Historical Background: The West and the World

In American colonial and national literature, the importance of the unknown lands that almost always seemed to lay to the West manifested itself in a multitude of discourses. Starting from Puritan visions of a wilderness with both heavenly and demonic potentialities[1] to the subsequent errand into said wilderness, the captivity narrative genre, and to literature that juxtaposed the domestic confinement of women with performances of masculinity and mobility on the western peripheries. Geographic imaginations assumed a central function in slave narratives that regularly drew analogies to scriptural or fantastical places and sometimes equated escape to the North and Canada with the arrival in the mythical Canaan, for instance in Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789). In contrast, being sold "down the river" became synonymous with descending into the living hell of the Deep South, hence correlating individual mobility or uprootedness, freedom or enslavement with one's positionality in a specific region.[2] Through its treatment as a subject of and setting for literary works, the West emerged as a particularly powerful imaginative nexus that inspired authors and readers to engage new configurations of region, nation, and empire as well as the sociocultural, ethnic, and gender configurations they encountered either through personal experiences, oral histories, or the tales of western settlers, prospectors, and travellers.[3]

In the US, the heightened significance of spatial imaginations and general proclivity for geographic matters were no new phenomena but date back to the Early Republic. The importance of space and its representations hence predates much of the territorial conquest of the West during the second half of the nineteenth century and the ideological ossifications of spatial imaginations

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1 Human geographer James Kunstler explains that "America in the minds of the earliest settlers was therefore a place fraught with paradox. Viewed as a wilderness, it was possibly wicked, possibly holy. If it was the Garden of Eden, then it was a place to which sinful man really had no rightful claim" (J. H. Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p. 18).

2 Based on the work of Tim Cresswell, mobility here is understood as "socially produced motion" that is characterized "through three relational moments": empirically observable (migratory) movement, representational strategies of cultural productions, as well as the "embodied experience" of mobility (T. Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, pp. 3–4).

3 Regarding the nation's cultural sensibilities for geography, Brian Jarvis coined the term "textualized spatiality" that highlights the importance of key concepts like wilderness, frontier, Wild West, small town, and open road for the imaginative construction of identity (B. Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 7).

into nation-building practices. During the colonial era, the doctrine of *terra nullius* (nobody's land) had undergirded the Puritan relationship to the western peripheries.[4] The concept served not only to uphold binaries of orthodoxy and heathenism but also as a justification to arrogate native land and resources, often justified by their supposed legal incapability of ownership. *Terra nullius* went hand in hand with John Winthrop's vision of the New World colonies as a shining City Upon a Hill that served as an example of righteousness for the sclerotic monarchies of Europe. Morally elevating the colonial society in this manner also meant an epistemic abjection of America's indigenous owners, whose resources and lands represented the building blocks of the Puritan utopia.

After the Revolutionary War, when the Appalachian Mountains were still the barrier to the western parts of the continent, atlases and gazetteers experienced a surge in popularity. In contrast to the mainly decorative function of traditional copper-plated maps, they represented a desire to quantify and precisely pinpoint topographies, infrastructures, and economic productions of regions in tandem with the overarching unfolding of industrialization, utilitarian thinking, and increasing commodification of nature.[5] Ever heavier geography tomes, travelogues, and gazetteers like Jedidiah Morse's *Geography Made Easy* (1784) became bestsellers that rivalled the impact of imported (or pirated) British highbrow literature. The display of ever more detailed maps in private homes turned into a symbol of social status, while school curriculums allotted more time to geography than they did to teaching the young republic's colonial history.[6] As a result, Susan Schulten explains that while *Webster's Dictionary* may have laid the groundwork for an American linguistic identity, Morse's books did the same for geography by "creating a common territorial and topographic basis for nationhood".[7] In this manner, the study and knowledge of American geography turned into a performance of patriotism.[8]

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4 In *Der Nomos der Erde* (1950), Carl Schmitt coined the term *herrenloses Land* (unclaimed land) to describe the concept of a vacant or "masterless" space, which was utilized to warrant the legitimacy of colonial expansionism in the North American colonies (B. Korf and C. Schetter, "Räume des Ausnahmezustands: Carl Schmitts Raumphilosophie, *Frontiers* und *Ungoverned Territories*", *Peripherie* 32 [2012] 126/127, pp. 147–170, at 157).
5 S. Schulten, "Maps for the Masses: 1880–1900", in: S. Schulten (ed.), *The Geographical Imagination in America: 1880–1950*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 17–44, at 18.
6 M. Brückner and H. L. Hsu (eds.), *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500–1900*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007, pp. 12–13.
7 S. Schulten, "Maps for the Masses", p. 19.
8 This makes for a noteworthy historical contrast to the state of geographical (il)literacy among Americans today. Jen Kennings dedicated a chapter of *Maphead* (2011) to this subject, noting that in a "1942 *Times* interview, Howard Wilson bemoaned the fact that the average American didn't 'comprehend the significance' of places such as Dakar and the Caucasus.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, literary historians like Samuel Knapp and Moses Coit Tyler further curtailed the hegemony of European publications. They "Americanized" literature by emphasizing its intimate connection with space, highlighting the importance of texts such as Thomas Harriot's *Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) and the expedition journals of Lewis and Clark. Others emphasized supposedly unparalleled properties of the country's landscape, proposing, for instance, that "America is remarkable for three things: it has the largest lakes, the longest rivers, and the longest chain of mountains to be found in the world".[9] Western expansionism was celebrated and naturalized by atlases that colourfully illustrated the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the annexation of Texas in 1845, the expulsion of British subjects from the Pacific Northwest, and the Alaskan purchase of 1867. Constant territorial aggrandizements appeared like stepping stones in the progressing flow of the

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Forget the 'significance' – I doubt that many Americans today could even tell you what continent they're on. Indiana University's Rick Bein recently performed a fifteenth-anniversary follow-up to his massive 1987 study on the spatial literacy of Indiana college freshmen. Indiana had put major efforts into improving geography education in the interim, so Bein was anticipating a big bounce in his results. Instead, scores declined by 2 percent. [...] In recent National Geographic polls, one in ten American college students can't find California or Texas on a map, ten times worse than the same numbers in [a] 1950 study" (J. Kennings, *Maphead: Charting the Wide, Weird World of Geography Wonks*, New York: Scribner, 2012, p. 71; see M. W. Lewis, "American Geographical Illiteracy and (Perhaps) the World's Worst Atlas", *GeoCurrents*, 30 April 2014, http://www.geocurrents.info/geographical-thought/american-geographical-illiteracy-perhaps-worlds-worst-atlas).

9 S. G. Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Universal History, on the Basis of Geography*, New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor, & Company, 1876, p. 564. The following understands landscape as working through an objective-subjective dualism. As geographer John Wylie explains: "On the one hand we have landscape as a 'portion of land'; on the other, landscape is registered in terms of a 'viewing eye'. [...] Defined thus, landscape is articulated in complex fashion; it shuttles between objective fact and subjective perception, between material substance and symbolic form, between the tangible and the intangible, reality and appearance. Putting this another way, the landscape concept hinges, right from the start, between outer worlds (the material, external world) and inner worlds (the internal world of human meaning, symbolism and imagination)" (J. Wylie, "Landscape", in: J. A. Agnew and D. N. Livingstone [eds.], *The Sage Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011, pp. 300–315, at 302). But these parameters can also intersect with each other. The landscape of "the internal world" can hence turn into an object of representation, as demonstrated for instance by Hong Kong artist Chan Dick whose photo series "The Trek 探" transforms the internal anatomy of preserved human specimen into similes of external landscapes, stating that "[i]nside the human body is a hidden landscape, an incredible sight to behold" (C. Dick, "The Trek 探", https://www.chandick.hk [accessed 22 April 2020]).

nation's history, retained by official statistics and "the social life of maps".[10] In the imaginations of avid readers and collectors of atlases that grew thicker and more detailed, expansion seemed like the preordained sequence of the nation's manifest destiny and a geographical puzzle that begged observers to fill in the remaining white spaces across the continent. This self-enhancing interplay between spatial imaginations and colonizing practices marked an ideology that some have referred to as "continentalism".[11]

Marc Augé refers to the resulting dual function of literature and placemaking when he distinguishes between "narratives that 'traverse' and 'organize' places [...] and the place that is constituted by the writing of the narrative".[12] Following this insight, the former represents the functional, illustrative function of maps and atlases to objectivize and codify space by giving it authority and discursive power that increase with the splendour of its presentation (e.g. through expensive gilt edgings) and function as a status symbol.[13] Their second function, however, lies not only in their content and aesthetics but also in their performativity within the realms of fantasy and imagination. Or, in other words, the audiences' expectations of what potentially rich and exotic lands might in upcoming publications be editorialized as future constituents of the nation-state. Empirical "hard facts" or anecdotes about ecosystems, resources, and foreign peoples inhabiting these new acquisitions consequently became authoritative supplements to the (semi)fictional stories and grand landscapes composed in literature,

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10 M. Brückner, *The Social Life of Maps in America, 1750–1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017, p. 3.

11 C. Vevier, "American Continentalism: An Idea of Expansion, 1845–1910", *The American Historical Review* 65 (1960) 2, pp. 323–335; D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History Vol. 2: Continental America, 1800–1867*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; J. D. Drake, *The Nation's Nature. How Continental Presumptions Gave Rise to the United States of America*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.

12 M. Augé, *Non-lieux: Introduction à une Anthropologie de la Surmodernité* [*Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*], J. Howe (trans.), Brooklyn: Verso Books, 1995, p. 84.

13 Discourse here refers to its Foucauldian, i.e. anti-foundationalist and constructivist understanding as a basic function in the production of knowledge and meaning. More precisely, "the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation [like] clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse. [...] Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history; [...] it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history, a unity and discontinuity in history itself, posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations" (M. Foucault, *L'archéologie du Savoir* [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*], A. M. Sheridan Smith [trans.], Abingdon: Routledge, 2002 [1969], pp. 121–131).

paintings, or musical compositions. Popular books like S. G. Goodrich's *Peter Parley's Universal History on the Basis of Geography* (1876) simultaneously educated and entertained their young readers by telling world histories that folded factual and fictional elements into a triumphal narrative of the United States as a nexus of global progress:

> Look at the steam-cars, hurrying along like birds upon the wing look at our sea-ports, and see the forest of shipping that is crowded into their harbors. Look at our lines of telegraph, conveying messages and news more rapidly than if they were borne upon the wings of the wind. Visit the city of New York, a busy, buzzing hive of men, containing nearly a million of people. [...] Enter the shops, and notice the beautiful articles of merchandise brought from China, from Java, from Hindostan, from Arabia, from all the shores of the Mediterranean sea, from England, France, Holland, and the borders of the Baltic. Go to the top of Trinity Church, where you can have a view of the surrounding waters [...]. See there the flag of every commercial country under heaven. See there, too, ships, sloops, schooners, and steamboats, coming and going like bees in a summer morning, all bringing their burden to the hive. What a beautiful sight is this, and in a country, too, which has been settled but little more than two hundred years [...] Go to Cincinnati, Louisville, Chicago, St. Louis, and proceed on the great Pacific Railroad to San Francisco on the Pacific.[14]

Popularized during the Civil War, newspaper maps visualized important battles and tracked military progress. The territorial consolidation after the end of the war and the political merger of the northern and southern states coincided with an intensifying infrastructural East-West integration enabled by the railroad and telegraph. The Early Republic's regional patchwork gradually made way for a sense of national unity and territorial coherence based on new experiential practices such as tourism, landscape photography, and local colour literature.[15] Schulten notes that, unlike European maps that focused mainly on topographical features and

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14 Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Universal History*, pp. 644–646. Instead of revising obvious misspellings in the following quotations, "[sic]" is inserted to mark them. The goal is to keep intact historical sources, not to retroactively "lecture" authors or indicate disapproval of their statements. In the case of previously unpublicized writings of settlers and travellers, this is also meant to preserve voice and context as these texts were often penned under difficult circumstances. Preserving original tone as far as possible is important because these texts present "a species of composition free alike to the illiterate and the learned, requiring no peculiar and appropriate style. [...] Men of the most common acquirements are not excluded, or thought presumptuous in attempting it, for it may be the fortune of such only, to have witnessed facts of the highest interest, or to have passed through countries not likely to be visited by the learned" (H. M. Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana; Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Mississippi River, in 1811*, Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, and Eichbaum, 1814, p. 6).

15 P. Giles, *The Global Remapping of American Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 9.

larger settlements, their US counterparts showed greater levels of details, often down to the smallest hinterland settlements, and in this manner emphasized the democratic dimension of mapmaking as a universal and non-hierarchical, albeit distinctly self-referential exercise. These features already hinted at trends towards inward reflection, exceptionalism, and unilateral thinking: On average, American atlases reserved around 80 per cent of their pages for depictions of "their" continent, whereas German publications of the same period allotted only 6 per cent to national territories.[16] On the one hand, this seems to corroborate the pivotal role of spatial imaginations in American nation-building during the long nineteenth century. On the other hand, it demonstrates a marked epistemic contrast to an under-researched aspect of transatlantic histories, namely how their European peers of comparably bourgeois background reflected on their spatial identity more through world histories and networks of geographic societies than through nationalistic mapmaking.[17]

In the field of literature, the American Renaissance movement transcended the conventional function of geography as an empirical science that produced maps primarily to aid navigation and exploration. In their literary discourses, spatial representations no longer remained limited to artistic or functional renditions of real-world geographies.[18] Instead, literary experiments with and subversions of the Enlightenment's homogenous understanding of space manifested themselves in descriptions of aberrant or purely psychological spaces. Formerly obscure and seemingly unknowable relations of individuals to their surroundings came under scrutiny and were mapped out in the works of Cooper, Thoreau, and Hawthorne, often within a distinctly American nexus of space-related themes that sought to emancipate itself from European styles and traditions. Melville's captain Ahab appears to point to these changing sensitivities in American literature when he

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16 Schulten, "Maps for the Masses", pp. 29–31.

17 H. Bergenthum, *Weltgeschichten im Zeitalter der Weltpolitik. Zur populären Geschichts-schreibung im Wilhelminischen Deutschland*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2004; N. Steinbach-Hüther et al., *Geographiegeschichtsschreibung und Digital Humanities. Neue Methoden für Zeit-schriftenanalysen*, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2019.

18 The ensuing entanglement of spatial representations with imperialist policies lead to Edward Said's critique of Euroamerican imaginations regarding the Orient. Said expressed this in the concept of "imaginative geography" and the normative exercise of (discursive) power that accompany seemingly value-neutral, objective practices such as mapmaking, hence emphasizing "how geography and conquest go together" (E. W. Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place", *Landscape and Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 241–259, at 247; see D. Gregory, "Imaginative Geographies", *Progress in Human Geography* 19 [1995] 4, pp. 447–485, at 447).

refuses to use a quadrant to assist him in the *Pequot's* navigation, lamenting that "thou tellest me truly where I *am* – but canst thou cast the least hint where I *shall* be?"[19]

In an emerging postbellum middle class, domestic maps, compasses, and other space-related objects served as decorative home furnishings, signifying an increasing intermingling of spatial, social, and psychological dimensions. Textbooks like Rand McNally's *Pictorial Atlas* (1898) became deeply invested in bio-spatial determinism, illustrating racial hierarchies of nations according to their industrial development and supposed character traits. War atlases recorded military gains and directly incorporated narratives of empire and expansionism. Public interest in detailed maps of Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii reflected a paradigm change in foreign policy and departure from George Washington's warnings against "foreign entanglement".[20] Mapmaking now became "strongly linked to imperialism and colonies and to attempts to extend the power of particular states and organizations. Maps were a means of depicting claims to territory and demarcating growing spheres of influence".[21] But racial-colonial mapping also assured and justified the supposed superiority of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants within a continental homeland. Schulten makes clear that "race and nation – sometimes race and continent – became conflated" while geographical spatiality turned into ethnic spatiality as part of "a metageography where continents correlate to race and physiography".[22]

At the close of the nineteenth century, the popular genres of the western adventure story and tall tale addressed a largely male and adolescent readership. Published episodically in dime novel format, these stories informed the spatial imaginations of an entire generation of readers. Often, they revolved

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19 H. Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851, p. 410.

20 S. F. Bemis, "Washington's Farewell Address: A Foreign Policy of Independence", *American Historical Review* vol. 39 (1934) 2, pp. 250–268, at 268; Schulten, "Maps for the Masses", p. 39.

21 J. A. Matthews and D. T. Herbert, *Geography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 5.

22 Schulten, "Maps for the Masses", pp. 33–35. This correlation, however, was not unique to the US and can already be observed in early eighteenth-century works such as the *Völkertafel*. Created by an unknown Styrian artist, the painting illustrates the alleged characteristics of ten European peoples and is emblematic for the essentialized nationalism that gripped Europe during the nineteenth century. The table, for instance, defines the demeanour of Russians as "*boshaft*" (vicious) and the traditional attire of Greek and Turkish people as "*weibisch*" (effeminate). Rather fittingly in the light of the above considerations, the artist describes the scientific specialty of the English as "*Geographie*" (F. K. Stanzel, *Europäischer Völkerspiegel: Imagologisch-ethnographische Studien zu den Völkertafeln des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1999, p. 21).

around heroic experiences and feats of former generations at the western frontier (i.e. the moving border between civilization and savagery) and inferred a "melodramatic prototype of 'American Manhood'".[23] In Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) or Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912) the wilderness no longer appears as a pagan, forbidden domain as it did in the captivity narratives of Puritan settler societies. In contrast, the untamed environments and unruly peoples of the West now formed an exciting antithesis to urban overcrowding and civil conveniences in the eastern cities. Western nature thus became a semi-real space where "real" masculinity and moral integrity could be performed unrestrained from societal restraints. Dime novels regularly featured extreme situations that had become rare in most people's everyday lives as urbanization and technological progress for the first time promised relative security and predictability.[24] Over time, every facet of the nation's past at the western peripheries solidified into discourses that construed the crossgenerational frontier experience as a source of commonly shared national and gender identities. The country's peripheral past came to be seen as the prime generator of a distinctively American character that reformed the ethnic and religious patchwork of colonial settler and immigrant societies into a new people connected by their shared imaginations of (western) space.[25] These spatialization processes laid the groundwork for an aggressive nationalism that heralded the end of inward-oriented and protectionist policies. In their place, more self-conscious geopolitics began to occupy policymakers and opinion leaders, which also included a stronger sense of mission. In the late century, missionary work undergirded the consolidation of continental territories into federal states as well as the nation's outreach into the Asian-Pacific and circum-Atlantic spaces, often against the resistance of native societies. According to Stuart Hall, America was no longer

> simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation – a 'system of representation' – which produced an 'idea' of the nation as an 'imagined community', with whose

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23 E. Senaha, "Manhood and American Literary History: An Overview with Selected Bibliography of Masculinities and Men's Studies", *The Annual Report on Cultural Science* 118 (2006), pp. 95–118, p. 98.

24 In *The Americans*, Daniel Boorstin suggests that through new genres such as sports reporting, weather forecasts, and yellow press journalism, citizens "hoped to find a residual stock of the unrepeatable and the unpredictable" in order to compensate for "lives of increasingly repeatable packaged experience" (D. J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, New York: Random House, 1973, pp. 402–407).

25 J. Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2009, p. 469.

meanings we could identify and which, through this imaginary identification, constituted its citizens as 'subjects' (in both of Foucault's sense of 'subjection' – subject of and subjected to the nation). [...] it is important to acknowledge that the drive to nationhood [...] can often take the form of trying to construct ethnically (or culturally, religiously or racially) closed or 'pure' formations in the place of the older, corporate nation-states or imperial formations; [...] of gathering *one* people, *one* ethnicity, gathered under *one* political roof.[26]

A growing wave of imperialism engendered a Machiavellian realpolitik in the form of an Open Door Policy in China and acquisition of Hawaii, Alaska, Samoa, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and others. These comprehensive colonial undertakings commenced soon after the territorial consolidation of the North American continent was completed, most notably by the Louisiana Purchase in the West, Adams-Onís Treaty in the Southeast, British-American 49th-meridian boundary in the Northwest, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Gadsden Purchase after the Mexican-American War in Texas and the Southwest. Intensifying contacts with non-white peoples in newly acquired territories spurred the implementation of Darwinist theory of evolution in the emerging natural sciences, while Ernst Haeckel's and Herbert Spencer's application of Darwin's laws to the sociocultural and political spheres epitomized natural selection and the survival of the fittest. In terms of spatiality, these ideas stressed the dynamics between supposedly uncivilized people and their civilizing and reformation by Americans. At the wild peripheries, the laws of nature seemed to show themselves in the most obvious fashion, while at the same time conveniently serving to rationalize, naturalize, and exculpate the displacement and slow-moving ethnocide of natives. Their un-American relationship with space in the guise of nomadic practices, alleged mis- or disuse of natural resources, and non-capitalist, non-industrial, and non-individualist lifestyles seemed to make their equal participation in the United States' spatial dialectics impossible. Strictly enforced racial hierarchies as well as pseudo-sciences like phrenology and eugenics converged with one another in their rationalization of the westward movement of white settlers, which they justified as the manifest destiny of the American nation.

Instead of ancestry, class, or gender, Social Darwinism put biology and race at the centre of personal and social identity. The peoples and worldviews encountered by Americans in "exotic" regions seemed to confirm to (pseudo)scientists that race was firmly connected to climate and environment. The conjunctions between "blood and soil" and the germ theory – the central tenets of European agrarian romanticism that were later appropriated by fascist ideologies – gained

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26 S. Hall, "Culture, Community, Nation", *Cultural Studies* 7 (1993) 3, pp. 349–363, at 355–356.

popularity through Hippolyte Taine's concept of "race, milieu, et moment".[27] Soon after the American Empire's rise at the fin de siècle, however, US policy-makers faced insurgencies, causing the deployment of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba 1898 and the massacres of the Philippine-American War between 1899 and 1902. During the latter, the South Carolinian Senator Benjamin Tillman and others opted to forfeit control of the far-away archipelago, fearing that annexation or further warfare would force Filipinos to seek refuge in the continental US. Here, a rising wave of non-white and, even more unsettling for some, Catholic and Jewish immigration from southern and eastern Europe already added fuel to the ideological flames of exceptionalism, populism, racialism, and nativism, igniting fears about the "decline of the West" as expressed in the title of Oswald Spengler's eponymous bestseller.

This and other popular works played a key role in the re-negotiation of ethnicity during the period. Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) prepared the groundwork that inspired the refoundation of the Ku Klux Klan in the reconstructed South. In the early days of cinema, D. W. Griffith's blockbuster *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) buttressed the historical revision of the Civil War by romanticizing the antebellum slave economy as a forlorn spatial order structured by medieval chivalry and heroic resistance against Yankee invaders from the North. Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) warned against miscegenation and championed racial hygiene, eugenics, and Nordic theory, carrying to extremes some of the gloomiest malapropisms of race and space of the so-called Progressive Era. These authors no longer viewed the tenets of civilization as results of moral self-control but as outcomes of genetic dispositions and racial hierarchies.

Understanding what processes led to this amalgamation of space, race, and empire at the end of the nineteenth century demands a return to the western peripheries and their textual representations in contemporary sources. This also means returning to a point in time when empire and nation-state were just two of many trajectories alongside which individual and collective concepts of space were imagined, performed, formatted, and ordered – hence a period in history when works of literature provided readers with a wide spectrum of possible "Wests" and "Americas".[28] American literature in fact produced an abundance of literary landscapes that seem confined solely to the realms of fantasy and imagination but that nonetheless deeply permeated popular consciousness as well as many aspects of material culture and social reality. In the decades

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27 H. Zapf, *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2010, p. 205.

28 Of course, this spectrum also includes later works such as L. Frank Baum's *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Alurista's spiritual nation of Aztlán, or H. P. Lovecraft's impossible geographies.

after the American Revolution, the West became such a compound of reality and imagination, known mainly through fiction and newspaper reports to citizens and immigrants arriving in New York or Boston. Like El Dorado in the sixteenth-century fever dreams of Spanish conquistadores, some (e.g. participants of the gold rushes and other runs on western resources) envisioned the West as a Cockaigne of free resources, personal enrichment, and other opportunities of economic mobility. For others, the West became a transcendental space defined by more intangible goods in the form of spiritual, ideological, regionalist, or nationalist worldviews.[29] Again others believed the West to be a space whose attainment necessitated certain character traits to take part in its allegorical geographies, for instance the hardships of the western journey and its need for heightened resilience and ingenuity.

Robert Athearn describes these multifaceted beliefs as "the West of the mind, of the spirit, a concept that for generations had reassured Americans of a future, a place to go, that often was one more of imagery than of substance, yet dreamers thought of it as being real".[30] The results were individual and collective visions of the West in which clear boundaries between reality and imagination seemed to matter less in the decades after the nation's independence. Until about the middle of the nineteenth century, most Americans would perhaps have agreed that their country, like the English colonies before, did not border on empty land but rather on various Native American nations. After the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), the Homestead Act of 1862, and several rushes on western resources, however, most time-honoured boundaries (both imagined and real) between East and West, North and South became more fluid and subject to re-negotiation.[31] Myth-making became a vital strategy to stabilize the newly acquired western territories in the context of their integration into the nation-state. In the words of Richard Slotkin, "the raw material of [western] history was immediately processed, conflated with ideology and legendry, and transformed into myth".[32] If anything,

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29 Aztlán is such a spiritual space in the southwestern US and northern Mexico where the Chicano movement located the sociocultural nexus of a Mesoamerican identity for which national borders have become meaningless. In this view, the Mexican-American borderlands – often viewed as an epitome of peripherality – are reimagined as the centre of the "Nation of Aztlán" (G. Pisarz-Ramirez and S. Wöll, *Periphere Räume in der Amerikanistik* [= Dialektik des Globalen. Kernbegriffe, 3], Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019, p. 31).

30 R. G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986, p. 10.

31 K. L. Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F' Word, or Being and Becoming Postwestern", *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (1996) 2, pp. 179–215, at 183–184.

32 R. Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998, p. xvi.

the semantic leverage and imaginative scope of the West, from whichever angle one may apprehend it, has only increased over time, continuously asserting its influence over all aspects of social and cultural life.

The West and the F-Word: Americanizing Space

In 1882, the US Census Bureau defined the nation's western border as marked by a certain population density of settlers "beyond which the country must be considered as unsettled".[33] This demarcation simultaneously commodified and dehumanized the peripheries, foreshadowing the rise of the frontier as the axiomatic spatial paradigm that would order the imaginations of generations to come. What Athearn poetically called "the West of the mind" together with the desire to carve out a uniquely American cultural and literary geography alongside the discursive patterns of western conquest culminated in the presentation of Frederick Jackson Turner's (1861–1932) frontier thesis at the 1893 Chicago World Fair.[34] Among the fair's attractions and technological innovations from 46 countries were the first fully electrified kitchen and first Ferris wheel, neoclassical White City architecture, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Few of the 27 million visitors however took the time to listen to the history lectures held by the young professor from the University of Wisconsin. In his lectures, Turner sketched out his own vision of the American West, which he imagined not as a geographical region or territory but as an umbrella term and meta-concept for

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33 J. T. Juricek, "American Usage of the Word 'Frontier' from Colonial Times to Frederick Jackson Turner", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 110 (1966) 1, pp. 10–34, at 28. More precisely, maps in the attachment census' attachments defined the frontier as the line beyond which the population density was less than two inhabitants per square mile, or less than .8 inhabitants per square kilometre (US Census Bureau, "11th Census 1890 Overview", *Through the Decades*, 18 July 2017, https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1890.html [accessed 30 April 2020]).

34 The Chicago expo's official title was "World's Fair: Columbian Exposition", meant to commemorate the fourth centennial of Columbus' arrival in the New World, albeit one year late and although Columbus never actually set foot on the American continent. As Astrid Böger explains, "[t]he guiding idea behind The World's Columbian Exposition was to build an harmonious and orderly model city, in many ways the exact opposite of the urban space that was the day-to-day reality Chicagoans negotiated at the time, and which they frequently experienced as chaotic, overcrowded, full of vice, and therefore dangerous" (A. Böger, "Envisioning Progress at Chicago's White City", in: K. Benesch and K. Schmidt [eds.], *Space in America: Theory, History, Culture*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, pp. 265–284, at 268).

the sociocultural dynamics that commenced alongside a contact zone between civilization and wilderness.[35] Ever since the arrival of the first European colonists on the North American continent, the frontier concept had been a powerful force in the public imagination of space. Often seen as lawless hinterlands, it called into question the stability of bordered regimes as well as the nation's and empire's projection of power in peripheral regions. The Census Report of 1890 provided a definition of the frontier while simultaneously declaring its end since almost all the continent's formerly unorganized territories had been organized as either states or territories of the United States. The official "closure" of the frontier, however, inspired the historian Turner to formulate his famous thesis, which he based on demographic data from the *Statistical Atlas*, derived from the Census Report.[36]

At this sparsely inhabited and moving periphery, Turner argued, century-long spatialization processes resulted in the creation of a common American identity that eventually transcended the oppositions of the (post)colonial immigrant societies. The western frontier thus became an epochal catalyst that translated the sequences of warfare and conquest into democratic structures and a meaningful national identity shaped by an exceptional relationship with space in general and the West in particular. The European and British influences and institutions that pervaded the 13 colonies were gradually reformed by the westward movement of both true-born Americans and newly arrived immigrants as they adapted to the harsh conditions at the peripheries and transformed the western landscape: "The buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this became the trader's 'trace;' the trails widened into roads, and the roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads".[37] The frontier thesis thus

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35 The term frontier in the American context exceeds its European etymology stemming from *frowntere* as the "front line of an army" and Old French *frontière* as "boundary-line of a country" (D. Harper, "Frontier", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2019, https://www.etymonline.com/word/frontier). In Europe, these meanings reach well into the twentieth century, visible for instance in the Battle of the Frontiers at the onset of the First World War.

36 M. Walsh, *The American West: Visions and Revisions*, Cambridge: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 2; see H. Gannett (ed.), *Statistical Atlas of the United States, Based Upon the Results of the Eleventh Census*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898, https://loc.gov/item/07019233.

37 F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, p. 14. Discussing the metamorphose of the later state of Wisconsin, Mark Wyman notes that "[t]he steam engine that brought about this revolution – driving lake boats, railroads, and saw mills – became the major engine of change in transforming the frontier of Wisconsin and the Upper Lakes into a settled part of the nation, integrated into its economy and government. In fact, most of the changes noted by Turner for his palimpsest rested on modes of

assumed the hierarchical succession of archetypal civilizations as part of a natural, almost evolutionary and pseudo-Darwinist sequence: First came the traders' and trappers' frontier, followed by the miners' and the farmers' frontier, before its end was heralded by the mobility revolution brought about by the railroad.[38] This transformation, Turner suggested, commenced along the lines of a moving contact zone, rendered accessible by the discovery of passageways across the Appalachian Mountains that opened the West for waves of emigration that would not stop until they reached the shores of the Pacific. Along the way, western settlements and communities had to negotiate the gradients between primitivism and civilization and develop new technologies, business models, morals, and means of democratic cooperation. Scarcity led to the fusion of formerly incompatible traditions and a uniquely American recombination of various cultures, consisting for instance of Swedish log cabin construction, German engineering, English laws and mapmaking, Mexican irrigation and cattle breeding, and Native American farming and food preparation methods.[39] For Turner, a new breed of people emerged

> as the pioneers on the Atlantic seaboard learned the local techniques of food production, as the hunters who first entered Kentucky and Tennessee dressed like Indians and copied their woodsmanship, and as the Rocky Mountain fur men burrowed even more of Indian ways. In the Pueblo area Spanish colonists incorporated many Indian culture elements and passed them on to their successors. The American fur trade, as its vocabulary reminds, owed much to the methods that the French had worked out. The American cowboy had greater indebtedness to Spanish experience [...]. The Spanish land system, mining law, and water law had partial adoption into the procedures of the American West. The log cabin is credited as a Swedish introduction, and other elements of wide diversity can be traced to other foreign or minority participants.[40]

Influenced by Turner's thesis, other scholars reimagined the spatio-cultural dynamics at the western peripheries. During the 1930s, a group of ethnographers reframed frontier ideology in terms of acculturation processes that

> required a meeting of two distinct cultures, and in most situations one found a socially "superior" and "inferior" culture side by side. In such cases, assimilation was almost certain,

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transportation: the Indians' birchark canoe, ideally suited for the network of streams and rivers, was quickly adopted by European traders; then came oxen, horses, the opening of the Eerie Canal, the arrival of steamboats and railroads. All brought new groups to the frontier who in turn left their marks, both as tangible objects and as institutions and beliefs" (M. Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 296).

38 Turner, *The Frontier*, p. 12.

39 The log cabin design was not only imitated by other European colonists but also adopted by Native American communities that helped to spread it across the continent.

40 Caughey, "The American West", p. 11.

since inferior cultures would normally adapt by voluntarily borrowing from the superior culture, and superior cultures commonly imposed themselves on inferiors. [...] [Ralph] Linton saw the end product as a "cultural fusion" in which elements of each culture combined. This was the most common outcome of Native and white interaction, the melding of both in an overarching Euro-American society with some limited Native elements.[41]

Approaching the subject from the perspective of Postcolonial Studies, Mary Louise Pratt envisioned a clash of civilizations through the concept of transculturation as "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. 'Contact zone' in my discussion is often synonymous with 'colonial frontier'".[42] Turner concluded that the unique spatial interactions between the country's eastern centres of power and its dynamic western peripheries created an exceptional American character as an entirely new society emerged through its members' relationship to the peripheral spaces they settled and subjugated:

> The West [...] is a form of society, rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older institutions and ideas to *the transforming influences of free land*. By this application, a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence.[43]

Shifting the focus from the coastal and colonial to the continental and national, this view "created a national historical interpretation. At some point then in the American past the whole nation was part of the west".[44] The West thus became more than a physical space, a region, or a territory; it became a socio-spatial order that (environmentally) determined a coherent national character that replaced the fragmented mosaic of (white) immigrant identities, which Turner and his contemporaries feared could otherwise result in a similarly fragmented

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41 Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F' Word", p. 193.

42 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Abingdon: Routledge, 1992, p. 6. In his provocative essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993), Samuel Huntington transferred a similar hypothesis to the stage of global politics, suggesting that the post-Cold War order would be structured not so much by economic and ideological factors but by conflicts between cultural and religious identities (S. P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72 [1993] 3, pp. 22–49, at 22).

43 F. J. Turner, "The Problem of the West", *The Atlantic Monthly* 78 (1896) 367, pp. 289–297, at 289 (emphasis added).

44 Walsh, *The American West*, p. 2.

and tense geopolitical situation as in fin de siècle Europe. Instead of an English East Coast, German-Scandinavian Midwest, African-American and Creole South, French-British-Russian Northwest, and Hispanic Southwest, all with their own antagonistic cultures and agendas, Turner imagined a common ground between them in the form of an "American spirit" carved out at the frontier: "[A]t the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs".[45] At the time of Turner's proposition, so-called germ theory was a dominant historical theorem. It suggested that the nation's character stemmed from Germanic sprigs transmitted to the New World.[46] Discounting this notion, Turner focused on "historical explanations that turned on an axis of the more recent past – explanations more area specific to their own experience than the forests of medieval Europe, the fens of England, or even the English colonial plantations".[47]

He concluded "that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American".[48] Becoming "more American" aligned itself with the era's political desires of constructing a more cohesive national historiography "that spoke to all Americans [and] explained the process of Americanization which created a nation out of diverse peoples and geographic fragments [...] in terms equal to those propounded by Europe's national historians".[49] Conversely, the idea of frontier history as universal history also put doubts on the relevance of local and regional spaces, not so much regarding their relevance for the nation but in terms of their cultural distinctness.

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45 Turner, *The Frontier*, p. 4.

46 Germ theory merged two separate epistemes as "a burst of German nationalism and a growing European interest in the history of German peoples inspire[d] the English and Americans to celebrate Anglo-Saxons as superior people competent to create institutions capable of ruling the world. In this view, high-minded, freedom-loving German people had migrated from their simple, pure life in the forests to infuse France and England with their excellent characteristics. [...] From these origins in German Romanticism, the English, and eventually, Americans were to combine race, nation, and language" (M. L. Meyer, "American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood Is Thicker than Family", in: V. J. Matsumoto and B. Allmendinger [eds.], *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 231–249, at 237).

47 M. Ridge, "The American West: Frontier to Region", *New Mexico Historical Review* 64 (1989) 2, pp. 125–141, at 128.

48 Turner, *The Frontier*, p. 4.

49 Ridge, "The American West", p. 128.

Despite its shortcomings, the frontier thesis opened a more comprehensive historiography that no longer limited itself to writing narrative histories, chronologies of political events, and biographies of "exceptional" personalities. It also created impulses to extend the range of space-related sources and approach the West in a more comparative and interdisciplinary manner. Turner asked basic questions and often gave equally basic answers that are still of interest for cultural geography and historical studies. Over time, his epochal spatial doctrine – combined with the errand into wilderness, manifest destiny, American Adam, and John Winthrop's notion of the City Upon a Hill – was mythologized and naturalized as a bedrock of US historiographies and policies. Identifying the frontier and auxiliary concepts as centrepieces of a particularly US spatial semantics thus represents an interim result of this book but also a connecting point for other disciplines to compare this American configuration with that of other nations or empires. Finally, the frontier thesis was successful because it conveniently explained expansionism and the appropriation of territories as natural processes that resulted not from exploitation and conquest but from the collision and "convergence of two chunks of history, the past and the future".[50] At the turn of century, Turner's thesis proved useful in undergirding an American exceptionalism that, bolstered by pseudo-scientific racialism and "muscular Christianity", became a driving force behind the United States' imperial policies. Today, discursive extensions and refinements of the frontier mythos continue to inform political agendas that, for instance, identify Middle Eastern regions as peripheries or counter-spaces to American-style democracy.

Old Western History: Expanding the Frontier

After his death in 1932, Turner left behind a strong academic following that continued his work. This group of so-called "old western historians" (sometimes called progressives) expanded and complicated the frontier thesis by including economic, ethnic, and environmental factors. Walter Prescott Webb's textbook *The Great Plains* (1931) stressed the role of regional differences in climate and aridity by contrasting life in the East to the struggles of pioneers on the Great Plains, or what he called "the Great American Desert".[51] Webb understood the

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50 Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F' Word", p. 186.

51 D. Worster, *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 137. Worster quotes an emigrant named Daniels who used the term "Great American Desert". Although he described the region as "uninhabited and uninhabitable", Daniels acknowledged that "the country is not worthless. It is destined to be the great pasture

plains' extreme climate and topographies as the fault-line that separated East and West:

> As one contrasts the civilization of the Great Plains with that of the American eastern timberland, one sees what may be called an institutional *fault* (comparable to a geological fault) running from the middle Texas to Illinois or Dakota, roughly following the ninety-eighth meridian. At this *fault* the ways of life and of living changed. Practically every institution that was carried across it was either broken and remade or else greatly altered. The ways of travel, the weapons, the method of tilling the soil, the plows and other agricultural implements, and even the laws themselves were modified.[52]

Webb's concerns regarding the fragility of the prairies' ecosystems and water supplies were confirmed by severe droughts during the 1930s and the western exodus of farmers during the Dust Bowl, powerfully illustrated by John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The Great Depression made the West appear less than exceptional during the 1930s and curtailed the enthusiasm and triumphalism connected to the frontier thesis. Ray Allen Billington was another doctoral student and biographer of Turner, as well as the founding president of the still-influential Western Historical Association (WHA). In the optimistic climate after World War 2 that once again favoured American exceptionalism and inspired by his mentor Arthur Schlesinger's pioneering studies of social and urban history, Billington revitalized the frontier thesis in the national and international arenas, albeit in a modified form that stressed material causes and actors (i.e. "users and subduers") over ideological constructs.[53] Based on causes and agents, Billington ordered western history as a processual sequence of historical frontiers formatted by different political, geographic, and economic factors:

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of the nation" (ibid.). In contrast, Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* imagines the region as a desolate, almost apocalyptic space: "If a curse had been pronounced upon the land", he writes, "it could not have worn an aspect of more dreary and forlorn barrenness. There were abrupt broken hills, deep hollows, and wide plains; but all alike glared with an insupportable whiteness under the burning sun" (F. Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, New York: Charles E. Merrill Company, 1910, p. 246).

52 W. P. Webb, *The Great Plains*. Waltham: Blaisdell, 1939, pp. 8–9.

53 Viewing the West through an economic lens, Billington suggested that the "frontier process can be roughly visualized in terms of two loosely defined groups. One – made up of fur trappers, missionaries, herdsmen, and others whose enterprise depended on preserving the wilderness – was interested in using nature. The other – comprised of farmers, speculators, town-planters, merchants, millers, and a host more whose profits depended on an expanding economy – was bent on subduing nature. Usually the Users preceded the Subduers" (R. A. Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, Kolkata: Scientific Book Agency, 1960, pp. 7–8).

The Spanish-Mexican Frontier, 1540–1776
The Traders' Frontier, 1776–1840
The Mississippi Valley Frontier, 1803–1840
The Great Basin Frontier, 1830–1846
The Miners' Frontier, 1858–1875
The Transportation Frontier, 1858–1884
The Ranchers' Frontier, 1865–1887
The Farmers' Frontier, 1870–1890
The Urban Frontier[54]

Using the frontier thesis as a starting point, Billington and other old western historians connected analytical parameters of race, class, and gender to the placemaking equation of the West, hence laying the groundwork for more critical scholarship that followed in their wake. In the conclusion to *America's Frontier Heritage* (1960), Billington acknowledges the inbuild flaws of Turner's thesis, while ultimately seeing it as the process that formatted the nation's historical and sociocultural identity. Concretely, he suggests that

> relics of the pioneer heritage remain to distinguish Americans from their contemporaries beyond the seas. Their faith in democratic institutions, their belief in equality, their insistence that class lines shall never hinder social mobility, their wasteful economy, [...] their lack of attachment to place, their eagerness to experiment and to favor the new over the old, all mark the people of the United States as unique. To say that these characteristics and attitudes were solely the result of a pioneering past is to ignore many other forces that have helped shape the American character. But to deny that three centuries of frontiering endowed the people with some of their most distinctive traits is to neglect a basic molding force that has been the source of the nation's greatest strength – and some of its most regrettable weaknesses.[55]

Apart from the frontier, nineteenth-century American literature engendered another angle of spatiality that put emphasis on the concepts of "original" or "first nature". Mostly ignoring its native owners and millennia of cultural history, the untouched wilderness became an ensign for innocence and purity that

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54 The list reflects the sequence of chapters in Billington and Ridge's *Westward Expansion* (2001). The urban frontier refers to the metropolitan bridgeheads that energized the settler economy in the West, most notably Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Santa Fe.

55 Billington, *Frontier Heritage*, p. 235. Billington was also known for his quirky limericks. Responding to Robert Dykstra's revisionist history *The Cattle Towns* (1968), he versified: "In story and film old Dodge City / Was a center of sin and tough titty. / But historians have shown / That imagine was overblown / It was moral and quiet (a pity)" (R. A. Billington, *Limericks: Historical and Hysterical*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1981, p. 34).

culminated in the "categorical opposition between things attributable to nature and those attributable to human society [which results in] a spatial purification, in which nature is understood as a pristine wilderness – a space-time outside or before the presence (or taint) of human settlement or activity".[56] This idealization of nature and reflection of timeless, transcendent values surfaces in the work of Thoreau, Wordsworth, and Whitman, the conservationist agendas of John Muir and the Sierra Club, as well as the oeuvre of Hudson River School painters like Frederic Church and Asher Durand in which "America's landscapes [turn into] 'secular cathedrals,' meant to inspire awe and reflection".[57] As part of the Myth and Symbol school in the emerging field of American Studies, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) re-examined the West through concepts like the American Adam, the myth of the garden, and agrarian utopianism, stressing the role of nature and mythical properties of the American landscape for the country's identity.[58] In *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx identified tensions between pastoralism and industrialization as a central theme of nineteenth-century literary discourses. Not unlike the present effort, Marx looked at established narratives by Thoreau, Hawthorne, Twain, and Melville but also included dime novels and paintings in his analyses. Industrialization's sweeping introduction of machines into the cathedrals of nature, he inferred, became key in revising the nation's relationship to space and expressed itself through various myths and symbols. Similar transformations occur, for instance, in the utilitarian exploitation of pastoral landscapes to which Thoreau alludes in *Walden* (1854)

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56 D. Gregory et al. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, Hoboken: Blackwell, 2009, p. 492. In the 1990s, an experiment in the Arizonan desert attempted to build a self-contained "natural" environment within a massive glass dome called Biosphere 2. Valerie Matsumoto recounts that the dome was "peopled by scientists and funded by Ed Bass, the famed Texas billionaire" but soon was "dealing with penetrable boundaries and the contamination of its pristine environment. The [...] experimental edenic utopia came to grief when alleged saboteurs 'breached four of the five sealed doors to the dome ... and smashed several glass panes.' The project, which had attempted to demonstrate that scientists could create and live in a state of pure nature, was based on what now seems like naive idealism" (Allmendinger and Matsumoto, "Introduction", pp. 4–5).

57 R. Andersen, "Nature Has Lost Its Meaning", *The Atlantic*, 30 November 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2015/11/nature-has-lost-its-meaning/417918/.

58 Neil Smith points out that this vision of "[e]xternal nature is pristine, God-given, autonomous; it is the raw material from which society is built, the frontier which industrial capitalism continually pushes back. As trees and rocks, rivers and rainstorms, it is external nature waiting to be internalized in the process of social production" (N. Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008, p. 11).

when he complains about the noise of passing trains that disturb his idyll at Walden Pond.[59]

This longing for natural harmony and transcendental qualities laments its contamination by human activities, marking a rejection of western expansionism and its uncritical celebration. Today, the Anthropocene represents the hypernym for the progressing "human dominance of the environment".[60] This includes what naturalist William Vogt called "the cornucopian faith", namely the naive belief in the abundance and inexhaustibility of natural resources.[61] As a result of human dominance over environments, the space of first nature is being degraded to Potemkin villages, becoming a mere stage for its own simulations.[62] In this spatial imagination, original nature has – like the postlapsarian Garden Eden – been "tainted" and can no longer be accessed through "authentic" experiences. What remains then is its aesthetic exemplification, for instance by landscape paintings that depict an untouched West.[63] For others, original nature turns into transcendental space accessible only for worthy

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59 Thoreau writes: "The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country traders from the other side. As they come under one horizon, they shout their warning to get off the track to the other, heard sometimes through the circles of two towns. Here come your groceries, country; your rations, countrymen! Nor is there any man so independent on his farm that he can say them nay. And here's your pay for them! screams the countryman's whistle; [...] All the Indian huckleberry hills are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city. Up comes the cotton, down goes the woven cloth; up comes the silk, down goes the woollen; up come the books, but down goes the wit that writes them" (H. D. Thoreau, *Walden*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989 [1854], pp. 115–116).

60 L. E. Edwards, "What is the Anthropocene?", *Eos*, 30 November 2015, http://eos.org/opin ions/what-is-the-anthropocene; see M. Ronda, "Mourning and Melancholia in the Anthropocene", *Post45*, 10 June 2013, http://post45.org/2013/06/mourning-and-melancholia-in-the-anthropocene.

61 Hine and Faragher, *Frontiers*, p. 178.

62 The idea of an unspoiled first nature informed works such as Guyot's *The Earth and Man* (1849) where the spatial destiny of mankind plays out in nature's "vast extents, its fruitful plains, its numberless rivers, the prodigious facility of communication, nowhere impeded by serious obstacles, its oceanic position [that] is made [...] to furnish forth for man, whose education the Old World has completed, the most magnificent theatre, the scene most worthy of his activity" (A. H. Guyot, *Earth and Man, Lectures on Comparative Physical Geography, in Its Relation to the History of Mankind*, C. C. Felton (trans.), Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1853 [1849], p. 297).

63 Andrew Wood explains that "[t]he transition from experience to simulation emerges in a tripartite process borrowed from William Cronon: first, second, and third nature. First nature is the world of the garden; it contains human beings living in the world, organically related to its natural cycles. Second nature is the world of the machine; it is the production of things. Third nature is best illustrated by Disney's California Adventure; it is the postmodern

participants, analogous to conceptions of paradise shared by Abrahamic faiths. This viewpoint introduces hierarchies by assigning moral values to actors as either participating in or being "outside" of nature, advancing generalizations and reductive binaries of noble savages and violent settlers. In *The Myths That Made America*, Heike Paul points to the contradictions of this epistemology: "Since the Myth and Symbol scholars did not thoroughly reflect their own positionality, their ideological presuppositions to a certain degree predetermined their findings, and their scholarly endeavors mainly produced an affirmation (rather than any precise definition or critique) of those American myths, symbols, and images on which the field imaginary of American studies relied so strongly".[64] Partially acknowledging these issues, Leo Marx concludes his analysis by conceding that "[t]he machine's sudden entrance into the garden presents a problem that ultimately belongs not to art but to politics".[65] This assessment proved almost prophetic in its anticipation of the next wave of western scholarship. As area studies programmes went overseas at the onset of the Cold War, the concepts outlined above began to be discussed in increasingly global and comparative contexts. In its various academic guises, the frontier thesis consolidated its influence in both American and transatlantic discourses, becoming a metaphor for progress and the overcoming of boundaries. Actual and fictional frontiers were exceeded by science, technology, and space travel, for instance by *Star Trek's* famous invocation of space as "the final frontier", thus framing the malleable limits of "liberal-democratic capitalism in the terms of an 'American Century'".[66] As part of his acceptance speech to the Democratic nomination, John F. Kennedy proclaimed that "we stand today on the edge of a New

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consumption of images" (A. F. Wood, "Communication in the Age of Mobility", *Wood Valley*, 2005, https://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/wooda/195/syllabus5rothman.html).

64 H. Paul, *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2014, p. 20.

65 L. Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 365. This statement also mirrors David Harvey's insight that "[a]ttachment to a certain conception of space and time is a political decision, and the historical geography of space and time reveals it so to be. What kind of space and time do we, as professional geographers, seek to promote? To what processes of social reproduction do those concepts subtly but persistently allude?" (D. Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80 [1990] 3, pp. 418–434, at 432).

66 Gregory et al., *Human Geography*, p. 26. The term American Century was first coined in 1941 by Henry Luce, the cofounder of *Time* magazine, describing "US global dominance [...] as the natural outcome of historical progress. [...] Insofar it was beyond geography, the American Century was beyond empire and beyond reproof" (D. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 51).

Frontier – the frontier of the 1960's – a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils – a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats [...] beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space".[67] Since the late 1980s, the frontier has also turned into a metaphor for the uncharted depths of cyberspace. Organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) envisaged the early internet not only as a virtual extension of civil liberties but also as an egalitarian space with the transformative potential of mitigating real-life issues such as access to information, physical disability, social anxiety, and racial discrimination.[68]

New Western History: Expatriating the Frontier

I know your language, but I wish it were silence
The seeds are sown in all the small acts of violence
I was just so tired, too tired to say a thing
Kept my head down, eyes closed, and let freedom ring
We let freedom ring
But whose freedom?   tUnE-yArDs[69]

At the end of the 1980s, Turner's chiefly white and male-centric conception of the American West was challenged by a new generation of scholars that focused on the understudied experiences of minorities and women and their position in a nation steering towards its manifest destiny to span from Atlantic to Pacific and along the way transform the continent into an agrarian utopia as envisioned by Franklin, Jefferson, Emerson, or Thoreau.[70] The validity of the

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67 Qtd. in J. M. Logsdon, *John F. Kennedy and the Race to the Moon*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 8.

68 B. Sterling, "A Statement of Principle", *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, 30 September 1992, https://www.eff.org/effector/3/6. Others populate cyberspace with stereotypical images of the West, imagining "an unfenced range of computer technology, inhabited by cowboys called hackers who rustle information from forms of artificial intelligence. [Cyberspace] offers the advantage of bodiless anonymity and conceptual freedom of movement while raising fears about the lawlessness that exists in a world of vigilante information-acquisition and piracy" (Allmendinger and Matsumoto, "Introduction", p. 5).

69 M. Garbus and N. Brenner, "Coast to Coast", *I can feel you creep into my private life*, 2018, https://open.spotify.com/track/4yX5P4BUapVsFjbMEKtJrB.

70 The movement also received attention outside of academia. *The Milwaukee Journal* reported on 11 October 1989 that "a corps of academic Young Turks has mounted a full scale war against one of the most influential intellectual concepts in American history: Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 'frontier thesis'. The scholars promoting what they call the 'new Western history' are

frontier's monolithic spatial order began to be scrutinized by New Western History, spearheaded by publications such as Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987) and Richard White's *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (1991).[71] These and other revisionist histories rejected the frontier as a prime generator of character and nation-building and instead viewed the West as an arena of conquest and settler colonialism, proposing that "the term 'frontier' is nationalistic and often racist (in essence, the area where white people get scarce)".[72] Instead of a state of mind and national triumph, the West in this conception turns into a space shaped by "invasion, conquest, colonization, exploitation, development, [and] expansion of the world market colliding identities" but also a multicultural "meeting ground, the point where Indian America, Latin America, Anglo-America, Afro-America, and Asia intersected".[73] Highlighting social realities and individual experiences of this "meeting ground", Limerick and her academic peers outlined a western patchwork of regions, each with their own and oftentimes traumatic histories. These histories were shaped by Euroamerican exploitation internal colonialism, and the continual struggle – both physical and discursive – over resources and ownership:[74]

> Happily or not, minorities and majorities occupied a common ground. Conquest basically
> involved the drawing of lines on a map, the allocation of ownership (personal, tribal,

teaching [...] that Turner's powerful idea [...] is racist, sexist, wrong, irrelevant – or all of the above" (qtd. in Walsh, *The American West*, pp. 10–11). Like other contemporaneous revisionist projects such as the controversial Enola Gay Exhibition in 1995, New Western History was viewed very critically by conservative observers.

71 See P. N. Limerick, C. A. Milner, and C. E. Rankin (eds.), *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991. Walsh suggested that the movement's critical stance could be explained by "insecurity in the wake of the Vietnam War [that] had shaken Americans' confidence in their world superiority and their imperial ventures [...]. The dark side of western history was not only revealed, but became its dominant face" (Walsh, *The American West*, p. 7). Another key publication was *Under an Open Sky*, whose opening paragraph asks provocatively: "Does the western past have a future?" (W. Cronon, G. A. Miles, and J. Gitlin [eds.], *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1992, p. 3).

72 P. N. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, p. 85.

73 Ibid., p. 86.

74 Stephen Howe defines internal colonialism as "the distinct separation of the dominant core, from the periphery in an empire. The term was created to describe the 'blurred' lines between geographically close locations that are clearly different in terms of culture. [...] Factors that might separate the core from the periphery can be: language, religion, physical appearance, types and levels of technology, and sexual behavior" (S. Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 18–19).

corporate, state, federal, and international), and the evolution of land from matter to property. [...] Western history has been an ongoing competition for legitimacy – for the right to claim for oneself and sometimes for one's group the status of legitimate beneficiary of Western resources. This intersection of ethnic diversity with property allocation unifies Western history.[75]

Based on these new paradigms, scholars from various backgrounds set out to deconstruct more ossified truisms of the West, suggesting alternative spatial conceptualizations that imagined the West through formats such as borderlands,[76] thirdspaces,[77] rhizomes,[78] or as site of transnational flows.[79] Others embedded the "New West" in Marxist critiques of disparate economic practices, for instance William Robbins' *Colony & Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (1994) that "echoed the negativism of the New Western Historians in [its] findings. The west, its resources and its laborers were exploited as part of a

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75 Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, p. 9. In one of the first articles about the New Western Historians, Richard Bernstein commented that "the stuff we were taught in elementary schools and universities alike, the narrative that Limerick sometimes calls 'the old hat frontier history' in which 'heroic pioneers brought civilization to a savage wilderness,' is distorted, misleading, exclusive, chauvinistic and, in the words of some more rhetorically radical historians, even 'racist' and 'sexist.' [...] The new historians question the very idea of a Western – and thus an American – success story. They represent a tipping of the moral scales to that unhappy point where national faults and imperfections seem to balance national virtues. [...] The new history of the American West incorporates the post-Vietnam mood. It reflects the willingness of the 60's generation to find the invisible worm eating away at the once blushing rose of the American self-image" (R. Bernstein, "Unsettling the Old West", *The New York Times*, 18 March 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/18/magazine/unsettling-the-old-west.html).
76 G. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.
77 Soja, *Thirdspace*.
78 N. Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.
79 Giles, *Global Remapping*; H. Paul, "Critical Regionalism and Post-Exceptionalist American Studies", in: W. Fluck and D. E. Pease (eds.), *Towards a Post-Exceptionalist American Studies*, Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2014, pp. 397–423. Herbert Eugene Bolton, one of Turner's renegade doctoral students who later worked as director of Berkeley's Bancroft Library, proposed similarly holistic approaches in his *Colonization of North America* (1920) and *The Spanish Borderlands* (1921). There, he disagreed with the frontier thesis and suggested that US history could not be properly understood without taking into account the transnational influences in the ordering of the United States (K. E. Chamberlain, "Bolton, Herbert E.", in: K. Boyd [ed.], *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, vol. 1, Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 1999, pp. 105–106). Digital tools can also help to visualize the historical distribution of spatial key concepts. Looking at the American English language corpus between 1800 and 2008 in Google's Ngram Viewer, for instance, shows a decline of the term "frontier" after World War 2 and a resurgence of "border" and "borderlands" during the 1980s.

continually changing and expansive global market system".[80] In the ecocritical tradition of Webb's warnings about the fragility of western resources, Donald Worster's *Dust Bowl* (1979) and *Rivers of Empire* (1985) illustrate the human costs of increasingly sensitive western irrigation projects. Aridity combined with creed, he argues, created an exploitative spatial order similar to what Wittfogel termed "hydraulic society".[81] As an anonymous commentator in the *American Phrenological Journal* already noted in the middle of the nineteenth century: "[T]he Western farmer wastes more in a year than the Eastern farmer saves".[82] Still other concepts have yet to be applied to the West, for example its view as a "state of exception" or realm of "necropolitics".[83]

Reflected in these partly conflicting and partly overlapping ideas, the West today has become a highly contested entity around which local, regional, national, and transnational explanations from various disciplinary perspectives intermingle and claim the prerogative of interpretation. Connecting threads between the above approaches are their critical stance towards nationalism, colonial history, and view of the US as an outcome of forceful bordering of a highly diverse transcontinental space. Although they implicitly or explicitly reject the frontier as a driving force behind national development, they nonetheless take part in a discourse of the exceptional West, albeit in reverse by emphasizing not dominant but marginalized histories and peoples as central for the nation-state and their own critique of it. This goes to show that any attempts (including those of the following analyses) of detaching western regions from the leviathan formats of frontier and manifest destiny also lead to their discursive strengthening and implicit confirmation as they are perpetually repeated, decoded, and re-encoded – even if being ultimately rejected. The New Western Historians' revisionary histories have also not stood uncriticized. Kerwin Klein concedes that "[a]lthough the ritual flagellation of Frederick Jackson Turner has become a popular scholarly pastime, we need a more careful conceptual history" and goes on to argue:

> The old, frontier-style western history, so the argument goes, has so closely identified itself with celebratory accounts of what a good thing it was for Europeans to have slaughtered their way across the continent that the only way to introduce non-male, non-white

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80 Walsh, *The American West*, p. 13.

81 D. M. Kennedy, "We Enjoy Pushing Rivers Around", *The New York Times*, 23 February 1986 sec. 7, p. 7, https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/23/books/we-enjoy-pushing-rivers-around.html.

82 Qtd. in L. U. Reavis, *A Change of National Empire; or Arguments in Favor of the Removal of the National Capital from Washington City to the Mississippi Valley*, St. Louis: J. F. Torrey, 1869, p. vii.

83 G. Agamben, *Stato di Eccezione* [*State of Exception*], K. Attell (trans.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 [2003]; A. Mbembe, "Necropolitics", *Political Culture* 15 (2003) 1, pp. 11–40.

voices to our public memory is to renounce frontier history, give up talking about western history in continental terms, and concentrate on the West as region. [...] Worse, [New Western Historians] would separate the West from the imperial processes that placed it at the center of national memory and joined it to transnational global histories. And they propose that replacing "frontier" with "West," historically the key word of Orientalism, will eliminate ethnocentrism from our scholarly discourse![84]

Considering its constant writing, subversion, and rewriting, it thus seems evident that no single concept to the American West can penetrate its multiscalar complexity and provide access to its every aspect. Now, well over a century after Turner's lectures in Chicago, the frontier has by no means forfeited its impact as a governing historical and cultural paradigm. Conversely, it continues to inform the narratives of history textbooks and western iconography in popular culture.[85] As Matsumoto notes, "the mixed legacies of the past come with us, as warning ghosts, burrowed strength, weapons, tools, and toys. Sifting through and scrutinizing them [...] provides a useful point at which to consider where we are and where we may be going".[86] Turner's original proclamations of an exceptional space proved useful in whitewashing centuries of conflict at the western peripheries after the end of the Civil War and thus during a time when American policy-makers sought to put past wrongs behind and rally public support for the nation's imperial enterprises around the globe.

Figuratively speaking, the West therefore has been scattered in all directions, at least with regards to its academic understandings. Its powerful myths and metaphors, however, constantly return to influence contemporary spatial imaginations, flexibly and effortlessly attaching themselves to spatial subjects, debates, and controversies. Examples can readily be discovered in discursive strategies used on the stage of national politics. During the 2016 presidential campaign, both Democratic and Republican candidates relied on tensions between periphery and centre as rhetorical tools to discredit their opposition. Democrats regularly characterized supporters of Donald Trump as located on the economic fringes and culturally barred hinterlands of the country. Hillary Clinton's dictum of a "basket of deplorables" referred to their lack of morals (in the form of racism, sexism etc.) and

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84 Klein, "Reclaiming the 'F' Word", pp. 181–183.

85 *True West Magazine*, a popular print and online resource for western history, asked in January 2019: "What myth? The frontier was as real as a sawed-off shotgun and wilder than anyone could make up. The same goes for the [western] towns where our unique American story unfolded" (L. W. Banks, "Too Tough to Die! From Arkansas to Washington, Western Towns Welcome the World to their Historic Downtowns to Immerse in and Celebrate the Glories of the American West", *True West Magazine*, 4 January 2019, https://truewestmagazine.com/too-tough -to-die-towns/).

86 Allmendinger and Matsumoto, "Introduction", p. 12.

hence their imagined remoteness from the centres of ethical standards.[87] In turn, Donald Trump's rhetorical strategy took cues from nineteenth-century revivalist movements that often centered around the peripheries. In his speeches, he praised the midwestern enclaves of small-town USA as the morally intact heartland of traditional values. He then contrasted this imagined archive of a purer (and implicitly whiter) version of America with the liberal metropoles at the coasts, which he excoriated as corrupt peripheries and "swamps" that could only be "drained" by an injection of conserved and conservative values from the heartland.[88] Similar dynamics are found in popular culture as part of comic books or folk and country songs that envision the rural West as a conservatory of the nation's true spirit, for example in the folk ballads of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and Johnny Cash. Different versions of Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" close with their lyrics either stating "This land was made for you and me" or asking: "Is this land made for you and me?" They hence point to basic issues of placemaking, ownership, and identity, as well as leading to the song's reading either as an "alternative national anthem [or] Marxist response to 'God Bless America'".[89] In their sum, these examples underscore the real-world impact and disruptive effects of literary and cultural geographies as key agents that continually permeate US and global discourses, consequently highlighting their ongoing relevance as matters that exceed purely historical or theoretical interests.

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87 See A. D. Holan, "In Context: Hillary Clinton and the 'Basket of Deplorables'", *Politifact*, 11 September 2016, https://www.politifact.com/article/2016/sep/11/context-hillary-clinton-basket-deplorables/.

88 See T. Widmer, "Draining the Swamp", *The New Yorker*, 19 January 2017, https://www.new yorker.com/news/news-desk/draining-the-swamp.

89 N. Spitzer, "The Story Of Woody Guthrie's 'This Land Is Your Land'", *National Public Radio*, 15 February 2012, https://www.npr.org/2000/07/03/1076186/this-land-is-your-land.