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Introduction by Paul Mapp, College of William and Mary

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Introduction by Paul Mapp, College of William and Mary

In *The Nation's Nature: How Continental Presumptions Gave Rise to the United States of America*, James D. Drake considers the contribution of continental thinking to the independence, nationhood, and constitution of the United States. Asking how the fearful Anglo-Americans of the thirteen colonies could envisage themselves without the protection of the British Empire, and how the fractious citizens of thirteen states could persuade themselves of the need for and viability of a potent central government, the book explores the ideas about North American space that made the Revolution and the Constitution imaginable. In *The Nation's Nature*, the usually overlooked “continental” in Continental Congress and Continental Army becomes an indicator of a historically specific and surprisingly consequential understanding of America’s and Americans’ place in the world. Drake takes the notion of “metageographies” (8-9), the sometimes articulated, sometimes unconscious mental structures that organize and give meaning to ideas about space, and uses the concept to reinterpret revolutionary thoughts and actions. The key examples for *The Nation's Nature* are the designation of the earth’s great landmasses as continents and the related belief that these continents form distinct, coherent, and characteristic spaces. In Drake’s account, geographers made continents, Anglo-Americans wrestled with the idea that continents make human beings, and revolutionary Americans claimed that the North American continent was made for them.

The Nation's Nature uses a variety of textual and visual sources—geographic treatises, maps, cartoons, newspaper articles, political pamphlets, poems, and letters—to get at the ways Anglo-Americans imagined the North American continent. In some cases, these writings and maps were explicitly making a claim about the nature of continents in general or North America in particular. Drake gathers these geographic statements, explicates their continental notions, and shows how widespread such ideas were among educated Europeans and Euro-Americans. He then moves to an array of revolutionary-era writings and illustrations that employed continental language or imagery while treating all manner of topics. Closely reading his texts and examining his images, Drake establishes the many and shifting meanings of the North American continent for revolutionary Americans and determines the uses to which these conceptions were put. Then, to account for the distinctiveness of spatial ideas in the thirteen colonies and young United States, *The Nation's Nature* compares prevailing geographic notions there with those of Britons in Nova Scotia, the Caribbean, and India, and, farther afield culturally, with the views of a representative and prominent Mexican intellectual, Francisco Clavigero.

The Nation's Nature argues that the idea of a differentiated, cohesive, and manageable North American continent was a precondition for the formation of an independent American nation and a powerful American government. Drake remarks that Anglo-Americans saw North America as a space large enough to sustain a great and separate nation, but small enough to be governed by one polity. He observes that American revolutionaries tended to emphasize continental features fostering national unity rather than those that might prevent it: they spoke of navigable rivers rather than western mountains; of ephemeral Indians rather than unyielding Canadians. Most subtly and

creatively, *The Nation's Nature* suggests that continental conceptions made possible the Constitution and *Federalist Papers'* scheme of representation. Belief in a unitary continent suited to a single nation supported the idea of a sovereign American people and made it less difficult to imagine a republic larger than those of Europe and the ancient world. Faith in an expansive continental destiny for Anglo-Americans made it easier to think of representation based on a growing population, and not organized strictly around existing towns, counties, or states.

For me, the principal achievement of *The Nation's Nature* is its fresh view of the American Revolution. Instead of another argument about the social, economic, and ideological causes of revolution and constituents of nationality, Drake points to a different kind of revolutionary origin. Instead of presenting another statement about the position of American political ideas in the mental universe of Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, and Montesquieu, Drake literally locates America in the eighteenth-century world. In part, this was the physical world as it was; more evocatively, it is the world as eighteenth-century people imagined it. What makes this effort successful is Drake's ability to relate geography, metageography, and geopolitics. It was not just that Anglo-Americans could look out from the Appalachians on a vast continent, but that they could find meaning in this space, seeing not just rivers, forests, and prairies, but also the naturally ordained frame of a single, separate, and powerful nation. Scholars are going to argue about where the continental conceptions *The Nation's Nature* describes fit among the many forces causing and shaping the revolution--indeed, they will do so in this forum—and that's evidence of the quality of the book: it gives revolutionary-era historians something new and weighty to talk about.

With their thoughtful and balanced assessments of *The Nation's Nature*, the four historians participating in this forum, S. Max Edelson, Matthew Rainbow Hale, Benjamin H. Irvin, and Jeffrey D. Kaja, do a nice job of getting this discussion going.

In their perceptive identifications of the major scholarly contributions of *The Nation's Nature*, the commentators indicate not only what the book's arguments are, but also where the logic of these argument may lead. Taking the comments together, they note the way *The Nation's Nature* makes a commonplace term like "continental" the object of new and fruitful attention, and how such attention can lead us to see the revolution in a new light. They praise Drake's demonstration of the pervasiveness of continental language and ideas and, more importantly, his case for the influence of continental notions of revolutionary thought and behavior. *The Nation's Nature*, the commentators observe, fills a revolutionary-era chronological gap between works on geographic thought in the pre-revolutionary and early republican periods of American history. Drake's respondents highlight the significance of his claim that the idea of an America continent that was fit for one American nation could allow Anglo-Americans to see themselves as that nation. They observe that this self-image could assist the United States' rationalization of Indian dispossession. Indeed, this continental thinking can even be seen as a kind of forerunner of Manifest Destiny.¹

¹ With Manifest Destiny in mind, it might be useful to place *The Nation's Nature* alongside Peter Kastor's excellent 2011 study *William Clark's World*. With the career of Clark as his narrative center, Kastor traces the transition in the United States from a fearful vision of the North American Far West in the decades

The commentators' main criticism of *The Nation's Nature* is that the subject of the study tends to determine its findings. Drake finds the continental language and thinking he seeks, they suggest, and looks past competing visions of American geography. Some British imperial officials, for example, favored policies restricting colonial expansion and concentrating American development, and prominent New Englanders would later champion a cis-Mississippi American republic. Drake, his respondents suggest, does not show how the continental model of America overcame these alternatives. Nor, they point out, need a continental vision of Anglo-American settlement necessarily have led to revolution. Anglo-Americans could have found a shared identity as subjects of a globe-circling British Empire rather than as citizens of a continental United States. They could have moved inland like Canadians or Australians rather than Americans or Afrikaners. Edelson, Hale, Irvin, and Kaja indicate that *The Nation's Nature* needs to lay out the context of continental thinking in greater detail, and to explain more precisely its relation to other strands of thought.

The objection that a study has focused too much on its topic is, of course, the classic criticism of a monograph. It is also one of the most difficult to refute; for it makes the virtue of having seen something the vice of not having discerned something else. My own feeling is that the distinctive demographic preponderance and related land hunger of the Euro-Americans in the thirteen colonies and young United States—issues Drake discusses in his innovative chapter comparing revolutionary America with Mexico, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, the British West Indies, and British India—points to an answer. For the best response to the commentators, though, it is best to look to Drake's response itself, which I will let speak for itself.

Participants:

James D. Drake is Professor of History at Metropolitan State University of Denver. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles. In addition to the book under review, he authored *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). His current project explores the role of the Rocky Mountains in early American history.

Paul Mapp is an associate professor in the department of history at the College of William and Mary. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2001, and is the author of *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (2011). He is currently working on an international history of the American Revolution.

after 1800 to the more confident continent-spanning ambitions of the 1830s and 1840s. His early nineteenth-century Americans lack the continental conviction of their late eighteenth-century forebears in *The Nation's Nature*, and there's an opportunity here for someone to reconcile or account for the apparently divergent arguments of two very rich books.

S. Max Edelson is Associate Professor of History at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Harvard University Press, 2006). He is currently writing a book about cartography and colonization in British America that will be titled *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined America before Independence* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2014). He has designed and developed a new internet resource for visualizing cartography, MapScholar.org, which will feature a dynamic digital archive of the historic maps mentioned in the book.

Matthew Rainbow Hale, Assistant Professor of History, Goucher College, earned his Ph.D. in History at Brandeis University. He won the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic 2010 Ralph D. Gray Prize for his article "On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers during the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, ca. 1792-1793," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (Summer 2009) 191-218. His study of the French Revolution's impact on American political culture will be published by the University of Virginia Press.

Benjamin H. Irvin is Associate Professor of History at the University of Arizona. He is the author of *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Jeffrey D. Kaja is an Assistant Professor of Early American history at California State University, Northridge. He is currently working a manuscript entitled *Worlds in Motion: Internal Development and the Evolution of Transportation Systems in Early Pennsylvania, 1680-1800*. His research interests include geography, mobility, transportation, and colonial and state development in Early America.

Review by S. Max Edelson, University of Virginia

In *The Nation's Nature*, James Drake examines how early Americans conceptualized North America as a coherent geographic space and how this continental consciousness served as a necessary precondition for the creation of the United States as an independent nation. The key word in the book's title is "presumption." In his view, European-American colonists presumed that they would someday populate a country that extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Drake argues that this sense of directed purpose operated within British American culture from the beginning of the eighteenth century and that a widespread belief in continental manifest destiny took root about a century before the phrase was coined to justify a war of territorial acquisition with Mexico in the 1840s.

The appeal of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* rested on the geographic argument that America's continental scale made it unsuited to subordination by the mere "island" of Great Britain. Such logic turned the ideal of American colonies as dependent children that must submit to the just rule of a mother country on its head. Paine's metaphor urged wavering colonists to pursue independence not only as a desirable political outcome but especially as a set of capacities that came with their land's continental grandeur. Drake understands Paine's formulation as a core truth that European colonists had already come to accept as a matter of scientific fact. When they spoke of an expansive future for their new nation, they did so with the image of a vast North America before their eyes that they saw as theirs to command.

Drake's quest to reveal the centrality of geographic thought in the era of the American Revolution is a gratifying exploration. It scrutinizes commonplace language and makes the naming of the Continental Congress and the Continental Army, terms that historians have used without thinking about their geographic meanings, newly interesting. It situates the abstractions of political ideas within real American spaces and provides a new explanatory context to make sense of maps as rich historical sources. These continental presumptions rested on a distinction between North America and the West Indies as fundamentally different kinds of places, thus opening a contrast between islands and mainland that gives the importance of the British Caribbean its due.

The idea that geographic categories are intellectually constructed to seem as if they reside in nature itself is the critical insight that drives *The Nation's Nature*. Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen developed this notion of "critical metageography" that Drake makes central to his reconstruction of how early Americans saw North America as predestined for colonial occupation. Lewis and Wigen argue that the clean lines that appear on maps to separate continents, regions, and nations are false thresholds that conceal "boundary-blurring cultural formations" by which peoples, races, and cultures mix in ways that make absolute categorizations impossible.¹ This critique calls into question static visions of geographic order in favor of a more dynamic sense of space. It is puzzling, then, that Drake

¹ Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 151.

argues that early Americans subscribed to one particular construction of North America that was so dominant that it pushed out other, competing understandings. The “prevailing metageography” that he identifies insisted that North America was a “naturally unified entity” that “ought to be inhabited by one people, under a single power” (58, 10-11). He shows that many contemporary geographers saw North America as a whole, linked by an as-yet-to-be-discovered Northwest Passage, but not how these texts and atlases, although widely shelved in early American libraries, transmitted their taxonomies of space into general understandings of what British America and then the United States could become. Benjamin Franklin’s vision of surging demography “extending our Western Empire [by] adding Province to Province as far as the South Sea” suggests that such an expansive vision was conceivable, and many colonists saw colonial charters that extended without limit into the west as invitations for future dominion (64). These were not the only metageographies that mattered, however.

Drake makes marvelous use of the power of electronic searching to scour primary source databases for geographic language, an investigation that has revealed the prevalence of geographic ideas to the construction of corporate identities across newspapers, broadsides, engravings, correspondence, books, and maps. But attentiveness to terms like “continent” ignores contending metageographical visions that sought to *limit* the expansion of settler society in the North American interior. British officials who sought greater imperial control over Indian affairs were among the most persistent advocates of redrawing the map of the American empire in this way. Instead of embracing the image of the southeast pictured in Thomas Nairne’s 1711 map to “assert British territorial claims,” Britain’s Board of Trade renounced this map’s notion of a greater Carolina and fought to keep aggressive traders and settlers within bounds in the aftermath of the disastrous Yamasee War of 1715 (71). The Board took a leading role in redrawing the map of British America in 1763 by proposing general boundaries that restricted the growth of colonies into indigenous lands. This plan, enshrined in part in the royal Proclamation of 1763, was much more than a bid to “stall” settlers until the Indians could be placated and inevitable westward occupation could commence (116). Britain made serious efforts to steer colonial populations toward newly conquered coasts and islands and deflect them from the remote and contested interior. Drake is right to note how colonists pointed to their charters and worked to undermine these constraints, but his approach obscures these contending visions and gives the false impression that continental expansion was a foregone conclusion. Drake’s insistence in *The Nation’s Nature* that the long arc of geographic presumption bent inevitably toward sea-to-sea dominion makes it hard to perceive that this debate existed or that it could have any other conclusion than that European Americans would become the “rightful occupants of their entire continent” (230).

The cartographic evidence that Drake assembles to suggest how much colonists “embraced and emphasized a spatially expansive vision of themselves as continental people” suggests a definition of “America” that the author does not intend, one that ended at, or just beyond, the Mississippi River (136). The single most important image of British sovereignty claims on the continent, John Mitchell’s *A Map of the British and French Dominions in North America* (1755), leaves most of Spanish Florida as well as everything west of the Mississippi’s last tributary off the map (89-90, 92-93). Johann Sebastian Müller’s

engraving of Clio and Father Time examining a globe in the wake of British military victories in 1758 revealed a picture of North America centered squarely on the St. Lawrence River and the seaboard colonies (84-85). An illustration in which George III beheld a map of his recently conquered territories in America likewise revealed only the eastern part of the continent. Drake makes an unconvincing argument that these images of Britain's conquests at the end of the Seven Years' War showed that Britain might "theoretically . . . rule over all North America," even as it pictured only a part of it (106-107). This Atlantic-to-Mississippi view of a coherent American national space persisted after the Revolution. Amos Doolittle's 1784 *A Map of the United States of America* imagined the new nation bounded by the eastern continent's great bodies of water (the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean). American commissioners charged to settle boundaries with Great Britain in the early 1780s were concerned with making the edges of this space clear, and they focused particular attention on Canada, Nova Scotia, Florida, and rights of navigation on the Mississippi. It was this more circumscribed vision of the continent that John Jay pictured in the *Federalist* when he celebrated the United States as "one connected, fertile, wide-spreading country" defined by the "navigable waters [that] form a kind of chain round its borders, as if to bind it together" (295). The idea of metageographies, in which culture and politics trump nature to determine a country's "real" form, should offer the conceptual flexibility to see that early Americans meant what they said when they focused on some of the continent and called it "North America."

A more conceptually open sense of how early Americans understood geography allows us to appreciate the full range of wild-eyed schemes for imposing jurisdictional order in eighteenth-century North America. Benjamin Franklin's prediction that Europeans' high rate of reproduction would create a truly continental nation seems prescient now. His writings, however, shared discursive space with pamphleteer John Cartwright's idea of a loose trading confederation of as many "independent states as can find habitations on the vast American continent." Those who could not picture what this system might look like could consult Cartwright's map, which showed strange new polities names like "Chicasawria" and "Wauwautainia" rising along, but not beyond, the banks of the Mississippi.² Some had abandoned a sense of latitudinal determinism in favor of view of a natural unity of North American places, but others imported peasant laborers from Greek islands to grow olives in East Florida's supposedly Mediterranean environment in the 1760s and 1770s. And long after the die was said to be cast in favor of manifest destiny, nineteenth-century *filibusteros* dreamed of a slave masters' republic that incorporated the islands of the Spanish Caribbean with the American South. Drake makes a convincing case that many early Americans came to view continental occupation as their national destiny, but it is important to remember that they did so in a crowded field that unsettled the certainty with which they might assume this outcome.

² [John Cartwright], *American Independence. The Interest and Glory of Great Britain* (London, 1774), 27.

Review by Matthew Rainbow Hale, Goucher College

Almost every time I discuss *Common Sense* with my students, one of them will identify Thomas Paine's argument that "there is something very absurd, in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island" as one of the most compelling in the entire text. In response, I try to get students to think about the rhetorical effect and ideological slipperiness of Paine's use of phrases like "nature" and the "common order of nature," both of which are employed in the sentence immediately following the "governed by an island" statement.¹ Now that I have read James D. Drake's *The Nation's Nature: How Continental Presumptions Gave Rise to the United States of America*, I anticipate that the next time the "governed by an island" idea is mentioned in class, I will also push students to think about how the notion of the "continent" helped Paine justify and visualize the polity labeled the United States of America. Indeed, one of the virtues of *The Nation's Nature* is the degree to which it forces us to think about old issues in new ways.

Drawing upon recent literature that outlines the "myth of the continents," Drake argues that the emergence of the United States owed a great deal to the enlightenment construction of North America as a "natural" phenomenon with political implications.² In particular, the author asserts, elites with an affinity for science and geography increasingly believed that "Britain's littoral mainland American colonies" formed one part of "a continent, however that continent might be defined." (28) To be sure, most individuals at the time were completely ignorant of the exact shape and texture of what we now call North America; most British colonists had not even crossed the Appalachian mountains. Yet that did not stop them from imagining North America as the "natural" seat of one great national power. Focus on the "continent," Drake reasons, thus not only facilitated a shift away from climatic or "latitudinal determinism" (55), but also conditioned British American colonists to think of their interests as being distinct from those of the mother country.

Throughout the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the author suggests, the potential for serious tension between British Americans and Britons was muted because "security concerns" related to imperial rivalries carried sway. (70) As long as the French, in particular, threatened to encroach upon British territory, the "fates of all the North American colonies" were supposedly inextricable. (77) The Seven Years' War intensified the alchemic process by which "the inhabitants of limited seaboard territories" acquired a "continental consciousness." (80) More specifically, that conflict was framed as a war for the North American continent, and published usage of the phrases "North America" and "continent" rose somewhat. (85) Once the French were decisively defeated, nothing seemed to stand in the way of British American expansion to the Pacific Ocean.

¹ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), 91.

² Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigan, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

In response to Parliamentary attempts to reorganize the empire in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, "colonists vocalized," Drake contends, "their continental identity—their uniqueness within the empire—more than ever before." (120) "Island-versus-continent rhetoric" accordingly "shot through the debate over the proposed Stamp Act," and British Americans like James Otis of Massachusetts chafed at the astounding geographical ignorance of British leaders. (129) Issues related to representation proved particularly irksome, as "Colonists embraced and emphasized a spatially expansive vision of themselves as a continental people." (136) While British policy makers highlighted the "doctrine of virtual representation," individuals like Daniel Dulany "insisted" that neither virtual nor actual representation sufficed because Americans possessed "distinct political interests" that "derived largely from their place in the world," from their "coherent North American identity." (139-40)

According to Drake, the American Revolutionary War "both revealed and helped sustain Americans' continental identity." (12) For one thing, General Richard Montgomery's ill-fated attempt to seize Quebec in 1775 produced a cult of martyrdom surrounding Montgomery and "firmly cemented the continental vision of the Seven Years' War to the Revolutionary cause." (193) In addition, the formation of the Continental Army unleashed latent aspirations regarding the "natural" unity of the people. As Americans pondered the difficulties of conducting a prolonged war against Britain, they also anthropomorphized the North American continent and made it their ally. The "vastness" of the continent "created a logistical nightmare and made British military conquest difficult," colonists insisted. (204) Moreover, because North America was so vast, it purportedly ensured a sizeable population that could bid defiance to any nation that attempted to invade. The continent itself, many claimed, thus played a pivotal role in American victory, and when peace negotiations took place in the early 1780s, representatives for the United States had no problem excluding Native Americans and making "audacious" claims for land. (219)

In the years after the Peace of Paris, Drake writes, "metageographical concepts had a central role in the debates over the Constitution." (260) Federalists stressed that "nature" had destined North America to be politically unified and insulated from Europe. Anti-Federalists responded by highlighting the faulty structure of representation in the Constitution, which "veered from the cherished—if somewhat unexamined—principle of actual representation." (296) Federalists answered that the people represented in "We the people" were a continental entity and needed a representation framework reflective of that fact. Continental modes of thinking thus enabled advocates of the Constitution to position themselves as guardians of popular sovereignty and the will of the people. Anti-Federalists accordingly found themselves on the defensive because denying "that a representational scheme could incorporate the entire nation was, in a sense, to deny a potent facet of popular sovereignty, to reject the will of a 'people' defined by nature or geography, and, in turn, to defend the powers of states, which were the products of human machinations and the arbitrariness of the old British imperial order." (303)

Drake's book is strongest when he emphasizes the expansiveness and ramifications of Americans' territorial appetite. As the author makes clear, British colonists and their

successors in the United States frequently linked their supposed destiny as a people to their ability to dominate the North American continent. Belief in a putative imperial mission in turn helped prompt various conflicts that were construed as continental affairs, even if those conflicts never actually took place in all sectors of North America. By showing how the “continent” figured prominently in many individuals’ minds, Drake succeeds in demonstrating the degree to which eighteenth-century concepts of “nature,” geography, and science shaped human behavior and action.

Drake also succeeds in adding a new language of analysis for scholars to consider. Republicanism, liberalism, sensibility, New and Old Light Christianity—these are concepts that have helped historians illuminate various aspects of life in early America, and now scholars will have to take into account references to the North American continent as well. In this vein, Drake makes good use of Thomas Paine, who was especially insightful when meditating on the continent as a “natural” force in political affairs.

Yet another strength of the book is its interdisciplinary approach to evidence. Maps, scientific treatises, political writings, congressional letters, visual iconography, newspapers, magazines, geography textbooks, and constitutional debates are all utilized effectively, and a short review fails to do justice to the array of topics covered by Drake. Consequently, the way in which geographical thinking helped structure many individuals’ thoughts about a wide range of issues is forcefully brought into relief.

The book is not flawless, however. For one thing, despite the author’s statement, about the “contingent way” in which continental thinking affected British-American historical development, there is a discernible teleological strand coursing through *The Nation’s Nature*. (9) Too often the reader gets the impression that Americans’ awareness of their position on the North American continent necessitated the colonial revolt against Britain. Indeed, only occasionally does Drake acknowledge the very real possibility that belief in a special continental destiny might have resulted in a more elaborate British imperial history rather than an independent American nation. (188)

Along the same lines, Drake pushes too far the idea that colonists were preoccupied with their “continental identity—their uniqueness within the empire.” (120) For even though Euro-Americans in the eighteenth century were keenly aware that they resided on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean, they nonetheless took increasing pride in the fact that they were Britons and protested Parliamentary policies in the 1760s and 1770s because they felt their rights as Britons had been violated. What is more, cognitive, commercial, political, and military links with the mother country were the means by which provincials forged bonds with individuals from other colonies. “Without the imperial connection, Anglo-Americans would not have developed a sense of provincial or transprovincial, ‘continental’ identity,” Peter S. Onuf astutely asserts, and “patriotic provincials cultivated an exaggerated sense of their Britishness, imaginatively identifying with their overseas countrymen . . . and muting the differences” between colonial America and Britain that

existed on the ground.³ More extensive consideration of the phenomenon of Anglicization would therefore have strengthened this book considerably.

Despite these criticisms, the author deserves credit for opening up a new way of analyzing eighteenth-century American life. He reminds us that a sense of place matters, and he also reminds us that geographical sensibilities play a role in structuring cultural and political identities. By pushing scholars to think about the emergence of the United States in relation to the enlightenment construction of continents, Drake has successfully added another layer to our understanding of American expansionist tendencies.

³ Peter S. Onuf, "Federalism, Democracy, and Liberty in the New American Nation," in *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600-1900*, ed. Jack P. Greene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 132 and 133.

James D. Drake's refreshing new monograph calls to mind an incident that occurred after President-Elect John F. Kennedy asked Robert Frost to read "The Gift Outright" at his 1961 inauguration. Frost agreed, and for the special occasion, he also composed a lengthy prefatory verse entitled "Dedication," which extolled Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, and which celebrated the Declaration of Independence as an instrument of global democracy. Frost, however, was unable to read his new poem. The sunlight glared so brightly off a freshly fallen snow that the poet could not make out his typescript words, not even after Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson offered his top hat as shade. Consequently, Frost had no choice but to set aside his "Dedication" and recite from memory the poem he had written decades before. A meditation on the character of the American people, "The Gift Outright" proclaims that England's colonists at last "found salvation" when they surrendered themselves to the land of their living, a land "vaguely realizing westward, / But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced[.]"¹

Just as snowblindness compelled Frost to do on that inaugural day, Drake turns his audience's attention away from the Founders of the United States and instead toward the nation's nature, away from the documents encased at the Rotunda of the National Archives and instead toward the majesty of Pike's Peak. Drake, professor of history at Metropolitan State College of Denver, does not write triumphantly about Americans' "salvation," as Frost did, but he shares the poet's conviction that the "vaguely realizing westward" geography of North America enabled former British colonists to coalesce as one people and to conjure a new national destiny. In this engaging volume, Drake argues that incomplete knowledge of the continent's expanse permitted Anglo-Americans to project fantasies of dominion across it. Moreover, a sense of cultural and biological inferiority—that is, an indignant self-consciousness of their "unstoried, artless, unenhanced" society—motivated them to seize and improve the continent in defiance of European expectation.

Drake, the author of *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), opens his latest book by inviting readers to imagine a deserted island. Whether or not they, like the majority of the author's students, envision a sun-drenched beach bathed in azure waters, Drake has proven a fundamental point, that our geographical imagination "reflects the cultural influences that inform it" (3). From this simple insight, much of Drake's argument gracefully unfolds: that eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans imagined North America much more clearly than they understood it; that their imaginings arose in large measure from contemporary maps, natural histories, travel narratives, and the like; and that those imaginings in turn contoured Anglo-Americans' political and constitutional sensibilities, as well, ultimately, as their national identity. In furtherance of this point, Drake frequently invokes the concept of "metageography," a term he borrows from geographer Martin W. Lewis and historian

¹ "Prelate's Trouble at Lectern, Poet's Problem with Sunlight," *Life*, January 27, 1961, 26-27. For "Dedication" and "The Gift Outright," see Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems*, rev. ed., ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 422-425.

Kären E. Wigen, which means “the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world” (8).² Undergraduates and lay readers need not be scared off by this useful word; it is the only shred of jargon in an eminently readable book.

Drake divides his study into two parts—it pivots on the War of Independence—and he unfurls his thesis across seven far-ranging chapters. He begins by examining geographical conceptions of North America as they evolved during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He focuses particularly upon the polemic that historian Antonello Gerbi dubbed the “Dispute of the New World,” the extended dialogue that arose among European intellectuals—Abbé Raynal, Cornelius de Pauw, and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, among others—about the geographies and environments of the western hemisphere.³ Several of these disputants characterized the Americas as cold, damp, putrefied climes where flora and fauna tended to degenerate. Such unflattering depictions naturally stuck in the craw of English settlers and their American-born descendants.

Though natural historians and other geographers seldom reached consensus about how a continent ought to be defined—as a region, for example, or as a landmass bounded by large bodies of water or other formidable topographical formations—they began to agree that Britain’s littoral mainland colonies occupied a portion of a discrete one (28). Rejecting rigid latitudinal determinism—the belief that environments remain constant across their respective circum-global zones—they instead came to embrace a Linnaean taxonomy of racialized continents and peoples. These intellectual developments caused Anglo-American colonists, who had witnessed the decimation of indigenous populations by disease and warfare, to believe that they, the British, were best suited to inhabit and cultivate North America (62).

Drake investigates the vain but persistent efforts of European explorers to chart a Northwest Passage, lest some rival power discover one first. He analyzes the Seven Years’ War within a global context, noting how the Treaty of Paris affirmed the British faith that North America ought to be ruled by a single power. As Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson later observed, the eviction of France left “nothing to obstruct a gradual progress of settlements, through a vast continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean” (101).⁴

After discussing the history of Pontiac’s War and the Proclamation of 1763, Drake describes the imperial crisis that arose from Parliament’s repeated efforts to tax American colonists. Building upon historian Edmund Morgan’s observation that Anglo-American

² Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

³ Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1973).

⁴ Quoted in Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 12-13.

legislative representation had never been predicated “on anything but geographically defined communities,” Drake explains that pre-Revolutionary debates over virtual and actual representation led Britain’s mainland colonists to conclude that the wide Atlantic ocean would forever prevent them from exercising a meaningful voice in Parliament (108).⁵ Believing that they inhabited a unique and isolated continent, American colonists began to conceptualize Britons as a separate people whose political interests diverged from their own. Drake repeatedly recalls the absurdity denounced by Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* that a vast continent should be “perpetually governed by an island” (2).⁶

The Revolutionary War, Drake asserts, enabled the inhabitants of thirteen disparate colonies to discover commonalities and to imagine themselves as members of a national community. The very notions of a Continental Congress and a Continental Army helped to soothe anxieties about the centralization of political power and the geographically disproportionate burdens of the military conflict. The establishment of an armed force whose soldiers hailed from every state and whose expenses would be defrayed by all of them constituted a foundational act of nation building (194-195). Far more grimly, the Revolutionary War provided Anglo-Americans the opportunity and justification to wage genocidal war against Native Americans along the eastern Great Lakes, in the Ohio River Valley, and throughout the southern borderlands. By their efforts to extirpate indigenous peoples, the former British colonists fostered their own sense of entitlement to the land as well as their racial solidarity as whites. (Here again Drake’s book is reminiscent of “The Gift Outright,” in which Frost curtly observes, “The deed of gift was many deeds of war.”⁷) Drake concludes his chapters on the Revolution by examining U.S. territorial ambitions at its close. The United States’ demand for lands formerly claimed by the British, including trans-Appalachian lands seized during the war by Spain, prompted the French foreign minister, Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes, to protest the Americans’ “mania for conquering foreign provinces before having conquered and secured their own territory” (221).⁸

Drake rounds out his book by exploring the manner in which citizens of the infant republic imaginatively appropriated the continent and constitutionally reconfigured it. In chapter 6, his most exciting chapter, he contrasts Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) with Francisco Clavigero’s *Historia antigua de México* (1780-1781), both of which

⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988), 41.

⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols. (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 1: 24.

⁷ Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, 424.

⁸ Comte de Vergennes to Chevalier de la Luzerne, 5 February 1780, in Mary A. Guinta et al., eds., *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1996), 1:23.

were written explicitly to refute Buffonian claims of American degeneracy. Offering an astute comparison of early Anglo-American and creole Mexican nationalisms, Drake makes a valuable contribution to the scholarly inquiries of Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra.⁹ He suggests that the histories and geographies of indigenous peoples bore tremendous influence on European notions of the continent. The wealth and population density of the Aztec Empire at Tenochtitlan, for example, struck the Spanish imagination much more forcefully than the comparatively disseminated Algonquian societies struck the English. Drake also briefly surveys the geographies and geopolitics of Britain's global colonies—including British India, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Barbados, and Jamaica—to explain why inhabitants of the thirteen rebellious colonies of North America alone so “emphatically merged their metageographical and political identity to create a vision of the future” (230).

Drake demonstrates that notions of geography weighed heavily on the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution. James Madison, he notes, worked diligently to countervail Montesquieu's axiom that republican forms of government better suit small polities than large ones. Circling back to the question of representation, and carefully reading numerous lesser-known Federalist Papers, Drake establishes that proponents of the Constitution vindicated apportionment of representation in the House on the basis of population rather than locality by contending that the former produced a more national government. To most forcefully advance their arguments, Federalist propagandists tapped “into their readers' and listeners' metageographical habits of the mind” (304).

Finally, Drake explores the magazine literature of the 1780s and 1790s, whose journals featured such patriotic titles as the *American Magazine*, the *American Museum*, and the *Columbian Magazine*. As Drake documents, the editors of these volumes insisted that the United States must expand across the continent and found new institutions of arts and letters in order to fulfill its national destiny. Though Drake nowhere utilizes the term, such nationalistic sentiment arose from a postcolonial impulse to dispel ancient European prejudices toward the Americas.¹⁰ As the author of “Thoughts on American Genius,” an early contribution to the *American Museum*, declared, “The time is come to explode the European creed, that we are infantine in our acquisitions, and savage in our manners, because we are inhabitants of a new world, lately occupied by a race of savages” (282).¹¹

Drake's monograph, more capacious than may be fully digested even in this lengthy summary, deftly blends original argumentation with synthesis. Early American scholars will recognize the imprint of Fred Anderson, Joyce Chaplin, Paul Mapp, Andrew O'Shaughnessy, and a host of other historians. The author draws on a profusion of sources,

⁹ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ For this reason, Drake's book might be fruitfully read in tandem with Kariann Akemi Yokota's *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially her second chapter, which concerns British American and U.S. geography.

¹¹ “Thoughts on American Genius,” *American Museum*, vol. 1., March 1787, 206-208.

including geographies, histories, travel narratives, almanacs, cartoons, sermons, and correspondence. He carefully analyzes maps—41 figures vibrantly illustrate the book—as well as the personifications of nations, such as the goddesses Britannia and Columbia, that adorn them. Drake also conducts numerous word-count analyses, much in the vein of Richard L. Merritt’s scholarship, demonstrating for instance that use of the phrase “North America” exploded after the outbreak of the Seven Years’ War.¹²

Winner of the Walker Cowen Memorial Prize awarded by the University of Virginia Press for an outstanding work in eighteenth-century studies, Drake’s book makes two important contributions to the historiography of the United States. First, it reveals that the American faith in Manifest Destiny distantly preceded Democratic newspaper editor John L. O’ Sullivan’s coinage of that phrase in 1845. Second, it illustrates how greatly an imagined sense of the North American continent shaped the national identity of the United States. Readers may frequently find themselves reaching for a map or a globe as they reconsider the origins of U.S. expansionism. If they do, *The Nation’s Nature* will reward their geographies and metageographies as richly as it rewards their histories.

¹² Merritt, *Symbols of American Community, 1735-1775* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966).

In *The Nation's Nature*, the historian James Drake seeks to explain how eighteenth-century ideas about geography led a broad swath of American colonists to form a new nation in North America. Employing as his analytical framework the concept of 'metageographies' – sets "of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world" – Drake argues that British colonists viewed their world through a metageography that divided the earth into continents (8). Drake further argues that a subset of colonists appropriated such continental presumptions to advance their political interests. Their "imaginings of the continent," he contends, "made Independence compelling, and the Constitution conceivable" (3).

Drake's book makes an important contribution to a growing body of scholarship seeking to link early modern ideas about geography to large-scale political and cultural developments in the Americas. In many important ways, it fills a chronological and intellectual gap between Paul Mapp's *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763*, which examines the years leading up to and including the Seven Years' War, and Martin Brückner's *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity*, which focuses mainly on the Early Republic period.¹ Drake weaves together a complex set of late eighteenth-century debates about geography and politics to underscore the influence of continental thinking on imperial and national developments in North America. In doing so, he links Mapp's argument that geographic uncertainty shaped colonial diplomacy to Brückner's thesis that America's emerging national identity evolved in concert with expanding consumption of geographical texts. Specifically, Drake bridges the gulf between colonists' geographical assumptions about the continent's future greatness and Americans' early nationalist belief that they were the continent's rightful masters.

Drake advances two main arguments based on a close examination of scientific, diplomatic, and cartographic texts, as well as the personal papers of numerous European and American luminaries. The first part of Drake's book (Chapters 1-3) asserts that the elaboration of the colonists' continental imaginings was a precursor to their move towards Independence. Central to this development was their belief in continental taxonomies that broke down the Earth's landmasses into distinct geographic units. Perceived hierarchies within such taxonomies forced Americans to defend their continent against European critics, who believed that latitudinal disadvantages and the degenerating effect of North America's climate on its flora and fauna frustrated long-term, consolidated expansion. Many colonists argued instead that once Britain had fully wrested control of North America from Indian and European powers, the continent's natural resources would yield immeasurable wealth. The colonists' commitment to their imagined continental empire strengthened after victory

¹ Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity: Maps, Literacy, and National Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

in the Seven Years' War seemingly cleared the way for aggressive expansion. When Britain proposed a more moderate plan of continental conquest than the one that colonists had envisioned, many Americans began to see themselves as a separate people with a distinct national destiny. As Drake argues, this rift in continental imaginings ultimately created the preconditions for American Independence.

In the second part of the book (Chapters 4-7), Drake argues that Americans' continental imaginings shaped key developments during the Revolutionary War and the debates over the Constitution. He examines the decision of some Americans to apply the continental label to political and military organizations like the Continental Congress and the Continental Army, though he admits that colonists employed that label reluctantly. Delegates and commentators often chose to use the modifier 'General' when describing congressional meetings in Philadelphia, and their use of the term "Continental" waned over time. Similarly, Drake demonstrates that the wartime experiences of soldiers reveal a disjuncture between the reality of the Continental Army and the rhetoric surrounding it; few people thought that America's armed forces constituted a unified continental body. Drake accurately presents such examples as illustrations of the contested and evolving nature of continental terminology, but he also leaves the reader questioning the extent to which Americans linked continental imaginings primarily to nationalistic impulses. Many Americans privileged state interests as much as, if not more than, national interests, and continental assumptions similarly colored such interests.

Although Drake shows that the influence of continental thinking was inconsistent, he successfully demonstrates that it pervaded and fueled the much of the pre- and post-Revolution rhetoric. On the most basic level, he finds the words 'continent' and 'continental' littering diplomatic exchanges, political tracts, newspaper accounts, and personal correspondence. He illustrates the importance of continental objectives in the diplomatic strategies of Americans and Europeans in the treaties of 1763 and 1783. He also links the continental visions of revolutionary leaders to their most influential writings, offering insightful analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. On a more ambitious level, Drake connects continental presumptions to the debates over the U.S. Constitution. "They figured so prominently," he argues, "that it is hard to imagine the Constitution's ratification occurring at all had the document's backers not been able to invoke these concepts" (260). The Federalists' ability to articulate their vision for a continental empire alleviated many Americans' fear that extending the nation's political sphere would destroy representative government.

Drake uses his continental perspective to advance many smaller arguments throughout the book, each of which complements the author's larger thesis. He is at his most persuasive when arguing that Americans used continental thinking to marginalize Indians and rationalize their own claims to undisputed ownership of the continent. Similarly, his analysis of the writings of British and colonial imperialists, which present Britain as a more effective colonizer than either France or Spain, lends credence to Drake's larger argument that Americans increasingly saw themselves as the only people fully invested in and capable of unifying various regions of North America under one continental empire. In both

instances, Drake demonstrates the influence of geographical imaginings on the evolution of colonial and revolutionary thought.

Such breadth of analysis is at once the source of the book's greatest strength and its most evident weakness. On the one hand, the sheer volume of topics and ideas covered in the book contribute to its persuasiveness. Drake rightfully sees continental rhetoric infiltrating debates ranging from botany to constitutional theory. On the other hand, it occasionally appears that the author is looking too hard for the word continent in his sources, leading him to conclude segments of otherwise thoughtful document or contextual analysis with loosely connected claims of the influence of continental thinking. At other times, Drake's effort to demonstrate the pervasiveness of continental imaginings leads him to jump quickly from one topic to another within chapters, limiting his ability to elaborate on the connections between rhetoric and specific geopolitical developments. For instance, he briefly skims over the Land Ordinances of 1785 and 1787, which, if more fully analyzed, would likely offer concrete connections between nationalism and continental presumptions.

Notwithstanding such minor criticisms, Drake has written a compelling book. Historians interested in geography, science, politics, diplomacy, and identity will find in Drake's monograph a wealth of documents, ideas, and arguments. Historians of the American Revolution and Constitution will likewise find fresh insights into the ideas and actions of several influential late eighteenth-century European and American thinkers. Finally, by expanding his analysis to include British, French, and Spanish America, as well as Europe, Drake's study offers another fine example of the growing influence of continental and global approaches to the study of Early America.

Reading this quartet of reviews has been a gratifying experience, and I want to first thank the authors. I wish everyone who has ever written a book could be so fortunate as to have such a group of thoughtful readers. They have left me flattered by their generous praise, humbled by their compelling criticisms, and, to my surprise, dusting off an old volume of Robert Frost's poetry. The overall impression I get from their reviews is that *The Nation's Nature* makes a compelling case that an imagined American geography helped give rise to a national identity and that continental land claims underpinned an imperial agenda long before "Manifest Destiny." Still, the reviews raise a number of issues worth discussing here, issues that I hope will live on as grist in the mills of future works.

Max Edelson offers the most incisive criticism, one hinted at by others. He reads my argument as holding "to one particular construction of North America that was so dominant that it pushed out other, competing understandings." He suggests that I ignore "contending metageographical visions that sought to *limit* the expansion of settler society." To an extent he is correct; I do focus on a particular construction, though it is so vaguely defined as to embrace a multitude of others. Part of my thinking in doing so stemmed from a fear of making an already massive subject—Jeffrey Kaja notes the book's "sheer volume of topics and ideas"—overly cumbersome and incomprehensible. I emphasize, though apparently not enough, that metageographies resulted from historical processes; that they often grew out of ignorance; that their resonance waxed and waned; that definitions of continents varied widely; and, more often than not, that the "disparate views on continental taxonomies lay buried in slippery, silent assumptions" (28). Metageographical visions could often be multifaceted, contradictory, incomplete, or unexamined.

Depictions of geography, then, can resemble elaborate rabbit holes, defying the possibility of simply assuming that, to use Edelson's words, "early Americans meant what they said." Ostensibly contradictory portrayals of North America often appear within a single work, including the very maps and texts that Edelson flags as evidence of a circumscribed continental vision. John Mitchell, in *A Map of the British and French Dominions in North America* (1755), can be seen as dismissing vast regions west of the Mississippi. The question is why? How much weight should be placed on the charter lines extending to the map's vertical edge with the statement that they "extend sea to sea." What should we make of another map's careful use of Father Time to mask unknown regions that we know diplomats had on their mind? Mitchell's and other maps, it seems to me, often had the capacity both to reveal current dominions and geopolitical contests, while simultaneously suggesting a sense of destiny or feeling of entitlement toward regions beyond the pale.¹

¹ For one scholar's recognition of the expansionist vision within the Mitchell map, see Matthew H. Edney, "John Mitchell's Map of North America (1755): A Study of the Use and Publication of Official Maps in Eighteenth-Century Britain, *Imago Mundi: The International Journal for the History of Cartography*, 60:1, 73-75.

John Cartwright and Benjamin Franklin offer two perfect examples of how authors, even within the span of a few pages, can seem almost schizophrenic in their metageographical presumptions. Franklin described the ideal status of the American colonies as “so many separate little States, subject to the same Prince.” Yet he did so in a letter where he also foresaw that “America must become a great Country.”² Sounding much like Franklin, Cartwright envisioned a confederation of as many “independent states as can find habitations on the vast American continent.” He also criticized attempts to meddle in the expansion of any of these states, and in his text he undercut his map’s suggestion that future American states be “bounded” by the Mississippi. Addressing fears that a powerful American empire might become a threat to Britain, he advised readers to take comfort in the “impossibility” that one of the American states should “extend its conquests beyond the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.” To resist their growth and sovereignty was futile, as Cartwright made clear by asking rhetorically whether these nations must not “cover in a few ages that immense continent like a swarm of bees?” Britons also had little to worry about because the future American states would follow the mold of Britain, with “British freedom as a soul, and a spirit of commerce as the breath of life.” Nowhere does Cartwright admit to the possibility of the descendants of a non-British power rivaling these American states.³ Cartwright, in short, displays many of the same presumptions as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Pownall, and Thomas Jefferson, all of whom at various points could imagine multiple states on the continent (however defined), which would nevertheless all share essential traits. And so I’m not sure that Cartwright means only what Edelson thinks he says.

I nonetheless take pleasure in Edelson’s corrective, for it may in fact be impossible to explain the outbreak of the Revolution without paying heed to how metageographical visions varied or were contested. As I crafted *The Nation’s Nature*, I found Marc Egnal’s argument that patriots had greater expansionist leanings than their loyalist counterparts inescapable.⁴ Yet I couldn’t subscribe to Egnal’s approach of lumping individuals into expansionist and non-expansionist camps and then seeking a correlation between each camp’s views on the Revolution. Debates over geographical visions, like political ideals, took place not just between individuals and groups but within individual consciences. One vision could nest within another, and people could hold multiple spatial identities simultaneously. Categorizing views has as many pitfalls as defining them.

My reluctance to follow Egnal’s tack, or to draw more competing shades of geographical thought into my analysis, may explain why the book appears to have, as Matthew Hale describes it, a “discernible teleological strand.” That readers would interpret me as having

² Franklin to Lord Kames, 25 February 1767, in Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 37 vols. (New haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959-), 14:68, 69.

³ [John Cartwright], *American Independence. The Interest and Glory of Great Britain* (London, 1774), 27-35 (quotations from 27, 28, and 30).

⁴ Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

cast a shadow of inevitability over events is disheartening, though not entirely surprising. Linking a broadly held if nebulous set of ideas to particular actions exposes one to this danger. When people would ask me what my book in progress was about, I sometimes remarked, only partly in jest, that I was doing what Bernard Bailyn did in the *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, only with geography. Bailyn's classic study has garnered criticism for comparing ideas held by Anglo-American colonists to "an intellectual switchboard," where signals led in 1776 to "a single, unmistakable conclusion . . . to which there could be only one rational response."⁵ I can see how one might think that I would subscribe to such an analogy, with early Americans' metageography forming the switchboard. I did, however, try to suggest that this set of ideas was a product of human invention and historical processes, and its prevalence waxed and waned. The existence of this metageography, moreover, constituted only one of many necessary yet insufficient conditions required for events to play out as they did. I wove bits of narrative history into the book partly with the hope of demonstrating the contingent interplay of ideas and events. I tried to cast early Americans' latching onto these ideas, and their use of metageographical language generally, as an active decision, much like that of Washington to cross the Delaware or the French to enter the war. Alas, given that multiple readers smelled a taint of inevitability in my book, I obviously did not do enough. As I argue, contemporaries making the case for the Revolution or the Constitution often portrayed themselves as having nature on their side. Though I may have bombarded readers with quotations evidencing such notions, my beliefs run far to the contrary.

Like inevitability, the issue of Anglicization arises in more than one review. I agree with Hale that it and the rise of continental presumptions have histories whose intersection needs further exploration. Scholars would profit, I think, in seeing Anglicization and evolving metageographical thought as two sides of the same coin. Both provided a source of shared identity and anxiety. The consumer culture described by T.H. Breen in *The Marketplace of Revolution* helped provide an expansive circle of trust, as did the notion among many Americans that they shared a continent. At the same time, changes in what it meant to be British, including a surge in English nationalism on the eve of the Revolution, likely intensified American efforts to prove that they were not inferior, just as they sought to disprove Buffonian aspersions and demonstrate the suitability of the American environment for a rising empire. Benjamin Irvin's suggestion that *The Nation's Nature* might be read profitably alongside Kariann Yokota's *Unbecoming British* hints at the compatibility of Anglicization and metageographical thought as interpretive frameworks. Bringing both to bear while heeding the nuances of state and national interests, an insightful suggestion offered by Jeffrey Kaja, would seem to me the Holy Grail.⁶

⁵ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 21, 22.

⁶ T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford, 2004); Breen, "Ideology and Nationalism on the Eve of the American Revolution: Revisions *Once More* in Need of Revising," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997), 13-39; and Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

I can only take satisfaction in thinking that I may have moved scholarship ever so slightly in that direction. I began my research for *The Nation's Nature* with what seemed a simple, antiquarian question, one tangential to my interests at the time: when did North and South America come to be recognized as two separate continents? I now recognize that question as incredibly naïve, and the roundtable's comments make clear that the issues I subsequently raised and tried to answer are far more important. I hope their thoughts help others avoid my mistakes.

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