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# Notes on the State of Virginia and the Jeffersonian West.

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### *Notes on the State of Virginia and the Jeffersonian West*

In Spring 1784, first term Congressional delegate Thomas Jefferson chaired the committee that drafted a plan for western government. At stake was the dimly defined territory past the Appalachians, ceded in the 1783 Peace of Paris that ended the war with England, and contested between several former colonies. The “Report of a Plan of Government for the Western Territory” defined boundaries; set liberal terms for “free males of full age” to meet and establish a “temporary government”; banned slavery after 1800; zoned and named future states; and established a timetable for entering the union on “equal footing” with the existing thirteen. Congress made some revisions and adopted the committee’s plan as the Ordinance of 1784 that April. The most significant changes were the “hard names”: Cherronesus in what is now Michigan, Assenisipia for today’s northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, and Pelisipia in eastern Kentucky.<sup>1</sup>

Over the next three years Congress passed a series of measures designed to bring revenue-bearing settlement and stability to a region that policy makers regarded as both

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<sup>1</sup> *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Penguin, 1977), 254-58.

dangerously fractious and rife with potential. A Land Ordinance of 1785 charged the geographer Thomas Hutchins with marking thirteen “ranges” (or columns) of property along the Ohio River. Angry squatters, Native Americans, and the “mirey swamps,” however, allowed Hutchins to complete only seven of the thirteen and the survey failed to generate the much needed revenue. In 1787 Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, which tightened the channels of speculation and government control in the Ohio Valley. The Boston-based Ohio Company had lobbied for the revised Ordinance, and settlers migrated from New England the following year. The Company’s promotional literature described a landscape of pure possibility: swamps were “natural meadows,” staple crops would reach “great perfection,” and the “raw materials” for manufacture awaited “an enlightened people.” The motto on the seal of the Northwest Territory outlines what was essentially a program of ecological imperialism: *melioem lapsa locavit*, a better one has taken its place.<sup>2</sup> The environmental changes that accompanied settlement, unsurprisingly, drew hostility from the existing inhabitants. Although the Northwest Ordinance assured that “property shall never be taken” without the consent of Native Americans, the government dealt arrogantly with the Ohio Indians. A series of treaties signed in 1789 led only to wars, which continued until 1794 – ending only after England cut off supplies to the resisting groups.

This invasion of Ohio provided the backdrop to one of the most important literary works of the Revolutionary period, Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Much as the legislation leading to the Northwest Territory was a combination of bureaucracy and force, so too did the *Notes on Virginia* issue a blueprint for national expansion. Jefferson

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<sup>2</sup> William Perkins Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler (eds.), *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Manasseh Cutler* (Cincinnati: Clarke, 1888), 393-97, 401-05; Edgar C. Reinke, “*Melioem Lapsa Locavit*: An Intriguing Puzzle Solved,” *Ohio History* 94 (1985), 68-74.

started the book in 1781 after receiving a set of Queries (or questions) from François Marbois, secretary to the French legation, and he made his most significant changes to the manuscript in 1783-84, right before taking his seat in Congress. The book appeared as a limited edition in 1785 and was published for a general audience two years later. The topical relevance was inevitable, and at least once settler perused its pages during his first winter in the Northwest Territory. Solomon Drowne, while waiting for the ice to melt on the Ohio, read Virgil's *Georgics*, Le Page du Pratz's *History of Louisiana*, and "Dr. Jefferson's Notes on Virginia." He pronounced the latter "*Opus omnigena literatura imbutuns*," a work imbued with every species of literary genius. The following Spring, Drowne gave an Address to the settlers of Marietta, the first federal town in Ohio, that drew heavily from his winter reading. He praised that "firm band" of settlers who braved "the great business of unbarring a secluded wilderness," and he likened the nation's expansion to the course of the sun. Taking a direct cue from the *opus omnigena*, Drowne intoned that "no foul blot [may] stain the important volume" which "time is unfolding in this western world."<sup>3</sup>

An equation between nationhood and the West runs through much of Jefferson's literary and political work. It was no coincidence that official pronouncements from the Ohio Valley echoed the language of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Not only did the book's composition and publication parallel the Ohio Ordinances, but it provided the conceptual basis for how the United States should expand. Secretary of War Henry Knox based the "benevolent plan," a federal Indian policy that shaped native-white relations over the next three decades, upon Jeffersonian thought. Anticipating progress across

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<sup>3</sup> Solomon Drown[e], *An Oration Delivered at Marietta, April 7, 1789, In Commemoration of the Commencement of the Settlement formed by the Ohio Company* (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas, 1789), 7, 10, 15; Solomon Drowne's journal is at the John Hay Library, Brown University.

space, Knox maintained that Native Americans eventually would adopt European methods of land use. Once they saw the better way, they would “improve” in culture and no longer need their traditional hunting grounds, making violent usurpation unnecessary. During Jefferson’s presidency, one of his lasting legacies was the Louisiana Purchase, which tripled the boundaries of the United States, and with preparations for the 1804-6 expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Jefferson returned to the preoccupations of *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Even in his waning years, Jefferson held fast to the vision of a civilization expanding across the continent. “Let a philosophical observer” travel “from the savages of the Rocky Mountains” east to the Atlantic seaboard, he wrote to William Ludlow in 1824:

These he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so on in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns.<sup>4</sup>

Popular culture has dipped into Jefferson’s own writings, making it impossible to disentangle his words from the history of the American West. His is one of the four faces that peers out at us from Mount Rushmore. The letter to William Ludlow presents the “stage theory,” a common eighteenth century idea that cast the interior as a future Europe and that is read today as an unsubtle rhetoric of empire. Wrestling with the legacy of

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<sup>4</sup> *Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 583.

Frederick Jackson Turner, a generation of historians have noted that the republican prospect led to arrogant usurpation in the next century. Yet “improvement” was just one keynote in Jefferson’s writings; so too did he understand that a westering nation would incorporate existing knowledge of the land, its flora and fauna, waterways, and natural riches. How then to situate enlightenment principles against nineteenth-century calls for Indian removal? This essay reviews three modes of Jeffersonian thought: improvement, incorporation, and disappearance – from the years of *Notes on the State of Virginia* to the period when Knox’s “benevolent plan” corroded into more aggressive policies.<sup>5</sup> The purpose is not to pin the legacy of an entire culture upon one person. Nor should the chronological structure of this essay be interpreted as the inexorable march toward Indian removal. Jeffersonian thought becomes all the more compelling, indeed, when we attend to the overlap between these three modes.

#### Improvement (*Notes on the State of Virginia*)

Although difficult to classify, *Notes on the State of Virginia* may be read as the product of and blueprint for an expanding republic. It belongs on the same shelf as westering texts like Jedediah Morse’s *American Geography* (1789), John Filson’s *Discovery, Settlement and present State of Kentucke* (1784), or Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1784). Its argument engages the Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* (1749-1804), the Abbé Raynal’s *Philosophical and Political History of the ... East and West Indies* (1772), and pamphleteering on both sides of the Atlantic about the promise of the Revolution. Yet the book also was a product of

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<sup>5</sup> I develop these ideas further in *From the Fallen Tree: Frontier Narratives, Environmental Politics, and the Roots of a National Pastoral, 1749-1826* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003).

the legislation being framed at that time. The opening sentence directs readers straight into the Northwest Territory. “Virginia is bounded on the East by the Atlantic,” the Query “Boundaries” begins,

on the North by a line of latitude, crossing the Eastern Shore through Watkin’s Point ... from thence by a streight line to Cinquac, near the mouth of Patowmac; thence by the Patowmac, which is common to Virginia and Maryland, to the first fountain of its northern branch; thence by a meridian line, passing through that fountain till it intersects a line running East and West ... which divides Maryland from Pennsylvania, and which was marked by Messrs. Mason and Dixon ....<sup>6</sup>

The remaining twenty-two Queries (or chapters) fill in this cartographically defined space. To lend the argument coherence, Jefferson rearranged the order of Marbois’s questionnaire, so that the discussion moves from Boundaries, to physical features of the land, to natural productions (“Productions, Mineral Vegetable and Animal”), to “Climate,” and lastly to civic and cultural institutions. The effect is what Solomon Drowne likened to the “unbarring of a wilderness” (or if one prefers classifying the book as natural history, to the completion of an old-fashioned museum diorama).

The same thematic tensions found in the literature describing Ohio, where future prospects were imagined over the real terrain, also shape the book. Jefferson’s ideological geography appears to be on the constant verge of overtaking the physical landscape. The Query “Rivers” offers a ready example. Marbois asked for a “notice” of the state’s “rivers, rivulets, and how far they are navigable.”<sup>7</sup> Jefferson responded with accounts of the Roanoke, the James, the Potomac, and their tributaries, emphasizing length, current

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<sup>6</sup> *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1954), 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> *Notes on Virginia*, 5.

and potential for navigation. Toggling between physical properties and trade, however, would lead to an expansion of boundaries. The topic shifts from one waterway to another – and well beyond the legal jurisdiction of Virginia. Without a single line of explanation, Jefferson writes:

... The Shenandoah branch interlocks with James river about the Blue ridge, and may perhaps in future be opened.

The *Missisipi* will be one of the principal channels of future commerce for the country westward of the Alleghaney. From the mouth of this river to where it receives the Ohio, is 1000 miles by water, but only 500 by land, passing through the Chickasaw country.<sup>8</sup>

The prerogatives of trade allow the “notice” to move from the Shendandoah, to the Ohio, to the Chickasaw territories of current-day Mississippi. The remainder of the Query ranges still further, reviewing trade posts at Santa Fe and New Orleans, as well as the Ohio River and *its* tributaries.

Here and elsewhere, imagined prospects eclipse material fact – despite the book’s nominally empirical basis. This tension between improvement and disappearance most dramatically shapes Query Six, “Productions, Mineral, Vegetable and Animals,” where a review of animals leads to a challenge of eighteenth-century scientific thought. At issue was the heliotropic theory, most famous propounded by the Comte de Buffon, which maintained that the earth dried at different rates after the biblical flood. Consequently different quadrants of the globe were more developed than others. In short, Buffon argued that “something” in the American climate “opposes the aggrandizement of animal nature.” French philosophes extended Buffon’s hypothesis to explain a cultural lag:

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<sup>8</sup> *Notes on Virginia*, 7.

Americans who lived “in a state of nature” were “incapable of progress” and “but little advanced in the arts of civilization.”<sup>9</sup>

To refute these arguments, Jefferson looked West. He sent for the bones and teeth of a Mastodon, which had been recently exhumed from a tar pit south of Fort Pitt, and recounted a Delaware legend about a mammoth living in the continental interior. The mastodon should suffice to “have rescued the earth it inhabited”; what Jefferson wanted, in short, was a *big* animal – whether living or not. The Mammoth appeared at the head of a table of weights, comparing animals from Europe and America, that meant to stifle Buffon’s hypothesis “that nature is less active, less energetic on one side of the globe than on the other.”<sup>10</sup> A visual juxtaposition displays the European cow (763 lbs) next to the Rhode Island bullock (2,500 lbs), the wild boar next to the Tapir, and so on down to the Shrew mouse and Flying squirrel. The weight for the Mammoth, for obvious reasons, is left blank.

Patriotism allows that omission, and as Jefferson shifts from the natural to the human realm, cultural achievements are tallied in the same manner as the weights of a bullock and boar: “We produce a Washington, a Franklin, a Rittenhouse,” he writes. Where the Abbé Raynal saw stunted human cultures in the New World, Jefferson would see potential; Native Americans are brave and “affectionate,” and they have demonstrated their capacity for refinement in oratory. The case for Indians follows the same logic as that brought to the land – they awaited the “improving” influence of Europeans. “Before we condemn the Indians of wanting genius,” Jefferson counters, “we must consider that

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<sup>9</sup> Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History* (London, 1797), 7:30, 39-40, 47-48; Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 53; Guillaume Thomas François Raynal, Abbé Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History ... of the East and West Indies* (London, 1783), 7:150-51.

<sup>10</sup> *Notes on Virginia*, 47.

letters have not yet been introduced among them. Were we to compare them in their present state with the Europeans North of the Alps, when the Roman arms and arts first crossed those mountains, the comparison would be unequal, because at that time, those parts of Europe were swarming with numbers; because numbers produce emulation and multiply the chances of improvement, and one improvement begets another.”<sup>11</sup>

To clinch his case, Jefferson would offer evidence that was questionable at best: a well-traveled speech by a western Seneca named Logan, or Tahgahjute, who lived and earned his living as a trader on the Ohio River. The history of the speech merits review, because it reveals how the figures of “improvement” overtook facts in accounts of the trans-Appalachian West. The story had its origins in a territorial conflict during the late colonial period. After a British-Iroquois Treaty of 1768, white settlers and speculators flooded into the trans-Appalachian West. This hostile milieu produced a crisis between Tahgahjute, a surveyor named Michael Cresap, and a Daniel Greathouse. After a spat of violence, Cresap and Greathouse sought vengeance against Tahgahjute’s family; the heretofore innocent Tahgahjute retaliated with thirteen scalps – equaling the number of his victims. News of these murders gave pretense for the colonial governor of Virginia, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore, to lead an army into Kentucky. And from the fallout came Logan’s speech, which was purportedly delivered after Dunmore’s War and which first appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal* as an implicit criticism of land grabbing under British rule. Jefferson later included the address in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, where he would compare Logan to Demosthenes and Cicero. In a stirring conclusion that recalls the cadences of the King James Bible (not to mention the figure of the Noble Savage), Logan justifies his revenge:

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<sup>11</sup> *Notes on Virginia*, 65.

I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance. For my country, I rejoice at the beams of peace. But do not harbour a thought that mine is the joy of fear. Logan never felt fear. He will not turn on his heel to save his life. Who is there to mourn for Logan? – Not one.” (*Notes* 63)

That the speech turned out to be the fabrication of local journalists never troubled Jefferson.

Drafted into a trans-Atlantic debate with the Comte de Buffon, the Logan of *Notes on Virginia* came to exist primarily as metaphor. His speech offered a possible equivalent to classical sources; a strike against the theory of degenerative climes; the embodiment of bad government under Lord Dunmore; and a foundation for Knox’s “benevolent plan.” But Logan was no longer an actual person. The implications were severe. Using *Notes on the State of Virginia* as a pilot, Knox saw Native Americans as figures for “improvement,” which complicated the life of any real individual who was forced to inhabit this “plan.”

Incorporation (The Lewis and Clark *Journals*)

If Jefferson’s westering vision has an epitome, it is the Louisiana Purchase and reconnaissance expeditions that followed. One of several, the mission led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark provided an opportunity to expand the trade network tested in the Query “Rivers.” The instructions given to Lewis were to find a Northwest Passage, by tracing the Missouri River, as well as “it’s course & communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean [to] offer the most direct and practicable water communication across the continent, for the purposes of its commerce.” Again following the model of *Notes on*

*the State of Virginia*, Lewis was to take note of the climate, geography, soil, mineral wealth, flora and fauna, and people of the Louisiana Territory. The Corps of Discovery (the name for the roughly forty trappers, traders, soldiers, one slave, and Shoshone woman who made the journey) left a base camp at St. Louis in 1804; wintered among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians in 1805-6; reached the Pacific and spent the following Winter in the Columbia River basin; recrossed the mountains in Summer 1806; and returned to St. Louis the following Autumn. Along the way Lewis, Clark, and the members who could write assembled an archive that totals over a million words and thirty bound volumes; they have been called “the writingest explorers of their time.” Afficionados and scholars liken the journey to everything from a national “epic” to the nation’s “bedtime story.”<sup>12</sup>

Nearly every account emphasizes the movement from East to West (although the explorers traveled in both directions). And the same accounts advance a well-worn plot: realizing Jefferson’s vision, the Corps of Discovery initiated a nation’s history over the interior of the continent. It was a story that Lewis himself encouraged. He did not enter the expedition’s daily log until 7 April 1805, when he crossed into territory that “the foot of civilized man had never trodden.”<sup>13</sup> What holds this figurative language together (with civilization reduced to the metonymic “foot”) is an implied narrative of progress across space. That the claim was inflated almost seems unnecessary to state; Lewis casts himself as the enlightenment Prometheus who brings “civilization” into darkness. Yet this story is

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<sup>12</sup> Larry McMurry, “The First American Epic,” *The New York Review of Books* (48), 8 Feb. 2001; Kris Fresonke, *Lewis and Clark: Legacies, Memories, and New Perspectives*, ed. Fresonke and Mark Spence (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 20; *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 7

<sup>13</sup> *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Gary E. Moulton et al., (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1978-2004), Apr. 7, 1805. Because there are several editions, entries will be cited by date.

remarkably enduring, and one that even serious scholars will occasionally indulge. In a blurb excerpted for a US Forest Service brochure, James Ronda (author of the definitive study of native-white relations during the expedition) suggests that:

Jefferson's Captains went up the Missouri into the West in search of ideas shaped by imagination and born of desire. The idea of a western wonder land – all these seemed waiting to be found in shapes of earth, rock and weather just over the horizon.<sup>14</sup>

Popular as well as scholarly histories follow the same trajectory as Jefferson's letter to William Ludlow, where an ideological geography is consummated by "earth, rock and weather." But there is a catch to Ronda's tactile prose. Despite its elemental bearing, the sentence hinges grammatically upon the word "seemed," which locates the "idea" in fuzzy mythology rather than fact. A western "wonder land" *seems* to await the arrival Lewis and Clark. Even in the words of an accomplished ethnohistorian, Native Americans appear as secondary figures.

By virtue of its sheer size, however, the archive does offers other approaches. And so narratives of "improvement" may often sit alongside examples of incorporation. One such episode (predictably overlooked in popular history) occurs on the return journey. From late May through June 1806, Lewis and Clark camped on the upper Clearwater River, in the heart of Nee-Mee-Poo or Nez Perce country.<sup>15</sup> Snow in the Bitterroot Mountains had forced them to wait; the *Journals* change tack as a result, showing

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<sup>14</sup> Ronda's *Finding the West: Explorations with Lewis and Clark* is quoted in the USDA Forest Service pamphlet, *Enduring Stories, Dynamic Landscapes: The Lewis and Clark Expedition on National Forests and Grasslands* (Washington, DC: USDA, 2004), np.

<sup>15</sup> The camp is the only extended site that does not have a name: nineteenth-century historians labeled it "Camp Chopunnish" (a corruption of the native language, Sahaptin?), and it is described today as "The Long Camp."

increased attention to nature and to native knowledge of the place. Action yields to astute observations on blooming flowers, fish runs, bird life, animal population, and the ways of harvesting these resources. On the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of May, the captains would identify their signature species: Lewis' woodpecker and Clark's nutcracker. The entry for 16 June notes the blooming glacier lily, Orange honeysuckle, Mountain Huckleberry, columbine, bluebell, Mountain thermopsis, and an angelica that was probably licorice root. A running essay on bears allowed for the distinction of grizzlies and a second species, noting a difference that native observers recognized already. An entry on 11 May describes salmon fishing. And so on.

Little of this information receives mention in popular accounts. Nature simply fails to offer the same gripping plot as the heroic march to the sea, and the stay among the Nee-Mee-Poos consequently appears to be little more than an interruption. Lewis likened the six weeks on the Clearwater to torture, cursing "that icy barrier which separates me from my friends and Country, from all which makes life esteemable." He offered self-counsel and in a passage that guidebooks invariably cite, wrote: "patience, patience" (17 May 1806). The Nee-Mee-Poos register in this story, if at all, as glorified stable hands. Lewis and Clark had left horses with them the previous Fall, in 1805, and most histories dwell upon a trivializing intratribal conflict that kept the white explorers from retrieving their herd. The high drama of the 1805 (westering) journey overshadows the 1806 (return) leg. In Fall 1805, the company had relied upon the geographically-limited Shoshone Sioux, who got the explorers lost and led them down a path where Clark was as "wet and cold in every part as I ever was in my life" (15 Sept. 1805).

It bears asking, what insight is lost behind the epic charge to the sea? In contrast to the previous year's journey, the 1806 crossing of the Bitterroots occurred almost without incident. (The company did depart earlier and was forced to backtrack once.) The Corps of Discovery owed its success to excellent guides. And the reason why becomes intelligible only by considering a history *before* Lewis and Clark. The Nee-Mee-Poos are a loosely organized nation, whose economy has traditionally operated within seasonal flows. Hunting and war parties regularly traveled to the Great Plains. Their traditional lore contains dozens of stories that involve mountain crossings, and following the acquisition of horses in the 1730s, the Nee-Mee-Poos increased their geographic range still further.<sup>16</sup> This happy convergence of factors resulting in an unremarkable leg of the expedition. The guides took the Corps of Discovery through one of the three routes to the Great Plains, following a trail that keeps the ridge to the left and the river to the right, along a string of blazes and massive boulder cairns. They returned to the headwaters of the east-flowing Missouri without incident.

The self-aggrandizing literary persona of a hero-naturalist, meanwhile, leads to conspicuous amazement about the Nee-Mee-Poo guides. Anticipating his metropolitan audience, Lewis emphasizes the skill of his "pilots" through a maze of mountains:

... we were entirely surrounded by those mountains from which to one unacquainted with them it would have seemed impossible ever to have escaped; in short, without the assistance of our guides I doubt much whether we who had once passed them could find our way to Travellers rest in their present situation for the marked trees on which we had placed considerable reliance are much

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<sup>16</sup>Allen P. Slickpoo emphasizes mobility in a published tribal history, *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Perces): Culture and History of the Nez Perces* (Lapwait, Id.: Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, 1973), 24-31.

fewer and more difficult to find than we had apprehended. these fellows are most admireable pilots; we find the road wherever the snow has disappeared though it be only for a few hundred places. (27 June 1806)

The language revealingly distances the author from his immediate locale. To one “unacquainted” with the terrain, the trail assuredly would be lost. Yet it was Lewis alone who was unacquainted; the perspective of the heroic traveler in near-impossible straits trumps the very real factors that made the Nee-Mee-Poos such excellent guides.

Here and elsewhere, the expedition’s success or failure depended upon productive Native American relations. After crossing the Bitterroots, Lewis split from Clark (who led a reconnaissance of the Yellowstone River) and met hostile Blackfoot Sioux. Pre-existing rivalries between the Blackfeet and Shoshones, who hosted the party the previous Fall, culminated with Lewis taking a bullet in his rear end. He survived, met Clark downriver, but did not write again until their return to St. Louis. The lesson is clear: despite nods in the *Journal* to the imagined audience, the expedition depended upon an ability to read knowledges about the land as well as the pre-existing histories there. One of the challenges that the literature of the early republic poses to contemporary readers is in this thick patina of mythology. The voice of Meriwether Lewis – or Thomas Jefferson, for that matter – overtakes a broader sense of the encounter, so that an easy explanation of the Bitterroot crossing becomes impossible to explain or simply not worth commentary. The problem is an overwhelming sense of national importance that begins with the authors themselves. Much as the need for an American Cicero turned Tahgahjute into an exemplum, Lewis’s master plot of endurance and triumph obfuscated the obvious. In reality the Corps of Discovery crossed the mountains, bid farewell to the Nee-Mee-Poo

guides, and “proceeded on.” For an audience primed for the high drama of an expanding civilization, what kind of story is that?

### Disappearance

The distancing from initial points of contact, as noted, was not simply an aesthetic concern. Similar cases of intellectual blindness bore consequences in public policy. As Jeffersonian principles warped with the next century, the same pretense of benevolence came to justify demands for Indian removal. The speech allegedly by Tahgahjute most notably took on new meanings. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, it served as proof of Indians’ excellence in oration: “Who is there to mourn for Logan? – Not one.” The later history of the speech, however, illustrates the tenuous role that (even idealized) Native Americans held as US power consolidated without an opposing European empire.

In 1797 politically motivated attacks led then Vice President Jefferson to revisit the case involving Tahgahjute, Cresap, and Greathouse. Jefferson published an appendix to *Notes on Virginia* in 1801 with several affidavits that reviewed the murder in tedious detail. Little about this controversy bears discussion today, except for a short comment that reveals a jarring indifference toward authenticity. Jefferson conceded that Logan’s famous speech was probably fake. Against allegations of forgery, or claims that the words were his own, Jefferson countered:

... wherefore the forgery? Whether Logan’s or mine, it would still have been American. I should indeed consult my own fame if the suggestion, that this speech is mine, were suffered to be believed. He would have a just right to be

proud who could with truth claim that composition. But it is none of mine; and I yield it to whom it is due. (*Notes* 230).

The words mattered only as an example of what an American could produce, and whether it was by a Native or British American did not matter. Yet the 1801 Appendix lays bear an important pattern of appropriation: as Tahgahjute on the Ohio Valley was drafted into a trans-national historical debate, so too did literary usurpation anticipate real ones.

The speech's continued circulation makes it a valuable marker for understanding how literary projects intersected with a broader history. That history sunk to a new low in 1814, when Andrew Jackson led the US against the divided Creek nation. Ostensibly part of the War of 1812, the battle nonetheless gave way to demands for 23 million acres of Creek land. Logan's words entered into these controversial events in specific ways. A young Washington Irving published a long essay in the *Analectic Magazine* that criticized US involvement in Creek affairs. Even while Irving expressed sympathy for "misguided" Indians, however, he also advanced the patronizing stereotype of an innocent and easily duped people. Later versions of the same essay show that the sympathies did neither the Creeks nor other native groups any favors. The same essay appeared in Irving's *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* six years later, but without the topical references. Pointed criticisms in the later version dissolve into vague reflections on the "Indian Character" and melancholy predictions about their fate. "There is something in the character and habits of the North American savage," Irving writes, "that is, to my mind, wonderfully striking and sublime." He posits a view then fashionable in England, that the United States should not "stigmatize the Indians" lest they "vanish like a vapour from the face of

the earth.”<sup>17</sup> The crux of his argument was the need to protect the good character of native people. Southern politicians who coveted Indian lands justified usurpation on the grounds that natives should be protected from backcountry whites, and so too did Irving echo a concern that corrupted Indians would not be able to “reclaim” their innate nobility. As evidence of that nobility, Irving cited Logan’s speech. The case for betterment from *Notes on the State of Virginia* in this way came to serve the proponents of removal.

But the story does not end there. Logan’s spurious speech took yet another turn when it was adopted in the 1830s by the Cherokee journalist, Elias Boudinot. The product of a missionary education, Boudinot exemplified the difficulties that Native Americans faced as they struggled over whether and/or upon what terms they should incorporate a colonizing culture. On one hand, Boudinot represented the republic’s best hope for “improvement.” Born Buck Waitie in 1804 from partially assimilated parents, he attended a Christian school in New England around the time that his contemporary, Sequoyah, developed a syllabary (like an alphabet but based on syllables) for the Cherokee language. Boudinot founded the *Cherokee Phoenix*, a bilingual newspaper that was published in English and in Cherokee. Siding with federal policies, Boudinot used the *Phoenix* to advance the image of a “civilization” that was being “redeemed from a savage state.”<sup>18</sup> He tallied and celebrated local “progress” in agriculture, trade, and culture. On the other hand, sympathies with the United States contributed to Boudinot’s alienation among his own people. In 1835, he signed the Treaty of Echota, the infamous

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<sup>17</sup> Irving, “Traits of Indian Character,” *Analectic Magazine* 3 (1814), 145; *Selected Writings of Washington Irving*, ed. William P. Kelly (New York: Modern Library, 1984), 299-301, 306, 311.

<sup>18</sup> *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot*, ed. Theda Perdue (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 94.

agreement that ceded lands in Georgia and led to the Trail of Tears. His views led to a forced march West, and eventually to his murder at the hands of a kinsman.

Boudinot's signature essay, "Address to the Whites," illustrates the difficulty of inhabiting a Jeffersonian vision. Written in 1826 to raise funds for a Cherokee school and purchase supplies for the *Phoenix*, this speech incorporated the republican language of progress across space to advance Native American civilization. Much like *Notes on the State of Virginia*, it begins by situating boundaries; reviews the quality and commercial potential of his nation's territory; it predicts the day when waste lands will become "one of the Garden spots of America"; and uses all the conventional markers of Enlightenment geography, tallying heads of cattle, looms, spilling wheels, mills, plows, smiths, schools, roads, "good books," and redeemed souls. As he turns Euroamerican conceptions of the environment and culture to his own people and place, however, he must acknowledge the prejudices of his audience. He observes that "the term *Indian* is pregnant with ideas" that strike listeners as "repelling and repugnant," and to the same ends that Jefferson used Logan, Boudinot offers a bit of literary polish to evidence his humanity. Even though the Cherokees need "not the display of language," the editor of the *Phoenix* drops allusions to *The Merchant of Venice*, the Bible, and Washington Irving. "They will vanish like a vapour from the face of the earth," Boudinot exclaims, must they "perish" and "go down in sorrow to their grave?" Drawing from a line of influence that passed from *Notes on the State of Virginia* to Irving's "Traits on the Indian Character," Boudinot would argue that the fate of a nation must "hang upon your mercy as to a garment. Will you push them from you, or will you save them? Let humanity answer."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Boudinot, *Cherokee Editor*, 72-73, 65, 79.

The phrasing echoes Logan's. A rhetorical question is followed by a short concluding phrase. And the adaptation rounds out the three modes charted in this essay: from a language of "improvement," to melancholy thoughts on "disappearance," to "incorporation." Because these three modes interlock and switch back, it would be a mistake to suggest the inevitability of chronology; that is, it simplifies matters to imply that literary disappearances led to real removals and that there was no other story to tell. Rather, Euro- and Native American worlds came together as a nation moved West, and the terms of this westering nation were being renegotiated constantly. This leaves several lessons that can be drawn from the Jeffersonian legacy. First, curiosity (even in the form of admiration) was not the same as adopting an Other's interests. Patronizing charity was as brutal as usurpation in the end. Second and more broadly, American culture is both permeable and imbricated by uneven distributions of power. Lastly, the US was (and is) a place where people from a variety of backgrounds try to figure each other out. Blinded by his own prejudices, Jefferson becomes particularly instructive in this process. He remains relevant to the study of colonial (or post-colonial) nations, where authors must struggle to situate themselves amidst human differences. The literature of intercultural contact is, as it also was for Jefferson, difficult, painful, unfair, and uncommonly rich.

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