

1812 in the Americas

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is the end product of a conference held in Brest at the University of Western Brittany, France, in June 1812. The point then was to explore the state of the United States in that period, but also to go beyond the military issue of the conflict to look at the social situation of the republic, its religious environment, trade ambitions, and war goals. It was also meant to assess how the country, through its many populations and social groups, reacted to the war and envisioned the post-war period. That is why the essays presented here deal with a remarkable variety of topics from very different perspectives. From a sweeping view of the place of North America in international politics down to the micro-analysis of Catholic presence west of the Appalachians, these essays depict the huge diversity of circumstances that defined the new nation.

The presence of scholars from Europe and the United States reinforced the different approaches and the scale from which the topics were researched. However, the conflict is viewed from the American side of the Atlantic. If the war of 1812 is today one of the least remembered armed conflicts in US history, one might argue however that the complexity of its circumstances, either prior, during, or after the three-year struggle, remains as challenging and exciting as any other historical period. Americans, white, black, and native, mostly built their future views of the nation on the achievements or lack thereof that came out of the war. Here is one short attempt at introducing some of the most pressing questions surrounding the period.

Troy Bickham introduces his book, *The Weight of Vengeance*, with a revealing anecdote on the state of American minds at the end of the war of 1812. Secretary of State James Monroe repeatedly complained to the British diplomat in charge that Britain came first in the wording of all sections of the treaty of Ghent (1814). As the author reminds us, the war “was a catalogue of American disasters,” but Monroe made it clear that the country now did “not stand in the same situation as at former periods” (quoted in Bickham 3). The war changed the United States in many ways. But it was not an ordinary war. First, it came as an offspring of the War of Independence which had ended only nineteen years before Madison signed the declaration of hostility in June 1812. The new conflict seemed to revive the old opposition between Loyalists to the Crown and American Patriots. Tensions had never totally abetted but a “cold war,” to use Alan

Taylor's phrase, persisted in the Borderlands until the second conflict broke out (Taylor 15). The country was far from united against the old colonial power. The South and West saw the lingering presence of European powers with mounting impatience while New England merchants enjoyed and relished the bounty of English trade.

However, Taylor also shows that up in Canada, even more people simply wanted to enjoy the cheap lands and low taxes offered by the British government, and cared little for war. In the old American Northwest, settlers had been flooding Indian lands since the end of the revolution and were demanding federal protection from British-supported native raids. As Donald Hickey phrases it, "[I]n some ways, the war of 1812 looked more to the past than to the future" (Hickey 2). The enemy was still the same and the stakes were no less than American sovereignty. In urging Congress to prepare for war in November 1811, Madison accused Britain of "trampling on rights which no independent Nation can relinquish" (quoted in Taylor 127). It seemed that little had been accomplished since 1783.

In *The Civil War of 1812*, Alan Taylor goes as far as saying that the great revolutionary struggle of Empire vs. Republic that had pitted England against parts of its North American colonies in the 1770s found great echoes in the renewed opposition of the 1810s. Status and independence, again, were the bones of contention. Maritime rights, and particularly the contentious British practice of impressment, were closely linked to issues of nationalities. The British Empire considered that any person born a British subject should remain a subject for life. On the contrary, the new republic viewed naturalization of foreign subjects as a choice of citizenship made by the individual, a re-enactment of the revolutionary act of turning from a British subject to an American citizen. Taylor also suggests that ideological differences ran not only along clear cut lines but crossed every boundary that could be thought of, geographical, national, or political. Even families found themselves at odds during the war. Some had crossed over to Canada and family members on either side fought each other during the American invasion (Taylor 7). Irish-Americans fought Irish soldiers enlisted in imperial forces; Republicans saw Federalists as lackeys to the British; Native Americans had to take sides in a conflict that allowed no neutral bystanders. In a sentence that sums up his whole argument, Taylor writes: "In this North American civil war, brother fought brother in a borderland of mixed people" (7).

The revolutionary rhetoric of freedom, independence and sovereignty rang from one corner of the country to the next. Newspapers led the

charge, publishing pamphlets, articles, and toasts in defense of the republic once again threatened by a cruel and tyrannical empire. As Nicole Eustace reminds us in *1812, War and the Passions of Patriotism*, “many more people in the United States read and wrote about the War of 1812 than fought in it” (Eustace x). She argues that feeling played an essential role in that war, carrying images and words that aroused the American and Canadian imaginations and participated in an emotional appeal for or against the war that helped define American and Canadian identities and hopes for the future.¹ As Daniel Boorstin warns in a preface, the War of 1812 may well be called a “sobering war” for the United States. It led the country to reorganize its military, recognize its weaknesses and federalize its armed forces. But even more interestingly, Boorstin suggests that “[T]he relatively small scale of its operations, the confusion of its causes, and the uncertainties of its conclusions—all these make a story in which we may see the ambiguities of international conflict drawn more vividly...” (Coles vi-vii). The war of 1812 did not only involve an imperial power and one of its former colonies, but it displayed the incredible diversity of the American continent and its myriad interests. Immigrants, patriots, native Americans, foreign troops all threw their forces into the conflict looking for often contradictory results. The turmoil not only reflected concrete tensions between two countries, it also testified to the efforts at nation building by peoples with widely differing agendas. The war crystallized and engulfed the tensions that had been building for years on the North American continent.

However, just as in 1775, many voices were heard and riots were quelled that opposed a conflict between brothers. War was felt to proceed from the “worst passions of the human heart” for a Maine pastor (quoted in Eustace 58). For the Federalists, it was the child of anti-British sentiments and would lead American commerce to ruin. Others looked at the sorry state of American military capacities and felt that the desire to go to war was close to treason against the well-being of the nation. There were two levels to this feeling.

Canada quickly stood as the main military objective of the war for the US, particularly in a context where the American Navy and privateers

¹ Brock’s words at the opening of the Legislature in July, 1812, testify to the issue: “We are engaged in an awful and eventful contest. By unanimity and dispatch in our councils, and by vigour in our operations, we may teach the enemy this lesson, that a country defended by freemen, enthusiastically devoted to the cause of their king and constitution, can never be conquered.” [Tupper. *Life and Correspondence of Brock*. (1845). London. 203, quoted in W. J. Rattray. “The War of 1812.” *The Scots in British North America*. (1880). Maclear And Company. Web.

seemed highly incapable of resisting the mighty power of the British fleet despite the excellence and experience of American seamen (Hickey 90-91). Even if demographic advantage seemed overwhelmingly in favor of the United States, republican defiance of standing armies and reliance on state militias and volunteers had weakened the American military organization when it came to fighting against hardened and disciplined British troops. However, as Troy Bickham argues, Canada was not considered as an end in itself, but as a means to negotiate with Britain when time would come to sit at the negotiating table (87-89). Jefferson's optimistic phrase that Canada's annexation would only be a "matter of marching" (quoted in Bickham 89) proved however as miscalculated in 1812 as it had been in 1775-1776. Both campaigns fell through in the northern climate as quickly and as miserably. Despite a lack of regulars and a short supply of militia fighters on a stretched-out frontier, British Canada repealed the American attempt once again.

Upper Canada had become a refuge to many Loyalists after 1783. That very area was even carved for them in 1791 out of the Province of Québec. According to the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, "between 80,000 and 100,000 (Loyalists) eventually fled, about half of them to Canada".² 80% settled in Nova Scotia, 8,000 in Quebec and the rest of them established villages along the borderlands and the St Lawrence River from Montreal to Detroit (Menig 2: 42; SLMC). This massive influx of mostly English-speaking, protestant populations changed the demographic makeup of Canada. Loyalists and "late" Loyalists who migrated a few years after American independence became quite influential in the regions they colonized, asking the central government for better representation of their interests, exerting "increasing pressure on the government of London to reform the administration of the colony in their favour" (SLMC). These new settlers were not all English speakers: Germans, Danes, Dutchmen and blacks joined them. Along with the already diverse population of the colony, this migration changed the distribution of the languages spoken above the border and initiated a new period in Canadian history. As Menig suggests, it also blurred the national boundaries between the two countries: the movement was "primarily North American. It was land these people were after. Few seemed to care whether they lived under the American or the British flag".³ Obviously, this ironically reflected the Native American sentiment towards the artificial border which divided up their tribal lands into nonsensical parts.

² Wilson, Bruce G. (2009). "Loyalists." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

³ Burt, A.L. *The United States, Great Britain, and British North-America*. Quoted in Menig 2: 44.

The second opposition to American war hawks came from within the United States.

More dangerously for the stability of the US, internal tensions between parties, towns, and regions threatened to pull the fragile American unity apart. Southerners and westerners as well as northern borderland settlers were in near open warfare against British and Spanish presence in their areas. They accused those foreign powers of arming and exciting Native resentment against American settlers. The British had kept forts along the border in order to maintain their strong relations with indigenous groups such as the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois. Detroit-Fort Malden was a case in point, what Menig has called the “initial focus of international conflict on the mainland” (Menig 2: 46). The situation in the American South was very similar. Spanish support to the Muskogee/Creek confederacy and the presence of British military officers from the Bahamas among southern tribes were mounting threats that regional commanders like Tennessee’s Andrew Jackson were screaming against. A long time before the declaration of war, people settling on the borderlands North and South had been experiencing an everyday guerilla war.

American Indians, on the contrary, continued to enjoy the presence of balancing forces against increasing American encroachment upon their lands. In the image of the Haudenosaunee/Iroquois in the North and the Muskogee/Creek in the South, indigenous groups used diplomacy as their “tool of choice” (Shannon 10). As Shannon demonstrates in *Iroquois Diplomacy on the Early American Frontier*, “negotiation on the colonial frontier [and later in the early republic] also demanded flexibility and innovation, the ability to create and maintain peace with others who rarely shared your interests and perspectives” (10). Indigenous groups living on the borderlands were able to keep active diplomatic ties with all sides in order to retain control over their lands as long as they could.

African-Americans also had a stake in the war. With the flight of Loyalists northward, about two thousand Blacks reached Canada after the American Revolution. Another thirty-five hundred settled mostly in Nova Scotia as a reward for their service during the war on the side of Britain. In 1812, two thousand more Blacks went to Canada and, along with the six hundred maroons from Jamaica shipped to Canada in 1796, they participated in the defense of the region against US invasion in the early stage of the conflict.⁴

⁴ “A Quick History of Black People in Canada.” (2014). Ontario Black History Society. Web. For a quick overview of black history in Canada as well as some more recent trends, see Anne Milan and Kelly Tran. “Blacks in Canada: A long

The seeds of implosion were also contained in American political culture. Despite the country's rising domination by the Jeffersonian party, tensions ran high in all quarters, fed by radically different political views on Europe, trade, and expansion, with ideas and debates developing thanks to an expanding national press. Jefferson's ambitious imperialistic policy in the West with the Louisiana Purchase and the subsequent exploratory expeditions he sent out were mixed with a Francophile policy that many in the United States disliked. A highly charged political opposition led many Federalists to secretly inform the British of American movements while New England contemplated secession. Enormous waves of new Irish immigrants filled American battalions with people eager to take revenge on the British for the quelling of Ireland's rebellion in 1798 (Taylor 7-10, Reid *Armies of the Irish Rebellion*).

Economic interests were also at stake which differed from one end of the federation to the next. If New England merchants favored trade with Britain—and most American trade was done between the two countries—other sections of the country saw Britain as monopolizing international trade and dictating the direction of an increasingly globalized Atlantic economy. Black slaves, fur-trading Indians and Scots in Canada and the American borderlands, Pennsylvania German farmers or northern Irish planters in the South all now relied on a global trade highly dependent on the British industrial revolution. But these groups did not profit equally from such transatlantic commerce nor did they benefit similarly from the policies set up by London or Washington. If the New England merchants enjoyed a highly profitable trade with the British, Scottish, Irish or even British immigrants hated Britain for impressing their nationals under the Union Jack. Western farmers had hated the Jefferson Administration for declaring an embargo in 1807 that had proved both highly inefficient and detrimental to their agricultural interests. Institutions like the Bank of the United States or Hamilton's national policy of improvements and high tariffs did not please the great barons of the South who bought their products abroad very dearly and adhered to a strict States' rights policy. Hence, lots of people saw more interest in crossing the border to Canada or for some, as Aaron Burr did in 1806, in devising wild schemes to seize parts of Mexico or divide the US into several smaller countries (Risjord 356-360). However, the dreams of expansion into Canadian immensity were pleasing to speculators, planters, and opponents to the imperial system. American hegemony over the North American continent would

thus be complete. Jefferson's dream of the Empire of Liberty would store up even more space for the generations to come.

The war, its causes and possible outcome generated an enormous amount of public debate. As I suggested earlier after Nicole Eustace, many words were uttered and written about the war. As Donald R. Hickey reminds us, the United States enjoyed a thriving press of three hundred and forty-five titles on the eve of the war, not counting "country editions of city papers". These newspapers widely reprinted congressional debates, speeches, but also "editorials, news from home and abroad, long-winded essays, bits of local gossips, literary pieces, poetry, humor, and advertisements" (Hickey 319). They were the American forum. The press truly reflected a widening national debate about issues local, domestic or international which testified to the growing democratic appeal of politics to US citizens. The press was partisan and instrumental either in defending government policies or attacking them. Cartoons slashed at government decisions or ridiculed government opponents as harshly. Famous articles or speeches were not only published in big coastal city papers but widely reprinted in any and all publications around the country only days or weeks following their original appearance, building up a national audience. Nation carving largely profited from the fiery political opposition reflected in the newspapers. Poems also conveyed political ideas and philosophical positions which were daily argued in the tavern and saloon. Pamphlets were circulated, sermons delivered then published in the printed form. Words were everywhere, spoken out in public, printed on the page, listened to, read out, argued upon. They made the stuff of identities, politics, trade, and war.

The 2012 Conference that took place in Brest, France, was held in two languages: English and French. I have kept this bilingual opportunity for this volume. Here is a short account of the arguments and approaches developed in this collection of essays.

The opening text is a fascinating reflection on the geopolitical environment in which the new republic found itself less than twenty years after the end of the war of Independence. Here, Adam Rothman takes up the concept of the paracolonial republic to explore the surroundings of the United States and to counter the usual view of the period as post-colonial in character. In fact, Rothman reminds us that the US in 1812 was an exception in the Atlantic world. Surrounded by monarchical colonial powers such as Spain and Britain, the republic itself was struggling with an irresistible desire to expand, using the imperial metaphor and acting against indigenous populations as any other colonial state, imposing its

worldview and trade policies as well as its cultural definitions on populations who resisted acculturation and the theft of their ancestral lands. That resistance was partly successful—they have retained a cultural heritage down to this day—but it also failed to shield them from expropriation and cultural oppression.

In the words of Gilman M. Ostrander, the Republic of Letters in the new United States was still a “collegiate aristocracy” at the end of the Revolutionary period.⁵ Literature had a slow beginning in the US. The novel in particular was slow to account for the specificity of American experience. As Ed White demonstrates in his essay, novel production before the war of 1812 was a mere four or five books a year and it failed to provide an account of events that stuck to the speed of change before the war ended. On the contrary, according to the author, “the conventions of poetry were best suited to an engagement with historical events”. Thus Key’s “Star-Spangled Banner”, published as a broadside in 1814 under the title of “The Defense of Fort McHenry”, suggests a “reactivity” and a “temporality” that were far more adequate to the pace of events than the novel. White reviews those works which preceded the great take-off of American literature, before Washington Irving and Fenimore Cooper, reflecting as well as acting the Democratic-Republican cultural revolution of the Jeffersonian party over the national(ist) culture. He looks into the transition from the hegemony of European references in the former colonies to the advent of a sense of national culture in the United States. He thus finds poetry to be a far more flexible form, better adapted to the periodicity and reactivity of the press than lengthier novel productions.

Before they became characters in major American novels, American Indians were actors in the great American drama of conquest, playing off one colonial power against the others. As in the previous conflict, alliances with native warriors seemed capital in a region where frontier warfare would eventually decide of the outcome of the war. Whether with the Haudenosaunee in the North or the Muskogee in the South, powerful confederacies were under a lot of pressure by local and national American leaders to join the fight on the “right” side. The British had agitated Indian frustration for years, relying on old connections and also on promises of emancipation from colonization which the Treaty of Ghent eventually all but ignored. Indigenous groups were the great losers in the peace negotiations even if “Article IX restored lands claimed by Indian nations allied to the British during the war” (Shuck-Hall 8). But nobody in the US

⁵ Don Duhadaway. (January, 2001). Review of Gilman M. Ostrander, *Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1776-1865*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4858>

heeded such dispositions, and as Sheri Shuck-Hall demonstrates in her essay, the lands taken away by Andrew Jackson from the Muskogee were never surrendered. The author provides a detailed account of the cultural, political, and economic interests at stake within the Muskogee confederation on the eve of and during the war. Concomitant with the beginning of the conflict against the British, the Creek civil war, as it is known, (1813-1814), was the expression of deep rifts within this and other indigenous groups. Shuck-Hall shows how an acculturated metis class was rejected by traditionalist militants who followed Tecumseh's vision and arguments in rejecting what they deemed the deleterious influence of western civilization. She focuses her study on the fascinating character of William Weatherford, *Hoponika Fulsahi* (the Truth Maker), who joined the traditionalists despite his strong cultural and economic interests among the metis class. The author insists on the importance of individual biographies in order to personalize often generalizing studies of native behavior and attitudes. She insists on the complexity of such mixed personal experiences which provide vivid accounts of the ambiguous choices native people had to make for themselves and their relatives.

John Dickinson takes us to the heart of the early hours of the conflict in his account of the northern borderland and the place of Canada in the North American struggle. As suggested in the first part of this introduction, the war of 1812 unfolded unexpectedly more widely than within the confines of the United States. If Spanish possessions in the American South would soon be lost to the United States, Canada gained a new sense of itself after successfully defending its territory from US invasion. After putting a final stop to an attempt at conquering the vast lands of the North, Dickinson shows that Canadians of all hues and religions set the basis for myths and heroes that greatly participated in forging a national identity in the subsequent centuries. The interest of his text lies also in the links he makes between that founding event—which was far more celebrated two years ago than in the US—and subsequent periods in Canadian history, focusing rather on English-speaking Canada than on the *Belle Province*, although he writes in French. Dickinson explains that for a long time, English-speaking Canada was thought to be the norm north of the border and received little attention compared to the minorities such as indigenous groups or the French-speaking province. However, it took many decades before Canadian history took shape in history books. Fifty years after the conflict, Laura Secord still did not have a real place in the pantheon of famous Canadians. Worse, until the 20th century, the United States was perceived very negatively and remembered for the atrocities committed north of the border by American troops during the

revolutionary war as well as during the war of 1812. Dickinson reviews the literature of local historians of the 19th century who built upon the painful memories of American “desperados” in order to make sense of who Canadians were.

In an attempt to create a wider picture of the period, this volume also contains an essay by Nelly André on revolutionary women in South America. The reason for this topic in a volume on the Anglo-American war is mostly based on the all-inclusive attempt of the 2012 conference held in Brest of providing a wide-ranging view of the state of the Americas at the time. By reviewing the role of women in the different revolutionary conflicts that liberated Spanish colonies from their European tutelage, André points out an aspect of such troubled times that remains to be explored in the North American context. André’s argument revolves around the ideas that the conquest of the “New World” by the Spanish was first of all a conquest of indigenous women’s bodies. Very few books have been written on the subjects, if one excepts noticeable attempts like Karen Vieira Powers’s *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600* (2005) or Juan Francisco Maura’s *Women in the Conquest of the Americas* (1997).

The main character in the mythologization of indigenous women in the Spanish-speaking world is the “Malinche,” the Aztec woman who betrayed her people and helped Cortez win over Mexico. The women who resisted Spanish oppression in Latin American history are too often “invisible,” hidden from view by the huge shadows of the men by their side. Too much emphasis on a military-political history has pushed women to the little corners of national narratives. That is one of the reasons why André has chosen to present several women’s biographies and portraits in order to bring forward names and faces of women who did find some recognition in national narratives, sometime centuries after their high deeds.

National identity was a vital component of the young American republic. And culture was a fundamental element of the period. More than seven million people lived in the US in 1812. But many had emigrated there, often from Britain, Ireland, Scotland, what is today Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, not mentioning the forced immigrants from the eastern coast of Africa (Senegambia, the Windward (now Ivory) Coast, the Gold Coast–Ghana, the Bights of Benin and Biafra–Nigeria, Central and Southeast Africa–Cameroon, N. Angola).⁶ But nationalities

⁶ “Slave Trade and African American Ancestry,” nd, quoting Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, (1969), 221. Web.

were not the only parameter in the questioning of American identity. Sectionalism flared during those years, almost rifting the young nation apart as it had during the revolution and the years following 1783. Commercial interests, political philosophy, differing views of Europe threatened to tear the national fabric apart. As many recent authors writing about 1812, Marco Sioli here considers the events of the period under their cultural dimension. His essay looks at the ways the press first justified the war and praised US courage and honor, then how American newspapers reflected on the event and helped devise a more affirmed national identity despite the poor record of American military deeds. Sioli shows how newspapers reflected the increasing partisan character of the press in the US. His sources derive from the huge collection of early American newspapers at the Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia.

Another genre that had a major impact on the discussions about going to war against the British Empire was the sermon. Little has actually been done on the role of religion at the time of the war since William Gribbin's 1973 *Churches Militant*. Lucia Bergamasco's contribution is then a much-needed place to call for more research on this important subject at the onset of the great religious revival of the 19th century. Bergamasco delves into the prolific literature of that period to show that ministers were deeply involved in the rhetoric of war. Apart from the Quakers and Catholics, the established churches took sides and bitterly argued for or against the war in front of their congregations. Federalists forcefully rejected the conflict while Republicans massively sided with the government on this issue. The interest of these sermons is also closely linked to the proximity of the preachers with the people. If, as William Gribbin has stated, "the pulpit was the community pulse point," Bergamasco strives to show the many social and moral issues religious speakers encompassed in their discourses and homilies. Her careful and close reading of these texts takes us to the arguments that shook the nation, such as sectional antagonism, slavery, political and moral reformation. Federalist views may not have died out in the era of Good Feelings. She even suggests, along with some other historians today, that religious revival as well as the moral crusades of the 19th century partly come from the anti-war, mostly Federalist, activities of that period.

The last essay is a micro-analysis which centers on the development of the Catholic Church in the Mississippi Valley. Tangi Villerbu argues that far from being a remote frontier region, the Transappalachian West belongs to both Borderlands and Atlantic histories. He looks at the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to set up an organized system of parishes and dioceses from the Great Lakes in the North down to Kentucky, and

from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. As suggested by Kathleen DuVal in her review of the term, works on borderlands are “multi-perspectival and cross-cultural studies of different peoples coming together.”⁷ This part of the United States still experienced frontier conditions, and prior to the war, was still mainly Indian country. With the British in the North, the Spanish in the South, and a very strong French presence in towns like St Louis or Detroit, the area was a borderland between very different and competing cultures. The essay explores the way the Church set out to organize space for its own development, caught in a very complex web of resisting Native nations, foreign powers, eastern populations’ migrations, and the uncertain consequences of a continental war.

Perhaps another collection of essays should be devoted to the European views of the conflict. British and French attitudes did a lot in the years prior to the war to bring the United States to the conflict. The US was drawn into European affairs despite the cautious policies of four US presidents. Washington’s warning about staying out of imperialistic countries’ business could do little when commerce was in essence already globalized and the US was already so tightly connected to the economies of the “old” continent. After almost twenty years of efforts to fend off conflict with European belligerents in a Europe plagued by Napoleon’s continental ambitions and Britain’s imperial domination of the high seas, the US saw war as the very last resort to salvage what it considered as a sacred heritage bestowed upon that second generation by the luminaries of the American revolution: the new republican experiment of modern times.

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⁷ Kathleen DuVal. 2014. “Borderlands.” *Oxford Bibliographies*. Web.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PARACOLONIAL REPUBLIC AND THE WAR OF 1812

ADAM ROTHMAN

Historians have recently begun to describe the early United States as “postcolonial.” While some historians use the term simply to identify the new era that followed the Revolution, many others use the term, somewhat paradoxically, to emphasize the lingering hangover of the pre-Revolutionary colonial order. Jack Greene, for instance, draws on the literature of postcolonial theory and early modern state formation to draw attention to fundamental continuities between the structure of the British Empire in North America and federalism in the early United States (Greene 2007). In a different vein, Kariann Yokota emphasizes the ongoing struggle, after independence, to pull the United States out from under Great Britain’s cultural shadow. Her book’s subtitle, “How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation,” advertises its theoretical orientation (Yokota 2011). Recognizing continuities from the colonial era highlights the predicament of Anglo-American creoles, like Thomas Jefferson, who were heirs to the grand heritage of European civilization, whether they liked it or not, yet who were also self-conscious innovators who wished to distance themselves from European corruption and war while building up what they often called a “rising Empire” in North America based on republican values of equality, consent, and popular sovereignty. The very language of empire provides a good illustration of this dynamic, for if American republicans eschewed old world empire, they freely adopted the word “empire” and applied it to their own United States (Onuf 2000).

Yet a powerful objection to labeling the early United States as “postcolonial” is that the colonial era did not end in 1783. To call the early United States postcolonial obscures the many ways that the United States as a settler society quickly emerged as a colonial power in its own right, bulldozing over indigenous people in a relentless westward expansion that helped the country to host the world’s most prominent slave system by the

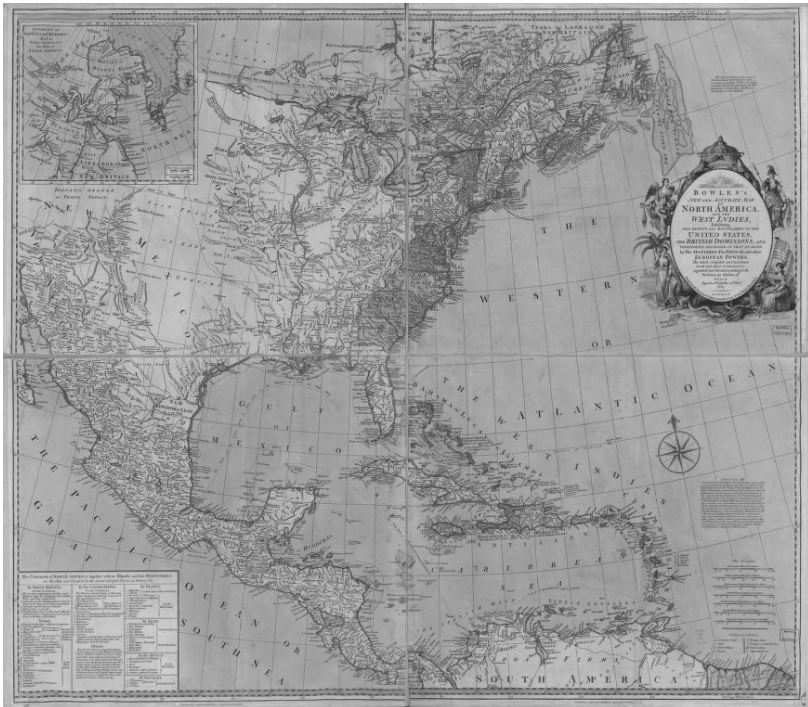
middle of the 19th century. For many scholars, then, the early United States was not *postcolonial* at all. It was just plain old colonial. From this point of view, the United States did not become postcolonial, if it ever did, until the global decolonization movements of the 20th century gave rise to a new vocabulary of liberation for subaltern people everywhere, including the United States, where one legacy of the various civil rights movements was a radically revisionist historiography in the fields of women's, African-American, and American Indian Studies (Chaplin 2003, 1453-4).

Historians now appear poised between understanding the early United States as a postcolonial republic and a plain old colonial empire. In her new cultural history of the War of 1812, Nicole Eustace acknowledges this duality, writing that "In the era of 1812, the United States was simultaneously a postcolonial nation and a neocolonial power," although it is not clear what was *neo* about it (Eustace 2012, 43). The two perspectives offer important and valid contributions to historians' knowledge of the early national era, and they are not mutually exclusive. Republican nationalism gave a powerful ideological boost to the old logic of settler colonialism, while federalism, the crucial solution to the balance of power between the national government and the states, as well as among the states, became a powerful device for national expansion conceived of in exceptionalist terms (Onuf 2000, 65-70).

One glance at a map suggests another objection to the idea of the early United States as "postcolonial": the new republic bordered other powers' colonies. One map that vividly depicted enduring colonial power in North America has the lengthy title, "Bowles's new and accurate map of North America and the West Indies, exhibiting the extent and boundaries of the United States, the British dominions, and territories possessed in that quarter by the Spaniards, the French, and other European powers" (Bowles 1784). Published in London in 1784, this map was supplemented by a table that meticulously enumerated the colonial possessions of the "several interested powers" in the region. Along with the thirteen United States were listed fifty-nine colonies from Greenland to Trinidad. What were the implications of this geopolitical challenge for the United States?

In a recent book on the War of 1812, Troy Bickham argues that what was at stake in the war was the "sovereignty of the United States in a postcolonial world" (Bickham 2012, 20). It may be true that US sovereignty was at stake in the war, but as Bowles' map reveals, the world was far from postcolonial. The seaboard United States was effectively sandwiched between the British Canadas to the north, the Floridas to the south, and Spanish Louisiana to the west, plus the many islands of the western Atlantic. Given this geopolitical situation, it might be more

accurate to declare that what was at stake in the War of 1812 was the sovereignty of the United States in a still-colonial world (Meinig 1986, 422-428). If the United States was at once postcolonial and plain-old-colonial, it was also *paracolonial* in that it existed alongside and within a broader and enduring colonial world.



Source: Carrington Bowles, *Bowles's new and accurate map of North America and the West Indies* (1784).

The historian of the British Empire C.A. Bayly points out that around the world in the early 19th century, a number of regional states emerged, consolidated themselves, and even thrived in the face of European colonial power, sometimes by taking advantage of European rivalries and selling to European markets. These “para-colonial states,” as he calls them, included Rama I’s Thailand, Iran’s Qajar regime, and Muhammed Ali’s Egypt. Perhaps the early United States belongs in this list, too. It may seem jarring to US historians to compare the early republic to such different states such as these, but the comparison rests on the common question of

how certain polities raised themselves up on the expanding margins and forced themselves into the shifting gaps of European power (Bayly 1989).

From different premises, literary scholar Sean Goudie has also called attention to the early United States' paracolonial situation. Goudie argues that the West Indies featured prominently, if ambivalently, in US American literary production from state papers to novels and plays. While U.S. merchants and their political spokesmen struggled to break into protected colonial West Indian markets, their literary culture papered over the republic's embarrassing complicity in and exploitation of Caribbean slavery. Goudie uses the idea of paracolonialism to trace a set of political, commercial, and cultural relationships between the United States and the Caribbean that spills outside the postcolonial/colonial dichotomy (Goudie 2006). The idea of paracolonialism draws attention to how the new United States navigated the colonial world around it.

European colonial power in America was not doomed to extinction by the American Revolution. That all of North America, or even—in the most grandiose fantasies—the whole American hemisphere would achieve independence, become republican, and confederate together originated in the early national period as the most utopian of republican fantasies. As John Quincy Adams put it in 1811, “The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religions and political principles, and accustomed to one general tenor of social usages and customs” (Ford 1914, 209). The Louisiana Purchase may have pointed Adams toward this distant destiny of national unity and cultural homogeneity, although Louisiana's culturally stubborn French-speaking Catholics resisted assimilation. Moreover, the republicans' dismal failure to conquer and annex Canada in the War of 1812 suggested that God had other plans in store for North America than unity. The transcontinental ideology of the mid-19th century known as Manifest Destiny was much less popular or plausible in the early national period, when formidable geographic and political obstacles stood in the way of US expansion.

John Quincy Adams was not as sanguine about the future of the United States as his grandiose prediction suggests. In the same 1811 letter to his father, Quincy Adams observed that the “common happiness” of this extensive imagined community depended on its political association within a single Union. “But let that federal Union which secures to each member the sympathies of the same body once be dissolved,” he darkly predicted, “and every part will in turn inevitably be trampled upon by the others, and America like the rest of the earth will sink into a common field

of battle for conquerors and tyrants” (Ford 1914, 209). This fear of falling apart, which would lead to war and ruin, ran deeply through the political thought of early nationalists like Quincy Adams.

The fear of disunion was rooted in distance and difference. The technical difficulties of transportation and communication across eastern North America kept people apart. Distinctive interests and values distinguished the different regions (New England, the mid-Atlantic states, the lower South, and the West) from one other. Regional differences could be complementary, but they could also lead to conflict, and those conflicts could be exacerbated by “external” threats and inducements—wedges driven into the Union by foreign powers in neighboring colonies (McCoy 1987). Such wedges included the nagging presence of British fortifications in the Northwest; Spanish control of the rivers that emptied into the Gulf of Mexico; generous land grants designed to entice migrants from the United States; gift-giving and influence-peddling among the Indians; the sponsorship of havens for fugitive slaves; commercial restrictions or liberalizations on trade between the United States and Caribbean colonies.

Threats emanating from neighboring colonies were often cast as violations of both the law of nations and the laws of nature, as if U.S. expansion was as organic as the flow of America’s rivers. Tropes of blockage and subversion permeated republican anxieties over the nation’s margins. Warning against French possession of New Orleans, for example, Jefferson famously asserted in 1802 that “France placing herself in that door assumes to us the attitude of defiance” (Ford 1904-5, 9: 364). A decade later, Jefferson deployed the rhetoric of colonial subversion to conceive of the Indians in the northwest as British pawns rather than independent actors with legitimate grievances against citizens of the United States who were intruding upon them. As he wrote in his justification for the conquest of Canada, “The possession of that country secures our women and children forever from the tomahawk and scalping knife, by removing those who excite them” (Quoted in Kaplan 1987, 119). Extending U.S. sovereignty over neighboring colonies thus became a requirement of national security, but it was easier said than done.

A close look at Louisiana helps to reveal the multiple dimensions of the young republic’s paracolonial situation. Louisiana was central to what historian Francois Furstenberg calls “the Long War for the West” from 1754 to 1815, when the attachment and incorporation of the region to the United States was far from inevitable. The North American interior served as an arena of imperial rivalry between France, Britain, Spain, and eventually the United States, with asterisms of colonial settlement and fortification amid a vast Indian country anchored at New Orleans. After

1783, the lower Mississippi valley became a “hot spot of the trans-Appalachian West” (Furstenberg 2008, 657). Spain consolidated its hold over Louisiana and Florida, envisioning its North American colonies as a buffer between the United States and Spain’s valuable Mexican possessions and vital to its control of the Gulf of Mexico. Just as the British did in Canada, Spain tried to cultivate native allies and attract migrants. In the 1790s, the disintegration of St. Domingue’s sugar-and-slave economy provided new opportunities for Louisiana planters to profit from plantation agriculture, and a sugar boom transformed New Orleans and its hinterlands (Rothman 2005, 75-6).

Louisiana’s fate was dictated by the intersection of European conflict with local assertions of power by settler communities, indigenous nations, and people of African descent in an intricate latticework of alliance and enmity. Not the westward sweeping movement of Anglo-American settlers, but a transatlantic geostrategic conjuncture caused by the Napoleonic Wars—specifically, Napoleon’s failure to restore French authority and chattel slavery in St. Domingue—resulted in New Orleans and the vast Louisiana territory falling into the orbit of U.S. sovereignty. Nothing illustrates the paracolonial aspect of the early United States better than the slave rebellion in St. Domingue, which contributed to the enlargement of Jefferson’s “Empire of Liberty” and intensified the security dilemma of slavery that accompanied it. The effort to end slave importation into the United States can be interpreted, at least in part, as an effort to insulate the mainland’s southern ports and plantations from the corrosive effects of revolutionary war in the Caribbean (Dubois 2009).

After its absorption in the United States, Louisiana continued to be shaped by its linkages to the circum-Caribbean colonial milieu. The purchase led to diplomatic and military conflict with Spain over the status of the Floridas which were now cut off from the rest of Spanish America (Stagg 2009). Spain rejected the legitimacy of France’s sale of Louisiana to the United States and held onto West Florida which the United States claimed as part of the deal. A strategic prize, the Gulf Coast became a battleground as the United States sought to wrest it from Spain without losing it to Britain, and local people of all stripes, from revolutionary republicans to slave and Indian refugees, vied to stake their own claims to autonomy in the midst of the international turmoil of the Napoleonic wars and the breakdown of authority in Spanish America. The Gulf Coast offers marvelous fodder for what Rafe Blaufarb calls “a transnational diplomatic history ‘from below’” (Blaufarb 2007, 742). Finally in the Adams-Onís or Transcontinental Treaty, ratified in 1821, the United States gave up Texas to secure Florida and other more valuable claims to the Pacific Northwest,

although the abandonment of Texas proved to be a temporary measure lasting only until the 1840s. The settlement of these questions enabled the United States to take a more assertive position on Spanish American independence that would lead to the Monroe Doctrine.

Refugees from the Caribbean infused Louisiana with new blood. Part of a broader diaspora, refugees from St. Domingue had been arriving in Louisiana from the early 1790s, but the largest single influx came in 1809, when more than nine thousand St. Dominguean refugees who had settled in Cuba were driven out of that island in the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Spain. More than a third were slaves, although as Rebecca Scott and Jean Hébard have recently argued, the classification of some of these refugees as slaves may well have been an act of re-enslavement upon their arrival in Louisiana (Scott and Hébard 2012). The arrival of so many refugees from St. Domingue, especially the wave of 1809, had a powerful impact on New Orleans, strengthening its francophone bloc and acting as a counterweight to cultural "Americanization" (Dessens 2007). Much of the distinctiveness of New Orleans is not simply a holdover from the eighteenth century, exemplified today by its so-called French Quarter, but is a result of its ongoing participation in networks of creole culture throughout the Caribbean in the nineteenth century (Roach 1996).

Louisiana's economy followed colonial grooves. While Louisiana planters benefitted from St. Domingue's collapse, they had to compete against sugar producers in Jamaica, Cuba, and Brazil who also stepped into the breach. To compete against colonial producers with more favorable ecologies for sugar production, Louisianan sugar planters lobbied for protective tariffs and struggled to stay at the cutting edge of agricultural progress by keeping close tabs on innovation and experimentation elsewhere. Although they wanted to continue importing African slaves, Congress eventually cut them off from the Atlantic trade and forced them to rely on the forced migration of slaves from the Upper South to replenish their labor supply. It was not a clean cut; throughout the 1810s, the Gulf Coast buzzed with slave smuggling, largely through the agency of privateers who preyed on Spanish shipping (Rothman 2005, 193-196).

Wherever sugar production boomed in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, it did so amid a newly existential awareness of the potential risks of slave resistance and revolt signified by incessant references to Haiti. Planters and their governments sought to quarantine themselves against the so-called "contagion" of liberty, intensified surveillance over their slaves, and assured themselves that their own slaves were faithful (as long as they were not tampered with). When a conspiracy was discovered

or an insurrection erupted, as on Louisiana's German Coast in 1811, overwhelming force put a bloody stop to it. Not surprisingly, then, local authorities were on guard against a slave insurrection throughout the War of 1812, and it is quite striking that as late as the U.S. Civil War, southern planters were still invoking the memory of Haiti to fend off abolitionism and emancipation, or to describe the collapse of their world in the closest analogy that they could muster: "a repetition of San Domingo" (quoted in Clavin 2010, 145).

The War of 1812 in the southern theater takes on a new significance when viewed in paracolonial terms. For Andrew Jackson and many other southern nationalists, Florida was the biggest prize. They resented Spanish authorities there for harboring fugitive slaves, fomenting unrest among the Indians, and offering a foothold to the British in wartime. The threat of subversion permeated Jacksonian rhetoric about Florida and was exaggerated to justify its seizure. Though deeply controversial, Jackson's incursions into Florida in 1814 and 1818 intensified the pressure on Spain to cede the territory to the United States (Meinig 1993, 24-32). Embedded in the process of absorbing Florida into the United States were other acts of what might be called (following Goudie) paracolonial "negation." The most dramatic was the destruction of the Negro Fort in 1816, a maroon community of refugees from the Creek War who had hunkered down in a stronghold on the Apalachicola River (Saunt 1999, 273-289).

Even more improbably, the Battle of New Orleans can also be placed in the paracolonial context of Afro-Caribbean history during the "Age of Revolution." It is legendary that Andrew Jackson assembled a multilingual, multinational, multiracial force to resist the British invasion, one that included French—and Spanish—speaking free men of color. But what may have been unusual for the United States had become standard in Caribbean warfare. Less celebrated than the free men of color who fought with Jackson is the presence of black troops among the invaders—African and Afro-Caribbean soldiers from the West India Regiments, which grew out of the British experience of war in North America and the Caribbean in the decades preceding the War of 1812. Moreover, more than three thousand enslaved African Americans fled to the British during the War of 1812. Several hundred settled in Trinidad, including some from Louisiana, where they were provided with land by the British government in one of the first British experiments with free labor in the West Indies (Rothman 2005, 151-152, 160).

It may appear only dimly related, but the fate of the black refugees in Trinidad and elsewhere is a reminder that the British had begun to carve out antislavery enclaves in the Atlantic world, most notably, Sierra Leone,

which was originally populated with Afro-American refugees from the Revolution. Just before the War of 1812, the successful African-American sea captain Paul Cuffee, who was fed up with racist discrimination in the United States, became interested in sponsoring black emigration to Sierra Leone; the war put his plans on hold, but he resumed his project when it ended. At the same time, the model of Sierra Leone helped to inspire a diverse coalition of white northerners and southerners to launch the American Colonization Society (ACS), dedicated to sending free and enslaved blacks to Africa. Understanding the ACS in relation to Sierra Leone and the British antislavery campaign is a step toward grasping the paracolonial dimension of the domestic struggle over slavery in the US. As Edward Rugemer has argued, pro- and anti-slavery forces in the US paid close attention to the progress of abolition and emancipation in the Caribbean; their competing interpretations of events deepened the rift between them (Rugemer 2008).

While Jackson's incursions into Florida set the stage for its cession by Spain, it is important to recognize that the War of 1812 also set a northern limit on U.S. expansion. At the outset of the war, Jefferson infamously—almost comically—predicted that the conquest of Canada during the war would be a “mere matter of marching.” That has to rank among the worst forecasts in American history, up there with South Carolina Senator James Chesnut's promise to drink all the blood caused by southern secession. But what explains Jefferson's blithe overconfidence? It was not just that he was mistaken about military tactics and strategy, or that he misjudged the character of the Canadians, but that his assumptions about the direction of History—his republican teleology—were dashed by the grittier reality of the organization of power in real time and space. To put it another way, the answer to Jefferson's question, “But who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively?” was the British Empire. The War of 1812 solidified the border between British North America and the United States; it made Canada a permanent geopolitical fact, a continental counterweight to republicanism, rather than an anachronism (Taylor 2010). Paracolonialism was here to stay.

The republican disappointment over Canada was compensated by Britain's abandonment of the idea of an Indian buffer state in the Upper Mississippi Valley, and the shattering of Shawnee and Creek resistance. These were pivotal events. The middle ground was washed away in a political mudslide, and the long war for the American continent moved further to the west, where it did not end until the final pacification of the Plains Indians in the 1890s.

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