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America and the American Revolution in British Geographical Thought,
c.1760-1830*

This article investigates British ideas about ‘America’ in the years before and after the American Revolution. How did popular geographical texts and their maps understand and represent ‘America’? What supposed characteristics and qualities were thought to distinguish the continent from other parts of the globe?¹ To what extent did the Revolution change these ideas? Many historians have explored British attitudes towards America in this period, often concentrating on ‘public opinion’ about the Revolution as expressed in parliamentary debates, petitions, pamphlets, and the press.² By focusing on high politics and journalistic print culture, these works tend to present the Revolution as a profoundly disruptive moment in British intellectual life. This article, however, takes a different approach: it analyses mainstream geographical works – rich but largely untapped sources which, due to their popularity and summative nature, can help expose the longstanding, formative ideas about America circulating in British literate culture. Collectively, these books interpret America both as a novel space literally and conceptually outside the ‘Old World’; and as a space circumscribed by, and defined in terms of, the projected priorities of Britain

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¹ Though it is now conventional to refer to North and South America as separate continents, this was not uniformly the case in earlier periods. Some geographical texts defined ‘continent’ as ‘a large tract of land [...] without any separation of its parts by water’: consequently, ‘the world is usually divided into two continents, the Old and the New’ – ‘Europe, Asia and Africa’ and ‘North and South America’ (Richard Brookes, *A General Gazetteer; or Compendious Geographical Dictionary*, (15th edn., London, 1819), p. x). See also Richard Blome, *A Geographical Description of the Four Parts of the World* (London, 1670), pt. iv, p. 1; Alexander Adam, *A Summary of Geography and History, both Ancient and Modern* (Edinburgh, 1794), pp. 124-5. For more on the idea of the ‘continent’, see Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley, 1997).

² The literature is enormous: for an introduction, see James E. Bradley, ‘The British Public and the American Revolution: Ideology, Interest and Opinion’, in H. T. Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the American Revolution* (London, 1998), pp. 124-54. Some key works include: Solomon Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press, 1775-1783* (Columbia, 1967); James E. Bradley, *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England: Petitions, the Crown and Public Opinion* (Macon, 1986); Alfred Grant, *Our American Brethren: A History of Letters in the British Press during the American Revolution 1775-1781* (Jefferson, 1995); H. T. Dickinson, *Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1995); Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, 2000); Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Troy Bickham, *Making Headlines: The American Revolution as Seen through the British Press* (DeKalb, 2009).

and its European neighbours.³ This tension has, of course, been fundamental to European writing and reflection on America from the very earliest encounters.⁴ Some historians have called attention to the ‘thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing [...] recognition of difference’ latent in the initial European ‘discoveries’.⁵ Others note that, when voyagers and scholars interpreted the continent, existing ‘texts and theories proved surprisingly resilient’⁶. The point is not, therefore, that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century geographical books offer entirely fresh parameters for viewing America. Instead, their value lies in how they codify and disseminate conventional ideas for wider consumption, in the process revealing more about the accepted structures and terminologies for understanding America in British literate culture. In order to understand ‘popular’ mentalities fully, we need to take conventional ideas seriously. The temptation in intellectual history is often to look for originality of thought and innovation; but we also need to think carefully and generously about ideas which might seem at first to be over-familiar, and which are revisited and reproduced until they are part of the accepted mental furniture of a period.

Geographical works therefore allow us access to crucial facets of British thought about America in the era of the Revolution – commonplace ideas which stand alongside the urgent, responsive debates of the politically engaged. These longstanding ideas not only penetrated mass-produced texts for broad audiences, but also endured great longevity and thrived deep into the nineteenth century. Significantly, the books’ responses to the Revolution itself are shaped by existing conceptual frameworks. This means that, far from signalling a comprehensive shift in British perceptions of the continent, Revolutionary events are inserted into established narratives; they are used to reinforce and amplify existing terms of reference and their

³ ‘Space’ here refers to (understandings of) emplacement, demarcation, distribution and connection. See Paul Stock, ‘History and the Uses of Space’, in Paul Stock, ed., *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History* (New York, 2015), pp. 1-18.

⁴ A useful summary is in Karen Ordahl Kupperman ‘Introduction: The Changing Definition of America’, in Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493-1750* (Chapel Hill, 1995), pp. 2-6.

⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991), p. 20. See also Germán Arciniegas, *America in Europe: A History of the New World in Reverse* (San Diego, 1986).

⁶ Anthony Grafton, with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 148. See also J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650* (Cambridge, 1970).

associated complexities. This, in turn, invites us to reappraise popular British conceptions of the Revolution outside the more usual emphasis on tumultuous disjuncture. The present article begins by discussing the contexts and significance of geographical books, before outlining how they (re)interpret America using perspectives grounded in ideas about both novelty and familiarity. It then moves on to consider the American Revolution, tracing how those ideas were applied and adapted in order to comprehend geo-political changes in the continent.

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To begin, I want to outline the context and utility of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century geographical writing. British geography books from this period have not traditionally received a great deal of attention. At first glance this may not seem surprising: many are highly repetitious, blatantly derivative, given to unacknowledged borrowing, and have unclear or pseudonymous authorships.⁷ These qualities are disconcerting for those methodologies – particularly in text-based intellectual history – which place high premium on authorial intent and textual integrity.⁸ Indeed, this may also explain why these books have been marginalised in traditional histories of geographical thought.⁹ Recently, however, Robert Mayhew has shown that geography books operate within established conventions which both establish and reflect developing disciplinary and epistemological parameters.¹⁰ Far from being inane monotonous, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century geographical works ‘developed and transmitted a widely accepted definition of the content of geographical enquiry’. In brief, their purpose was to ‘determine relative locations upon the earth and to describe the phenomena to be found in those locations’. This could be achieved through both mathematical calculation and

⁷ For works dismissive of eighteenth-century geographical books see: Alan Downes, ‘The Bibliographic Dinosaurs of Georgian Geography (1714-1830)’, *The Geographical Journal*, cxxxvii (1971), pp. 379-87; Lester Jesse Cappon, ‘Geographers and Map-Makers, British and American, From About 1750 to 1798’, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, lxxxi (1972), pp. 243-71; Margarita Bowen, *Empiricism and Geographical Thought: From Francis Bacon to Alexander von Humboldt* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 90, 125.

⁸ For the importance of authorial intentions see Quentin Skinner, ‘Motives, Intentions and Interpretations’, in *Visions of Politics: Volume 1, Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 90-102.

⁹ Richard Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography: A Critical Survey of Current Thought in the Light of the Past* (Lancaster, 1939), pp. 35-48; Preston James, *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas* (Indianapolis, 1972), pp. 140-4.

¹⁰ Robert Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650-1850* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 32. See also Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp. 167-9.

narrative description, approaches explicitly derived from classical authorities (especially Ptolemy and Strabo), and which remained methodologically consistent throughout the period. In other words, ‘geography’ was recognised as a ‘coherent body of knowledge about a clearly-defined object’: the situation of different spaces on the earth, and the characteristics and content of those spaces in natural and human terms.¹¹

Geographical volumes from this period therefore seem formulaic because their concerns and methods are framed within conventional parameters; they are both products and producers of a ‘stable system’ of intellectual enquiry. In practical terms too, they derive from specific publishing practices, especially the professionalised circumstances of eighteenth-century Grub Street hackwork – an environment which lent itself to the reproduction of commonplace ideas. We need to understand these books sympathetically in terms of their contexts of production – that is, outside post-Romantic frameworks of possessive authorship, textual originality and scholarly diligence.¹² A volume with derivative content, for example, may not necessarily indicate a failure of authorial originality, but rather the continued currency of certain received ideas. Accordingly, there is growing recognition that ‘books of geography were numerous, varied, and popular in the Enlightenment’ and that they can be revealing expressions of commonly-held perspectives and identities.¹³

This is an important point because geography books became increasingly marketable in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Between 1650 and 1750 new ‘special geographies’ for adults – that is, books ‘devoted to describing all the countries in the world’ – were published in Britain at the rate of roughly 2.27 per decade. But between 1760 and 1830, the rate of publication increases to 7.38 new

¹¹ Robert Mayhew, ‘The Character of English Geography c.1660-1800: A Textual Approach’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxiv (1998), pp., 388-93. See also Paul Stock, ‘Histories of Geography’, in Paul Hamilton, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism* (Oxford, forthcoming). For the contemporary French context see Anne Godlewska, *Geography Unbound: French Geographic Science from Cassini to Humboldt* (Chicago, 1999), esp. pp. 21-55.

¹² Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, pp. 37-42, 21. For more on Grub Street publishing see: Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London, 1972); Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹³ Charles Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago, 2007), p. 168; Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, esp. pp. 23-48; David N. Livingstone, ‘British Geography, 1500-1900’, in Ron Johnston and Michael Williams, eds., *A Century of British Geography* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 26-31.

books per decade, peaking between 1780 and 1810, with 11.33 per decade. There is a similar trajectory in works produced as schoolbooks or for a juvenile readership: between 1670 and 1770 there were nineteen new texts published in Britain; between 1770 and 1830 this increases to sixty-two new titles.¹⁴ Nor does this include multiple editions and reprints: several works ran to double-digit editions, with one reaching its forty-sixth reissuing.¹⁵ It is not easy to explain definitively the apparent popularity of geography books. Rising production is probably related to more general increases in reading in the eighteenth century, evidenced and encouraged by improvements in literacy, bookselling practice, lending libraries, and newspaper circulation. Crucially, the legal decision against perpetual copyright in 1774 challenged existing publishing monopolies and allowed new competitors to reduce prices and increase trade.¹⁶ It allowed ‘suppressed demand for reading’ to be met by ‘a huge surge in the supply of books’, though it is important to recognise that this principally affected older out-of-copyright titles, rather than newly published works.¹⁷ It also seems plausible that imperial expansions and contractions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would have heightened British readers’ curiosity in the wider world. Several scholars have noted ‘the fresh stimulus to natural history and ethnography coming from Cook’ and other explorers;¹⁸ while many more have analysed the close relationship between empire-building and geographical enquiry.¹⁹ In addition, there is evidence that geographical study was considered increasingly important in educational terms, something reflected by the numbers of books for students, and their diverse use in ‘grammar schools, commercial schools and public lectures’ as well as

¹⁴ Figures extrapolated from graphs in O. F. G. Sitwell, *Four Centuries of Special Geography: An Annotated Guide* (Vancouver, 1993), pp. 16-18. The figures for adult special geographies do not include what Sitwell describes as ‘related’ geographical works. See also the statistics in Barbara Backus McCorkle, *A Carto-Bibliography of the Maps in Eighteenth-Century British and American Geography Books* (Kansas, 2009), p. 5.

¹⁵ For example: Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer*: six editions 1762-1815, and a further fourteen ‘other versions’ 1771-1842, some with multiple editions of their own; William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar*: forty-six editions 1770-1843; Thomas Salmon, *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar*: eighteen editions 1749-85. See Sitwell, *Special Geography*, pp. 120-4, 272-84, 500-5.

¹⁶ For a summary see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1997), pp. 111-63, esp. pp. 117-18

¹⁷ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 109, 115, 120

¹⁸ Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1967), p. 502. D. R. Stoddart also sees Cook’s voyage as a key moment: *On Geography and its History* (Oxford, 1986), p. 33.

¹⁹ See Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, eds., *Geography and Empire* (Oxford, 1994); Morag Bell, Robin Butlin, and Michael Heffernan, eds., *Geography and Imperialism 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1995); Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

universities.²⁰ Clearly, there were growing numbers of geographical books circulating in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, and the market was strong enough to justify frequent (re)production of titles with similar content.

Who, though, was actually reading these books? A large number make explicit statements about their intended audiences, usually presenting themselves as practical guides for those who need to be well-informed about the world: soldiers, merchants, statesmen, lawyers, historians, naturalists, clergymen.²¹ Importantly, however, they are also intended for ‘people of *every* rank and description, from the prince to the peasant’; they are equally suitable for ‘the lady’s library, the tradesman’s parlour, and the peaceful retirement of the sequestered cottage’.²² While it is often problematic to deduce a text’s intended readers using its internal evidence,²³ the apparently broad readership for geographical works is also borne out by bibliographic details. Some, such as D. Fenning and J. Collyer’s *New System of Geography* (1764-5), are lavish folio books with copious maps and illustrations; others, such as Thomas Ewing’s *A System of Geography* (1816), are smaller, cheaply-made volumes mass-produced for educational and non-elite readership.²⁴ My point here is that geography books are not, in generic terms, solely texts for intellectual or political elites. Instead, their commercial feasibility and varied target audiences meant that their contents were disseminated broadly throughout British reading society, and this, in turn, means that they are useful sources with which to identify mainstream cultural conventions circulating in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. By identifying ideas common to several texts, we can begin to approximate those concepts which had both immediate purchase and long-term endurance in the period.

²⁰ Mayhew, ‘Character of English Geography’, p. 399. See also Livingstone, ‘British Geography’, pp. 14-21; Charles Withers and Robert Mayhew, ‘Rethinking “Disciplinary” History: Geography in British Universities, c. 1580-1887’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, new ser., xxvii (2002), pp. 11-29; Mayhew, ‘Geography in Eighteenth-Century British Education’, *Paedagogica Historica*, xxxiv (1998), pp. 731-69; Brückner, *Geographic Revolution*, pp. 9-10, 159.

²¹ See, for example, Bernhard Varen, *A Compleat System of Geography*, trans. Dugdale and Shaw (2 vols., London, 1733), i. 9; George Augustus Baldwin, *A New Royal, Authentic, Complete and Universal System of Geography* (London, [1794]), p. iii. For more on the ‘intended readers’ of geography books, see Mayhew, ‘Character of English Geography’, pp. 393-5.

²² Christopher Kelly, *New and Complete System of Universal Geography* (2 vols., London, 1814-17), i. preface.

²³ St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp. 3-6, 434-7.

²⁴ Charles Withers, *Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 178.

This article is based on close analysis of thirty geographical texts and their maps published in Britain between 1760 and 1830.²⁵ Such a sample size allows trends to be identified across several books, and also avoids giving excessive prominence to a few individual titles. I have concentrated on regularly re-printed (that is, especially popular) books, as well as on multi-volume works with substantive discussions, though I have also consulted shorter gazetteers. My purpose is to discern how these books understand and present ‘America’ as a distinct geographical region.²⁶ For the sake of clarity, I am not using these texts to categorise objective qualities which purportedly define or even shape societies and individuals in a material sense.²⁷ Instead, I am exploring the ideological languages with which British geographical texts identify and describe an area called ‘America’. In what follows I will show that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British geographical works understand the American continent both as a space of novelty, detached and distinct from Europe, as well as a space defined in terms of European political and conceptual frameworks. My point is not to imply an explicit debate in which quantifiable numbers of books adopt opposing positions. Geographical texts can and do pursue particular arguments – some are pro- or anti-Revolution for example – but most present America in complex terms, as simultaneously novel and familiar. Neither is it my objective to trace the genealogy of the ideas I discuss back to a set of ur-texts or even authorial intentions. The former is exceptionally difficult in books where ‘silent plagiarism was far more common than careful acknowledgement of scholarly indebtedness’.²⁸ And the latter is no less challenging given that authorship is frequently anonymous,

²⁵ According to Sitwell’s bibliography, there were 188 geographical works of all kinds published in the British Isles during this period. This total includes those books purporting to describe every country in the world, not books focussed specifically on particular regions. See Sitwell, *Special Geography*. In discussing maps not included in this article, I have for the convenience of readers used the copies digitised in Early English Books Online, Eighteenth Century Books Online, and British Library Nineteenth Century Collections, all collected at JISC Historical Texts: <http://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk/>

²⁶ For bibliographical approaches to periods before 1760 see Peter Burke, ‘America and the Rewriting of World History’, and Richard C. Simmons, ‘Americana in British Books, 1621-1760’, both in Kupperman, *America in European Consciousness*, pp. 33-51 and pp. 361-87. See also Simmons, *British Imprints Relating to North America, 1621-1760* (London, 1996); John Alden and Dennis C. Landis, eds., *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493-1750* (6 vols., New York, 1980-97).

²⁷ See David N. Livingstone, ‘Environmental Determinism’, in John Agnew and David Livingstone, eds., *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (London, 2011), pp. 368-80; James M. Blaut, ‘Environmentalism and Eurocentrism’, *The Geographical Review*, lxxxix (1999), pp. 391-408.

²⁸ Robert Mayhew, ‘British Geography’s Republic of Letters: Mapping an Imagined Community, 1600-1800’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lxxv (2004), pp. 255.

pseudonymous or otherwise opaque.²⁹ It is not known with complete certainty, for example, who wrote and revised William Guthrie's *Geographical Grammar* (first edition 1770), the most re-printed geography book of the period.³⁰ Instead, we need to approach these works differently, outside more recent, and potentially anachronistic, concepts of authorship, derivation, and originality. By reading popular texts in bulk, and by identifying the commonalities they contain, we can see them as products and producers of 'culturally enacted memory' about America.³¹ We can identify the ideas which circulate throughout British geographical writing, and which frame everyday comprehension of the continent.

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British geographical works commonly present 'America' as an entirely 'new', unique space outside existing terms of reference. One early eighteenth-century work is archetypal when it speaks of America as an 'unknown' land 'so far as yet undiscovered', knowledge of which is 'mere conjecture'.³² Similarly, several maps show vast tracts of unadorned land, identified only as 'parts unknown' or 'great space unknown' (see figure 1).³³ This tendency to focus on novelty and strangeness is, of course, a commonplace observation in the earliest American discovery narratives. To take just one example, Las Casas's version of Columbus's *Diario*, talks about the trees and fish 'so different from ours that it is a marvel' and the 'beautiful verdure so

²⁹ One example will suffice: The English Short Title Catalogue identifies the author of *A New and Complete System of Geography* (1796) as John Payne, named author of another geography book published five years earlier. But the book's title-page credits part of the work to Robert Heron, a Grub Street journalist. To make matters worse, 'Robert Heron' was also a known pseudonym of a third person, the geographer John Pinkerton. See ESTC No.: T174284; Sarah Couper, 'Pinkerton, John (1758–1826)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., 2008) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22301>, accessed 23 Mar 2015]

³⁰ Guthrie died six months before the *Grammar*'s publication. His publisher John Knox is a candidate for (part-) authorship, but he later described himself as the book's 'editor' or compiler. There were also contemporary suggestions that parts of the *Grammar* were copied from Anton BÜSCHING's *Neue Erdbeschreibung* (English trans., 1762). The identities of the people who revised the text through its subsequent forty-six editions are unknown. See Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 155-6.

³¹ Brückner, *Geographic Revolution*, p. 172.

³² *A New General Atlas* (London, 1721), p. 237.

³³ 'A New and Accurate Map of North America', in Charles Middleton, *A New and Complete System of Geography* (2 vols., London, 1778-9), ii. following p. 486. See also 'North America', in Brookes, *A General Gazetteer* (1st edn., London, Newbery, 1762), following entry on 'Jaar'; 'North America', in J. Tytler, *The New Universal Geographical Grammar [...] an Improvement and Continuation of Mr Salmon's Grammar* (2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1778), following p. 610.

different from ours'.³⁴ Consequently, geographical works typically begin their American sections with details of the initial explorations. The significance of this lies not so much in the foundational status of the 'discoveries', but rather that novelty remains a conventional way to understand America's *current* eighteenth- and nineteenth-century condition, as well as its past.³⁵ The *New Royal Authentic and Complete System of Geography* (1787/8) proclaims that America will 'bring to view new countries, new men, and new manners, as well as exhibiting novelty in the animal and vegetable systems'.³⁶ And John Bigland's *Geographical and Historical View of the World* (1810) talks about America extending 'the boundaries of European knowledge', opening up new and unfamiliar fields for study and reflection.³⁷

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The idea that America is 'still imperfectly known' generates mysteries for geographical works.³⁸ An especially common cause of anxiety concerns the origins of native American people – a topic of disturbing significance because it complicates or undermines received classical and Biblical histories.³⁹ Consideration of this problem thus features in many geography books.⁴⁰ One text even concludes that native Americans 'were not descended from any people in the ancient continent' – in other words, that America is a self-contained space completely separated from the old world.⁴¹ Nor was this an isolated opinion: a contemporary English version of Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* describes America as 'a world that is still in its infancy', freshly emerged from the ocean and hence a 'new world' in geological

³⁴ *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's Voyage to America 1492-1493, Abstracted by Fray Bartholomé de Las Casas*, trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman, 1989), pp. 89, 101.

³⁵ See, for example *A New and Complete System of Universal Geography* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1796), ii. 83-6; *The Glasgow Geography* (5 vols., Glasgow, 1819), iv. 5-21.

³⁶ Thomas Bankes, Edward Warren Blake and Alexander Cook, *A New Royal Authentic and Complete System of Geography Ancient and Modern* (London, n.d. [1787/8?]), p. 461.

³⁷ John Bigland, *A Geographical and Historical View of the World* (5 vols., London, 1810), v. 374.

³⁸ Middleton, *Complete System*, ii. 446.

³⁹ See L. E. Huddleston, *Origin of the American Indian: European Concepts 1492-1729* (Austin, 1967); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982).

⁴⁰ See the early seventeenth-century English translation of Mercator: *Atlas or Geographical Description of the Regions, Countries, and Kingdoms of the World*, trans., Henry Hexham (2 vols., Amsterdam, 1636), ii. 436. For later texts discussing this problem at length see *A System of Geography* (4 vols., Glasgow, 1807), i. 3-43; M. Malte-Brun, *Universal Geography* (2nd edn., 9 vols., Edinburgh/London, 1834), v. 12-34. Malte-Brun's *Géographie Universelle* (1810-29) was translated into English between 1822 and 1833. See Sitwell, *Special Geography*, p. 361.

⁴¹ Adam, *Summary of Geography*, p. 695.

terms.⁴² America's novelty is therefore both exciting and disconcerting; it poses an interpretative challenge to existing European knowledge.⁴³ Indeed, so thoroughly is America associated with the idea of novelty, that one work categorises subsequently-discovered lands as part of America, regardless of their physical location. This book includes Cook's and Bougainville's Pacific discoveries in its section on America, annexing the islands as additions to the American continent.⁴⁴

How, exactly, is America different to Europe?⁴⁵ Geographical works engage here in a number of conventional remarks. A common assertion is that America is much colder than Europe.⁴⁶ While some works are 'at a loss to account' for this, others, perhaps following William Robertson, theorise that 'the immense quantity of land stretching towards the north pole' and cold winds blowing over the Atlantic explain this phenomenon.⁴⁷ Already we can detect here a tendency to define the whole continent in terms of the Northern areas most closely connected to British interests, something which becomes even more prevalent during and after the Revolution. Geography books also state that America is 'proportionally greater' than the old world: 'its mountains, its lakes, its rivers, are of greater magnitude'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the contents of that space – animals, vegetation, even people – 'appear to bear a proportion, both in the number and size, to the extent of the country which has given them birth'.⁴⁹ In other words, America exists on a bigger scale: the continent

⁴² Guillaume Thomas Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, trans., J. Justamond (2nd edn., 5 vols., London, 1776), v. 124. Raynal's original phrase actually describes America as 'ou les ruines & le tombeau de la nature, ou le berceau de son enfance' [either the ruins and the tomb of nature, or the cradle of infancy]. The English translation therefore simplifies Raynal's speculations in order to stress novelty. See *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissements & du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (6 vols., Amsterdam, 1770), vi. 193.

⁴³ Burke, 'America and the Rewriting of World History', esp. pp. 40-47.

⁴⁴ Middleton, *Complete System*, ii. 509-37.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about America's differences, focussing on classificatory and zoological issues, see Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (1955), trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh, 1973).

⁴⁶ See Karen Ordhal Kupperman, 'The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period', *American Historical Review*, lxxxvii (1982), pp. 1262-89, esp. pp. 1269-71.

⁴⁷ *System of Geography* (1807), i. 2; *Glasgow Geography*, iv. 2. See William Robertson, *The History of America* (3 vols., Dublin, 1777), i. 252-6. Robertson also cites other scholars – including José de Acosta and Buffon – who were troubled by this question.

⁴⁸ *System of Geography* (1807), i. 1.

⁴⁹ Malte-Brun, *Universal Geography*, v. 8. The belief that giants resided in the Americas continued to circulate in the late eighteenth century. See, for instance, Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *The History of a Voyage to the Malouine (or Falkland) Islands [...] translated from Dom Pernety's Historical Journal* (1769) (London, 1771), pp. 288, 294.

requires European observers to rethink existing ideas about size and proportion.⁵⁰ Some earlier maps even show America's boundaries stretching away into blank space, as if to suggest that the continent is potentially limitless.⁵¹ The idea that everything is bigger in America has, of course, become a very prevalent cultural cliché, but it is evidently an idea with a long history, familiar through constant repetition: even Ortelius mentions America's 'exceeding largeness' when compared to the rest of the world.⁵² Furthermore, in suggesting that the organic occupants of a space replicate the presumed scale of the space itself, these texts accept a key tenant of environmental determinism: that there is a direct relationship between a space's form and the development of its contents. This, in turn, provides a supposedly material basis for interpretative generalisation. After all, if local circumstances reflect the proportion and attributes of the whole continent, it must be acceptable to propose general rules about the space from localised evidence.

Standing as both an example of and challenge to such generalisation is another conventional remark about America: that it is a space of great variety and diversity. Despite being 'much colder than Europe', America still possesses 'all the different climates of the world', 'multitudes of islands [...] most of them fertile' and a 'variety of soils'. Consequently, it produces 'in abundance most of the metals, minerals, plants, fruits, trees and woods to be met with in the other parts of the world, and some of them in greater quantities and higher perfection'.⁵³ Indeed, explorers are reportedly 'amazed' by how different these natural resources are 'from those which flourish in Europe'.⁵⁴ Cartouches and title pages often display the exotic creatures and plentiful assets which characterise America.⁵⁵ There is an obvious conceptual tension here because the books want to present America as both uniform and extremely varied; that is, to suggest that diversity is itself a general characteristic of the space. It is also instructive to compare the insistence on American abundance with the books' usual

⁵⁰ For more on the 'inconceivable immensity' of America see J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 29-56.

⁵¹ 'A New Mapp of America Septentrionale', in Blome, *Geographical Description*, pt. iv, following p. 2; 'America', in *Thesaurus Geographicus* (London, 1695), p. 473.

⁵² Abraham Ortelius, *An Epitome of Ortelius his Theater of the World* (London, [1601?]), p. 5.

⁵³ Banks et al., *Complete System*, p. 463.

⁵⁴ Kelly, *Complete System*, i. 517.

⁵⁵ See, for example, 'A New Map of America from the Latest Observations', in *New General Atlas*, following p. 236. For further discussion of (gendered) use of cartouches see Michael Wintle, *The Image of Europe: Visualising Europe in Cartography and Iconography Throughout the Ages* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 240-7, 310-26.

treatment of Africa. Whereas this similarly ‘unknown’ continent is often presumed to be empty and devoid of worth (‘destitute’, ‘not fertile or populous’, ‘reduced to the lowest ebb of ignorance and barbarity’⁵⁶), America’s unexplored regions are reputed to contain untold riches: ‘diamonds, pearls, emeralds, amethysts, and other valuable stones’.⁵⁷ This is, in fact, a relatively fresh interpretation: Ortelius’s early English adapter had described America as a land lacking wheat, wine and domestic animals, and which needed to be ‘enriched from Europe with all these and other sundry commodities’.⁵⁸ But by the eighteenth century, America is celebrated as a treasury of new assets, a development which surely reflects increasing British commercial interests in the continent.⁵⁹ Indeed, other contemporary texts present America as a viable economic opportunity: the *Annual Register for 1768*, for instance, gives records of imports and exports to America, attempting to show that the continent is commercially profitable for the British Empire.⁶⁰

The supposed ‘newness’ of America also possesses a societal and moral dimension. Geographical works often present the continent as an uncultivated space free from the moral and political precepts of the old world. For pre-eighteenth-century texts, this is usually evidenced by harsh remarks about the continent’s iniquity: it is a space where ‘devilish spirits’ are worshipped by ‘cruel, lazy and malicious’ people ‘quite destitute of all good’.⁶¹ Later eighteenth-century texts, however, often replace or combine this with primitivist sentiments, a set of ideas with increasing currency in the late eighteenth century.⁶² Guthrie’s *Geographical Grammar*, for example, speaks of America as ‘untutored by science and untainted by corruption’. Native Americans are

⁵⁶ D. Fenning and J. Collyer, *A New System of Geography* (2 vols., London, 1766), i. 307; Middleton, *Complete System*, i. 241.

⁵⁷ Bankes, et al., *Complete System*, p. 463.

⁵⁸ Ortelius, *Epitome*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ See Elliott, *Empires*, pp. 88-114; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America 1606-1789* (rev. edn., Chapel Hill, 1991); Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States Volume 1: The Colonial Era* (Cambridge, 1996), esp. E. L. Jones, ‘The European Background’, pp. 95-134.

⁶⁰ *Annual Register; or a View of the History, Politics and Literature of the Year 1768* (5th edn., London, 1796), p. 204] (*Annual Registers* from this period often have multiple page sequences distinguished by the symbols ‘j’ and ‘*’)

⁶¹ Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie in Four Books* (4 vols., London, 1652), iv. 99; *Thesaurus Geographicus*, p. 474. Thomas Hobbes had, of course, characterised America as a place of ‘brutish manner’ and ‘no government’: see *Leviathan* (1651), ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 89-90

⁶² For more on primitivism and the Americas see: P. J. Marshall and Glyn Williams *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London, 1982), pp. 187-226; David Quint, ‘A Reconsideration of Montaigne’s *Des cannibales*’, in Kupperman, *America in European Consciousness*, pp. 166-91.

ignorant of ‘almost every European art’, but this signifies ‘a state of honest independence and noble simplicity’.⁶³ America, according to this perspective, actualises the primeval state of nature: only there ‘it is possible to attain a thorough knowledge of mankind, unbiased by education, unimproved by learning and untainted by corruption’.⁶⁴ America therefore stands outside European historical teleology and its governmental and moral conventions. It offers a glimpse into ‘the state of mankind in the earliest ages’; a society with no arts, riches or luxury, where ‘liberty is [...] the prevailing pattern’ and power is ‘persuasive rather than coercive’.⁶⁵ The apparent ‘newness’ of America is therefore in some respects an idealised version of an imagined past.⁶⁶ However, America appears ‘new’ to British and European observers not just because it apparently resembles long-departed antiquity, but also because it seems to exist outside the frameworks of historical progress as conventionally understood. America is both within and outside stadial ideas about history.

There are clearly some conceptual complexities here: these texts stress the ‘undiscovered’ nature of America, but undercut that assertion with discovery narratives and accumulated details; they generalise, paradoxically, about its immense variety; they interpret its unfamiliarity in terms of stadial ideas about the past. Importantly too, these are not the abstruse ruminations of prominent thinkers or marginal texts; they inhabit mainstream, high-circulation books and are therefore a prominent part of the public discourse on America. However, it is important to acknowledge that, necessarily, comments about America’s supposed novelty are only meaningful from an old world perspective: as the *Thesaurus Geographicus* admits, America is called ‘the New World [...] in respect of us’.⁶⁷ This has several repercussions, the most important of which is that the ‘novelty’ argument may well achieve precisely the opposite of its ostensible purpose. Rather than placing the continent outside the conceptual contours of the old world, it in fact re-positions

⁶³ William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar* (London, 1770), pp. 551-4

⁶⁴ Michael Adams, *The New Royal System of Universal Geography* (London, [1794?]), p. 318. Sitwell surmises the publication date ‘on the basis of the dates attached to some of the illustrations or presented in the “chronological list of remarkable events” (pp. 944-51)’. See Sitwell, *Special Geography*, p. 69.

⁶⁵ Bankes et al., *Complete System*, p. 463; Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (1770), p. 553.

⁶⁶ Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 117-18.

⁶⁷ *Thesaurus Geographicus*, p. 473.

America more firmly within British and European perspectives and priorities. This may seem self-evident, but it also harbours troubling implications for the study of geographical thought and cultural encounters. If any attempt to assert novelty can be read as tactic to translate difference into familiarity, is ethnocentrism all but inescapable? Are geography books effectively popular advocates of empire, engaged in a textual annexation of America?

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Geography volumes frequently define America in terms of European knowledge and convention; in doing so, they locate the continent firmly within European historical trajectory and cultural vocabulary. A recurrent concern, for example, is whether America was known to ancient authors.⁶⁸ Exact conclusions vary, but in either case the classical tradition remains a reference point for how to interpret America.⁶⁹ One late-eighteenth-century work is especially forthright:

Having made Europe the station and point of view from which we contemplate the rest of the earth, we have therefore been induced to regulate the order of our work by the connection and reciprocal dependency between Europe and the other quarters of the globe. [...] America [is...] much more intimately related to Europe than either Asia or Africa, and we proceed next, therefore, to the geographical history of America.⁷⁰

Geographical works therefore present America ‘with regard to Europe’: how it was potentially known to the ancients; the sequence and extent of its discovery by Europeans; how it was populated by ‘new adventurers from all parts of Europe’; how the land itself ‘belongs to’ European states or private proprietors; and how its contents are the ‘wealth and ornament’ of imperial endeavours.⁷¹ According to this perspective, America is literally and conceptually incorporated into Europe. Even its supposedly unique features – its large mountains and rivers and abundant resources – are related back to imperial uses and ambitions: American space is defined as an extension of European interests and activities.

⁶⁸ For a contemporary discussion of whether ancient authors could have known about America, see Heylyn, *Cosmographie*, pp. 95-6. For texts with different perspectives on the issue – for and against respectively – see Blome, *A Geographical Description*, pt. iv, p. 2; *New General Atlas*, p. 237.

⁶⁹ See David A. Lupton, *Romans in a New World: Classical Models in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Ann Arbor, 2006).

⁷⁰ *Universal Geography* (1796), ii. 82.

⁷¹ Richard Brookes, *General Gazetteer* (1819), entry on ‘America’.

Geography books frequently describe America as European property.⁷² Richard Brookes's *Geographical Gazetteer* (1762), talks about 'Europeans' as 'masters' of American space who 'lay claim to' and are 'in possession of' the New World.⁷³ Guthrie's *Grammar* (1770) speaks about European 'proprietors' who 'appropriate' their new 'possessions'.⁷⁴ The language often attempts to confer legitimacy. For one text, the land was 'given' to European rulers by the first explorers – a phrase which implies lawfulness and generosity but also presumes that ownership is determined and conferred solely by Europeans.⁷⁵ Others naturalise that acquisition with maps showing clearly defined colonial possessions. George Millar's *Complete System of Geography* (1782), uses a key to illustrate which regions belong to which imperial power, while the *Historical and Commercial System of Geography* (1800) highlights the Tordesillas meridian of 1494, thereby reiterating a long tradition of European spatial demarcation (see figure 2).⁷⁶ [INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

An emphasis on ownership presents America as a territory; that is, a controlled space under the established jurisdictions of rulers or states.⁷⁷ A focus on novelty ostensibly stresses America's distinctiveness while incorporating it into a set of Eurocentric worldviews; by contrast, the 'territorial' approach makes the bolder, apparently empirical, claim that America is already legally and governmentally a part of European imperial space. America already participates in the spatial dynamics of the European state system, and, as such, it is a projection of Europe overseas. Furthermore, the emphasis on territory conflates a presumed present with an imagined future: it does not finely discriminate between areas directly controlled by or connected to the imperial centre, and potential areas for expansion. Some maps, for

⁷² For more on ideas of property and empire see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-1800* (New Haven, 1995), esp. pp. 73-91.

⁷³ Brookes, *General Gazetteer*, (1762), entry on 'America'.

⁷⁴ Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (1770), pp. 562-4.

⁷⁵ *System of Geography* (1807), i. 18.

⁷⁶ 'South America Agreeable to the Most Approved Maps and Charts by Mr Kitchin', in George Henry Millar, *The New and Universal System of Geography, being a Complete History and Description of the Whole World* (London, 1782), following p. 778; 'A Map of South America from the Latest Discoveries', in *New Historical and Commercial System of Geography* (Manchester, 1800), following p. 538.

⁷⁷ Chenxi Tang, *The Geographical Imagination of Modernity: Geography, Literature, and Philosophy in German Romanticism* (Stanford, 2008), pp. 16-18. Tang draws from Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950), trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York, 2003), esp. pp. 140-51. See also Robert Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. pp. 127-68.

instance, show the British colonies without a clear western border; instead, they stretch out speculatively into the spaces beyond.⁷⁸ If the ‘novelty’ arguments sometimes present America as a stylised past utopia, an emphasis on American territory is also, in part, a statement about imperial futurity and desire.

At times, geographical texts seem to interpret European ‘possession’ of America almost as a collective enterprise – ‘the great scene of European ambition’ – though of course they also delineate antagonisms between imperial rivals.⁷⁹ Isaac Payne’s *Introduction to Geography* (1809) observes that America is a patchwork of competition between the Spanish, British and Portuguese, French and Dutch, while Tytler’s *Universal Geographical Grammar* (1778) includes a lengthy description of English, French and Spanish empires.⁸⁰ This reconfigures America as a scene of spatial disputation. For all the assertiveness of imperial proclamations, states often had difficulty defining their territory in America – not just for political reasons, but also due to contested knowledge about specific geographical regions. Diplomatic treaties, for example, often search for precise language to settle a border dispute, only for ambiguities and ‘doubts’ to be continually re-visited in subsequent amendments.⁸¹ Seen from one perspective, these disputes undermine the blithe presumptions of legality and inevitability which lurk behind ‘territorial’ assertions. Additionally however, America’s ‘new’ and ‘unknown’ status is a vital component in narratives of ownership and control: some contemporary political commentators saw ‘the uncertain limits of the English and French territories in America’ as the root cause of the Seven Years’ War.⁸² In other words, America’s novelty is an accelerant to imperial activity: the continent can be seen simultaneously as both ‘undiscovered’

⁷⁸ ‘North America’, in Brookes, *General Gazetteer* (1762), following p. entry on ‘Jaar’.

⁷⁹ Tytler, *Universal Geographical Grammar*, p. 321.

⁸⁰ Isaac Payne, *An Introduction to Geography* (2nd edn., London, 1809), p. 251; J. Tytler, *Universal Geographical Grammar*, pp. 690-97. See also Guthrie, *Grammar* (1770), pp. 562-4. Payne is talking about South America; his description of imperial rivalry in North America (p. 227) is more complex because he also mentions the United States and ‘unconquered countries’.

⁸¹ See, for example, the drawn-out border negotiations between Britain and United States following the Treaty of Paris in 1783 – still only partly resolved in the 1790s and not fully settled until the mid-nineteenth century. See clauses expressing ‘doubts’ in ‘Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and the United States, signed at London, 19 November 1794’, in Clive Parry, ed., *The Consolidated Treaty Series* (231 vols., New York, 1969-81), lii. 248-9, 271-2. For a summary of this dispute see Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space and Environment in Canada before Confederation* (Vancouver, 2008), pp. 117-36. For wider problems in early modern border disputes see Jeremy Black, ‘Boundaries and Conflict: International Relations in *ancien régime* Europe’, in Carl Grundy, ed., *World Boundaries Volume 3: Eurasia* (London, 1994), pp. 19-54.

⁸² ‘The History of the Present War’, in *Annual Register 1758* (3rd edn., London, 1762), p. 2.

and a colonial possession because its unfamiliar spaces are there to be apportioned and absorbed. This explains why many maps show presumptuous and conjectural colonial boundaries alongside un-bordered tracts of ‘space unknown’ – two cartographic emphases which might otherwise seem to be suggesting different things about imperial reach and authority.⁸³ Seen in these terms, America’s ‘newness’ is precisely what makes it a nascent imperial space.

Another important complexity concerns the language of territory and ownership, and the tendency, noted above, to understand America as a commercial resource. Geographical works tend to present the continent as a vast repository of goods waiting to be exploited. The terminology ostensibly celebrates reciprocal ‘ties of commerce’, though the focus is usually on America as a ‘source’ of ‘commodities’ ‘brought from thence unto Europe’.⁸⁴ On one level, such comments place America within a global network: far from being an isolated, circumscribed or enduringly unfamiliar location, it is deeply connected to the old world on a practical level.⁸⁵ Particular maps, for instance, show a densely-annotated American coastline in order to stress the extent of European investigation; others stress America’s proximity to Europe and ease of trans-Atlantic connections (see figure 1).⁸⁶ There is often a double aspect to these commercial interpretations. One text, for instance, describes America as an ‘immense treasury of nature’ which nonetheless requires modification to assist it towards greater perfection – especially the use of domestic animals and agricultural techniques.⁸⁷ In other words, geographical texts assert the unique, naturally-occurring qualities of America, but also suggest that European intervention is required to contextualise and realise its potential. On the surface this might seem to resemble comments about European territorial possession, not least because both perspectives are concerned with the literal and conceptual exploitation of American space. But there is an important distinction here. The focus on territory suggests that America is already

⁸³ See ‘North America’, in Middleton, *Complete System*, ii, following p. 486.

⁸⁴ Guthrie, *Grammar* (1770), p. viii, 562; John Payne, *Universal Geography* (2 vols., London, 1791), ii, 625.

⁸⁵ Some works even suggest that America is geologically connected to the old world thanks to a continuous range of ‘elevated land’ extending from Persia via Mongolia and the Behring Strait to the Rocky mountains. See Malte-Brun, *Universal Geography*, v. 2.

⁸⁶ ‘A New Map of America from the Latest Observations, revised by I. Senex’, in *New General Atlas* (1721), following p. 236; ‘A New and Accurate Chart of the Western or Atlantic Ocean Drawn from the Most Approved Modern Maps by Thos. Bowen’, in Middleton, *Complete System*, ii, following p. 486.

⁸⁷ Payne, *Universal Geography*, ii, 626.

under direct European control; it sometimes projects a prospective future on to the present, implying that European domination of America is a fully-realised achievement – even if the balance of different imperial jurisdictions is contested. By contrast, a focus on commercial opportunity is more concerned with process; it styles America as a space of possibility and part of a developmental trajectory driven by Europe’s on-going needs and priorities. These different views exhibit slightly different assumptions about America’s current condition and the prospect of historical change. The former tends towards confirmation of an already-realised state of affairs, the latter towards a prospective future as yet unattained. As I will show, this question – about the admissibility of historical change in America – becomes especially significant when geographical texts interpret the American Revolution.

Overall, it is clear that British geography books commonly see America as the instrument and embodiment of European political and economic interests. Furthermore, America is a British and European intellectual space: it is a ‘field for the acquisition of knowledge’ and offers ‘amusement and instruction’ for the philosopher, naturalist, merchant and politician.⁸⁸ Fenning and Collyer’s *New System* argues that America gave ‘a new face to the affairs of Europe’. This ‘newness’ is not strictly an assertion of the continent’s unfamiliarity; America is instead a new façade upon which to project customary political and intellectual concerns.⁸⁹ Some modern scholars see this as a form of ‘assimilation’: ‘conquerors and colonisers of America’ transformed the “New” world, and its inhabitants, into a likeness of the Old’.⁹⁰ From this perspective, geographical writing is a mechanism for conquest: ‘the social political domination of the earth by Europe was inscribed in geographic science and translated into a discursive authority over the earth [...which] in turn, justified and consolidated Europe’s social-political authority’.⁹¹ Geography books are, in other words, manifestos of ethnocentrism and empire.

⁸⁸ *System of Geography* (1807), i. 1.

⁸⁹ Fenning and Collyer, *System of Geography*, ii. 625.

⁹⁰ Pagden, *European Encounters*, 10. See also Elliott, *The Old World*, pp. 28-53; Michael T. Ryan, ‘Assimilating New Worlds in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxiii (1981), pp. 519-38.

⁹¹ Tang, *Geographical Imagination*, p. 16.

While persuasive in some respects, this view lacks some nuance – not least because it presents the old world as an unchanging ‘initial code’ for interpretation of the globe.⁹² In fact, many historians have shown how the idea of Europe was not a stable concept before or during this period. In particular, the territorial and political fluctuations of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars intensified long-running uncertainties about the definition and extent of Europe.⁹³ We therefore need to think in terms of mutual construction: ideas about America also help refine and sharpen notions of Europe and its supposed global role.⁹⁴ In particular, America helps to construct an idea of ‘Europe’ orientated around statehood, ‘civilisation’ and ‘modernity’: what Michael Heffernan calls a ‘politico-legal narrative’ which stresses territorial sovereignty, justified imperialism, and expansive commerce.⁹⁵ This is an important point because it foregrounds the self-reflexivity – rather than just the aggressive self-assertion – of British geographical writing on America. Comments about the novelty and familiarity of America are not just ethnocentric appropriations; they are also attempts to formulate and stabilise a self-identity through the medium of American comparison. This is particularly significant in the British case, because this selfhood is not structured uniquely in terms of emergent nationalism or through competition with continental European rivals.⁹⁶ Such sentiments certainly direct aspects of geographical books – especially, as we shall see below, in the attention paid to British colonies and their successor states. But in writing about America, the books also build and disseminate a wider idea of Europe in which ideals and practices supposedly common to ‘the enlightened parts of the earth’ can be discerned, celebrated, and exported in a space ‘where once ignorance reigned triumphant’.⁹⁷

⁹² Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Imagination* (New Haven, 1994), p. 154, cited in Anthony Pagden, ‘Europe: Conceptualising a Continent’, in Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 51.

⁹³ For more on Europe’s limits see: W. H. Parker, ‘Europe: How Far?’, *The Geographical Journal*, cxxvi (1960), pp. 278-97; Wintle, *Image of Europe*, esp. pp. 31-80. For the idea of Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see: Stuart Woolf, ‘The Construction of a European World View in the Revolutionary-Napoleonic Years’, *Past and Present*, cxxxvii (1992), pp. 73-101; Martyn Thompson, ‘Ideas of Europe during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lv (1994), pp. 37-58; Paul Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe* (New York, 2010).

⁹⁴ See Elliott, *The Old World*, pp. 4-7; J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Some Europes in Their History’, in Pagden, *The Idea of Europe*, pp. 63-66; Arciniegas, *America in Europe*, p. 2; Kupperman, ‘Introduction’ to *America in European Consciousness*, pp. 5, 15-23; David Armitage, ‘The New World and British Historical Thought’, in Kupperman, *America in European Consciousness*, pp. 68-70, 52.

⁹⁵ See Michael Heffernan, *The European Geographical Imagination* (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 23-8.

⁹⁶ See Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities* (Oxford, 2011), esp. pp. 1-20.

⁹⁷ William Gordon, *A New Geographical Grammar and Complete Gazetteer* (Edinburgh, 1789), p. 450.

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To what extent, though, did British perceptions of American space change over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? The period witnessed a number of political revolutions in North and South America, but here I want to concentrate on the rebellion of the British colonies and the creation of the United States (1775-83).⁹⁸ The central question for British geography books is, on the surface, a simple one. Does the Revolution – and the consequent emergence of a new independent state – fundamentally alter conceptions of American space? Or are its effects limited, either because the Revolution itself is a marginal event, or because the United States continues to operate within European political and intellectual parameters? To some extent, these different perspectives reflect extensive contemporary debate about the Revolution in British politics and literate culture.⁹⁹ But crucially, they are also refinements of the longstanding novelty and familiarity dynamic which orientates understandings of America throughout this period. In other words, the Revolution is inserted into a wider set of extant discourses which frame how recent and unfolding events in the new world can be analysed.

A few geographical works adopt strongly pro-Revolution sentiments and consequently celebrate the advent of a new American spatiality. John Payne's *Universal Geography* (1791) declares that 'no event in the history of the world has been more important than the revolution in America'. In practical terms, it says, the United States no longer pursues trans-Atlantic trade (with Europe) and is instead focussed on domestic agriculture: cultivating the land will apparently increase the population 'in a proportion hitherto unknown'. Furthermore, America's new independence will allow 'the human mind to be exercised [...] and its powers enlarged'; Americans will become 'a people exemplary for integrity in their dealings; for honour and public virtue'.¹⁰⁰ Payne's book presents the Revolution as a radical

⁹⁸ This is not to imply that British works disregard events in South America: for William Pinnock, the early nineteenth-century South American Wars of Independence are 'the most important [event] in American history' alongside the initial European discoveries and conquests, and U. S. War of Independence. See *A Comprehensive Grammar of Modern Geography and History. For the Use of Schools and for Private Tuition* (2nd edn., London, 1834), p. 418.

⁹⁹ See Bradley, 'The British Public and the American Revolution', pp. 124-54; Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence*, pp. 129-65; Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 237-84.

¹⁰⁰ Payne, *Universal Geography*, ii. 665.

innovation: new agricultural uses of space will facilitate independence from Europe, build a state on fresh commercial and civic principles, and even effect intellectual and moral improvements. To support these arguments, the book provides up-to-date maps which assert the United States' burgeoning dominance: they accentuate its size compared to the rest of the continent and use emphatic borders to show its firmly established presence.¹⁰¹ Other maps eschew the western border into order to celebrate the United States as a large and confident country seeking further expansion (see figure 3).¹⁰² [INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

John Walker's *Elements of Geography* (1788, third edition 1800) also adopts an aggressively pro-Revolution tone: 'the friends of humanity must rejoice to see them [the Americans] cutting short the barbarous and sanguinary code of laws which they derived from Europe'. This project is not yet complete: in some respects, the United States is still 'shackled with the ancient prejudices of Europe', notably slavery and other 'old prejudices, follies and superstitions'.¹⁰³ However, the work understands the Revolution not simply as a disruptive juncture, but as an on-going, innovatory process: through its new constitution, America can gradually divorce itself from the familiar precepts and practices which define Europe and its prior engagement with the new world.¹⁰⁴ Formerly a mere appendage defined mostly in terms of imperial priorities, America is now a truly new, independent space in which to explore – and realise – new political and societal principles. These geography books tap into what has been called 'utopian thinking' about the Revolution.¹⁰⁵ They anticipate America's great 'political importance' and the resultant 'extraordinary consequences': 'at some

¹⁰¹ 'North America with the Boundaries of the Thirteen United States, as Settled by the Treaty of 1783' and 'The United States of America 1791', in Payne, *Universal Geography*, ii, following pp. 624 and 664.

¹⁰² 'A New Map of North America, showing all the New Discoveries 1791', in Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer; or Compendious Geographical Dictionary* (7th edn [?], London, 1791), following p. entry on 'Amby'. Edition numbers for this work are inconsistent: Sitwell identifies a fifth edition in 1791 and a sixth in 1815, with nearly a dozen variants and reprints between these dates. See *Special Geography*, p. 121. Compare McCorkle, *Carto-Bibliography*, pp. 70-75. Similar maps also appear in *New and Complete System of Universal Geography* (1796), ii, following p. 82; Guthrie, *Grammar* (1799), following p. 868.

¹⁰³ John Walker, *Elements of Geography and of Natural and Civil History* (3rd edn., London, 1800), pp. 573-4.

¹⁰⁴ The volume includes copious constitutional documents as evidence of the changes underway: see Walker, *Elements*, pp. 554-73.

¹⁰⁵ Gary B. Nash, 'Sparks from the Altar of '76: International Repercussions and Reconsiderations of the American Revolution', in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c.1760-1840* (New York, 2010), p. 1. See also Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1977), esp. pp. 242-66.

future day’, says one, ‘America [...may] boast that she is the cradle of the human race’.¹⁰⁶

Such effusive accounts of the Revolution are relatively unusual; more commonly, geographical texts modestly revise their conceptions of America to accommodate novel developments. Responding quickly to the end of the conflict, the 1785 edition of Guthrie’s *Geographical Grammar* in part reproduces the text of the 1770 edition, but adds some approving remarks on ‘the establishment of a new Republic’: its religious tolerance, representative government (‘all power resided in the people, and was derived from them’), press freedoms, and ‘free, independent and virtuous people’.¹⁰⁷ The 1795 up-dating of Richard Brookes’s *General Gazetteer* also modifies an earlier text with compliments about the ‘admirably calculated’ constitution and the ‘illustrious George Washington’. Significantly too, the United States increasingly defines the whole continent: a list of colonial possessions is included only after details of the various U. S. states.¹⁰⁸ The purpose here is to emphasise America’s newly distinctive character, and to suggest the emergence of a unique non-imperial American space with its own history and perspective. Some texts include their accounts of the Revolution in entries for the United States rather than for Britain, arguing for the conflict as a foundational event, rather than as the appendix to longstanding imperial endeavour.¹⁰⁹ And others even ventriloquize the American voice, talking about ‘the late war which brought about *our* separation from Great Britain’.¹¹⁰

All these perspectives recondition the ‘novelty’ theme in order to understand America as a space of new ideas and opportunities. Thanks to the Revolution, the continent no

¹⁰⁶ Bigland, *Geographical and Historical View*, v. 464; Malte-Brun, *Universal Geography*, v. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (9th edn., London, 1785), pp. 56, 776, 800-2.

¹⁰⁸ Brookes, *General Gazetteer* (‘9th edn’, London, 1795), entry on ‘America’. The reproduced text is from the original 1762 edition.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, *Glasgow Geography*, iv. 417.

¹¹⁰ *Universal Geography* (1796), ii. 154, emphasis added. This volume appears to reproduce text *verbatim* from Jedidiah Morse’s *American Geography* (1st edn. 1789). Compare Morse, *The American Geography, or A View of the Present Situation of the United States of America*, (London, 1794) , pp. 105-272, and *Universal Geography* (1796), ii. 105-204. The quotation cited above therefore derives from Morse (*American Geography*, p. 198), who is explicitly setting out to write geography from an American perspective: see Brückner, *Geographic Revolution*, esp. pp. 107-120. Morse himself drew from earlier British works: see J. K. Wright, ‘Some British “Grandfathers” of American Geography’, in Ronald Miller and John Wreford Watson, eds., *Geographical Essays in Memory of Alan G. Ogilvie* (London, 1959), pp. 144-65.

longer preserves and displays the primeval past; instead, it both represents and enacts the prospect of social and political change.¹¹¹ Note, for example, the energetic and spatially expansive language in the 1819 edition of Guthrie's *Grammar*: the United States 'excites universal attention' due to its 'augmentation of its territory and power, the extraordinary extension of its commerce, and the enterprising spirit of its people', as well as its 'progress' in 'clearing of land'.¹¹² These comments are underpinned by a view of history which privileges transformative potential: America sets a progressive example to the whole globe, partly because it is apparently positioned outside the tired trajectories of the old world.

This is not, however, the full story, since arguments for post-Revolutionary American 'novelty' – just like the cognate ideas from which they emerge – are founded upon reference to Europe. Payne's *Universal Geography* states that America has 'entirely changed the political system of Europe', and the anonymous *System of Geography* (1807) makes a similar point when it dwells on how America has rebalanced the geopolitical and economic strengths of European states.¹¹³ In some cases, Europe is the causal impetus for American innovation, as well as being the context for comparison. Though it praises the achievements of the United States, Guthrie's 1785 *Grammar* notes that indigenous South Americans remain 'very unlike the generality of the people of the ancient hemisphere': they are 'more feeble in the frame, less vigorous in the efforts of the mind'. Americans are innately 'averse to toil', and it is European (specifically British) intervention and migration, culminating in a 'war between the mother country and the colonies', which has ultimately enabled the successes of the new state.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the United States will inaugurate (or perhaps re-enact) 'the principles of British jurisprudence [...] over a new continent'; it will be a new 'seat of mighty empires, distinguished by cities extensive as Rome, learned as Athens, and beautiful as Palmyra'.¹¹⁵ Not only are America's apparent innovations considered in terms of their impact on Europe, but the very notion of that change is premised on refinement of a set of European priorities and suppositions.

¹¹¹ For similar contemporary views, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America* (2 vols., Princeton, 1959-64), i. 239-42

¹¹² Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (44th edn., London, 1819), pp. 805, 813. The edition number is Sitwell's, see *Special Geography*, p. 283.

¹¹³ Payne, *Universal Geography*, ii. 625; *System of Geography* (1807), ii. 261.

¹¹⁴ Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (1785), pp. 772, 776.

¹¹⁵ Payne, *Universal Geography*, ii. 666; Gordon, *New Geographical Grammar*, p. 450.

Other geographical works simply denigrate the Revolution's significance, and in doing so assert the continued pre-eminence of European empires. Extraordinarily, some decline to discuss the Revolution in substantive detail at all. Baldwin's *Universal System of Geography* (1794) – a work of 812 double-column pages – devotes only eleven paragraphs to the 'unfortunate contest', culminating in some bland and deadpan remarks on its exorbitant cost and 'regretted conclusion'.¹¹⁶ As late as 1819, Brookes's *General Gazetteer* makes almost no overt mention of the Revolution in its article on 'America', admitting only that 'this vast colonial territory has seceded from the protection of the mother country, and been acknowledged an independent country'.¹¹⁷ The maps in these texts reinforce their arguments. Old plates were sometimes re-used to save expense, but by choosing to employ long out-dated maps, a geography book could ignore or downplay the Revolution's effects and importance.¹¹⁸ Baldwin's *Universal System* employs a twelve-year old map of America originally printed in Millar's *New and Universal System* (1782) – an image which makes no acknowledgement of the Revolution and shows British colonies extending to the Mississippi (see figure 4).¹¹⁹ The objective is to suggest the Revolution's irrelevance; it remains apposite to refer to America primarily in terms of its old colonial connections. Some early nineteenth-century works even decline to acknowledge the growing territory of the United States. Maps in John Smith's *System of Modern Geography* (1810-11) and Kelly's *Complete System* (1814-17) ignore the Louisiana Purchase (1803), suggesting instead that the continent remains largely unclaimed or dominated by European powers. In this context, the United States is an aberration in a continued imperial trajectory.¹²⁰ [INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

¹¹⁶ Baldwin, *Universal System*, pp. 797-8. This work appears to be largely a reprint of Millar's *New and Universal System* (1782) by the same publisher. Compare Millar, *New and Universal System*, pp. 797-8. For a similarly brief account, see Bankes et al., *Complete System*, p. 493.

¹¹⁷ Brookes, *General Gazetteer* (1819), entry on 'America'.

¹¹⁸ See McCorkle, *Carto-bibliography*, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁹ 'North America Agreeable to the Most Approved Maps and Charts by Thos. Condor', in Baldwin, *Universal System*, following p. 788. The volume does contain a map of the United States, but it is not bound in the section on 'America' along with the Miller-derived map; instead it is in the section on Spain following p. 708. McCorkle, *Carto-bibliography*, pp. 44, 213

¹²⁰ 'North America', in John Smith, *A System of Modern Geography* (2 vols., London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1810-11), ii, following p. 998; 'North America', in Kelly, *Complete System*, i, following p. 528.

At their most extreme, a few geography books even interpret the Revolution as a British imperial triumph. William Gordon's *New Geographical Grammar* (1789) comments on the United States' lack of infrastructure and money as a sure sign of future 'anarchy and confusion', asserting that the British Empire has in fact strengthened itself by abandoning 'the pernicious maxim of extending the limits of empire abroad'.¹²¹ By contrast, John Pinkerton's *Modern Geography* (1802) argues that 'the American War marked no diminution in Britain's commitment to empire'. Pinkerton notes how America will remain tied to its 'parent state' for commercial reasons, and hopes that Africa and Asia will also 'be animated by the English character', particularly its supposed 'benevolence and integrity, and [...] rational and practical freedom'.¹²² Despite losing the War of Independence, Pinkerton says, Britain has won a larger victory, shaping America (and potentially other continents) in its image.

These texts therefore absorb American space into a British and European narrative, relegating the post-Revolutionary United States to a subsidiary position which demonstrates continued the imperial mastery of the old world. For some works, this absorption is literal: several discuss the Revolution under their entries for 'England', in the process making an implicit statement about the continent's lack of independent volition.¹²³ One text even insists that 'the political history of the United States is blended with that of England', and refers its readers to the former for a full account of the Revolution's 'furious and disgraceful quarrels'.¹²⁴ The strategy here is to present America as still residing conceptually in an imperial context: the book does not pretend that the Revolution never occurred, but instead conducts a textual annexation, making the event part of a continuing imperial paradigm, rather than a new narrative of political independence. Michael Adams's *New Royal System* (1794) interprets the America as a demonstration of British imperial theory and practice: previously it evidenced 'the greatest degree of prosperity and glory', but a failure to govern with

¹²¹ Gordon, *New Geographical Grammar*, p. 475.

¹²² John Pinkerton, *Modern Geography* (2 vols., London, 1802), i. 26. Pinkerton goes on to attack the Revolution bitterly: he comments on the 'selfishness and avarice' of the republic and notes that 'the spirit of a commonwealth is money'. These remarks have an anti-Semitic aspect: 'it is to be hoped and expected that this character will not, like that of the Jews, become indelible' (ii. 560-4).

¹²³ See *Historical and Commercial System* (1800), pp. 486, 181-5.

¹²⁴ Kelly, *Complete System*, i. 612, 590. The comments on the problems with Revolutionary government are in the context of an attack on the 'political intrigues' typical of 'those who espoused the principles of the French Revolution'.

‘moderation and wisdom’ subsequently demonstrated imperial ‘folly, arrogance or arbitrary designs’. For this work, America is primarily an instrument with which to measure the achievements and current state of Britain.¹²⁵

Even those texts which acknowledge American independence often present the United States as entering into an existing political and economic system dominated by European powers and their priorities. An edition of *Salmon’s Grammar* published mid-conflict emphasises the emergence of a new imperial competitor. The true cause of the Revolution, the book explains, is that Britain and the colonies are ‘natural rivals to one another’ and that war was precipitated by a trading imbalance to America’s detriment. Though the book is not especially sympathetic to the Revolutionary cause – Americans are ‘very unwilling to part with their money, even in their own defence’ – it nonetheless treats the emerging country as a newly independent participant in a global imperial state system. It is not a breakaway rebel, casting off the concerns of its former rulers, but a competitor driven by the same interests as imperial powers: trade, governance, and revenue.¹²⁶ When Gordon’s *Geographical Grammar* (1789) details at length the treaty settlement between the United States and Britain, it does so in ways which emphasise the former’s entrance into familiar geopolitical practice: the concern for ‘government, territorial rights and property’, materialised by defined borders and legal formulations, and which define the spatial mechanics of European states.¹²⁷ Indeed, some even see the United States itself as a ‘rising empire’ which seeks out ‘unappropriated western territory’ and divides it into ‘new states’ as part of an ‘amalgamation of its territory and power’.¹²⁸ In these books, America may no longer be a literal part of European territory, but it is absorbed into established geopolitical principles. In that sense, America’s supposed independence is less an abrupt deviation into a new political system, and more an ‘extension of the European

¹²⁵ Adams, *New Royal System*, p. 940. Adams’s article on ‘Political Geography’ (pp. 928-940) is strongly redolent of the article in Guthrie’s *Grammar* ‘Of the Origins of National Laws, Government and Commerce’; it emulates the general structure and repeats certain phrases. Compare Adams, *New Royal System*, p. 933 and Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (1770), p. xxxiv.

¹²⁶ Tytler, *Universal Geographical Grammar* (1778), pp. 699-704. This edition is confident of British victory, writing that ‘the downfall of the American republic seems fast approaching’ (p. 704). By the 1782 edition, however, the text is more circumspect, noting that the Americans ‘never seem to have had the remotest thoughts of submission’. See Tytler, *The New Universal Grammar [...] the Whole being an Improvement and Continuation of Mr Salmon’s Grammar* (4th edn., Edinburgh, 1782), p. 746.

¹²⁷ Gordon, *New Geographical Grammar*, p. 491.

¹²⁸ Bigland, *Geographical and Historical View*, v. 459; Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (31st edn., Montrose, 1799), p. 891; Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar* (1819), p. 805.

state system.’¹²⁹ Despite its apparent political separation, for many texts America is still replication of European imperial practices and priorities.

*

On the surface, then, British geographical works seem to offer two distinct interpretations of the American Revolution. Some present the Revolution as a novel step in innovative social and political directions, whereas others emphasise more familiar imperial and European dynamics. Crucially though, these are not newly-crafted perspectives produced in response to Revolutionary events. Instead, they are derived from longstanding narratives which conceptualise the new world in terms of novelty, or as a projection of European concerns and priorities. In this respect, the Revolution specifies and modifies, but does not fundamentally alter, extant British frameworks about how to understand America. Importantly too, these frameworks are intimately connected because both regard the continent as a derivative space reliant on Europe for definition.

Far from being oppositional, emphases on novelty and familiarity are therefore simultaneous and mutually reinforcing: America’s newness is conceived in terms of comparison with Europe; and those Eurocentric projections are framed as new realisations of a prospective ideal Europe. For all British geographical books, America is to some extent an embodiment of a potential future. It is a quasi-imagined space which exemplifies certain aspirations and preconceptions, or even an idealised version of a particular idea of Europe: a fairer, more tolerant state; a revitalised place of opportunity; a rejection of old, tired forms of government; a new, more powerful, kind of empire. In the sense that it represents a new futurity, America signifies both novel possibilities and a projected version of the old world. America acts as a mirror to British and European self-perception and desires.

These conclusions substantiate recent scholarship which understands the Revolution not as a transformative disjuncture but as part of longstanding European processes and continuities. The intellectual causes of the Revolution, for example, lie in long-term disputes about political ideas and governance. For Stephen Conway the colonists’

¹²⁹ Eliga H. Gould, ‘Revolution and Counter-Revolution’, in David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York, 2002), p. 210

discontent emerges from their adherence to seventeenth-century ideas about ‘self-governing communities’, and a resultant ‘clinging to old ways’ in resisting perceived metropolitan reforms. In other words, America was widely understood in political terms as a British derivative, and the nature of that derivation is a matter for debate and, ultimately, conflict.¹³⁰ Similarly, Jonathan Clark argues that the Revolution was not a radical rupture, but was instead a ‘civil war among people who openly subscribed to similar ideals’. Both sides drew ammunition from ‘ancient English’ ideas about liberty, governmental prerogative and religious duty; and the conflict emerged from constitutional difficulties which had similarly bedevilled metropolitan relations with Scotland, Wales and Ireland.¹³¹ For these historians, British contemporaries understood the Revolution overwhelmingly within the framework of Old World rivalries and politics. The war itself was considered partly as a global struggle between European powers;¹³² and partly as a domestic and imperial episode in which the colonists were either ‘rebels’, or defenders of ‘rights held in common with the people of Britain’.¹³³ Opponents and supporters in Britain continued to think of the colonists as ‘part of the transatlantic British nation’; and only the colonists’ alliance with France challenged this idea by tapping into long-running geo-political anxieties.¹³⁴ Even the ultimate success of the Revolution did not necessarily overturn British attitudes towards America. Britain’s commitment to empire was largely undiminished, and the key elements of the old Atlantic order were soon reconstituted: in migration, trade, capital, and cultural exchange the United States remained dominated by Britain.¹³⁵ Indeed, for P. J. Marshall, British politicians did not fundamentally change their attitudes at all: relations ‘were still judged, as they had been in the days of empire, primarily in terms of profit and loss’; in foreign policy

¹³⁰ Stephen Conway, *A Short History of the American Revolutionary War* (London, 2013), pp. 32, 31-56.

¹³¹ Jonathan Clark, *From Restoration to Reform: The British Isles, 1660-1832* (London, 2014), pp. 229-42.

¹³² Conway, *Short History*, pp. 87-119.

¹³³ P. J. Marshall, *Remaking the British Atlantic: The United States and the British Empire after American Independence* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 9-10.

¹³⁴ Stephen Conway, ‘From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739-1783’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., lix (2002): esp. pp. 87-100.

¹³⁵ P. J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2005), p. 353; Jay Sexton, ‘Epilogue: The United States in the British Empire’, in Stephen Foster, ed., *British North America in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 318-48.

terms, America was ‘to be dictated to on commercial matters, but otherwise ignored’.¹³⁶

The evidence from geographical works, then, corroborates and deepens this recent historiography. Geography books articulate long-term, commonplace British understandings of America, and show how those precepts continue to shape perceptions of the Revolution and its aftermath into the nineteenth century. The Revolution itself was not necessarily a paradigm-shifting event in British culture: even expressions of its apparent novelty tap into established traditions for conceptualising the American continent. Importantly too, these books provide insights not restricted to the views of intellectual or political elites. Geographical works, like other forms of mass-produced and mass-consumed writing, deserve to be taken seriously, not only in terms of their complex content, but also in terms of what they can suggest about the ideas circulating among the many people who produced, purchased and read them. ‘Popular’ mentalities are never easy to discern, but a thorough textual examination of seventy years of geographical reference works can tell us more about how British people understood ‘America’ in the era of the Revolution.

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¹³⁶ Marshall, *Remaking the British Atlantic*, p. 313.

Figure Captions for:
**‘America and the American Revolution in British Geographical Thought,
 c.1760-1830’**

Figure 1

‘A New and Accurate Map of North America’, in Charles Middleton, *A New and Complete System of Geography* (2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1778-9), ii., following p. 486 (detail). First published in the 1777-8 edition of this work, this map presents America as an undiscovered and unfamiliar space: note the blank areas labelled ‘parts unknown’ and ‘gr. space unknown’. Unlike in figure 2, unexplored regions are not assigned to imperial ownership. Imperial powers are, however, within easy reach: Britain and France are shown as proximate, and the Azores provide a prominent and convenient staging post for trans-Atlantic travel. Image: King’s College London, Foyle Special Collections Library, FOL. G114 MID.

Figure 2

‘South America Agreeable to the Most Approved Maps and Charts by Mr Kitchin’, in George Henry Millar, *The New and Universal System of Geography, being a Complete History and Description of the Whole World* (London, 1782), following p. 778 (detail). The central interpretative move of this map is the key in the upper right corner. The key designates regions – even blank areas – to imperial powers, and in the process territorialises America: Brazil to Portugal; Chili and Peru to Spain; the Falklands to England, and so on. This copy has been damaged from repeated folding. Image: Library of Congress, G114.M65.

Figure 3

‘A New Map of North America, showing all the New Discoveries 1791’, in Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer; or Compendious Geographical Dictionary* (9th edn., London, 1795), following entry on ‘America’ (detail). This map was first published in the 1791 edition, when it purported to be precisely up-to-date (see McCorkle, *Carto-Bibliography*, p. 74). It shows the United States as an established and expansive state: its name sprawls westwards with no clear delimitation to its potential growth. Image: Library of Congress, G102.B87
1795.

Figure 4

‘North America Agreeable to the Most Approved Maps and Charts by Thos. Condor’, in George Augustus Baldwyn, *A New Royal, Authentic, Complete and Universal System of Geography* (London, [1794]), following p. 788 (detail). This map makes no allusion to the Revolution and was originally published twelve years earlier in George Henry Millar, *The New and Universal System of Geography, being a Complete History and Description of the Whole World* (London, 1782), following p. 788. Its re-use in Baldwyn’s work suggests a deliberate under-playing of the Revolution’s significance, not least because a more modern ‘Map of the United States and of North America’ is hidden away in the section on Spain (following p. 708). The re-used Millar map, by contrast, is sited prominently next to the main article on America. The text also disregards the Revolution; it is covered in just a few paragraphs. Image: Library of Congress, G114.B19.