious example—but these novels were not considered literary as, for instance, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) was.<sup>51</sup> As a result, literature was deemed no place for the “higher standard of public accountability” that Cooper sought for his novels and for himself as an author (Hartorn).

As the struggles over boundaries on the “continent of Columbus” intensified into the mid-nineteenth century—with Spain, France, England and Mexico ceding territory to

the U.S.—Columbus became entrenched in ostensibly nonfictional genres. Columbus “has to this day seldom breathed comfortably in any other medium” than historiography because, I have argued in this essay, he had become so bound to the time and space of the American continent that he could no longer be distinguished from that which he was believed to have brought into being (Spengemann 176). The relegation of Columbus to more restrictive conventions of historical writing at a time when the increasingly divisive issue of slavery underscored the tenuousness of the new nation indicates also the degree to which the legacy of Haiti was present, if hidden, in the historical consciousness of U.S.-Americans.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the Haitian revolutionaries whom Cooper attempts to distance from the Columbian legacy that he would have Americans inherit were neither entirely repressed nor forgotten. They would come to form the basis of an alternate legacy, one that African-American separatists, such as J. Dennis Harris, would formulate as a historical moment founding a different kind of empire—not an Anglo-American one extending north into Canada, but an “Anglo-African” one extending south into Central America.<sup>53</sup>

Although Cooper would like to claim a hemispheric American history founded on the moment of Columbian discovery, he also wants to bracket certain events in Caribbean history that would have threatening implications for the U.S. In moments when a history of insurrection might allow readers to trace a lineage to the United States’ own oppressive policies, such as Indian Removal and slavery, Cooper deploys the Black Legend to reclaim a more benign British colonial past as the nation’s own—even as he implicitly deploys this appropriation of the British legacy against present-day Britons. In either formulation, Cooper imagines a synecdochic relationship between the history of

specific regions on the continent and the present condition of the continent as a whole. In other words, the shifting part—whether it is the fifteenth-century Spanish Caribbean or seventeenth-century British North Atlantic seaboard—comes to stand for a still fluid, contemporary America. Thus, Cooper’s novelistic sketch of America’s Columbian beginnings betrays a geographic anxiety about expansionist claims to the continent founded on a history of Columbus in the Caribbean. Such anxiety was not felt by Cooper alone. In this essay, I have argued that the critical rejection of *Mercedes of Castile* resulted from Cooper’s calling attention to the geographic imaginary on which historical claims to American land relied. In passing through the historical time of the Caribbean, these claims became threatening in the ambivalent form of the historical romance, which did not treat discovery, expansion and slavery as strictly contained. Despite Cooper’s investment in the historical romance as the highest form of truth, the failure of *Mercedes* ensured that when intellectuals, such as Duyckinck, declared that “truth is now better than fiction,” readers would turn to realist history (90).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper addressed this letter, dated 15 March 1840, from his residence at Otsego Hall in Cooperstown to President Martin Van Buren.

<sup>2</sup> Some writers, such as surveyor Charles T. Jackson, did invoke Columbus when arguing for the U.S. government's rightful claim to Maine, for instance, but this argument relied less on legal claims than on the popular belief that the U.S. had assumed Columbus's role as discoverer of the continent: "The mariner's compass was invented, and served to guide Columbus across the pathless ocean. A new world was discovered, and soon became the abode of civilized men. Our great nation now extends its arms from the St. Croix to the Capes of Florida, and westward to the Rocky Mountains, and the Columbia river, and is destined to cover this whole Continent" (viii). The official connection between Columbus and the midwest and northeast of the continent was more tenuous than with the northwest, where Spain ceded its claims—based on the 1493 papal bull—to the U.S. To counter British claims to the Great Lakes and Maine, government representatives relied less on appeals to Spanish discovery than on the Treaty of Paris (1783), which ended the U.S. War for Independence but failed to establish a clear line between British and U.S. territories along the Canadian border.

<sup>3</sup> Trouillot describes the paradox of the Haitian Revolution as having the "peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened" (73). Mills describes the inability of nineteenth-century historians to come to terms with the legacy of slavery in America as "structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity" (19).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the legacy of Irving's Columbus biography, see Adorno. Literary nationalists believed Irving's turn to Spain a satisfactory response to their call for a literature that turned away from British forms as Adorno avers: "Irving's Columbus was thought capable of building the national reputation in the field of letters" (66).

<sup>5</sup> See Bushman 102.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to undervalue the achievement of Irving's biography, which was a careful compilation of rare sixteenth-century Spanish sources, but rather to underscore his audience's eagerness for a more expansive Columbian history.

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<sup>7</sup> It is significant that Irving does not allude to the Haitian Revolution until 1501, almost ten years after Columbus' first voyage, because it puts temporal distance between the foundational act of discovery, which Irving wants to incorporate into national history, and the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade. Irving, in fact, struck from his *Columbus* manuscript a more condemnatory passage on slavery that called for its gradual abolition. See the Twayne edition (1981) edited by John Harmon McElroy 589.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest describes the inability for white Americans to incorporate slavery into their historical understanding of the continent not as resulting from an archival gap but as “the *purpose* of a historical understanding shaped by and devoted to white supremacist ideology” (4).

<sup>9</sup> This opinion is the reverse of earlier attitudes toward the historical romance during its emergence in the 1810s and 1820s when “first Scott, then Cooper ... were saluted not so much for their adventurous plots as for the amount of truthful and accurate detail by which they made their adventures plausible” (Miller 247). It also contrasts with Duyckinck's earlier reception of Cooper, when he compared him favorably to Scott (Pfitzer 34). By 1841, however, Duyckinck likened Cooper to one of the “herd of guides and vulgar travelers who rush in at the heels of the discoverer” Scott (90). After 1841, Duyckinck continued to grow in his distaste for the romance as evidenced by his pronouncement that Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) was an “intellectual chowder of romance” (qtd. in Miller 246).

<sup>10</sup> See *History in the United States* 33 and 71. Callcott notes that this loss of interest does not correspond, however, to historians' output at least initially.

<sup>11</sup> For a genealogy of early nineteenth-century genres, including the historical romance, see Moretti 14-17.

<sup>12</sup> On the heightening tensions between the U.S. and U.K. in the late-1840s, see Giles 66. For a more thorough history of the conflict, see Rakestraw.

<sup>13</sup> According to Rakestraw, U.S. colonists began settling the region in 1836. See *For Honor or Destiny* 38.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the history of the *Inter Caetera*, see Korman 45.

<sup>15</sup> The terms of the Monroe Doctrine were invoked again by James K. Polk during the 1840s to justify the U.S. occupation of Mexico. For more on Polk and the Monroe Doctrine, see Beard 5: 137 and Murphy 27.

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<sup>16</sup> “Oregon Territory.” Legal Proceedings. *Richmond Enquirer* [Virginia] 22 May 1838: 2.

<sup>17</sup> According to Beard, Cooper did not view the looming war against Mexico as unjust: “Being sovereign, independent states, Texas and the United States had every right, he reasoned, to treat for annexation ... Cooper preferred dollars to bullets as instruments of negotiation, but he would not have agreed ... that the slave interests created the war to serve their selfish purposes. He did, however, object to efforts to extend slavery into the new territories” (5: 139). For more on Cooper’s attitudes toward U.S. expansion, see also Breinig.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the emergence of the continent as a fundamental geographical unit for understanding America and how it served U.S. expansionism, see Adams, esp. the introduction in which she argues that North and South America were not viewed as more distinct regions until the second half of the twentieth century.

<sup>19</sup> The tradition of demonizing Spanish interactions with the indigenous populations they encountered in the Caribbean dates back to Indian advocate Bartolomé de las Casas’ “Brevissima relación de la destrucción de las Indias” (1552) but was picked up by British historiographers to contrast their supposedly more benign treatment of Native Americans in the colonization of America.

<sup>20</sup> Not only did this doctrine dissolve Native American sovereignty, but it also made U.S. citizens beholden to the justice system’s endorsement of the discovery doctrine: “The subjects of the discovering nation must necessarily be bound by the declared sense of their own government, as to the extent of this sovereignty, and the domain acquired with it,” which is why Marshall could rule against—as he did—a private citizen’s right to buy land from Native Americans.

<sup>21</sup> See Frances Fuller Victor, “Hall J. Kelley. One of the Fathers of Oregon,” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* Dec. 1901: 381-400.

<sup>22</sup> “Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde el fin del siglo XV.” Review. *North American Review* Jan. 1839: 109-143. Francis Parkman, who was a Cooper admirer and known among the New England romantic historians for *The Oregon Trail* (1847-9), began serially publishing this work a year following the treaty, but he makes no mention in it of Columbus or Spain, perhaps because the issue had been settled by then.



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<sup>23</sup> In an advertisement for his 1829 abridged edition of *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (New York: G and C and H Carvill, 1829), Irving enacts this conflation by calling his work a “history of the first discovery of our country” (4).

<sup>24</sup> In an example of the ideology of Manifest Destiny as it applied to Oregon, the American Home Missionary Society faulted both Spain and Great Britain for lacking the foresight to follow in the footsteps of Columbus and John Cabot: “Had the kingdoms of Spain and Great Britain looked upon the discoveries ... with a truly prophetic eye, who can believe that they would have been so tardy in linking the destinies of the *New* with the despotic thrones of the *Old World*? They lost the best portion of the globe by not anticipating the mighty march of mind” (emphasis in original). Asking its members to learn from European mistake, the author of this 1843 report encourages members to take seriously the political importance of the west by undertaking the “moral cultivation of this immense territory” (116). This kind of “educational and religious activity exerted by interstate migration and by organized societies” was “the most effective” way for “the East to regulate the frontier,” according to Frederick Jackson Turner (35).

<sup>25</sup> For example slave narratives, such as the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (1847), were published to promote the abolition of slavery. Contributors to the “Juvenile Department” of William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper *The Liberator* began their histories of slavery in America with Columbus’s landing in the Caribbean in narratives inspired by the Black Legend: Columbus’s landing was believed to have ushered in the influx of Spaniards who caused the death of the native population, which in turn produced a need to import slaves from Africa to labor on the islands (1831 Nov. 19 and 1833 Feb. 23). Although less overtly political, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s lectures on nature, poetry and other abstract expressions of the new Transcendental philosophy were also available in print via such texts as *Nature* (1836) and *Essays* (1841 and 1844). For a compelling account of the political valances of Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1845), particularly as it relates to the Oregon debate, see Giles.

<sup>26</sup> Eggleston cites Morse directly and reproduces entire sections of his *Universal Geography*.

<sup>27</sup> In her study of sea narratives, Blum sees a shift in literary modes as well: “In the 1820s and 1830s, popular interest was gratified by naval literature,” including such maritime novels by Cooper as *The Pilot*

(1824), but “this interest in American naval experience did not last into the 1840s, when the generic demands of sea writing have been seen as shifting from historical romance to realism” (72).

<sup>28</sup> See Nietz 200 and 234.

<sup>29</sup> Historical romancers concerned themselves, as Dekker puts it, with “ways of knowing” (218).

Such ways of knowing were closely intertwined with forms of knowing or genre such that certain kinds of historical truth—i.e., ways of knowing about the Native American past—were viewed as available only through fictionalized accounts of past events, such as the French and Indian War that forms the backdrop of Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). As attested by the popularity of the historical romance during the 1820s and 30s, readers did not necessarily perceive the relationship between the fictional and the factual as conflicted. However, as debates over land claims, which were often linked to Columbus’s legacy, intensified into the nineteenth century, distinguishing between fact and fiction—at least superficially—became more desirable. Authors were not to call attention to the literary devices they employed if they wanted their narratives to be effective.

<sup>30</sup> To compromise with Southern states who argued that they would not be represented in numbers proportionate to Northern states whose economy relied less on slave labor, Federalists added to the U.S. Constitution a three-fifths clause that would count three of every five slaves as part of a state’s population. This concession, made to get the unanimous votes needed for the Constitution to be ratified, ensured that slavery would remain not only an issue in U.S. government but a controversial one at that.

<sup>31</sup> Appearing in the Duyckincks’ *Cyclopedia of American Literature* (1856), Kettell was remembered then as now (when he is remembered) for *Specimens of American Poetry* (1829), an anthology of American literature that begins with Puritan writings. Before the Massachusetts-born newspaper editor and congressman published *Specimens*, however, Kettell translated the edition of Columbus’s journal published by Navarrete at Hispanist George Ticknor’s request.

<sup>32</sup> While historians treated the romantic nature of their subjects as intrinsic to them so that they could still claim objectivity in their historical narratives, authors such as Cooper and Robert Montgomery Bird held that the histories of discovery and conquest had to be treated as fiction for them to be at all believable. For instance, in *Calavar; Or the Knight of the Conquest: A Romance of Mexico* (1834), Bird states that “the history of Mexico, under all aspects but that of fiction, is itself—a romance” (28). He employs a form of

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logic that Cooper uses in his preface to *Mercedes* by arguing that treating this history in any other form but fiction makes it less than true.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper mentions his difficulty with the title in at least six letters. See those dated 18 Oct. 1839, 12 Nov. 1839, 30 March 1840, 6 June 1840, 29 Aug. 1840, and 28 Oct. 1840. By 2 Aug. 1840, Cooper had decided upon *Mercedes of Castile* as the title.

<sup>34</sup> Compare the letter dated 12 Nov. 1839 to the one dated 2 Aug. 1840.

<sup>35</sup> Heathenism was used to justify land claims and thus expand Christianity in the Americas during the period of discovery and exploration. When Indian title to land on the American continent was disputed under U.S. jurisdiction, sixteenth-century practices were ruled if not just then effective in terminating native sovereignty, thus instituting what has come to be known as the discovery doctrine. For more on this doctrine, which maintains that only discovering governments or their successors may conquer or enter into land agreements with Native Americans, see Korman.

<sup>36</sup> See "Oregon and England."

<sup>37</sup> Although he had received some instruction in Spanish, Cooper never mastered the language. See Franklin 513-514.

<sup>38</sup> Cooper expressed this ambivalence about the British colonial past throughout his literary career. For instance in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Cooper portrays the characters fighting in the French and Indian War on the side of the British sympathetically while also attempting to use these characters to create a national origin story distinct from British stories. According to Kennedy, "Cooper cannot solve the problem of England in part because he can never acknowledge the deep, personal aspect of his national prejudices or recognize how his family history and marriage complicate his intellectual judgments. But he remains convinced that American national self-respect and self-confidence hinge on exorcizing England as a possessive presence" (115).

<sup>39</sup> James Cooper Papers, 1789-1851, in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library, Accession #6245-a etc, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va. Special thanks to the helpful staff at the Small Special Collections Library and the Harrison Institute whose Lillian Gary Taylor Fellowship in American Literature has made this research possible.

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<sup>40</sup> Cooper's efforts to claim the Spanish colonial past without entirely relinquishing the English past explains why African American separatist J. Dennis Harris, in *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (1860), claims not Columbus but the Haitian Revolution as the founding event of an Anglo-African empire that he desires to see based in the Caribbean and Central America. As the borders between the U.S. and Mexico become real, the Caribbean exists more and more in tension with relationship to the continent allowing Harris and other black separatists, such as Martin Delany in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), to see the Caribbean and Central America as both separate from and part of the continent.

<sup>41</sup> While in the narrative thus far Cooper has seemed to reject the influence of the Black Legend, here he embraces it in order to justify the U.S. policy of Indian Removal put into effect a decade before the novel's publication—a justification made possible by connecting the Black Legend to the history of post-revolutionary Haitians. In addition to the dark shadow cast here by ancient Spanish figures, a modern Francophone-Africanist presence also haunts this history. Brickhouse explains that U.S. writers invented such figures as Cooper's descendants of the children of Africa to "crystallize the ambiguities confounding an Anglo-Saxonist national ideology" ("The Writing of Haiti" 436). As Cooper's repression of the existence of modern Haitians by pushing them into the sub-textual level confirms: "[Franco-Africanism] often marks a place of disturbance or ambivalence within its accompanying text: an indeterminacy surrounding the issue of racial identity rather than a hidden truth to be revealed at an opportune moment; a pervasive anxiety of origins rather than the titillating revelation of these origins" (Brickhouse "The Writing of Haiti" 429).

<sup>42</sup> In their turn-of-the-nineteenth-century geography textbooks, both Morse and Rowson celebrated Columbus's discovery as an act bringing into being a new continent. Such geographies were the primary vehicles for history until the increase in textbooks on history itself beginning in the 1820s. For more on the history of early textbook publication, see Nietz.

<sup>43</sup> In early national geography textbooks, such as those written by Morse, the earth was considered to be divided by water, so people on either side of an ocean were believed to be naturally separated. Whereas Morse describes the continents of Asia and America as separated by a strait of water, he believes

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America—from Cape Horn to the North Pole—to be joined into one continental unit by the strip of land called the Isthmus of Darien, which today is the site of the Panama Canal.

<sup>44</sup> Irving himself mimicked the structure of Fernando Colón’s sixteenth-century biography of his father. See Hedges.

<sup>45</sup> Columbus’s first voyage was better known than any of his four voyages in part because a more complete record of it had been preserved by Bartolomé de las Casas, who used the journal to write his *Historia de Las Indias*. See Fernández-Armesto 68.

<sup>46</sup> For a thought-provoking discussion of Poe’s *Journal* as it relates to claims to Oregon territory, see Brickhouse “Scholarship and the State.”

<sup>47</sup> Brickhouse “Scholarship and the State” 701. Greenhow also cites Irving’s *Astoria* as evidence backing U.S. claims of its prior settlement of Oregon territory.

<sup>48</sup> Cooper responded to critics of *Mercedes* in his preface to *Afloat and Ashore* (1844): “The writer has published so much truth which the world has insisted was fiction, and so much fiction which has been received as truth, that, in the present instance, he is resolved to say nothing on the subject. Each of his readers is at liberty to believe just as much, or as little, of the matter here laid before him, or her, as may suit his, or her notions, prejudices, knowledge of the world, or ignorance” (v).

<sup>49</sup> The successful annexation of Oregon territory by either the British or the U.S. relied, if not on raw might, then on historical claims. Because these claims relied on resolving which nation was first to discover, explore and settle this region, the historical figures representing each were overdetermined in the literature promoting Oregon’s annexation. Cooper’s romance must have appeared to readers to be an inappropriate vehicle for a figure whose unsettled legacy meant that the future possession of the continent was still in question.

<sup>50</sup> The Compromise of 1850 brought California into the Union as a free state under the condition that slaves escaping to freedom in the north be returned to their owners in the south upon penalty of a fine. The issue was divisive. Not only did it draw figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson into the debate who had until then avoided definitive political statements against slavery, it also led—indirectly at least—to violence. The repeal in 1854 of the Missouri Compromise (1820), which prohibited the extension of slavery north of parallel 36°30', meant that inhabitants of territories applying for statehood could vote to determine

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whether their state would enter the Union as a free labor or slave state. As a result, settlers with conflicting positions on slavery rushed into new territories to vote for or against slavery in the state. Violence erupted between the factions in Kansas, where abolitionist John Brown had moved to fight for the Free-Staters. He would be executed in Virginia six years later in his infamous raid on Harper's Ferry, during which he led a slave revolt. The politics of slavery became forcefully physical in the government as well when Democrat Preston Brooks beat Republican Charles Sumner nearly to death by in the U.S. Senate. This sequence of events reveals that the fragile compromises that the U.S. had been able to maintain until the 1850s could no longer keep the issue of slavery from threatening the future existence of the nation.

<sup>51</sup> See Arac 178.

<sup>52</sup> See Trouillot, especially chapter four. See also Hunt.

<sup>53</sup> In his travel narrative *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (1860), Harris replaces the moment of Columbian discovery with the history of the Haitian Revolution as foundational to the Anglo-African empire that he argues is necessary for descendants of Africans who, disenfranchised in North America, should look elsewhere for a place to settle on the continent, which he believes is more their home than Africa.

## CHAPTER FOUR

**Discovering the Haitian Revolution:****Anglo-African Empire in the Tropics**

When Martin Delany—an early supporter of Central American emigration—wrote, “we must not leave this continent; America is our destination and our home,” he adapted the geographical logic that had allowed the U.S. to extend from east to west by grounding itself historically in Caribbean discovery. In Delany’s first published advocacy of black emigration, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), he does not claim Columbian ancestry as so many of his white counterparts were wont to do when arguing for expansion, yet Columbus remains his entry point into American history.<sup>1</sup> Using what he calls the “living records” to show the entitlement of African Americans to full citizenship, Delany begins a history of the colonization of the continent in 1492. Columbus appears not only at the start of this history but also whenever Delany desires to put the history of slavery into perspective. Thus, the Portuguese slave trade in Africa occurred “fifty years previous to the sailing of Columbus in search of a new world,” and the first fort on the Gold Coast was constructed “eleven years prior to the discovery by Columbus.” Delany frames African-American history as such not only to shed light on the darker side of New World history but also to make the case for the physical superiority of Africans over Europeans in America, where, because he believes they are more fit workers, they deserve at least the “common rights of man.” In case his argument is not convincing enough, Delany also claims that Africans preceded Columbus to the New World on an ancient Carthaginian voyage.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the power that prior discovery had in advancing American territorial claims (see Chapter

3), Delany adapts it to support his own colonization project in the continent to which he believes African Americans “have originally more right.”<sup>3</sup>

This claim is one that Delany’s contemporary and fellow emigrationist, J. Dennis Harris, did not make, although Columbus remains a pivotal figure for him too. In *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (1860), Harris’ travel narrative about his explorations throughout the Caribbean, he acknowledges that ancient ruins testify to histories alternative to those of Columbian discovery, “but like many other interesting objects which the historian fails to comprehend ... [its story] is left entirely to the conception of poets” (162). In imagining that half of San Domingo lacks a past, Harris works this division between history and poetry in order to gain backing for an Anglo-African state by an existing imperial power in the New World. Bruce Harvey has argued that “one task of antebellum geographical writing was to elide for national conscience the discomfiting facts of slavery” (243); in response, some black emigrationists, such as Harris, William Wells Brown and James Theodore Holly, sought to employ the geographical logic of Columbian history without replicating elisions that could threaten the legitimacy of their own projects.<sup>4</sup> They did so by turning away from the history of slavery exclusively to a history which they viewed as more empowering—the Haitian Revolution’s. By narrating the Revolution, these historians seized on the importance that Columbus’s discovery lent to the region to counter Anglo-American claims to the continent.<sup>5</sup> In casting the Haitian Revolution as the foundational event of African-American history, Harris attempted to legitimate black emigration to an empire extending from Caribbean and Central American nations. Rather than discard the Columbian myth founding Anglo-American empire, Harris recast it to make historical



space for an Anglo-African empire that would—he hoped—eclipse the Anglo-American one, and he did so paradoxically by appealing to the economic interests of Anglo-Americans. As opposed to scholars who interpret writers like Harris and Brown as challenging official U.S. histories by (in all senses of the word) replacing them, I argue in this chapter that these historians may be understood as radical not because they rebelled against *where* American history rightfully began but rather *when* it began.<sup>6</sup>

Harris' efforts to resolve problems of belonging for Americans of African descent were interrupted by the U.S. Civil War (1861-5), which was in part an attempt to settle the question of how African Americans would be incorporated into the Union. Although Harris' emigration venture stalled and ultimately failed, the narrative he wrote to promote "colored"<sup>7</sup> nationalism in the Caribbean deserves resuscitating. In addition to being one of few African-American authored histories of the Haitian Revolution in the nineteenth-century U.S., *A Summer* forcefully reveals the link between American discovery and slavery that made historical claims legitimating expansion a precarious enterprise. When the history of Hispaniola was traced from Columbus to the Haitian Revolution, this enterprise looked threatening to an Anglo-American empire still sustained by a slave economy (as Irving's and Cooper's dismissive treatment of the Revolution in their Columbus narratives indicate.<sup>8</sup>) For Harris, examining this history strengthened his promotion of a tropical black empire.<sup>9</sup> In his travel narrative, a commendably enterprising Columbus remains Harris' touchstone, but only so that he can displace him with the black revolutionary history that he believes better legitimates emigration to the tropics. Contrary to his contemporaries,<sup>10</sup> Harris' narrative engages both emigration and Columbus. This engagement reveals how narratives of discovery and slavery could have

concrete implications for the course of African-American history and economy, which Harris viewed as emanating from the Caribbean.

From the 1830s to the 1850s, the cause of emigration spread much as the cause of abolition did—through lectures and conventions as well as in the circulation of newspapers and books.<sup>11</sup> Harris had experience with all of these. Little is known about Harris' early life other than his trade as a plasterer in Cleveland,<sup>12</sup> but evidence of his involvement in the abolitionist cause appears in 1858 in the published *Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio* where his name is listed on the committee registry.<sup>13</sup> Although one of the convention's resolutions "absolved from all allegiance" African Americans to "a government which withdraws all protection"—a reference to the Dred Scott decision (1857)—the committee also resolved not to condone emigration, arguing that "the amount of self-sacrifice required to establish a home in a foreign land, would if exercised here, redeem our native land from the grasp of slavery" (7). This position was consistent with Frederick Douglass', whose preeminence among African American leaders made his views forceful among the black community.<sup>14</sup> When Delany took a stand for emigration in *Condition*, he effectually took one against Douglass, which Robert S. Levine has interpreted as a challenge to Douglass to extend the work of black elevation to countries south of the U.S. border.<sup>15</sup> While Douglass only began to come around to emigration after Republican victory in the White House failed to ensure victory for African-American interests in the form of the abolition of slavery (1860-1), Harris aligned himself with emigrationists like Delany no later than 1859.

In the year following his participation in the Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, Harris wrote to Republican Congressman Frank B. Blair of Missouri requesting to

serve as an agent promoting Blair's plan for African-American emigration to Central America. In contrast to Delany, who also wrote to Blair indicating his endorsement years earlier of the same measure,<sup>16</sup> Harris did not reject financial backing from Anglo-Americans. For this reason, Harris was not always as favorably received on his transnational tour to advocate for Blair's plan as he was in his native Ohio, where "a strong interest in emigration [had existed] for a decade" (*Bell Survey*, 213). In a letter to the editor of the Ontario newspaper the *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet*, attendees to one of Harris' meetings referred to him not as an agent but as a "tool" and called him "a deceptive Judas, ready to betray his brothers for thirty pieces of silver." Drawing a line between free people of color in Canada as British subjects and those in the U.S. because the former "have no Dred Scott Law," the writers of this letter denounce emigration as a "white yankee" scheme under which émigrés would be little more than slaves.

Perhaps these African Canadians were familiar with Blair's "The Destiny of the Races of this Continent" (1859), in which he outlines his justification for the emigration of free African Americans. Like most of his Anglo-American contemporaries who also supported free labor and thus abolition, Blair did not believe in racial equality. On the contrary, his belief in the inferiority of African Americans and conviction that the darker races were better suited for life in the tropics led him to promote the Caribbean as a site for African-American emigration—an argument he makes, ironically, by posing like Delany that Africans naturally survived the "effeminate" Spaniards who first discovered the region. Unlike Delany, however, he argues that the realization of Columbus' vision has been achieved in the U.S.'s recent territorial acquisitions bordering the Pacific: "A railroad across the continent, now that the steamboat plows both oceans, will bring China

nearer to Europe than America was in the days of Columbus, and both Europe and Asia may meet in their products in the heart of our continent” (12). Imagining U.S. technology as that which, through commerce, draws the nation closer to continents across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, Blair espouses the discovery doctrine tenet of contiguity. According to European colonial policies, “discovery” of a territory extended to regions surrounding it so that, for example, “the discovery of the mouth of a river gave the discovering country a claim over all the lands drained by that river; even if that was thousands of miles of territory” (Robert J. Miller 4). For Blair, the discoveries of how to build and harness the power of steamboats and the transcontinental railroad effectually gives the U.S. claim to global capital without having to occupy regions now made contiguous to America through modern machinery.

After Blair advances his position on free labor by imagining the free enterprise of the U.S. as a continuation of Columbus’ mission, he turns to the issue of emigration, which he sees as intertwined with U.S. interests for how it can protect the nation’s commerce. Blair supports African-American emigration to Central America not only because he believes African Americans are more suited to the climate than Anglo-Americans but more importantly because he hopes it will allow the U.S. to establish a protectorate over the region akin to Great Britain’s over Canada. Such an influence would naturally extend across the region, he argues, because the descendants of Africans whom he hopes will move there are still American and thus “addicted to respect” the U.S. government (23). Making a cheerful comparison of his plan to the Indian Removal Policy, Blair thinks the displacement of the U.S.’s black population into Central America would, in effect, turn Columbus’s belief that he was in the Indies into a reality:

The contiguity of the United States, and the relations which its commerce and overshadowing power would create, and the very posture of the country, enveloped in the waters poured out from our land and the Gulf stream that washes our shores, must make the people who inhabit it *with us, though not of us*. It would, in fact, become our India,<sup>17</sup> but under happier auspices; for, instead of being governed by a great company, to drive the people to despair and insurrection by its exactions, it would have its own Government, which would owe a fealty to ours. (23, emphasis mine)

Blair's phrase "with us, though not of us" is reminiscent of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on tribal sovereignty in *Cherokee v. Georgia* (1831) in which Chief Justice John Marshall ruled the Cherokees to be a "domestic dependent nation" whose relationship to the U.S. Marshall compared to "that of a ward to his guardian." After the *Dred Scott* decision, which ruled that all descendants of Africans had "no rights which the white man was bound to respect," even this relationship between African Americans and the United States had been foreclosed—at least within national borders. Harris well understood this fact, and despite African-Canadian understanding to the contrary, it gave him little love for the U.S.<sup>18</sup>

In his letter to Blair, Harris says that he supports the emigration plan for some of the same reasons but not the same principles as Blair:

for while it is evident that the white and black races cannot exist in this country on terms of equality, it is equally certain the latter will not long be content with anything less ... The Government drives us to Canada, where we are indeed free, but where it is plain we cannot become a very great people. We want more room,

where it is not quite so cold—we want to be identified with the ruling power of a nation; and unless this be obtained, Canada must be looked to as a strong military post for future use, in the very vitals of America. (34)

Threatening to attack the U.S. from Canada if emigration to the tropics is not endorsed, Harris supports a U.S.-backed black state south of its borders whose climate, Harris agrees, is more conducive to the elevation of the race.<sup>19</sup>

It was to survey potential sites for Blair's Central American Land Company that Harris first visited the Caribbean, a trip that would form the basis for *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* (1860). According to a June 1859 edition of the *Cleveland Morning Leader*, Blair's company was formed "to establish a nucleus for the colonial policy" of Blair, Holly and "other eminent men both white and colored" by sending agents, such as Harris, to potential sites of colonization in the tropics.<sup>20</sup> There, these agents would purchase land that they would then sell for \$50 a share. Although Harris' journey to the Caribbean does not appear to have resulted in any purchase of territory, Harris wrote *A Summer* with pecuniary interests in mind. He wanted to attract investors to these areas, and San Domingo particularly, not because he was, as Blair would say, "addicted" to the U.S. but because he was addicted to the Americas, which like Delany in *Condition*, he views as constituting the borders of his race's manifest destiny.

First published beginning July 14, 1860 in the New-York-based *Weekly Anglo-African*—a publication marketed to abolitionist and African-American readers—Harris' *A Summer* is made up of 16 letters.<sup>21</sup> In the published book, these letters function as chapters that are organized into sections according to the countries Harris visited: "San Domingo" (Harris' name for the island encompassing the Dominican Republic and

Haiti), Grand Turk's and Caicos Islands and British Honduras. Harris' sojourn through them occasions his philosophical musings on their customs, anecdotes about the people he encounters, inclusions of their immigration ordinances as well as entire letters in which Harris reproduces another historian's work. In this historical-travel narrative, Harris invites African-American emigrants to fulfill the destiny of San Domingo and, by extension, the hemisphere. Rewriting the history of American slavery to give it redemptive meaning through his account of the Haitian Revolution, Harris's narrative is informed by the hope that the island's history will lead to "the discovery at last of what is to be the final purpose of American slavery—the destiny of the colored race after slavery shall be abolished" (174). That destiny, Harris believes, will be realized on San Domingo—the island nations of which he believes are fated to be united. Subjoining his history of the Haitian Revolution to a sketch of the physical and cultural geography of the Dominican Republic, *A Summer* brings together Columbian history with appeals for emigration and the founding of what he calls an "Anglo-African" empire. Columbus remains Harris' point of entry into Caribbean history, but only so that he can supplant discovery with the black revolutionary history that Harris believes better legitimates emigration to the tropics.

Harris argues for the likelihood of race elevation in San Domingo, specifically on the Dominican (eastern) side of the island, by bringing his readers into Haitian history—a goal he achieves through depicting Haiti as a land of facts and, by contrast, the Dominican Republic as a land of poetry still in need of discoverers and settlers to bring it into full historical being. The book's very structure elicits such a reading. It begins with a letter by the poet-abolitionist William Cullen Bryant who welcomes Harris' "valuable

and interesting” information on “the Spanish part of the island of San Domingo” since “much less [is known of it] than of the French part” (69). And it ends with an appendix on “The Anglo-African Empire” in which Harris makes his final appeals for emigration south of U.S. borders where he believes descendants of Africans have thrived and will continue to do so: “I have said [Haiti’s] history would prove this” (174).

Harris combines poetic and historical modes in *A Summer* with an overt political agenda unseen in the Columbian narratives by his Anglo-American contemporaries who, in succumbing to romantic visions of the American continent, either ignore (Rowson) or gloss over (Irving, Cooper) the ignoble legacy of slavery. Rather than merely imply that his history authorizes expansion, as Cooper does in *Mercedes* for example, Harris remains quite frank about his intentions. Although Harris becomes lost in reveries at the beauty of the Dominican landscape, its economic potential pulls him out of the dream-like state as when he observes that the moon will not “make silver out of anything upon which it may happen to shine” and the hills are “nothing but potato-ridges” (105).

While Harris’ candor about his goals for traveling to and writing about the Caribbean is quite apparent, his use of narrative techniques to achieve these goals is more subtle. The loose coherence of *A Summer* has led John Ernest to describe Harris’ history as “reckless.”<sup>22</sup> To be clear, Ernest views this recklessness as Harris’ textual strategy for “question[ing] the nature of historical understanding itself,” meaning, at least in part, the narratives of Spanish colonial history that had underpinned U.S. expansion since the late eighteenth century (50). “Neither comprehensive nor conclusive” though Harris’ history may be, I maintain that he desires clarity (Ernest 50). In arguing for the fitness of the tropics for free black (and white) labor, Harris understands that “there is perhaps no



portion of the civilized world of which the American people are so uninformed,” and so he “almost despair[s] of these papers being regarded as other than humorously paradoxical” (Harris 82). In other words, Harris anticipates that audience ignorance will diminish his narrative’s potential for a broad readership. As a result, I believe that Harris does not question the nature of historical understanding about American origins by entirely rejecting it. By overlaying his history of the Haitian Revolution with a Columbiad, Harris uses the geographical site of the 1492 discovery to familiarize readers with an alternate history. That is, he does not forgo San Domingo as a site of historical primacy. Rather he emphasizes the importance of more recent events over earlier ones. In this way, Harris charts a future geographical space for a free colored nation by tying it to different chronological coordinates. For Harris, both white and black empires remain rooted in the same space of the Caribbean, yet their respective histories create lineages that extend geographically outward in either direction from the island of San Domingo. According to his version of these histories, the Anglo-American empire has extended northward since 1492 while the Anglo-African one has tended southward since the introduction of Africans to the island in the same era. Revolution plays an important role in the history of both empires: whereas the American Revolution redeems Anglo-Americans from the legacy of the Black Legend, the Haitian Revolution redeems Anglo-Africans from the legacy of slavery.

Although Harris suggests that Anglo-American and Anglo-African imperial agents do not share the same ancestral lineage, he indicates that they share a historical geography at the start of his second letter, when he introduces readers to San Domingo’s

past—a past that he anticipates readers will recognize only in their familiarity with Columbus:

There is no school-boy but remembers, when tracing the history of Columbus on his perilous voyage across the sea in search of a new world, how eagerly he watched each favorable indication of bird or sea-weed, and ultimately with what rapture he greeted the joyous cry of land; nor who, looking back through the vista of centuries past, but brings vividly to mind the landing of Columbus, the simplicity of the natives, the cupidity of the Spaniards, and their insatiable thirst for gold. But further than this—further than a knowledge of a few of the most striking outlines of the earlier history of Hayti, or Hispaniola—there is generally known little or nothing; little of the vicissitudes and sanguinary scenes through which the peoples of this island have passed; nothing of the “easily attainable wealth almost in sight of our great commercial cities;” nothing of its sanitary districts peculiarly conducive to longevity. On the contrary, erroneous and exaggerated notions prevail, that because it is not within a given circle of isothermal lines it must necessarily be fit for the habitation only of centipedes, bugbears, land-sharks, and lizards. (81)

Harris here recognizes the dual nature of U.S. interest in “Hayti, or Hispaniola,” which appears marked by a rupture in historical awareness. As well-acquainted as school-boys are with the island’s history of discovery, they are just as ignorant of events “further than this”—so much so that “erroneous and exaggerated notions prevail.” The erroneous notions to which Harris refers are evident in such writings as Scottish anatomist and ethnologist Robert Knox’s *The Races of Men* (1850) in which he describes Haiti as a

place where things fall apart and where people of any skin tone become black. Thus, he writes, “with a deepening colour vanishes civilization, the arts of peace, science, literature, abstract justice” (76). Although Harris completely disavows the dehumanizing results of “deepening colour” in San Domingo, he agrees that as a result of miscegenation, races will not whiten but rather will be absorbed into one “colored nationality” (181). In *A Summer*, Harris puts Knox’s devolutionary thesis to his advantage by arguing the reverse: that people of color are, in fact, best fit for civilized life in the tropics—an argument he foregrounds by sketching in the island’s later history about which most readers are uninformed.

To correct misconceptions about the history of Hispaniola post-1492, Harris recounts its sanguinary scenes as well as its wealth and conduciveness to the health primarily of its inhabitants of African descent, and he begins with Dominican history. Using *The Gold Fields of St. Domingo* (1860) as his source,<sup>23</sup> Harris describes the decline of the Dominican Republic by offering the familiar narrative of the Black Legend. He follows his semi-ironic statement that “the civilized history of the country began in 1492” with a relation of the “unparalleled suffering” of the native population as a result of this history (84). He continues by reciting the Spanish introduction of African slavery to the island as well as the rise of the French colonial power, and he concludes with Jean-Jacques Dessalines who “slaughtered the French, laid waste to the country for leagues, carried off the remaining slaves and so bewildered and astounded the Spanish residents that they gathered up what moveable wealth they could and left the country” (86). After reviewing this devastating series of events, Harris somewhat surprisingly decides “to commemorate the landing of Columbus” by collecting shells on the bank of the Isabela

River, and he displays the cultural superiority he felt as an American travelling through the country by defining an *estancia* as “a farm, but it does not mean a farm in English by a good deal” (99, 93). As Silvio Torres-Saillant has noted, Harris’ condescension toward Dominican culture, work ethic and politics “hews out an incentive for American industry and talent to relocate to the Dominican Republic” (130). This rhetorical strategy was common among other emigrationists. For example, in Delany’s *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861), he concludes the section “What Africa Now Requires” with the assertion that “descendants of Africa in North America” should “impart the seeds which shall germinate and give birth to fortunes for them [our children]” because the Liberian population “has received all that the [white] missionary was sent to teach, and is now really ready for more than he can or may receive” from them (55, 52).<sup>24</sup> Likewise Harris believes the island of San Domingo readymade for colonization by African Americans because Columbus has planted the seed of civilization that Harris hopes U.S. immigrants will reap. Despite eschewing the history of Columbian discovery for the history of the Haitian Revolution in most of *A Summer*, Columbus still stands for Harris—as he did for Rowson, Irving and Cooper—as an admirable symbol of proto-capitalist values.

An “enterprising spirit” of exploration and trade, such as Columbus was believed to have, had been held superior to that of American populations since the end of the fifteenth century, and it helped to justify the conquest of the western hemisphere (Irving *Columbus* 12). Even if discovering empires found regions already occupied, they could deem the territory unoccupied, or *terra nullius*, if not “‘properly used’ according to European and American law and culture” (Robert J. Miller 4). Harris expresses this tenet

of the discovery doctrine by casting the eastern, Dominican side of San Domingo as relatively lacking in history—and thus more desirable to cultivate—compared to the western, Haitian side.<sup>25</sup> He describes the D.R. as “a garden of poetry and the home of legendary song,” which lends to the island a quality of being frozen in time (117).<sup>26</sup> While the Haitian Revolution gives Harris the historical drama he needs to redeem slavery, it is the unscripted D.R. that calls the would-be emigrant from the Pacific Northwest to the Caribbean: “The Pike's Peak fever will ere long be exhausted. Then there is, probably, no more promising field for enterprise than this in the entire new world” (103). The D.R. is a field for enterprise because it has been for “so long a comparative *terra incognita*,”<sup>27</sup> producing—alongside “generations of indolent men and women, excelling only in superstition, idleness, and profound stupidity”—a poetic quality that invites the missionary, politician, and poet alike (82). This progressive element, Harris believes, will bring San Domingo into the present.

As opposed to Africa, which Harris views as lost in paganism, the D.R. belongs to the hemisphere that Harris calls home and on which he hopes Protestantism will gain a “foothold” through manual labor schools (174, 108). Harris describes how a Methodist mission, begun twenty years prior, attempted to convert the largely Catholic population but was unsuccessful only because the school attached to the church had been recently closed. According to Harris, “the Catholics will not go to hear” the Methodist ministers in the church, but their children “soon learned to distrust the ceremonies of their mother church” by imbibing the “‘infidel’ teachings of the Wesleyans;” however, “having succeeded in weaning the people from positive Catholicism without yet embracing the Protestant religion, it seems to have left them with a general belief in every thing, which

is, as I take it, the nearest point to a belief in nothing” (109). Harris believes that manual labor schools of the kind proposed by “a Mr. Treadwell,” an African-American settler from Massachusetts, to be the only method for “infusing a tone of morality in the country” (108). Harris views a work ethic as lacking, for example, among the Dominican military as well. After observing a government parade, he describes the soldiers “like a parcel of ragamuffin boys” and the scene itself as “ridiculous”: “Dominicana has a government,” he muses, “so poets have empires” (80). To Harris the “non-progressive appearance of everything” gives the country a romantic quality that wants not only the guiding hand of Anglo-African political agents but also their lyrical voices. The D.R.’s luscious landscape calls to Harris’ mind epic poetry about pre-Columbian America by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whom he expects will be surpassed by a poet-emigrant to San Domingo with its “remarkable history, exquisite legends, and extraordinary traditions ... Should there be sufficient emigration in this direction to produce a poet of the Hiawatha school,” Harris regrets, “I should be sorry for the laurels of Mr. Longfellow” (96).

Whereas Harris’ depiction of the Dominican people as “uncivilized victims of nature” does not make his travel narrative distinct from those written by other North Americans, his focus on the racial classification of high-ranking workers does (Salvatore 87). Harris frequently reminds readers that people of African descent thrive in the tropics by including parenthetical asides that his boat’s pilot, for instance, or a General whom he encounters is black (79, 80, 83, 87, 90). Neither does Harris, like his Anglo-American counterparts, shy away from depicting scenes of work. On the contrary, the “geographico-chronological flow of the personal journey” for Harris connects scenes of

work that he witnesses to the future destiny of African-American immigrants in the same region (Salvatore 92). To attract these immigrants, Harris offers specific figures about the cost, for instance, of a cotton gin, and its price in the New York market: “send them out here, and would they not accomplish more for the elevation of the colored race by the successful cultivation of cotton, in eighteen months, than all the mere talkers in as many years?” (90). In this case, the D.R. would no longer be stuck in the era of Columbus because African Americans would effectually speed up historical time for the island as well as for themselves. Although Harris would like the American settlement that he discusses in the Dominican section of his narrative to root out the religion of Spain, he desires that emigrants continue to emulate the nation’s method of colonization: “The land being in common is considered of the first importance, for by this means a small outlay of capital—say one hundred dollars—secures to the settler the grazing advantage of the whole tract, where not otherwise in use. This idea was suggested by an eminent gentleman of St. Louis,<sup>28</sup> and has been the custom of early settlements in Spanish colonies for centuries past” (107). In such instances, Harris’ *A Summer* reads more like a promotional tract for colonization—in his positive depiction of the region’s potential—than a travel narrative—in his negative portrayal of a culture he deems inferior to his own.

Harris further develops the tension between these two tendencies in his writing with the history of Haiti, which he records as both a “field of unparalleled glory” as well as an “awful mine, surcharged with combustibles, and destined to appall all parties” (117, 127). In contrast to the Dominican Republic’s poetical quality, Haiti is “a land of historical facts” (117). Harris gleans these facts from several sources that he credits at the

start of the five chapters in which he recounts the history of the Haitian Revolution. These sources include Bryan Edwards' *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo* (1797), Marcus Rainsford's *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (1805), and Thomas Coke's *A History of the West Indies* (1808–11) in addition to the history Harris receives "from the lips of veterans yet upon the soil" (148). Although he borrows heavily from the printed sources, Harris skips "the Discovery of Hayti, by Columbus," which introduces both Rainsford and Coke's histories (Rainsford xxi). Despite refusing to recount the history of European empires' beginnings in America, Harris occasionally suggests parallels between Anglo-American history and Haitian history. At times the comparison is favorable, as when Harris refers to Toussaint L'Ouverture as the "Washington of Hayti" (131, 141).<sup>29</sup> More often, it is not. For example, when recounting the transmission to Haiti of the French National Assembly's decree "that all men are born free, and continue free and equal as to their rights," particularly property owners, Harris compares the debate over its interpretation to the Dred Scott decision, "for the question immediately arose whether the term 'every person' included the mulattoes" (125). In an implicit parallel to the Supreme Court's denial of the rights of citizenship to African Americans in the Dred Scott ruling, Harris notes that mulattoes were criminalized as a result of their color after Haitian planters heard the 1791 decree that they were all to have the same rights. While Harris portrays Toussaint as emblematic of the field of Haitian glory, he depicts free man of color Vincent Ogé's execution as planting the nation's minefield. According to Harris, Ogé's violent death "irritated to madness" the mulattoes who "only awaited an opportunity to avenge his wrongs" (134). Harris takes a personal interest in the plight of mulattoes throughout the



narrative most likely because he identified with them as a free man of color, yet this interest also derives from his view that persons of mixed race are best adapted to the climate of San Domingo.

The question of race serves as the platform for other instances when Harris compares Haitian history to U.S. history because it helps him to universalize truths about human nature that necessitate the growing presence of Anglo-Africans in the “new-born empire” (148). Harris first makes such a comparison when giving a brief background of Haitian history prior to 1790. After offering statistics for the island’s agricultural production under French rule, he quotes lines from an anonymously written poem published in Coke’s *History*. The poem depicts the “immorality and irreligion” to which Harris believes San Domingo is “peculiarly conducive,” and which somehow brings Harris “to the consideration of the all-important subject called in America the ‘negro question,’ but which is, nevertheless, the immortal question of the rights of man” (120). This consideration leads Harris to give a taxonomy of races in Haiti: whites who “conducted themselves as if born to command,” blacks “awed into submission,” and mulattoes who “were not much above the condition of the free blacks in the United States” (121). In casting Haitian mulattoes as virtually enslaved, Harris revises the revolutionary history of Haiti by William Wells Brown, who having been a slave in the U.S., depicts mulattoes in Haiti as benefitting from the social advantage of their color. Harris would collapse the difference between slaves and mulattoes to support his case for one American colored race incorporating all people of color that would thus be able to vie with Anglo-American empire.

Harris next compares Haitian and U.S. history after recounting the issuance of the Haitian Constitution of 1801, which he calls Toussaint's "Declaration of Independence."<sup>30</sup> In 1792, the French revolutionary government granted free people of color the rights of citizenship, and the following year, French Commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax abolished slavery to win the support of former slaves to the French cause in the fight against Britain, which had invaded Haiti amidst the turmoil of the Revolution. However, once Toussaint—a former slave—released the 1801 Constitution declaring all slaves to be free and slavery "forever abolished,"<sup>31</sup> Harris writes that French planters feared the loss of their profits "unless [French] government could be prevailed on to send an armed force to crush at once a revolt which had become so formidable as to assume independence" (135). He continues:

The complicated interests of commerce were instantly alarmed and awakened to action; powerful parties were formed; a horde of venal writers started immediately into notice; a change was wrought in the public sentiment as by the power of magic; and negro emancipation was treated in just the same manner that negro slavery had been treated before. Such was the fickleness of the French at that time, and such is the inconstancy of the human mind in ours. (135)

The comparison between the behavior of the French during the Haitian Revolution and "the human mind in ours" serves as a warning to readers against relying on the U.S. government, which proved untrustworthy to Harris for at least two reasons: the Dred Scott decision and filibustering.

The U.S. did not officially sanction but nevertheless did not stop filibustering activities that could have extended slavery into the very territories where Harris

envisioned the Anglo-African empire taking root. Like modern-day conquistadors, filibusterers like William Walker invaded foreign nations with the intention of setting up new governments. This activity threatened both free and enslaved African Americans because if these private aggressors—many of them pro-slavery Southerners<sup>32</sup>—could gain U.S. recognition after helping to overthrow the government of a Latin American state, U.S. jurisdiction, and possibly slavery, could extend further south. The permeability of national boundaries threatened not only slaves “who (particularly in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act) equated freedom with the ability to cross” U.S. borders, but also free people of color because the protection of slavery in U.S. territories amounted to the denial of black citizenship (Adams 22).

Harris was well aware of the consequences of extending the U.S. border across more of the hemisphere. In warning readers of *A Summer* that “reforms do not go backwards, nor filibustering northwards,” Harris writes in the hope that he and his fellow emigrants will, in effect, beat filibusterers south. He recognizes, however, that due to the weakness of many Central American states—as demonstrated by Walker’s successful coup in Nicaragua—moving south is not enough. Much of *A Summer* reads as Harris’ impassioned plea for either U.S. or British protection of the Anglo-African state he hopes to plant in the Caribbean. Although throughout most of the narrative Harris’s bitterness towards the U.S. manifests as a preference for British protection, he concludes with a final appeal to the U.S. to “forever wipe out the stain which Walker has cast upon the very name of all who boast themselves citizens of this republic” (171). The U.S. backing of an Anglo-African state in the Caribbean would, Harris believes, provide African-

American emigrants with a security against unauthorized filibusterers who were poised to move the U.S. deeper into the American continent.

To ground the “*colored nationality*, that shall divide the continent with the whites,” Harris sought a Caribbean mythos alternative to Columbian discovery, and he finds one in the Haitian Revolution (181, emphasis in original). Hoping that his own narrative of the event in *A Summer* might “start into notice” to sway a capricious audience, Harris responds to the literary marketplace by adding “yet another ‘lesson of the hour’ to be gleaned from the history of this marvelous revolution”: the “treachery” that caused Toussaint’s tragic death and led to the rise in power of Haiti’s first black emperor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, whom Harris calls the “prince of cutthroats” (135, 86). Although quick to mention that mulattoes did not implement the “horrid measures” of Dessalines, he nevertheless recounts such measures with gruesome detail in a letter titled “A Chapter of Horrors (which the delicate reader may, if he please, omit)” (127).

Although Harris exactly replicates in this chapter some of the bloody scenes recounted in Coke’s *History*,<sup>33</sup> he mixes Coke’s language with his own eerie didacticism. For example, Coke writes, and Harris repeats, that insurgents on one M. Odeluc’s plantation had lifted “the ensign of rebellion and had actually erected for their standard *the body of a white infant, that they had impaled on a stake*” (Coke 439, emphasis in original). Harris makes two minor but significant edits: he changes Coke’s italics on “the body of a white infant” to all caps—the only instance in the narrative when he uses this typography—and he follows the scene with the moral, “so much for happy negroes and contented slaves!” (129). At the chapter’s close, he repeats another horrific scene from Coke in which a husband and his pregnant wife are brutally killed, but this time he quotes

Coke directly: “Such were the first displays of vengeance and retaliation, and such were the scenes which closed the year 1791” (134). Again, Harris uses irony in following this quote with a lesson derived from a children’s book about the meaning of “tit for tat” or the law of retribution.<sup>34</sup> Historian Matt Clavin has argued that the Gothicization of the Haitian Revolution in such Anglo-authored histories as Coke’s downplayed the possibility of widespread slave revolt by emphasizing its surreality. In *A Summer*, Harris refuses to allow the Gothic mode of his sources to assure readers that such events could not recur by blending their sensationalism with his own teaching that whites’ sense of security is misplaced, specifically in their beliefs about the contented slave or their safety at home.<sup>35</sup>

Harris took advantage of a latitude unavailable to the authors he cites because the audience of the *Weekly Anglo-African*, where *A Summer* was first published, was likely already pro-emigration (Floyd J. Miller 170). His history of the Haitian Revolution spoke to this audience in different registers. For Anglo-American proponents of African-American emigration, Haiti was the minefield meant to “serve Americans as a finger-board of terror so long as slavery there exists”—a fear that Harris could capitalize on after the Dred Scott decision caused Blair and others to believe slavery had spread into the entire country.<sup>36</sup> For African-American emigrationists, Haiti was the field of glory. Harris effectually replaces the grandeur of Columbian discovery in San Domingo with the “tyranny, scorn, and retaliating vengeance” that “have given birth to an empire which has not only hurled its thunderbolts on its assailants, but at this moment bids defiance to the world.” Employing the cyclical theory of history (see chapter three) to show that “the day of the Anglo-African in America has not yet clearly dawned but it is dawning,”

Harris reveals finally that his reflections on “how analogous the history of the seven-hilled city and that of the United States promises to be” are meant to show that the former will not only rival but will one day surpass the U.S. empire (149).

Well aware that the “way to make a thing useful is to make it agreeable,” Harris writes the letters of *A Summer* to inspire support for his plans for colonization. “Who reads Mr. Wells’ well-written but ponderous ‘Travels and Explorations in Honduras’?” Harris asks skeptically, (referring to William Vincent Wells’ 1857 travel narrative.). Rather than discuss the soil or topography of Central America as Wells does, Harris instead “endeavored to seize on whatever might seem to be of importance, and at the same time interesting to such of your readers as desired to have some more general information respecting tropical America” (166). Harris exhibits a narrative self-consciousness throughout the text. On the voyage to the Dominican Republic, for instance, he laments how the calm of the sea detracts from the poetry of the naval scene he offers readers: “Would there had been a storm, if only for descriptions sake!” (78). Further, Harris asserts at the narrative’s conclusion that he “dwelt at most length on the isle of Hayti” not only “because it is a source of greatest interest to us,” but also “because there is perhaps no country the intrinsic value of which is so little known.” This source of interest derives from both the history of Haiti and the potential for the re-settlement of African Americans in “the Spanish territory of Hayti”—a moniker for what Harris otherwise calls San Domingo. (Here again he reveals the importance of the island to him as a single geographical unit (168).)

Harris attempts to project the island’s destiny in *A Summer* from the start. Describing the island’s emergence into view as a “long, dim, bluish outline, as of a

cloud,” much as Cooper narrates his first view of the continent in *A Notion of the Americans*, Harris tells readers how he approached “the eventful shores of San Domingo, embracing as it does Dominican and Haytien republics. But however thrillingly interesting its past history may have been, the *practical* question was whether the present state of affairs here would not be found unsatisfactory” (79, emphasis in original). Harris’ idea of an Anglo-African empire depends upon his expectation that the country will again unify. While he believes that “the destiny of the island” is political union, he envisions that this union will come not from French or Spanish but rather from an Anglo-American cultural influence when “some white, but principally colored” North American immigrants introduce the English language. After calling this measure one of the many “peaceful and benignant mean[s]” that Anglo-Africans will effect, Harris reminds readers of the island’s need for recognition if not protection, which the U.S. government had still not given.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the betrayal Harris feels as a result of U.S. legislation that has left him and other free blacks like him with “no protection” (70), he is savvy about appealing for black emigration in the interests of protecting U.S. capital along the lines advocated by Blair. He argues that a protected settlement in the Caribbean would attract “English and American families, white and colored” and would “turn the important commerce of the tropics in this direction.” Harris notes that only one of ten vessels in the harbor of the D.R. belong to a U.S. company, even though the U.S.’s location makes it and not Europe “the natural market” for Caribbean trade. Harris also understands that most U.S. merchants know about the lucrateness of Latin American markets because they have made fortunes in tobacco, mahogany or hides but “invariably lost it ... by the depression

of currency in consequence of the momentary revolutions” (171). This allusion to the filibustering activities of “the pirate Walker,” whose *The War in Nicaragua* was published the same year as *A Summer*, harkens back to a previous chapter Harris had written on British Honduras. Harris uses the chapter as an opportunity to denounce Walker, whose notorious filibustering activities in Mexico and Nicaragua led to his eventual death by firing squad in Honduras when he was handed over to the local government by British authorities. Walker was one of several men who beginning in the 1850s began invading Central American countries in the hopes of taking control of their territory in violation of the Neutrality Act. Harris alludes to the event of Walker’s death when he mentions that Walker’s “recent experience at Truxillo will probably induce him to respect [the Honduran island of] Ruatan,” and he supports the British presence in the region, denouncing the U.S. for its “weak and vacillating” policy, to which he attributes the initial success of Walker’s “invasions” (160, 161).

After handling “The Sovereignty of the Bay Islands” in the Honduras chapter, Harris turns to a discussion of “English vs. American View of Central American Affairs,” but he offers only an English view. Harris quotes Anthony Trollope’s *West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1860) extensively in this section to discredit U.S. archaeologist E. G. Squier’s position in such publications as *Nicaragua* (1852) and *Notes on Central America* (1854). In these texts, Squier attempted to debunk claims the British had made to the area since 1848 in order to assist the U.S. in its interest in building an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua.<sup>38</sup> In the passage of *West Indies* that Harris quotes, Trollope reports on the recent history of Greytown, which attracted Walker (as it did more or less legitimate U.S. and British businesses) with its strategic location on the Lake of Nicaragua through



which U.S. capital could flow from New York to California and back. Because Walker “could not get good tools to do bad work,” his venture was unsuccessful, but Trollope argues that until the local government receives British or U.S. protection, it will continue to be vulnerable to attacks like Walker’s and thus the Lake of Nicaragua route will remain un-lucrative (164). Harris agrees with Trollope: “there is no hope for the Central American States except by intervention on the part of some government capable of protecting them” (165).

Delany had a hand in such an intervention years earlier. According to Levine, he was elected mayor of Greytown in 1852, and although he never accepted the position or even traveled to Nicaragua, he advocated for black emigration to the country in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852). Moving in his self-published book to an emigrationist position for the first time, largely as a result of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), Delany believed that assumptions in the United States about the inferiority of African Americans resulted initially not in their “hatred to ... color,” a notion he calls “sheer nonsense,” but from policies that stipulate their foreignness to America (193). This discrimination extended also to U.S. territories, and Delany singles out the Pacific Northwest specifically to make his case: “Oregon has instituted a law, prohibiting a colored person from testifying against a white man, and also from settling in the Territory. And those who now reside there, do so by the merest sufferance” (285). On the one hand, he attempts to correct the notion of African Americans’ foreignness to the U.S. by reminding readers of their participation in the American Revolution, but on the other, he expresses doubt that they will ever be granted the full rights of U.S. citizenship, which is why he advocates for emigration to American

sites outside of the U.S. Although he had believed in the early 1850s that one needed only touch the soil of the West Indies or Central America to elevate oneself, within 10 years, he had abandoned America for Africa as the most desirable place for relocation.

There is no evidence that Harris ever supported Delany's Africanist position—in *A Summer* he argues against African colonization—but Delany likely had direct influence over Harris' stance on Central American emigration. Delany mentions him in a letter dated January 15, 1861, to Harris' colleague Holly, who had been secretary of the National Emigration Convention (1854) that Delany chaired in Cleveland. Writing to persuade Holly to give up his plans for Haitian emigration because “the government would appoint *over them* [Harris and Henry Highland Garnet] ... a white man [Redpath],” he urges Holly to consider the benefit of emigration to Africa for how it might not only allow them to shut down the slave trade but also because it promises “certain wealth to us” (366-367, emphasis in original). Wealth certainly interested Harris too, but he was better convinced by Delany's earlier position that America was more the home of African Americans than Africa, and its geography made his case: “Central America, by common assent, not only realizes in its geographical position the ancient idea of the centre of the world,<sup>39</sup> but is in its physical aspect and configuration of surface an epitome of all the countries and all the climes” (167). While Harris borrows Blair's idea of America as centrally positioned to benefit from European and Asian trade, Laurie Maffly-Kipp argues that he inverts “prevailing Euro-American views of the backwardness of the region,” thereby laying the groundwork for an Anglo-African empire that surpasses all others (150). Harris does at times make this inversion, which is

why he despairs that his narrative will be received as nothing more than “humorously paradoxical,” but he cannot entirely commit to it.

In order to use the discourse of Manifest Destiny successfully, Harris must argue that the physical geography of Central America and the Caribbean determines their fate as the future basis of Anglo-Africa. Thus, when Harris remarks upon Central America’s natural splendor, it is to assert that “the most beautiful countries in the world are the most lamentably ill-governed,” and when he relates anecdotes about his travels in the hot climate, they are to show the “correctness of that theory, which assumes . . . the infusion of Northern blood as one of the means by which the more sluggish race of the tropics is to be quickened and given energy” (170, 139). Harris expresses U.S. views about the backwardness of Central America to support arguments like Blair’s that protection of the region would amount to protection of U.S. capital, but he is also interested in how African Americans can tap into Central American markets. The freedom of African Americans cannot be ensured, Harris argues, without crossing the southern border: “How much will our friend Wm. Whipper make in a year running his craft up a Canadian creek? The tenacity with which our leading colored men embrace that short-sighted policy which teaches them to confine their enterprises to certain proscribed, prejudice-cursed districts, is not only extraordinary—it is marvelous” (155).<sup>40</sup> Teaching them to expand their enterprises by looking to the guiding stars of the tropics, Harris writes *A Summer on the Borders of the Caribbean Sea* paradoxically to reinforce U.S. boundaries by urging African Americans to disregard them.<sup>41</sup>

The U.S. backing of an Anglo-African state in the Caribbean would, Harris believes, provide emigrants with a security against unauthorized filibusterers who were

poised to move the U.S. deeper into the southern part of the continent. The Dred Scott decision, which effectively moved the national issue of slavery into territorial politics, made certain that free people of color in the U.S. would not be safe anywhere its empire extended.<sup>42</sup> Harris also implies throughout his narrative, however, that the vulnerability of African Americans is to some extent shared by Anglo-Americans. Immediately before recounting his chapter of horrors, Harris remarks that the colonial governor of Haiti “foresaw the evils that must burst upon the colony, without having it in his power to apply either a preventive or a remedy” (127). Harris tries to offer such a remedy in his “homeopathic sketch” of *A Summer* (86). In re-visioning American space and time as hinging on Caribbean history attached not to the events of Columbian discovery but to the Haitian Revolution, Harris hoped to ameliorate the racial illness of the U.S. for people of any color before the disease became terminal for all. However, in looking to San Domingo as the place to stanch the loss of rights for African Americans, Harris does not entirely reject the discovery narrative that Anglo-Americans had been using to expand across the hemisphere under the guise of Manifest Destiny. Harris reflects frequently on Columbus’s legacy during his visit to the site of the island’s first Spanish settlement, La Isabela (1494). After viewing the mouth of the Isabela River, Harris notes that the former Spanish town “has passed away forever” despite some lingering evidences of commercial life, such as “mahogany timbers” and two boats bound for Europe. “And with these exceptions,” he further muses, “and with these alone, *unless it be the absence of the Indians*—were Columbus to arrive here again to-day, he would not find a particle more of improvement than was found here over three centuries and a half ago” (emphasis added). In imagining the disappearance of the Indians as a result of Columbian discovery,

San Domingo has become for Harris *terra nullius* not only symbolically but also in fact. In a final statement about the locale, which is laden with irony given the content and goal of Harris' narrative, he declares that "the only question is, why a man of Columbus' sense ever stopped there at all. It is not worth the pen and ink it would take to describe it" (99). Despite using Columbus as a mechanism for disaffiliating from Anglo-American empire, Harris maintains the Caribbean as the place whose history—albeit peopled with figures from the Haitian Revolution—legitimizes expansion. In depicting the Dominican Republic as a relative *terra incognita* compared to the adjacent Haiti, Harris casts himself as a would-be Columbus for the Anglo-African empire.

### **Coda**

In Howard H. Bell's introduction to *Black Separatism and the Caribbean, 1860* (1970), which re-printed for the first and only time Harris' *A Summer*, he notes that "the black pride of our day stands in deep debt to the Negro Nationalism of the sixth decade of the nineteenth century for its tenets" (1).<sup>43</sup> This indebtedness extends to the way early black nationalists, such as Harris, imagined American geography and history as demonstrated, for example, by Ivan Van Sertima's *They Came before Columbus* (1976), a collection of historical essays edited by Bradford Chambers titled *Chronicles of Black Protest* (1968).<sup>44</sup> Yet while these twentieth-century texts use Columbus as a framing device for alternate American histories that include people of African descent, neither of these authors adopts the Haitian Revolution as foundational to their histories. Rather, they ground their narratives on Spanish texts. Van Sertima, for example, picks up where Delany left off by publishing a monograph supporting the thesis that Africans first discovered the continent. Although he uses archaeological and linguistic evidence to

reconstruct the history of pre-Columbian Africans, Van Sertima's study begins with Columbus. With "the footnotes of the Spanish and Portuguese documents" as his guide, Van Sertima writes in the mode of a historical romance in his first chapter, "The Secret Route from Guinea." It depicts post-1492 interactions between Columbus and the Portuguese king in which the latter laments not having "taken the rumors from Guinea more seriously" regarding a route from Africa to the New World, for he understands that the implications of Columbus's voyage will lead to the division of the globe as it was with the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) (14, 3). Van Sertima never states exactly what he believes the implications of his study are, but it seems he hopes for a re-apportioning of academic prestige—that is, in replacing the highly recognizable literary topos of Columbian discovery with African discovery, African history might assume a significance it has barely been accorded by American institutions of higher education.

Chambers' focus is rather on American history as it relates to the tradition of black protest. While most of the historical documents included in this collection are written by African-American authors well-known for their radicalism (i.e., David Walker and Malcolm X), the first section of the volume begins with "the origin of a myth"—the chapter in Genesis in which Noah curses Ham.<sup>45</sup> Columbus follows in excerpts translated from Martín Fernández de Navarrete's 1825 *Colección* in which the navigator imagines Hispaniola to be an excellent source of slave labor.<sup>46</sup> These documents, along with early slave statutes, are meant to provide context for the abolitionist texts dating from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century that make up the rest of the volume's first section. Instead of arguing for the primacy of African over Columbian history, Chambers continues to position Columbus as the gateway to national historical time; however, in

emphasizing the navigator's implication in the history of American slavery, Chambers changes the Columbian narrative from one that leads to freedom to one that leads in the opposite direction. The volume concludes with the rise of the Black Power movement and reports on race riots to create a lineage from Columbus to twentieth-century U.S. social problems in the hopes that readers might cease "to avoid the implications of our history" by confronting "the facts of our history" (Lincoln 11). Although he concludes with the suggestion that "Thomas Jefferson's prophecy" of a race war may soon be realized, Chambers—unlike Harris—remains committed to U.S. history. He alludes to Haiti four times outside of the section on Columbus and of those instances, only twice to its Revolution.

Harris' observation that "there is perhaps no portion of the civilized world of which the American people are so uninformed" as Haiti continues to hold true. Since the 1850s, the Haitian Revolution has gone the way of the Indian in American popular memory.<sup>47</sup> As Alfred N. Hunt has noted, "Contemporary observers of antebellum America were far more aware of the Caribbean influences in the American South than are present-day observers of American society" (189). Hunt attributes modern ignorance to nineteenth-century racial and cultural politics on the one hand and to current ideas about history on the other. While he characterizes present-day attitudes about history as unidirectional, he argues that nineteenth-century writers believed influence moved in two directions, which is why they "naturally linked the destinies of the Americas" (189). In this chapter I have argued that this linkage was far from natural.<sup>48</sup> Although I believe that the centrality of the Caribbean to the American historical imagination has generally diminished since the nineteenth century, Harris' recognition of its importance in 1860

provides a framework for using Columbian history as an opening onto a different past, one that would project a more hopeful future for those it brings into historical awareness. Utopian though Harris' emigration plan may appear at times in *A Summer*, it was no mere fiction. Concrete steps had been taken to start U.S. settlements on the island of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Harris traveled to the Caribbean with the express intention of increasing their number with African Americans who were left unprotected by the initially neutral position of the antislavery Republican Party.<sup>49</sup> After the outbreak of the Civil War, which began a year after the publication of Harris' narrative, funds that might have been used to encourage the emigration initiatives of Blair and Harris had been diverted toward the war effort, and the plan was dropped. The issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) inspired new hope among African Americans, who believed the political rights they received with the passing Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would once again make the United States a habitable place in America.<sup>50</sup>

In using Columbus to enter into the Haitian past, Harris demonstrates the kind of hemispheric imaginary that rendered Columbus important to the U.S. historically in the first place. As opposed to the Afrocentrism of Van Sertima or the tragic tone of Chambers' volume of U.S. documents, Harris writes Caribbean history to celebrate the Haitian Revolution as emblematic of what "the colored race" could yet achieve in America. Harris' narrative represents a time when the island, for a moment, emerged into view with "unparalleled glory" (117). But as the pragmatic tone of Harris' narrative reveals, *A Summer* cuts two ways. Although he discovers San Domingo as the site where African Americans could, with hard labor and the support of a more powerful Anglo-



American government, free themselves from historical erasure, this discovery by and large precludes the culture of the existing population. For his fellow African Americans, on the other hand, Harris hoped his history of the Haitian Revolution would cure them of their “addiction” to the U.S. and its official histories. As recurring references to Columbus throughout black-authored American histories indicate, prior discovery in the Caribbean and prevailing attitudes about what constituted civilization in the western hemisphere continued to provide a powerful frame for understanding the development of the New World, even in African Americans’ desire to reimagine their relationship to it.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In “Radical Configurations of History,” Russ Castronovo states that “genealogy, for the slave, confers little more than an illegitimate legacy,” which explains Delany’s motivation for writing this revisionist history of Africans (527). According to Rachel Adams, Delany wants to prove that “black people are a longstanding presence in the New World, rather than the unwelcome newcomers they are often mistaken for” (70).

<sup>2</sup> This claim was one Freneau made in “The Rising Glory of America” (1776), although he refers to such a voyage not to legitimate the ancestry of Africans on the American continent but rather the indigenous populations of Central and South America. For Freneau, the “civilized” ancestry of the Aztecs and Incas makes Spanish colonial history markedly different from and worse than British colonial history, which he claims as part of the U.S. past only insofar as he sees British colonists—in their agricultural practices—sowing the seeds of liberty that blossom with the Independence movement. Delany’s argument was revived during the Black Arts movement in the 1960s and 70s, particularly in a monograph by Ivan Van Sertima titled *They Came before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (1976), which I discuss briefly in this chapter’s conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas descent from Africa naturalized Liberia for some proponents of black emigration, such as those who formed the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816, one’s nativity in the United States made other American nations a more desirable choice for those who believed that the ACS was under the control of slaveholders. For the latter, America the nation may have rejected the naturalization of its black population, but America the continent was still the rightful place for Americans of African descent. The insistence of the Monroe Doctrine that the hemisphere rightly belonged to Americans made the rest of the continent potentially available to U.S. natives—an idea that was echoed with surprising frequency by those that the Supreme Court had completely disenfranchised in 1857 with the Dred Scott decision.

<sup>4</sup> Brown recounted Haitian history in both *St. Domingo: Its Revolution and its Patriots* (1854) and *The Black Man: His Antecedents* (1863) and Holly in *Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race as Demonstrated by the Haitian Revolution* (1857). Brown adopts the heroic portrait of Columbus popularized

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by Irving by blaming slavery on his successor, Francisco de Bobadilla. See *St. Domingo: its Revolutions and Its Patriots* 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Delany in *Condition*: “And among the earliest and most numerous class who found their way to the New World, were those of the African race. And it is now ascertained to our mind, beyond a peradventure, that when the continent was discovered, there were found in Central America, a tribe of the black race, of fine looking people, having characteristics of color and hair, identifying them originally of the African race—no doubt being a remnant of the Africans who, with the Carthaginian expedition, were adventitiously cast upon this continent, in their memorable excursion to the ‘Great Island,’ after sailing many miles distant to the West of the Pillars of Hercules.”

<sup>6</sup> In some ways, I am arguing against the reading that Ernest gives of *A Summer in Liberation Historiography* (51) as well as arguments in general about black-authored histories of Haiti, such as Castronovo’s, who in “Radical Configurations of History” claims that Brown “staged an insurrection against the monumental past” in *St Domingo*. I agree that these authors wrote histories foregrounding the importance to American history of African Americans as opposed to Anglo-Americans, but I believe that focusing on Haiti as the location of this history indicates African-American historiographers’ awareness of the significance of the Caribbean and Columbus to the Anglo-American historical imagination.

<sup>7</sup> Harris’ term meaning people of all color—primarily black but also white.

<sup>8</sup> Both Irving and Cooper felt compelled to allude to the Haitian Revolution in their books about Columbus, but Irving excised the parts of his narrative that expounded upon the relationship between European discovery and slave revolution and Cooper pushed his Haitian history into a footnote below the narrative proper. See chapters two and three above.

<sup>9</sup> At the conclusion of *A Summer*, Harris avers that the U.S. protection of an Anglo-African state in the Caribbean “would in some degree recompense the colored race for the services they have rendered to the government, the fruits of which they have not been permitted to enjoy; would make this great nation less obnoxious to the weak; lay the foundation of a future empire; and cause those lovely regions to bloom with industry and skill as they now bloom with eternal verdure” (171).

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Brown does not promote Caribbean emigration in *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots* (1854), and while Holly does advocate for emigration, he does not begin his account of Haiti with Columbus (1857).

<sup>11</sup> According to Bell in “Negro Nationalism,” it was not until the 1850s that African-American emigration also became tied up with black nationalist movements, but African Americans advocating for a black state remained in the minority (42-3).

<sup>12</sup> See Floyd J. Miller 237. Brief biographical sketches about Harris appear in Howard H. Bell’s introduction to *Black Separatism* (1970) and Floyd J. Miller’s *The Search for a Black Nationality* (1975).

<sup>13</sup> The convention’s first resolution was that the “American government immediately and unconditionally abolish that essence of infernalisms—American slavery” (6).

<sup>14</sup> According to Bell, “This stand in 1858, as earlier, was in accord with the opinion of the established conservative leaders of the abolitionist cause. They did not at that time favor emigration for any reason except for personal safety, and for that one purpose Canada was entirely satisfactory. To that date most of the champions of emigration were veterans such as Delany, Garnet, and William C. Monroe now favoring emigration to Africa; or Holly, Whitfield, and Walker with heavy leanings toward Haiti or some other Caribbean area” (*Survey* 20).

<sup>15</sup> See chapter two of Levine, *Politics of Representative Identity*.

<sup>16</sup> By this time, Delany was less interested in emigration to South America than he was to Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Although according to Armesto, a recent biographer of Columbus, scholars are uncertain when Columbus’s desire to transnavigate the globe became identified with a quest for Asia, he affirms that the Admiral’s motives were “material as much as scientific” (42). In representing Blair (rather than Spain) on his own voyage to the Caribbean, Harris acts as a latter-day Columbus.

<sup>18</sup> In *A Summer*, Harris calls his “greatest sin” registering himself with the U.S. consul as a citizen of a country that produces “indefinable definitions” about race and who it does or does not make eligible for citizenship (90).

<sup>19</sup> The writers of the Ontario letter denigrating Harris attempt to redeem Canada from this climatological argument. Anticipating that “a crisis will soon occur in the U.S. to affect our friends and

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countrymen there,” they assert that in Canada “the temperature, salubrity of climate, productiveness and fertility of soil affords ample field for their encouragement” to emigrate there instead.

<sup>20</sup> The article lists Harris as one of the “agents and commissioners” for the city of Cleveland.

<sup>21</sup> Because issues of this newspaper are missing after July 14, it remains unclear in how many issues these letters were published (Bell *Black Separatism* 11-12). James Redpath bought the newspaper in early 1860 and used it the following year to promote the cause of Haitian Emigration. See Penn, ch. XI. Penn says the periodical was “one of the most powerful journals in the Abolition cause” (83). See also McHenry ch. 2 in which she contextualizes the production of the *Weekly Anglo-African* with that of other such publications in the building of African-American literary communities: “these publications regarded the need for self-representation as central to the future of black Americans in the United States and saw their columns as places where black voices would find a receptive audience” (130).

<sup>22</sup> In *Afrotopia*, Wilson Moses has argued that seeming “ironies and contradictions” in black-authored histories in fact “indicate honesty and complexity of thought ... if black social thinkers have sometimes appeared to be tortured, inconsistent, and ambivalent, that is only evidence that they have reflected with honesty on the human condition” (95).

<sup>23</sup> The author, Wilshire S. Courtney, directs readers who want more information on Columbus to Irving’s biography (29).

<sup>24</sup> Even though Holly wrote *Vindication* to defend “the capacity of the Negro race for self-government” as illustrated by the Haitian Revolution, he also invokes the idea of *translatio imperii*—or the transfer of empire—to promote the island’s colonization by African Americans, whom he believed would bring Haitian civilization to fruition: “Civilization and Christianity is passing from the East to the West ... Let us see to it, that we meet the exigency now imposed upon us, as nobly on our part at this time as the Haytians met theirs at the opening of the present century. And in seeking to perform this duty, it may well be a question with us, whether it is not our duty, to go and identify our destiny with our heroic brethren in that independent isle of the Caribbean Sea, carrying with us such of the arts, sciences and genius of modern civilization, as we may gain from this hardy and enterprising Anglo-American race, in order to add to Haytian advancement” (65). This narrative of the westward course of empire had been used at least since

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the Age of Discovery to justify the expansion of European nations. For a compelling discussion of how Columbus became implicated in this ideology, see Bartosik-Vélez.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, quoting James Redpath, says that 20 million people could settle on the entire island. Because most of the island inhabitants live in Haiti, Harris believes the Dominican Republic is the more desirable half to colonize.

<sup>26</sup> Holly also describes the island, although not the D.R. specifically, as a garden: “Our brethren of Hayti ... exercise sovereign authority over an island that in natural advantages is the Eden of America and the garden spot of the world” (44). Columbus himself believed that he was close to Eden when he stumbled upon the island of Hispaniola: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/hns/garden/history.html>.

<sup>27</sup> The impetus for discovery and exploration into the nineteenth century remained mapping “unknown” regions. Thus, “revision, rather than testifying to the impossibility of making a text commensurate with the world’s unfixed or newly discovered features, became itself a sign of Western ‘progress’” (Harvey 36).

<sup>28</sup> Most likely a reference to Blair.

<sup>29</sup> According to Hunt as well as White and Drexler, antebellum American writers often made such a comparison. However earlier in *A Summer*, Harris mocks the heroic status of George Washington, whom he calls “our ‘liberator’ and Father of his country. (Bah!)” (87). Such contradictory allusions to Washington indicate the simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from the U.S. that Harris felt. For more on the “ironic indebtedness” of early nineteenth-century African Americans to their nation of birth, see Sandra Gunning, “Nancy Prince and the Politics of Mobility, Home and Diasporic (Mis)Identification,” *American Quarterly* 2001: 32-69.

<sup>30</sup> Drexler and White have recently argued the same (59). They interpret Toussaint’s Constitution as a rewriting of the Code Noir, which instead of enslaving, ensures the freedom of former slaves (63).

<sup>31</sup> See Article 3:

[http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Haitian\\_Constitution\\_of\\_1801\\_%28English%29](http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Haitian_Constitution_of_1801_%28English%29).

<sup>32</sup> For instance, Henry A. Crabb and William Walker were from Tennessee, James Long was from Texas, and John Quitman was a transplant to Mississippi. For an excellent recent history on military filibustering in nineteenth-century America, see May.

<sup>33</sup> Coke was a Methodist bishop who traveled many times across the Atlantic Ocean from the U.K. to the western hemisphere on evangelical missions. After travelling to the West Indies in the 1780s, he composed *A History* to record “evidences of Christianity” in the islands and to “stimulate our cotemporaries and successors, either to follow our example, or to improve upon the plan which we have adopted” (iv, vi). Although anti-slavery in principle, Coke describes the Haitian Revolution as “horrible beyond all example” and a manifestation of the cycle of vengeance that unceasingly begets violence (408).

<sup>34</sup> Harris quotes from *Evenings at Home* (1792), a children’s book written by John Aikin and Anna Barbauld to whom Rowson refers in her preface to *Reuben and Rachel* (1798) as writing books for boys.

<sup>35</sup> James Kerr has argued that the *Waverly* novels of Sir Walter Scott might be understood as a “countergenre to the Gothic,” and Harris certainly borrows from this mode of romanticizing the past, particularly in his use of the stadial theory of history. Bell observes in his introduction to *Black Separatism* that Harris wrote his Haitian history in haste and for this reason was heavily reliant on sources (5). As a result, readers cannot glean his opinion on this history except in asides.

<sup>36</sup> For example, in *The Destiny of Races*, Blair proclaims that as a result of the Dred Scott decision: “The sublime thought that has filled the bosoms of American patriots, philosophers, and poets, and which the millions have ever uttered with rapture, ‘This, this is the land of the free,’ the Supreme Judicature just now proclaims must be surrendered to the doctrine which makes Slavery national, and, in spite of the will of the people, opens up all our territories to become the home of the slave!”

<sup>37</sup> The U.S. government recognized Haiti officially in 1862.

<sup>38</sup> Squier’s *Nicaragua* begins more or less with Columbus whom he depicts as prevented from reaching “the treasures of the Indies” by the Bight of Darien, which is now the site of the Panama Canal (9). For more on the archaeological writings of Squier, who was the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to Central America in 1849, see Harvey, chapter four.

<sup>39</sup> Meaning the “new Eden.” See Maffly-Kipp 150.

<sup>40</sup> William Whipper was an African-American writer and abolitionist who assisted those using the Underground Railroad to escape from slavery into Canada.

<sup>41</sup> The motto of *The Anglo-African*, in which *A Summer* was serialized was, “Man must be free; if not through the law then above the law.”

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<sup>42</sup> According to Whittington, this shift occurred because politicians at the federal level desired to sidestep the explosive issue of slavery at all costs: “As sentiment at both extremes on the issue grew more intense, however, strategies of avoidance and compromise became less politically viable. In order to preserve their existing organizations, leaders of both parties sought to shift final resolution of the slavery issue into some other forum where national political leaders would not have to take a position. The favored compromise was to shift the decision to the territorial legislatures and to the federal judiciary in the hope of compartmentalizing the dispute, moving it away from national electoral politics and removing the fuel from the political fires of both the Northern abolitionists and the Southern fire-eaters” (377).

<sup>43</sup> It was during this decade that the Columbus narrative also began to change quite markedly in tone from one of triumph to fatalism. Schuman, Schwartz and D’Arcy contextualize this change in the academic turn toward multiculturalism: “Reactions against conventional historiography emphasize the positive qualities and contributions of marginalized peoples, based on the conviction that every minority is entitled to interpret the past in its own way—to create ‘countermemories’—without the interference of Eurocentric interpretation. By the 1970s, these movements had penetrated the academy and reshaped understandings of the past by giving the victims of history unprecedented attention” (3).

<sup>44</sup> During this era Ishmael Reed, Victor Hernández Cruz, Shawn Wong and Rudolfo Anaya established the Before Columbus Foundation (1976), which is “dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of contemporary American multicultural literature” and has been presenting the American Book Award since 1978. See <http://www.beforecolumbusfoundation.com/about-bcf.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Christian pro-slavery advocates often justified slavery by pointing to the Old Testament Book of Genesis when Noah’s sons encounter him asleep and naked, and Noah curses the descendants of Ham—the only son to look directly upon Noah’s nakedness—to slavery. For more on the Curse of Ham as it relates to U.S. slavery, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Irving’s Columbus biography resulted from Navarrete’s publication of this particular edition of Columbus’ writings.

<sup>47</sup> Although in 2010 alone, at least three monographs were published on Haitian-U.S. relations, Schuman, Schwartz and D’Arcy have demonstrated that a gap exists between the publication and



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dissemination of such scholarship and popular historical understanding. For an excellent review of the 2010 books and a history of recent scholarship on the Haitian Revolution, see Maureen L. Daut's review essay "Daring to Be Free / Dying to Be Free: Toward a Dialogic Haitian-U.S. Studies," *American Quarterly* June 2011: 375-389.

<sup>48</sup> To be clear, economic relations existed between the Caribbean and the U.S., but I believe their historical association during the nineteenth century was caught up in proto-imperial ways of thinking about American geography.

<sup>49</sup> According to Bell in "Negro Nationalism," despite the election of Abraham Lincoln, the disappointing results of the 1860 election for African Americans caused even the anti-emigrationist Frederick Douglass to come around by early 1861 and support the Haitian initiative (49).

<sup>50</sup> Respectively, the amendments abolished slavery, overturned the Dred Scott decision by restoring the rights of citizenship to African Americans and gave African-American men the right to vote.

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