In loving memory of my grandfather, Lammert Postma. He learned me how to travel, and that travelling roads less traveled by, make, in the end, all the difference.
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This dissertation was written while I was trying to juggle with my father’s illness, loves won and loves lost, all amid of a process of finding my own way in life. Sometimes, indeed, I have been digging in the dirt. Jens Staalstra, Chris Stutterheim and Lena Woudstra all helped me in their own particular ways. Without their love, friendship and support this would not have been possible. I also wish to thank those who bore grace when I excused myself to work on my latest chapter. Last but not least, this dissertation is dedicated to Lammert Postma. He was my grandfather, but so much more than that. His achievements serve as inspiration for my own endeavors.
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INTRODUCTION

I see in you, certain to come, the promise of thousands of years, till now deferred …

The new society at last, proportionate to Nature …

Fresh come, to a new world indeed, yet long prepared,
I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal,
Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America,
Heir of the past so grand,
To build a grander future.

Walt Whitman, “Song of the Redwood-Tree.”

When America achieved independence in the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the former colonies had to tackle the problem of how to put the gains of the War of Independence on a firm institutional foundation. The aftermath of the military conflict with Great-Britain was shaped by the debate over the scope, power, and authority of a central government that would bind the states closer together. In the years leading up to the Declaration of Independence, many Americans had envisioned America as an expansive empire that would spread beyond its population centers on the eastern seaboard. Hence, when peace negotiations finally started, the American delegation, led by Benjamin Franklin, did not only demand independence but also sought the recognition of territorial claims stretching all the way to the Mississippi River. So, when the delegation returned home, it had not only secured independence, but also British acceptance to its territorial claims.

Rather than an anti-imperial struggle, the American revolution was America’s struggle for its own empire. In the first decennia after its independence, free of British constraints and controls, the young nation commenced. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 doubled the size of the emerging American nation. The admission of Texas as a state in 1845 and the settlement of the Oregon boundary question with Britain in 1846 further
expanded the young nation. The American-Mexican War from 1846-48 added more territory with the spoils of victory of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, along with the postwar Gadsden Purchase from the recently defeated Mexican government in 1851 further enlarged the borders of the American West into the shape we know today. In the space of less than half a century, the nation tripled its size and its coastline. Not long after that, America made its "splashing entry, apparently into the world of Great Powers" (Stephanson 75). Through a national policy of overseas expansion in 1898, Americans pressed for commercial and territorial advantages beyond the continent in Hawaii, the Philippines, and various Caribbean and Pacific islands.

Emphasizing the policies of expansion calls into question dominant perspectives on American development in the early nineteenth-century. While American textbooks generally apply the term imperialism to the end of the nineteenth-century, the imperialist label is generally not applied so readily to the earlier part of that century, the era of continental or frontier expansion.¹ From its founding there has been a dichotomy in America regarding the country’s active and passive expansionist policies. “[America] is a well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all,” wrote John Quincy Adams in 1821. So long as America had a western frontier to move into, that process of expansion seemed apparently non-imperialistic. This desire to be seen as a positive force continues to the present.² But the whole story of early nineteenth-century America, of course, must include the pattern of settler colonialism. Westward expansion had been prefigured or accompanied by white settlers that in turn confiscated the land for themselves while

¹ I consider imperialism here as a story of empire building, characterized by “a political unit that is large and expansionist,” and “that reproduces differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates (qtd. in Lessons of Empire 3).
² Former U.S. President George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said on April 29, 2003: “We don’t seek empires. We’re not imperialistic; we never have been” (Ferguson 22).
expelling and displacing native populations. When not exterminating them, the government forced them onto reservations. This westward expansion eventually brought the full integration of the newly settled territories into the federal system. Such events raise questions of how early nineteenth-century America extended and enforced governing authority over its territorial periphery and how this periphery was integrated into the American state. How did early nineteenth-century Americans, for instance, perceive their place in time and history, and which ideas and energies enabled them to subdue Indian tribes with no more than small armies without considerable resistance?

The English poet William Blake (1757-1827) once wrote that “the foundation of empire is art and science. Remove them or degrade them, and the empire is no more. Empire follows art and not vice versa, as Englishmen suppose.” Indeed, as this dissertation shall seek to demonstrate, the role of culture in helping Americans to understand and to come to terms with expansion cannot be overestimated. Because, as Edward Said makes clear in his *Orientalism*, it is through culture that the assumption of the “divine right of imperial powers to rule is authoritatively supported” (Ashcroft 85). Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* begins from the same assumption, asserting that political and economic operations of imperial expansion are nothing without culture. The goal of this dissertation, then, is to bring some of these early nineteenth-century cultural works together, ranging from travel narratives to paintings, linking them with empire building. Indeed, as the following four chapters shall demonstrate, cultural production functioned
as “a lubricant of empire” that “organically” (Said 12) helped the American public to “understand, accept, and consume the exercise of empire” (Said qtd. in Wrobel 431).³

The argument of this dissertation is structured chronologically. The first chapter lays the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations for the exploration of expansion in pre-Manifest Destiny, early nineteenth-century America. The analysis begins with a discussion of how colonials progressed to provincials, discussing the complexities of the lived relationship that colonials and provincials had with reality. Puritan and Pilgrim heritage, but also particular liberties that were achieved under British imperial governing structures, shaped the American consciousness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century in important ways. When Americans gained their independence, they deeply felt and experienced that they “had created a new world,” an idea that was moreover guided by an utopian depth that convinced them that theirs was morally better (Wood 48). America was truly a utopia achieved, they believed. This ideological construction, developed in the colonial and revolutionary period, christened American thinking, and would be a dynamic energy and justification in the westward movement of the American nation-state in the following century.

Territorial expansion drove American leaders to adopt imperial policies. Expansion was linked to state- and nation building, and moreover, expansion required nation-building. Outlining how exactly this language was spoken, the second chapter shall focus on the early 1800s, and specifically on Thomas Jefferson and his understanding of good government, and the Lewis & Clark Expedition of 1804-1806. For Thomas Jefferson expansion was interwoven with his vision of good government, as his

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³ I use the term “organic” here in the sense used by Antonio Gramsci when he speaks of a “historically organic” ideology, based on genuine cultural leadership and “spontaneous consent,” as distinct from ideologies imposed by “state coercive power” (12).
empire was defined in sharp contrast with its European (in particular British) counterparts, as an “Empire of (or for) Liberty.” On these grounds, it was considered natural to bring the West under American control. Part of Jefferson’s vision for an American continent was the Lewis & Clark Expedition that clearly underlines the expansionist ambitions of early nineteenth-century Americans. The analysis of this expedition shall moreover make clear how the expansionist political language was translated into an organic cultural message of science, discovery and heroism, creating a rather utopian innocent idea of empire, with America as the legitimate owners of its western hinterlands.

As the nation-state expanded in the early nineteenth-century, such expansion required state-building. But as the third chapter examines, state-building happened not in a cultural vacuum. When the Erie Canal opened in October 1825, it established New York as the commercial hub of the United States. At the same time, New York became the center of an American school of landscape painting. As a project of the intellectual and political elite, landscape paintings by men like Thomas Cole had the effect of transforming the understanding of an American empire into an nationalistic, aesthetic, sublime experience in the 1830s and 1840s. Men like Thomas Cole and George Inness told the narrative that the wilderness of the West simply had to be tamed and filled with civilization and order because nature was where God had placed the possibilities for mankind to realize the “city upon the hill.” Moreover, these paintings depicted the message that God had instilled Americans with the energies and powers, in the form of technology, to conquer and settle these lands. As such, the paintings depicted the American landscape as a pastoral setting where human beings and nature could coexist peacefully. By analyzing Thomas Cole’s “The Oxbow,” among other paintings, this
chapter demonstrates how landscape paintings worked as an important catalyst for a nation-state that was supportive of westward expansion in the 1830s.

The fourth and final chapter, then, portrays how much Americans were instilled with an expansionist, imperial ideology by the mid-nineteenth-century. In the developing capitalist economy of antebellum America, lawyer and writer Richard Dana Jr. published his experiences of working on an American ship, but also wrote about his experiences in California in his *Two Years Before The Mast*. Dana’s book was a charge against the poor working conditions in the American merchant fleet, and as such, is to be considered rather a narrative of “anti-conquest” than of open conquest. Still, Dana’s book created a great deal of interest in California for many Americans, describing California as having beautiful land, pleasant weather, and a lack of people. Foremost, Dana described Californians as culturally and morally backward. Despite its social message, the analysis of *Two Years* tells that cultural production has a deep investment in the political character of its society, as paradoxically, the book was still a powerful expression of a growing hegemonic culture that was supportive of a westward movement in the 1830s and 1840s. This movement would eventually culminate in Manifest Destiny in 1845, and hence, guided massive settlement of California throughout the nineteenth-century.

The goal of this dissertation, finally, is not trying to argue that the early nineteenth-century American nation-state was an empire – although historians and political scientists have rarely used the term to describe the country. Rather, its main concern is to show that Americans developed expansionist energies and policies well before its formulation as Manifest Destiny in 1845, and also long before the Spanish-American War of 1898. Expansionist energies were part of the process of nation-building,
and happened not pre-dominantly through imperial policies of force, but went rather hand-in-hand with cultural expressions. This dissertation’s findings will show in each and every chapter, finally, the deep entanglement between culture and the process of justification and acceptance of nationalism, expansion and imperialism in early nineteenth-century America.
I

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW WORLD:
FROM COLONIALS TO AMERICANS

Here the Church, descending from her God,
Shall fix on earth her long and last abode;
Zion arise, in radiant splendors dress’d

O Land supremely blest! To thee this given
To taste the choicest joys of bounteous heaven;
Thy rising Glory shall expand its rays,
And land and times unknown, rehearse thine endless praise.

Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge, “A Poem on
the Rising Glory of America” (1771)

This is Mr. Locke’s doctrine,
It is the doctrine of reason and truth,
And it is, sir, the unvarnished doctrine
Of the Americans.

Junius Americanus (Arthur Lee)
Boston Evening Post (May 4, 1772).

The colonization of the North-American continent brought many people with different
motives and ideas together. We can argue that the experience of English religious
refugees on the North-American continent had a lasting influence on America’s process
of self-justification. Also the transition period, from colony to province, within the
British Empire, were important for the founding narrative of America. In these formative
years, the ideas of the nation were forged and defined, creating what Benedict Anderson
describes as an “imagined community” (6). When the Pilgrims and Puritans moved from
Europe to the North-American continent in the early seventeenth-century, by actually

doing it, they perceived themselves as pioneers, having the unique opportunity to bring

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4 “The Rising Glory of America,” written by Philip Freneau and Hugh Henry Brackenridge was first read at
the Princeton commencement ceremonies in 1771. In the wake of the Boston Massacre, Freneau and
Brackenridge’s poem caused a sensation. In the years leading up to the Declaration of Independence, the
College of New Jersey was a hotbed of Revolutionary sentiments (Castillo 1).
5 This imagined community is different from an actual community because it is not based on everyday face-
to-face interaction between all of its members. A nation “is imagined because the members of even the
smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the
minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). National identities are thus not concrete
truths but rather collective imaginings.
alive the religious and intellectual philosophies of their times on the North-American continent. This experience instilled settlers and future-settlers with the self-understanding that they were an exceptional people, with unique liberties and possibilities, carrying with them a moral responsibility. In the late eighteenth-century, especially in times of crisis, provincial Americans exploited these sentiments, imagining their nation as both the surpassing of the past and the hope of the future. Eventually, by the end of the eighteenth-century, through historical experience, it became the grand-narrative by which Americans defined themselves. However, to understand why the first settlers, colonials and provincials perceived themselves as so unique, it is helpful to first get a better understanding of their motives. As we shall see, we have to see their experience in the context of the changing intellectual and cultural horizon of that century.

In the course of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, already, though gradually, old certainties were eroded by new knowledge and new ways of looking at experience. It caused European thought to flourish in the seventeenth-century. By then, astronomers wrote about gravity and planetary motion; natural philosophers published chemistry texts, botanical guides, and essays on alchemy; physicians made new discoveries about the human body, issuing studies of plague, blood corpuscles and body temperature; historians produced chronologies and national histories, and political theorists wrote about absolute monarchy and natural rights. In the beginning, like everything new, science and new discoveries brought uncertainties, anxieties and doubts. Because scientists questioned the fundamental base of life and human existence itself – undermining God’s power, the church believed – accusations of heresy and witchcraft

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6 I align myself here with Joyce Appleby, who argues that “Exceptional does not mean different. All nations are different; and almost all national sentiments exploit these differences” (419). To exploit them is simply part of the formation of a national identity and self-consciousness.
were not uncommon. However, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries these attitudes gradually changed. People started to see that human reason, operating by means of careful observation and experiment, had the possibility to expose the mechanisms of the natural world in which he had lived for so long like a fearful and wondering child. Nature, it was argued, instead of being a mere collection of occult phenomena, was a system in which “God was a mathematician, whose calculations were accessible to man’s intelligence” (Hampson 24). All, or almost all, scientists were sincerely religious men – deeply convinced that their discoveries glorified God, because their work “revealed the unsuspected grandeur of His creation” (24). In this scheme, seventeenth-century science and reason were understood as means by which one could get closer to God, and through which one could, ultimately, glorify God.

In the course of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the new sciences and discoveries brought unprecedented optimism. Man was the master of his own destiny and had the ability to shape his material and social environment to his own convenience. This optimism also affected the political sciences. For centuries, Europe had been occupied by religious conflicts, essentially about the question who was the highest authority in society – King or Church? Instead of looking back at the Old Testament, theologists and philosophers started to produce new promising philosophies about the organization of society. In an attempt to challenge the divine rights of kings, philosophers of natural law started leaning on ideas of classic republicanism – originating back to the classic works of Cicero and Aristotle. Inspired by the popular idea in science that man was master of his own destiny, theologists and philosophers such as Martin Luther could declare that “every man is responsible for his own faith, and he must see it
for himself that he believes rightly” (qtd. in Hampson 114). Other thinkers, like Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), also looked back to the classic period, using its texts to formulate ideas about ideal governance and to produce new promising philosophies. Hobbes described in *Leviathan* that mankind first existed in a state of nature, where man could live in absolute freedom, but, accordingly, lived in constant danger. Life in a state of nature was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

According to Hobbes, to escape this state, men gave up a portion of their natural freedom, in exchange for the benefits of civilization through the rule of law. Those were to be formulated in social contracts which were to regulate social interactions. Hobbes’ ideas are of particular importance, because parts of his philosophy were adopted by the Puritans and Pilgrims when they first set foot on the North-American continent.

In these changing times, around the 1620s, the first group of religious settlers set foot on the North-American continent. Although the Pilgrims and Puritans differed in their precise motive for escaping Europe, we have to see their departure for North-America in its then dominant religious and intellectual context. The first colonies came to be based upon systems of governance that had its roots in the new political philosophies of the seventeenth-century. For a long time, both groups had had a hard time in England, with the Central Church seeking to condemn and dispel them. Upon leaving for America, both groups sought to establish a system that would protect them from these evils in the future. The Pilgrims, for instance, build a system around Hobbes’ idea of a social contract,

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7 The Plymouth Pilgrims, who landed on America’s shores in 1620, held that their differences with the Church of England were irreconcilable and that their worship should be organized independently. The group received a charter to sail to America and to start their own colony in an area that was later to be known as Plymouth Colony. Ten years later, in 1630, a group of Puritans also found their way to the North-American continent. Unlike the Pilgrims, the Puritans saw their journey as a possibility to reform the Church from within.
that they titled the *Mayflower Compact*. The compact was the first governing document of their Plymouth Colony, and was signed on November 11, 1620. The document underlined their loyalty to the English Crown, and moreover stated that they bound themselves “together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience” (Bradford). Although its original text never survived, the document essentially was a social contract that the Pilgrims established to prevent their colony from falling into Hobbes’ natural state of disarray.8 The Puritans designed a similar compact in 1630, titled “A Model of Christian Charity.” The text was written by John Winthrop, the colony’s first governor, and had a much stronger emphasis on moral, religious qualities to also prevent the colony from falling back into Hobbes’ natural state. Winthrop believed in personal and collective autonomy within each village. His ideal was to create a utopian society, a religiously based social, political and economic structure, that was purified of selfishness and immorality – bound together in a Puritan Commonwealth.

We can say that the lived experience that America’s first settlers had with reality was a complex one, but, foremost, it was dominated by the conviction that they were an exceptional people with an exceptional opportunity. Exceptionalism not only meant

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8 The Pilgrims fear for disarray was a reasonable one. Their ship, the *Mayflower*, was originally bound for the mouth of the Hudson River. The decision was made instead to land farther north, in what is now Massachusetts. This inspired some members of the group who were not members of the congregation of religious dissenters, who were leading the expedition, to proclaim that they “would use their own liberty; for none had power to command them …” (Winthrop 180). To prevent this from happening, the Pilgrims established a government.
different to them: the Puritans and Pilgrims perceived their societies as “unique, one of a (superior) kind” (Byers 86). To them this was undeniable, both in practical, as well as in cultural and intellectual terms. For the first time in the history of mankind, autonomous individuals had the possibility to create a truly New World based on liberty, freed from European deadwood, corruption, fear, and what else. This society could be constructed on optimistic scientific principles that were considered modern in the early seventeenth-century. By actually “living” these principles, Pilgrims and Puritans, as deeply religious people, could, moreover, glorify God. They understood that these unique possibilities “carrie[d] with it a unique moral value and responsibility” (86). The society that they created was interspersed with this narrative, establishing the central foundation of what was to become, in Raymond Williams’ phrase, America’s “dominant culture.”9 We however have to see this “dominant culture” as something they thought and talked with, rather than about, “[r]eaching down to levels of consciousness that are themselves mute – never told but retold inside consciously constructed arguments” (Jehlen 19).10

They were God’s Earthly Manifestation, the Pilgrims understood, so when they arrived in the New World to build their first settlements, they were “lucky” that European diseases had decimated the hostile Indian population. However, in the Pilgrims view this was not luck, but “God who had thinned the land for them” (qtd. in Geiter and Speck 69).

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9 As Myra Jehlen points out, Raymond Williams “distinguishes between ‘the dominant culture’ in the society and certain other ‘practices, experiences, meanings and values’ which are ‘alternative’ to the dominant culture or even ‘oppositional’ to it.” But in America, alternative or oppositional forms have characteristically been “associated with the Old World and thus rejected by the very process of national emergence” (174-175). “Since there were in America no alternative sets of ideas of values, except the expelled Old World order” – the hegemony that resulted “reached virtually all levels of thought and behavior” (Bercovitch xiv).

10 This view goes back to Louis Althusser’s notion of ideology as inescapable, as the very condition of thought, as what he calls “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (162). Individuals never stand outside ideology, and ideologies are not the content of thought. Rather they are its conditioning structures and figures.
And, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us,” wrote Puritan leader John Winthrop in 1630 in his “A Model of Christian Charity.” America was a shining example, he explained, eventually serving as a moral example of an ideal Christian community to the whole world. In this context, exceptionalism was a mode of thought that defined their experience, conditioning their thought and convincing them that they were chosen. America was the new Promised Land, reserved by God for His new chosen people as the site for a New Heaven and a New Earth. Everything pointed in this direction. The Pilgrims’ leader, William Bradford, for instance drew upon the imagery of Old Testament (Hebrews 11:13) strangers and pilgrims who had the opportunity to return to their old country, but instead longed for a better, heavenly country. Bradford wrote in his later publication Of Plymouth Plantation: “but they knew they were Pilgrims, and looked not much on these things; but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits” (72). In the following decennia and centuries this “imagined relationship” with reality proved to be the foundation of the story of America, unifying colonials and provincials, especially in times when their unique liberties were threatened.

In first decennia of the eighteenth-century, the remote colonies transformed into provinces that were well integrated into the British Empire and the transatlantic economy. In this transition, the theocracy that the Puritans had sought to establish failed. Instead, most colonists increasingly came to view themselves as integral parts of a British and European cultural world. American colonials became participants of the age, linking them ever closer to some of the principal trends in eighteenth-century culture. Many factors influenced this transformation. In part, it resulted from increased contacts between
the colonies and the outside world. But it was also due to the changing political situation in the homeland. Whereas under King James II the prospect of a Roman Catholic dynasty would have been likely, in 1688, he was overthrown in the “Glorious Revolution” by a union of Parliamentarians, with the help of William II of Orange. Most colonials happily acceded (Landsman 1-5). It must however be emphasized that the colonists did not identify with everything British. Instead, they would identify themselves as provincials, with a particular provincial point of view. In this context, the narrative of exceptionalism survived and blossomed with every crisis. In times of emergency, when the colonists’ particular liberties were threatened, the narrative worked as a unifying principle, the guarding of which seemed especially important to the eighteenth-century colonists.

From the perspective of eighteenth-century colonial America, liberty was not only fragile, but rare. Although the term liberty meant many things to many people, the colonials shared the conviction that theirs was a nation of liberty in a world of tyrannies. Because, as the colonists saw beyond their borders, they saw a world of absolutist monarchies, such as France and Spain. Beyond those lay a larger world full of what were generally referred to as despots. What also made the preservation of liberty so compelling to the American provincials was its connection to nearly every other element of prosperity and social happiness. “In the provinces in particular,” writes Landsman,

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11 By the end of the seventeenth-century, crisis had become its source of strength, “fastened upon it, gloried in it, even invented it if necessary” (Bercovitch 62). In the 1670s, for instance, the settlers brutally clashed with Indians, during which the exceptional covenant that the Pilgrims had with God was reinforced in Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson by Mary Rowlandson. As the Puritan society transformed and degraded due to outside influences, Mary Rowlandson believed this to be sinful: in her view, the settlers failed to uphold their special covenant with God. When Rowlandson was captured by Indians during King Philip’s War (1675-1676), she concluded that God had orchestrated the events of her captivity. As she surveyed her home after an attack, she credited the destruction not to the Indians, but to God. During her captivity, Rowlandson, however, strove to live by the scripture and fulfill her side of the covenant. Hence, after her redemption, it affirmed her faith in God’s special relationship with His chosen people, re-subjecting Americans to God as His chosen people. Although her book was a bestseller, it could, however, not stop the colonies from becoming more worldly orientated.
“liberty, piety, prosperity, and Enlightenment all seemed to be strongly interconnected” (166). Life in America resembled the general harmony of nature, colonial and provincial Americans understood. Hence, the institutions by which they lived were also in perfect harmony with the Universal Natural Order that God had created. “Under a system of liberty,” wrote the Independent Reflector in 1752, “the Subjects of a free State, have something open and generous in their Carriage. […] They can think for themselves; publish their Sentiments […] secure and unmolested.” Under such a system, “[a]griculture is encouraged, and proves the annual Source of immense Riches” (78). Moreover, liberty promoted enlightenment, as it was considered impossible “for the Sciences to grow and flourish under the Frowns and Terrors of Oppression, as for a People to breath Liberty under the savage Administration of a Tyrant. The Advancement of Learning depends on the free Exercice of Thought” (315), wrote the Reflector in 1753.

Indeed, liberty was part of many realms of colonial life. In politics, liberty meant principally freedom from arbitrary rule, and in particular, that from of absolute monarchs. Provincial Americans were accustomed to living under a government that was “largely dependent upon the consent of the governed” (Becker 72). Socially, liberty increasingly came to mean the right of citizens to pursue their fortunes without obstructions from the

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12 In 1690 British philosopher and physician John Locke published his “An Essay Concerning the Human Understanding.” His essay would have a major impact on eighteenth-century clergy and revolutionary thinkers. Locke stated that man is born with a clean slate. It is from experience, i.e. sensations from the natural and social world, that mankind socializes. This framing made it possible for the eighteenth-century Americans to believe that in the world of human relations, as well as in the physical world, it was possible for men to correspond with the general harmony of nature. Since men were born with a clean slate, and in Locke’s understanding men in a state of nature would always willingly come together to form a state, Locke’s answer was that the only law that would bind men was reason. Since reason is the only sure guide that God has given to men, it is the only foundation of just government. Locke “desired to know what kind of government that is … where one man, commanding a multitude … may do to all his subjects whatever he pleases.” His answer was clear: such government was a bad government, since governments ought to exist “for men, not men for governments.” “[A]ll governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed” (Becker 71-72).
authority of state, or from the tyranny of birth. In civil life, liberty signified the presence of legal protections. In the religious culture, liberty signified the right to follow one’s science in accordance with the word of God as revealed in the Bible, and the freedom from arbitrary human authorities that tried to impose their wills. All in all we can say that Americans understood that their particular liberty was the source of prosperity, of freedom of enquiry, of Enlightenment, and even a pure form of religiosity. It confirmed the belief that the governments they had established were unique, “just the kind that God had designed men by nature to have” (Becker 73).

That provincial liberty was indeed the source of prosperity was given additional weight by what provincial Americans saw happening around them. During the first half of the eighteenth-century, the colonies in North-America prospered economically. It was liberty and enlightenment that were the foundations of such growth, provincial Americans understood, as their economy – in contrast to others – was unconstrained. Commerce itself was a positive good, and in economic terms, increased trade seemed the key to the creation of wealth. Liberty, in this sense, signified the liberty to buy and sell on the open market, free from excessive metropolitan control, which was rather linked to

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13 It is important to note, obviously, that the meaning of liberty varied from place to place and from group to group. Within the confines of New England, Landsman writes, “liberty for many was often associated with the authority of local communities to conduct their own affairs without interference from the outside.” In Virginia, it was rather “the property of the gentry, of male landowners, who claimed the right to govern, represent, and speak for their communities and their households without restraint from government of the colony or the empire” (Landsman 151).

14 In this sense, Catholocism was an unfit religion in the minds of most Protestant colonials, just because it was a creation of human authority. In the eyes of the colonials, “the Pope was an arbitrary ruler, as absolute in religious matters as the French monarch was in civil affairs” (Landsman 159). Together, this “unholy alliance of Catholic powers” posed a threat to Protestants’ liberties through their expansionist designs (159).

15 It for instance allowed preachers to connect the theories of John Locke with religion. “Locke rode into [America] on the backs of Moses and the Prophets” (237), writes Clinton Rossiter. The theories of John Locke are an interesting example of how religion married with politics

16 Benjamin Franklin’s essay on population, titled “Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries” reflected such optimism. Franklin suggested that the availability of land and the possibilities one had in the colonies, unlike Europe, was allowing for a growth in population.
corruption. In this scheme, morality and the market came to be intertwined: “colonials understood that the market served to promote the balance and order of the natural order, constituting an important tool in promoting harmony, peace and civility” (Phillipson 179). Above all, “prosperity and commercial expansion [served] as moral justifications for any social action,” because, in effect, colonials believed that prosperity, commerce and liberty demonstrated America’s “conformity to nature and to the divine order” (167). So, when all these particular colonial liberties were threatened by restrictive British tax laws in 1765 (Stamp Act) and 1767 (Townshend Act), these were considered as going against everything what colonial America stood for.

From the moment when forming a new government and independence became a distinct possibility, continuing throughout the War of Independence, America was filled with hopes for preserving its particular liberties. Rather than an anti-imperial struggle, the American Revolution was America’s struggle for its own empire, free of British constraints and control. During this struggle, terms such as “New World,” “New Earth” and “Liberty” were transformed into a peculiar destiny: what had been incidental in the colonial past all of a sudden acquired purpose and momentum. All of history prior to the formation of the Euro-American New World was “pointed towards this formation as a goal, in which the New World was not simply a place, but a mission” (Byers 86). Americans thus experienced and actually lived that they had created truly a New World. During the 1760s and 1770s patriot leaders for instance drew on the image of a “chosen band, removed from the depravations … of Europe” (qtd. in Bercovitch 121). Also, increasingly, they spoke of the conflict in apocalyptic terms. Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* used biblical precedents and emphasized providence: a fallen Old World, an
Egyptian England, and a New Canaan charged “by the design of Heaven” with “the cause of all mankind” (83). However, independence meant more than simply the elimination of a monarchy. It added a moral dimension, a theistic utopian depth. “We are now really another people,” proclaimed Thomas Paine in 1782 in a letter to the Abbé Raynal. “Our style and manner of thinking have undergone a revolution more extraordinary than the political revolution of the country. We see with other eyes; we hear with other ears; and think with other thoughts, than those we formerly used” (163). For Paine, as for most Americans, the revolution was intended to “form a new era and give a new turn to human affairs” (qtd. in Wood 48). This high optimism reflected New Jerusalem and New Earth: it was a commonly shared vision, deriving both from Enlightenment thinking and, unmistakably, from Puritan New England.

We can say that America saw itself as the achieved utopia of wealth, rights, freedom, the social contract, and, with its independence, the utopia of democratic representation in the late eighteenth-century. This was given further ideological weight in the reform minded salons of Europe in the 1790s.\(^{17}\) In the following centuries, Americans would act upon it, with exceptionalism as their grand narrative, equating America with the ancient republics. The American Republic was predestined to prosper and grow into what Jefferson titled an “Empire of (for) Liberty.” From this perspective we have not to see American expansion and the building of an empire in the early nineteenth-century as simply a matter of attaining more land and more wealth. For Americans, in contrast to Europeans, “empire” did not necessarily suggest dangerous concentrations of power and

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\(^{17}\) Appleby writes that “for late eighteenth-century European revolutionaries, America became a political prodigy – a phenomenon, giving proof that reform was possible. America was simply destined to do great things, for which both history and God testified” (419). In this sense, the American way was not just a better way of life, but a long-promised glory, its “light spread[ing] from the day-spring in the west […] until the perfect day,” as John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail in 1786 (403).
schemes of world domination. Rather, it was the manifestation of something great. This was announced as an “Empire of (for) Liberty, an Empire of Reason, an Empire of Virtue, an Empire of Live, a Great and Mighty Empire; the largest the World ever saw” (Bercovitch 114). These descriptions unite political and scientific progress with biblical prophecy, together compromising the narrative of America. As the following chapters shall demonstrate, the deeply experienced belief that America was an exceptional country was acted upon, developing into an expansionist force in the early nineteenth-century. Moreover, it was the central message that was repeated over and over again, not only in policies that guided westward expansion, but also in countless cultural narratives and beliefs, such as paintings and novels. The following chapter shall then seek to demonstrate how obvious westward expansion was for Thomas Jefferson, and how the Lewis & Clark Expedition worked within this ideological rationale.
II TURNING THE UNKNOWN INTO THE KNOWN:
JEFFERSON’S “EMPIRE OF LIBERTY”
& THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

We should have such an empire for liberty as … never surveyed since the creation: and I am persuaded no constitution was never before so well calculated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.

Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Monticello, April 27, 1809.

In the first decades after its independence, America proudly proclaimed liberty and cherished democracy, but also behaved imperially. These seemingly contradicting terms – liberty versus imperialism – especially intermingled during Thomas Jefferson’s presidency (1801-1809). Whereas most Americans remember Jefferson for writing the Declaration of Independence, seeing him as a defender of liberties, imperialist he was. In Jefferson’s time America largely expanded beyond its original borders, years during which Jefferson could proclaim that America should be an “Empire of (or for) Liberty.” However, this not meant expansion for its own sake, as his empire’s safety, both economically and politically, was to be secured by expansion. Moreover, Jefferson’s empire was not to be equated with its European counterparts. America was the embodiment of goodness, and with its democracy, rights and unique liberties, its expansionism was, also, altogether, a different one.

For Thomas Jefferson westward expansion was interwoven with his vision of good government – all implied in the slogan “Empire of Liberty.” Already in 1780 he first coined the phrase, while the American War of Independence was still being fought. In a letter to his friend and revolutionary war hero George Rogers Clark, Jefferson briefly, but very specifically, outlined his ideal that in 1801 would become policy:
We shall divert through our own Country a branch of commerce which the European States have thought worthy of the most important struggles and sacrifices, and in the event of peace [ending the American Revolution] ... we shall form to the American union a barrier against the dangerous extension of the British Province of Canada and add to the Empire of Liberty an extensive and fertile Country thereby converting dangerous Enemies into valuable friends.” (*Papers*, vol. 4, 237-238)

Jefferson linked economy and expansion to security: the larger his empire, the safer the position of the young republic would be. It were ideas that had been with him since his earliest days, and also echoed in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In Jefferson’s system, the sum of good government, as he would later declare in his First Inaugural Address (delivered on March 4, 1801), was one “which will restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.”

We can say that the material base upon which Jefferson built his vision of America was both democratic and capitalistic, agrarian and commercial, and that his ideal was deeply rooted in the colonial experience. Foremost, Jefferson’s empire would not be as the British Empire in America in the previous decade had become, an empire built on force and fear – remote provinces subject to the despotic rule of a distant metropolitan government. Having experienced the British colonial rule himself, Jefferson’s greatest concerns were unnatural concentrations of population, wealth and power that he
associated with British imperial rule. In the America of 1800, mercantilist east-coast seaport cities represented the British metropolis.\(^{18}\) Jefferson was afraid that the east-coast seaports might dominate the American hinterlands, like Great-Britain had dominated its provinces on the North-America continent before. He feared that these cities would dominate the periphery and would create permanent inequalities and inefficiencies that he associated with a monarchical empire. Jefferson’s economic fantasy was therefore that Americans, having withdrawn from the carrying trade, would be able to meet Great-Britain on a level of commercial equality, trading surpluses for manufactured goods. This would allow America to follow its own path, instead of being dependent on the trade that the Great-Britain dominated. Hence, it was by means of internal commercial expansion and system of rivers that the American union could offer a profitable alternative to the mercantilist regime of unequal benefits. Jefferson wrote to George Washington that “since all the world was becoming commercial, America too must get as much as possible of this modern source of wealth and power” (qtd. in Appleby 153). By adding “extensive and fertile Country” to the United States, Jefferson’s “Empire of Liberty”

\(^{18}\) Another angst, also appearing in Jefferson’s letter to Clark that motivated Jefferson’s vision for expansion in his “Empire of Liberty,” was the possibility that Great-Britain would take possession of unclaimed areas in America’s hinterlands. Thomas Jefferson was aware that the North-American continent was a vast place, full of natural richness that Great-Britain was not ready to give up yet. British trappers were already active in north-western areas by the 1780s, and Jefferson feared that future British settlers might take possession of these areas. The best thing for American security would therefore be to chart the continent, and lay American claims before other nations could do so. The fear for British revenge also largely motivated America in the 1783 Treaty of Paris to negotiate besides peace, also the area known as Transappalachia, a region west of the Appalachian Mountains, east of the Mississippi. The Americans benefitted most of the treaty: independence and a vast area they had not won militarily, had scarcely populated, and had no solid legal claim to, prior to the peace treaty. Measured in square miles, the treaty added an immense expanse. Whereas the original rebelling thirteen colonies comprised about 384,000 square miles, the new nation after the Peace of Paris gained another 540,000 square miles – the areas of the ten-plus states eventually created out of Transappalachia (Nugent 39). Although Jefferson took no part in the negotiations, he, like Benjamin Franklin, John Jay and John Adams believed that the land west of the Appalachian Mountains belonged to the United States.
would furthermore not only keep imperialist foreign nations at bay, but also work as a protection against internal corruption.  

The most important pillar of the “branche of commerce” in regard to expansion, as Jefferson mentioned in his letter to Clark, was the encouragement of freeholding farmers. Jefferson had unlimited confidence in progressive agricultural development, believing that the republican political qualities were deposited in farmers by God. In Jefferson’s mind, farmers were the most valuable citizens, as they were the true republicans. They built their own houses, raised their cattle and grew their own food. He praised farmers as “the chosen people of God,” and connected physiocratic ideals with the American environment, using terms that echoed Puritan New England rhetoric.

“Those who labor the earth are the chosen people of God, if He ever had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue,” Jefferson wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (170). As products of their environment, these freeholding men and women were the people on whose shoulders the future of America rested. From the states of Georgia to New York, then, a hinterland

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19 Jefferson most feared monarchical developments. Jefferson’s Democratic-Republicans accused John Adam’s Federalists of monarchal traits in the Presidential campaign of 1800. Society had to be protected from tyrannical dangers – both foreign and domestic. During the presidency of John Adams’ (1797-1801) tensions rose high to establish which direction America should develop into, energies that outburst in the elections of 1800. Adams and his Federalists had led America into an undeclared naval war with France and in the process expressed an activist concept of government. Moreover, with anti-French hysteria rising, Federalists in Congress had passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, aimed at stopping radical French influence, and limiting the influence of people who were critical of Adams’ policies. Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican Party believed these policies contradicted democratic principles. The prospect they offered was a different one, aimed at rallying the American nation around Democratic-Republican ideas. Thomas Jefferson summarized these ideas as an “Empire of Liberty.”

20 The term “physiocratic” was coined by Pierre-Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, a French friend of Thomas Jefferson, and a disciple of political economist François Quesnay (Manning xviii). It describes the belief that “the wealth and virtue of nations resides in the cultivation of the land, and that agrarian nations are the most contended” (xviii). Jefferson believed that “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands” (*Paper*, vol. 8, 426).

21 When Jefferson wrote to John Jay in 1785, he explained: “It is the focus in which He keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth” (qtd. in Manning xviii-xix).
ran westward that provided Americans with the right material base for a nation of independent and industrious property holders. Moreover, a progressing west would provide new settlers continuously with undeveloped lands, allowing the people, and through them the nation, to flourish. In this process, farmers would spread the ideal of a republican society.

We can say that expansion was Thomas Jefferson’s reason of state, defined by the term “Empire of Liberty.” In his vision, America was destined to expand its republican domain. From this perspective, farmers had an essential task to fulfill, as they were “the chosen people of God” – spreading the ideals of good government. We can also say that Jefferson drew upon a clear division between New and Old World traditions and customs. America was different and unique – destined to expand, “a rising nation, spread out over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye,” Jefferson wrote in his First Inaugural Address. Such imperial ambitions stood in stark contrast with European nations.22 “The nation,” writes Stephen Howard Brown in his analysis of Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address, “was […] for Jefferson more than a political category; it represented the vindication of history itself, a promise on the way to fulfillment that liberty could find a home, far away from the tyrannies of the past and the Old World and spreading ever westward” (85). For such purposes, America obviously needed land. It was the Lewis and Clark Expedition that brought this vision alive.

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22 Europe’s past, labored by sentiments “under which mankind has so long bled and suffered,” was marked by “throes and convulsions,” the “agonizing spasms of infuriated man, seeking though blood and slaughter his long-lost liberty,” Jefferson wrote in his First Inaugural Address.
Thomas Jefferson had long been personally interested in sending an expedition to explore the interior of North-America.\textsuperscript{23} There were however three events that prompted him, once he became President in 1801. In that year Jefferson and his personal secretary Meriwether Lewis read Scotsman Alexander Mackenzie’s book, in which the alarming news appeared that Mackenzie had travelled across Canada to the Pacific Ocean in 1792-1793. This news disturbed Jefferson because such a voyage could help Great-Britain to claim the Pacific Northwest, and begin to occupy and exploit the region.\textsuperscript{24} The second event that motivated Jefferson was that Spain had sold the Louisiana Territory to France as part of a secret treaty in 1800. Jefferson had long believed that America was secure when Spain owned Louisiana, because he thought that it would fall into American hands whenever America was ready. Now France and Napoleon were a real threat to occupy Louisiana. The third event was that in 1802, Spain revoked the “right of deposit” and obstructed Americans from storing goods at Spanish controlled New Orleans. The

\textsuperscript{23} During his five years stay in France, from 1784 till 1789, Jefferson formed “a pretty full collection of the English, French, and Spanish authors, on the subject of Louisiana” (Smith 15). However not satisfied with the existing books, he began a long series of efforts to organize actual exploration of the area across the Mississippi River. His first plan was worked out in 1783. While serving in Congress, Jefferson had asked his friend and frontier Revolutionary War hero George Rogers Clark to consider leading a privately sponsored expedition to explore the West. Jefferson feared that Britain might secure a foothold west of the Mississippi – which was then the western boundary of the United States – and forestall expansion. George Rogers Clark however declined the offer. Connecticut born adventurer John Ledyard, who in 1776 had joined James Cook third and final voyage, met Jefferson in 1784 in Paris, where Jefferson was stationed as ambassador. with financial backing from Marquis de Lafayette, Jefferson suggested that Ledyard would explore the North-American continent by travelling overland through Russia, crossing the Bering Strait, heading through Alaska, and then across the American West into Virginia. The mission however miserably failed, when Ledyard was arrested in Irkutsk in February 1788, and deported to Poland. Ten years later, in 1793, as a member of the committee of the American Philosophical Society, Jefferson shared the sponsorship, financing, and preparation of an expedition headed by André Michaux that was to explore Louisiana, by ascending the Missouri, and to go on to the Pacific. The initiative however failed, when it appeared that Michaux was also working for the French. However important here is that both actions followed augmentations of British interests in the western wilderness, again underlining that Jefferson passion for expansion was largely linked to safety.

\textsuperscript{24} In the end it appeared that McKenzie had not found the Columbia River, and thus his voyage did not give Great-Britain any claims. Still, in the book, McKenzie recommended that Britain exploit the route that he had pioneered, occupy the Pacific North-West, and open a direct fur trade with Asia from a port on the Pacific coast. This obviously disturbed Jefferson.
Spanish provocation cut-off three-eights of the trade of American goods, encouraging Jefferson to undertake efforts to increase American control of the trans-Mississippi area. In the midst of these political events, Jefferson began planning an expedition of discovery with Meriwether Lewis.

As Robert Miller’s *Native America, Discovered and Conquered* states, the expedition Jefferson and Lewis designed was aimed at the Pacific Northwest, a territory that had not yet been occupied by any Euro-American government. Jefferson ultimately stated all the actual objectives for the expedition in three documents. First, on January 18, 1803, Jefferson explained in a secret message to Congress that the primary goal of the mission was commercial, and was an attempt to find a “Northwest Passage” across the continent to the Pacific Ocean. In a famous letter of instructions to Lewis, dated June 20, 1803, Jefferson also explained the purposes of the expedition. He instructed Lewis, “The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River […] and [its] communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, whether the Columbia […] or any other river [that] may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce” (Bergon xxiv). It was obvious that the expedition, and any passage it might find, would pass through the territory of dozens of Indian Nations. Moreover, the possible fur trade the expedition might establish, would take place on tribal territories. Therefore Jefferson specifically instructed Lewis and Clark to establish friendly relations with tribes they would encounter. “In all your intercourse with the

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25 A secret message was required because the expedition was an attempt to take the fur trade away from Great-Britain. Jefferson referred in the letter to Great-Britain as “that other country” (Miller 101).
26 Jefferson also instructed Lewis to make observations of the weather, soil, plants, and animals, to make celestial observations, and prepare a map.
natives, treat them with the most friendly and conciliatory manner which their own
conduct will permit,” wrote Jefferson (qtd. in Kukla 261).

In respect to Indian Nations, for Jefferson it was inevitable that America’s expansion would eventually push Indians into the dustbin of history, unless they would embrace white civilization. There was “room enough” in the “chosen country,” Jefferson told in his First Inaugural Address, “for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation.” There was however no room for “the aboriginal inhabitants” who resisted the tide of settlement and civilization, Jefferson explained in his Second Inaugural Address four years later. His idea was that Indians could only benefit from America’s expansion by abiding to the disciplines of the American market. America’s westward expansion was thus not a threat, but rather a resource that Indians should exploit. Jefferson’s hope was that “Indians would trap furs to buy U.S. goods and also that American trappers would be allowed to gather furs in the territory and that the United States would become the world’s biggest player in the very lucrative fur trade” (Miller 102).27 “Our people multiply so fast that it will suit us to buy as much as you wish to sell,” Jefferson told an Indian chief in 1805, “and if at this time you think it will be better for you to dispose of some of them to pay your debts, and to help your people improve the rest, we are willing to buy on reasonable terms” (qtd. in Onuf 49). Now the balance of power, however, decisively favored the Americans, with European powers no longer offering critical support, Jefferson realized the diminishing numbers of Indians were no match for the rapidly growing American population.28

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27 A bonus would of course be that Americans would undercut the British fur trade with China.
28 It was not that Jefferson hated Indians, but rather that he understood that progress exacted human costs. As Onuf explains in his analysis of Jefferson’s empire, Jefferson hated their degraded condition “under the
Around July 4, 1803, the news of the Louisiana Purchase arrived in Washington. This only increased Jefferson’s impulses. Now the United States had purchased France’s sovereign and commercial rights in the Louisiana Territory, the Lewis and Clark Expedition took on a new objective. On January 22, 1804, Jefferson wrote a new letter of instruction to Lewis and explained that he now had to begin exercising America’s powers over the Indian Nations in the Louisiana Territory. To do so, Jefferson now granted Lewis the freedom to directly propose trade relations between Indian tribes and the United States, and that Lewis now was to proclaim the United States’ sovereignty over the tribes. After the Louisiana Purchase, America now should be “the great white father” for the tribal nations. “It will now be proper you should inform those through whose country you will pass, or whom you may meet, that their late fathers the Spaniards have agreed to withdraw […] that they have surrendered to us all their subjects […] that henceforward we become their fathers and friends,” wrote Jefferson to Lewis (Jackson 165). The following conduct of Lewis and Clark demonstrates clearly that they carried out Jefferson’s instructions and his goals.

Lewis and Clark told Indian Nations about the United States’ authority. As Robert Miller’s discussion of the legal aspects of the Lewis and Clark Expedition makes clear, Lewis had written a 2,500 word speech that he first read out on August 3, 1804. In the letter, Lewis repeatedly called Indians “children” and called Jefferson their new “father.” Moreover, he pointed out that __pernicious influence of America’s anti republican enemies.” For Jefferson it was clear that it was George III who had turned the natives into savages (Onuf 46-47).
[Our great chief] commanded us … to undertake this long journey … to council with yourself and his other red-children … to give you his good advice; to point out to you the road in which you must walk to obtain happiness. He has further commanded us to tell you that when you accept his flag and medal, you accept therewith his hand of friendship, which will never be withdrawn from your nation as long as you continue to follow the councils which he may command. (Jackson 165)

Miller furthermore makes clear that Lewis warned the tribes not to disappoint their new great white father because “he could destroy you and your nation as the fire destroys and consumes the grass of the plains” (105). Besides military threats and offering advice, Lewis emphasized that tribes allow American traders to enter their territory. Lewis also warned the tribes they stopped warring, because if tribes would annoy American traders, Jefferson would stop traders from coming. On the other hand, if they listened to Jefferson’s advice, “traders would arrive to trade for furs at the best prices Indians had ever received (105). The message was clear: the tribes were now under the political and commercial authority of the Americans.  

Jefferson had an empire in mind that stretched across the continent, and included the Pacific Northwest. To realize this goal, the Lewis and Clark Expedition also needed to perfect and complete the American claim by occupying the Pacific Northwest.  

To do so, Lewis and Clark built and named forts. During their expedition

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29 In his journal, Lewis writes: “we made [the tribes] sensible of their dependance on the will of our government for every species of merchandize as well for their defence and comfort” (Bergon 237).
30 In 1792, the private American ship captain Robert Gray was the first American to discover the mouth of the Columbia River, to name it, and to publicize the discovery. This gave America a first discovery claim.
through that area, Lewis and Clark also continuously performed rituals that confirmed the American claim on the region. Throughout their journals they recorded that they carved and branded their names on trees and stones. The scientific aspects of the expedition were also part of claiming new lands, because as Alan Taylor, among other historians, recognizes, “the collection and publication of geographic information [was] critical to diplomatic claims to new lands” (19-20). Publication of voyages and discoveries were “the ceremonies of possession expected by Enlightenment exploration” (39). Thomas Jefferson, a founding-father and a man of the enlightenment, commanded Lewis and Clark to perform the same scientific tasks, and he expected them to publish their journals. Jefferson made these orders because such journals would reinforce diplomatic claims. As Onuf and Hartman conclude, “Jefferson knew that commerce and science were inextricably interdependent in the construction of a Pacific empire” (“Introduction” 6).

Not only by building forts, but also as scientists, Lewis and Clark occupied the Louisiana Territory and the Pacific Northwest, turning the unknown into the known. For the general American public the image of the West however remained fuzzy for the years to come.

Lewis and Clark brought the expedition safely back to St. Louis on September 23, 1806. Soon after their arrival, Thomas Jefferson spurred Lewis – as Jefferson

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The American claim was however threatened when Scotsman Alexander McKenzie made his trip across Canada in 1792-1793. Jefferson was eager to complete the American claim by occupying the area, because, as Miller makes clear, Spain, Russia, Great-Britain all raced for the Pacific Northwest.

31 In the winter of 1804-1805 the expedition built the wooden Fort Mandan, in modern-day North Dakota. In the winter of 1805-1806 they built Fort Clatsop at the mouth of the Columbia River.

32 Lewis even carried a branding iron with the words “M. Lewis Capt. U.S. Army” (Miller 111). As historian DeVoto makes clear, Lewis and Clark “carved and branded trees and affixed notices to them” because “in the polity of nations this was ritual to buttress the claim which the United States had to the Columbia drainage through Robert Gray’s discovery. The ritual announced that they had traversed the country and had occupied it” (512).

33 Taylor recognizes James Cook, the British Captain, asked that his discoveries be “quickly published by Authority to fix the prior right of discovery beyond dispute” (32). Furthermore, when Alexander MacKenzie wrote his 1801 book about crossing Canada in a scientific manner, he was aware he had “to validate exploration in Europe’s literary and official circles” (30).
considered him the more literate of the two – to draft manuscripts of their journals. Besides making diplomatic claims before other nations could do so, as Lewis and Jackson in their essay “The Race to Publish Lewis and Clark” make clear, Jefferson “seemed to feel that his choice of Lewis to lead the expedition would not be justified, in the eyes of his Federalist opponents, until the journals were published” (176). Leading European scientists, such as Alexander von Humboldt were also eagerly awaiting the journals. In the mean time, Lewis, appointed by Jefferson as governor of the Louisiana Territory (in 1807), however, had difficulty producing a manuscript. He began an excessive use of alcohol, dying under mysterious circumstances in October 1809, at a wayside tavern in Tennessee. Testimonies lead most observers to conclude that Lewis took his own life. Hence, it was not until 1904 that the official journals were published, exactly a century after the expedition had left St. Louis.

Besides failing to publish their journals, the Lewis and Clark Expedition had also failed to find an easy passage across the continent. Still, however, we can say that their expedition was a success, for it was the iconic status that Lewis and Clark achieved that helped the American nation to understand, accept and consume Jefferson’s exercise of empire. As Betty Houchin Winfield’s essay on the press response to the return of Lewis and Clark makes clear, newspapers described them as heroes. \(^{34}\) To a young nation – the United States was barely a dozen years old at the time – “with no commonly sung mystique […], no natural literature – no *Iliad […]*” their journey “offered the equivalent of a national poem, a magnificent epic for an unfinished nation” (Bergon ix-x). By achieving heroic status, Lewis and Clark moreover helped the American public to guide

\(^{34}\) See Winfield’s essay. Lewis was recognized as an enlightened hero. Appointed by Jefferson to lead the expedition, he had shown superhuman mental and physical strength, even encountered the exotic “other,” and demonstrated admirable moral leadership that was to be admired.
and extent Jefferson’s imperial desires, fantasies and achievements, pointing to a new American identity. As Winfield argues, the Lewis and Clark Expedition “served as American hybrid for the hero concept, a bridge between the old kind of enlightenment elites of the revolutionary patriots to the new kind of democratic notable, a pragmatic and enterprising new citizen” (875). In this sense, the Lewis and Clark Expedition created sentiments of national unity, creating in Benedict Anderson’s words “an imagined community.” Furthermore, Thomas Jefferson’s goal to create a unified “Empire of Liberty” – from sea to shining sea – was largely completed in the following years by other imperialists and agents of empire.

We can say that both Thomas Jefferson’s imperial fantasies and the Lewis and Clark Expedition inspired future presidents and travelers to discover and conquer the West for themselves. It was Thomas Jefferson’s imperial ambitions and policies and the path breaking work of Lewis and Clark that opened up the road to an American Pacific Northwest, eventually becoming the Oregon Trail. Beginning with Lewis and Clark, and continuing with the explorations of Zebulon Pike, Stephen H. Long, John Charles Frémont, and others, Americans came to know and want the mysterious and different western lands described by these explorers. Eventually, the elements of Jefferson’s expansionist policies became the rationales and justifications for the idea of a divinely inspired American expansion across America. Future presidents further sought to strengthen the nation’s grip on the West through military strategy and diplomacy. By the

\footnote{35 In the late 1830s and 1840s the Mississippi Valley was hit hard with economic distress, many settlers started to look at the land and supposedly better markets of the Pacific Northwest, by then called Oregon. Frontier settlers moved westward all the way to the Pacific with their family, rifle, wagon and livestock, in the process driving away Indian tribes.}
1830s, these expansionist fascinations were summed up in the term “Manifest Destiny.”36

The following chapter shall however seek to demonstrate that westward expansion and
“Manifest Destiny” were not merely economically and politically motivated ideas.

Because by the 1830s, beside explorers, settlers and politicians, also painters, writers and
other artists, as agents of empire, started to discover and capture the lands of the West.

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36 The precise term “Manifest Destiny” was coined by John L. O’Sullivan in the Democratic Review, just as national expansionist fervor reached a crescendo in the mid-1840s, shortly preceding the War with Mexico and the annexation of Texas, Oregon, California, and most of the Southwest. See conclusion.
III

THE AESTHETIC EMPIRE: NATION BUILDING WITH IMAGES

Though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe … the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.

Thomas Cole, 1836.

Pictures are more powerful than speeches … Patriotism, that noblest of sentiments, for it is a sentiment as well as a principle, and governs more in that capacity than in the other, is kept alive by art more than by all the political speeches of the land.

American Art-Union, Transactions, 1845.

In the early nineteenth-century world America represented the historic victory of liberty and democracy over barbarous, authoritarian, repressive states. America had, on the other hand, no strong authoritative leaders, creating a void that raised questions about the ideas that knitted together citizens and society. Because how were values to be derived in a condition where neither civil society nor a political state would seem to provide such values with plausible foundation? Among public intellectuals of this period, as we have seen, America’s nationalism was conceived almost entirely in bombastic, futuristic terms. “American glory,” the revolutionary generation believed, “beg[an] at dawn,” and, in John Locke’s words, “in the beginning, all the world was America” (Lowenthal 106-12).

Despite the passion of such exhortations, these tended to mask a feeling of insecurity in America’s lack of a past, a sense of shortcoming accentuated by historic romanticism in Europe. In response to the European remark that “[Americans] are not a country, you are a continent” (qtd. in Kaufmann 671), Americans could not feel confident merely by bragging about their future possibilities. Instead, they needed, as Eric Kaufmann writes, “a romantic medicine to compensate for their insufficiently historicized landscape” (671).
In the early nineteenth-century, in response to such challenges and to forge the idea and the virtues of the nation, American intellectuals began apprehending their landscape. By settling, naming and historically associating themselves with the American wilderness, they started a process of what Kaufmann titles “the nationalization of nature” (669).

Until the late eighteenth-century, wild nature had a rather dual meaning in American history. First, nature was viewed in biblical terms, as a foreboding place of exile which promised danger. Wilderness was where Christ had struggled with the devil, where one had to endure the devil’s temptations, and “to which one came only against one’s will, and always in fear and trembling” (Cronon 71). The Puritans for instance interpreted their surroundings as the biblical wilderness, conceiving Indian attacks as the work of Satan himself. Still, they considered their place secure from Old World conflicts, leading to a second understanding of wilderness, treating nature as an obstacle to be overcome, having the possibility that it might be recovered and turned toward human ends – “planted as garden […] or a city upon a hill” (71). The late eighteenth-century increasingly saw expressions of geographic national pride, with men like Thomas Jefferson fortifying the agrarian ideal. This pride, however, was still offset by a low esteem accorded to the frontier. As Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur observed: “By living in or near the woods, [back settlers’] actions are regulated by the wildness of their neighbourhood,” leading him to believe that “our bad people are those who have degenerated altogether into the hunting state. As old ploughmen and new men of the woods, as Europeans and new made Indians, they contract the vices of both” (63-66).

Satan’s home became God’s own temple and entered the stage of American nationalism in the course of the eighteenth-century, largely due to the aesthetic, romantic
doctrine of the sublime.\textsuperscript{37} One of the hallmarks of romantic thought was the privileging of the “élan vital (or life force) of the unconscious, or nature, over that of rational consciousness and civilization” (Kaufmann 666). Nature, in the form of landscapes and peoples, was especially well-suited to nationalism and emerged in the work of early romantic nationalists like Rousseau, Herder, and Fichte. Romantic thinkers, the earliest of which were German, typically subscribed to the notion that nations were “primordial, organic outgrowths of nature, whose self-realization in terms of statehood and cultural expression was of paramount importance” (666). According to Edmund Burke, whose *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757-59) had a profound influence on aesthetic philosophy and artistic practice, sublime landscapes were exactly those places that people had avoided before. Raw and wild nature, the mountaintop, in the chasm, in the waterfall, in the thundercloud, in the rainbow, in the sunset, there one could be close to Christ.\textsuperscript{38} The best proof that one had entered a sublime landscape was the emotions it evoked, as a reunion with Christ would most probably overwhelm one with excitement. Although a trip into the wild could still be a terrifying affair, wilderness was no longer considered an experience to be feared.

By the end of the eighteenth-century, the transformed understanding of wilderness in America led to a process of what Eric Kaufmann titles the “nationalization of nature” (Kaufmann 669). Instead of a fearsome place to be avoided, the concept of

\textsuperscript{37} The Romantic movement developed in the latter part of the eighteenth-century as a reaction to rational, universalist thought of the Enlightenment and modernization.

\textsuperscript{38} In regard to painting techniques, the beautiful inspired feelings of harmony and sociability and was associated with what Burke and his contemporaries believed were feminine qualities: smallness, softness, weakness, sensual curves, pastel colors. The sublime, by contrast, was harsh, antisocial, and masculine. Unlike the sunny, accommodating world of the beautiful, the sublime was a realm of obscurity and brute force. Yet, as Burke maintained, the sublime could only be an “agreeable horror:” feelings of sublimity resulted from experiencing portrayals of threatening objects and situations, not the objects and situations themselves.
wilderness became loaded with America’s deepest core values that created and idealized it. “Almost everything in nature, which can be supposed capable of inspiring ideas of the sublime and beautiful, is here realized,” wrote prominent American historian Jeremy Belknap in 1784. “Aged mountains, stupendous elevations, rolling clouds, impending rocks, verdant woods, crystal streams, and gentle rill and roaring torrent, all conspire to amaze, to soothe and to enrapture” (qtd. in Kaufmann 671). Landscape painter Thomas Cole in his “Essay on American Scenery” underlined this notion, when he wrote that while lacking a storied past, “American scenery … has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe. The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness” (Tymn 14). Nearly every landscape painter of the period for instance accepted the challenge of capturing the Niagara Falls on canvas. The Niagara Falls was one of the most important American symbols of the sublime and wild nature. It was one of the wonders not just of the natural world, but of the American nation, a powerful cultural symbol of the pristine, unfallen nature. Because it had no equal in the Old World, Americans could claim cultural prominence.

The influence of the aesthetics of nature went on to inspirit all spheres of American intellectual life by the early nineteenth-century. Men as Belknap, Sulliman and Wadsworth not only drew attention to the symbolism of the American landscape, but also to the virtues that were associated with its beauty. These men, as “arbiters of taste” (Kornhauser 8), understood that aesthetics offered nationalistic virtues, with beauty “as

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39 Belknap’s description of the White Mountains of New Hampshire was echoed by figures like the painter John Trumbull, famous for his historical paintings, the art patron Daniel Wadsworth, himself a picturesque traveler seeking scenery in the Northeast, and the Yale College geologist and travel writer Benjamin Silliman.

40 With the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the Niagara Falls became an annual tourist destination. John Trumbull painted several of the earliest views, including *Niagara Falls from an Upper Bank on the British Side* (1807) and *Niagara Falls from Below the Great Cascade on the British Side* (1808). Both paintings were acquired by Daniel Wadsworth for his collection in 1828.
political order lived out in the body, [in] the way it strikes the eye and stirs the heart” (Eagleton, *Aesthetics* 37). “National character often receives its peculiar cast from natural scenery. [...] Thus, natural scenery is intimately connected with taste, moral feeling, utility, and instruction” (19), Sulliman and Wadsworth told their readers in 1819. Aesthetics had the possibility, it was understood, of “healing the rift” and “reunite[ng] humanity with [the] world” (Eagleton, *Aesthetic* 25). “I call beauty a social quality,” wrote Edmund Burke in 1757, “for when men and women [...] give us a sense of joy and pleasure and beholding them, they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; [...] and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them” (Burke 95).\(^{41}\) In this sense, as Terry Eagleton offers, we have to see aesthetics as an ideological construction that helped the bourgeois, public intellectual community to forge their political aspirations and nationalistic virtues that were so much needed to bind people together in early nineteenth-century America (*Aesthetics* 28).

Together with the intellectual emphasis on nature developed a cultural movement that sought to depict the sublime beauty of the North-Amerian landscape, making its virtues reachable for the larger public. By the early nineteenth-century, improved infrastructure, mainly in the form of canals, had opened-up the hinterlands of New York. This made the wilderness accessible for trade and travelers, but also for painters like Thomas Cole, who had developed a special interest for landscape painting. Around 1825, the English born Cole sold three landscape paintings in New York. His paintings impressed influential men like John Trumbull, Daniel Wadsworth and Asher B. Durand, who became Cole’s main patrons, financing his trips and buying and exhibiting

\(^{41}\) Or, as Georg Hegel put it, “It is [...] through culture that the individual acquires standing and actuality” and the Spirit of State Power “is the point of the self which the many points or selves, through renouncing their inner certainty, are fused into one” (298, 311).
his paintings. These men, as “arbiters of taste,” understood that the aesthetic portrayed in Cole’s paintings “insert[ed] social power more deeply into” its subjects, and so had the possibility of “operat[ing] as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (Eagleton, *Aesthetics* 28). Landscape painters such as Thomas Cole were then moderators, “agents of empire” (Said xxi) of the political and intellectual hegemony. In their paintings the hegemonic “consciousness was represented as principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic geographies and peoples” (xxi). However, the painters themselves were also products of empire, producing paintings “in constant relation to the ideology which permit[ted] it such relatively autonomy” (Eagleton, *Criticism* 89).

In an effort to justify the American claim to the North-American continent, artists for instance romanticized the indigenous presence while eliminating all signs of the Native Americans’ actual relationship with the land (Kornhauser 6). It are exactly these eliminations, i.e. the *not depicted* or the *not saids*, that illuminate the ideological necessities “which constitute the very principles of [the painting’s] identity” (Eagleton, *Criticism* 89). In most early Hudson River School paintings, Native Americans are for instance so integrated into the wilderness that they seem one and the same, “appearing as symbols of the original purity of God’s wilderness” (Kornhauser 6). One finds a good example in Thomas Cole’s *Kaaterskill Falls*, painted in 1826 (see fig. 1). By 1824, tourism had developed in the Northeast, and the Kaaterskill Falls made for a nice weekend trip from New York City.\(^{42}\) Cole, however, eliminated all signs of tourism and

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\(^{42}\) Visitors could travel up the Hudson River from New York City to the town of Catskill on a fast steamboat, hop aboard a coach to the Catskill Mountain House, which had opened in 1824, check into that hostelry, then take a carriage to an observation platform at the top of the hills, or from there, follow a foothpath to their base (Groseclose 119-120).
instead presented images of a pristine wilderness. His work embodies the sublime: eerie light creates a supernatural sensation, storms sweep across the sky, the sun refracts around them to fall on orange and gold leaves and natural rock formations and dead trees assume “anthropomorphic forms” (Groseclose 6). The falls run white through a darkened chasm, creating contrast that causes the falls to appear to jump towards the viewer. To emphasize the pristine wilderness, Cole included a Native American as sole witness to the purity of American wilderness. However, Native Americans had long been removed from the Northeast by the time Kaaterskill Falls was painted, as white settlement and tourism had already claimed the region. While the falls indeed belong to a mountain area rich with ancestry, tradition and invention, Cole “exaggerated the ‘untouched’ quality of the Catskill region’s wilderness lands” (Wallach 51). 43 In this sense, we can say that Cole created an experience of wilderness that instilled in American viewers the understanding that the landscape was naturally theirs.

Other major ideological silences, or not saids, in Hudson River School landscape paintings were narratives of progress, technology and capitalism. 44 In the course of the nineteenth-century, as the perception of wilderness transformed from degraded to a more organic source of national distinctiveness, Americans came to see themselves more and more as the offspring of their natural landscape. 45 Cole depicted

43 The falls and the region – also spelled Catskill, Katterskill, Katskill, and Kaaterskill – were given their name by the original Dutch settlers. Washington Irving utilized and invented fictional characters like Rip van Winkle and Ichabod Crane in two highly popular books of 1809 and 1819.

44 Cole already revealed such elements in his “Essay on American Scenery” (1835), proclaiming that “Where the wolf roams, the plow shall glisten; on the gray crag shall rise temple and tower – mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil” (Tymn 16-17).

45 As Merchant outlines, now that Christ had been found in wilderness, it would be best to exorcize the devil from it. The best way to do this would be by recovering nature by reclaiming the land, and reinventing the whole earth in the image of the Garden of Eden. In this scheme, “Human labor would redeem the souls of men and women, while cultivation and domestication would redeem the earthly
such elements especially in his *The Oxbow* (1836, see fig. II), which is widely viewed as a quintessential Hudson River School painting. It is as if the storm revealed in *The Oxbow* is a reminder of constant transformation of the wilderness. Cole lays out the distant view of perfect, enlightened, tranquil cultivated farmland in summer on the right, suppressing the sublime passing thunderstorm and tree trunks on the mountain left. Whereas the garden on the right features a meandering Connecticut River, tempting farmland, peaceful smoking chimneys and sunshine, the desert on the left, depicted as a mountain, features a rather sinister, inaccessible and hostile wilderness. Since the thunderstorm moves left, in that sense leaving the landscape, civilization follows its trace. We can see the withdrawing thunderstorm over the wilderness as the storm of human progress, eventually making place for civilization, transforming wilderness into a heavenly, civilized garden. In this setting, Christ is moreover reunified with humankind, as in the background, on the cultivated side, cutover scars in the forest on the hill spell the Hebrew letters “Noah.” As Merchant points out, which, when viewed upside down, form the word “shaddai,” meaning “the Almighty” (Merchant 142). It is clear that in Cole’s view, through cultivation and development of the wilderness, Americans shall be reunited with God. Cole’s *not saids* depicted the cultural and political idea that Americans were simply destined to possess the vast tracts of wilderness of its hinterlands.

Men like Cole and other Hudson River School painters also portrayed early images of developing capitalism, depicting the newly settled wilderness as a pastoral setting where technology and nature could coexist in balance. In this sense, the combination of technology and the marketplace were means to bring light to the dark wilderness” (134), with the prospect of a “reunification of the earth with God […] in which the redeemed earthly garden merges into a higher heavenly paradise” (134-136).
world of undeveloped nature.\textsuperscript{46} Important associations of progress, transformation and of reclaiming the land, often found in Hudson River School paintings, are railroads, trains and tree stumps. By the 1840s, as Leo Marx demonstrates in his \textit{The Machine in the Garden}, the machine had captured the public imagination. The locomotive, “an iron horse or fire-Titan” became a national obsession by the 1830s (191). With its speed, noise, fire, iron and smoke, the train became the embodiment of transformation and advancement, “a testament to the will of man rising over natural obstacles” (191). Armed with the power of technology and capitalism, mankind was now really able to speed-up the process of reclaiming the wilderness and turning it into a tamed garden of abundance. As John Stuart Mill argued in his comments on Tocqueville’s \textit{Democracy in America}, the locomotive is the perfect symbol “because its meaning need not to be attached to it by a poet; it is inherent in its physical attributes. To see a powerful, efficient machine in the landscape is to know the superiority of the present to the past”(qtd. in Marx 191).

Painters added mechanistic science and laissez-faire capitalism to the narrative of development “to create a grand narrative of Enlightenment” (Merchant 136). However, what the paintings ideologically implied, but not directly said, was that capitalist production was possible by imposing order on the fallen worlds of nature and human nature. Such associations can be seen in Thomas Cole’s \textit{River in the Catskills} (1843, see fig. III) and George Inness’ \textit{Lackawanna Valley} (1855, see fig. IV). In the background, both paintings depict a train that seems to be one with the landscape. Instead of causing disharmony, “the train is a unifying device” in both paintings – emphasizing that “there is nothing inorganic about progress” (Marx 220). Whereas in Cole’s \textit{River in the Catskills}

\textsuperscript{46} The original story of capitalism is also at its core a recovery story, “from desert back to garden through the transformation of undeveloped nature into a state of civility and order” (136), Merchant explains.
the train indeed blends into nature, in Inness’ *Lackawanna Valley* these associations can be observed too, as the puffs that come from the train are the same friendly puffs that arise from the houses and church in the background. In the foreground, both paintings have tree stumps – indicating that the pasture has just been cut out of the wilderness. Besides tree stumps, both paintings have solitary figures – both resting on the foreground – “look[ing] out across “Arcadia” (221). As a powerful story, the idea of development functioned as ideology and legitimization for westward expansion and settlement of the New World. In this scheme, capitalism, science and technology provided the means of transforming the material world into a New World Garden.

We can say that the American wilderness, which previously had been viewed as a depraved region, came to be perceived as as an organic source of national distinctiveness and virtue by the early nineteenth-century. Paintings by figures as George Inness and Thomas Cole produced a body of work which lent to the American landscape an almost mystical power. The story in their paintings, through the absence of a direct *actual* story, tells the blending of nature and technology, shaping progress in their paintings as an ordained sequence of events. By doing so, their paintings claimed the landscape, “depicting nature as the stage of dramas of growth and decay, of aspiration and defeat – investing it with emotions appropriate to visions of national destiny” (Trachtenberg 21). Westward progress as America’s destiny was the ideological narrative not said and not depicted, but rather the ideological mindset the painters of Hudson River

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47 In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville observed this phenomenon in *Democracy in America*: “In Europe people talk a great deal of the wilds of America, but the Americans themselves never think about them; they are insensible to the wonders of inanimate nature and they may be said not to perceive the mighty forests that surround them till they fall beneath the hatchet. Their eyes are fixed upon another sight: the American people view its own march across these wilds, draining swamps, turning the course of rivers, peopling solitudes and subduing nature” (181).
School painted with. Their paintings told the narrative that the wilderness of the West simply had to be tamed and filled with civilization and order: nature was where God had placed the possibilities for mankind to realize the “city upon the hill.” Moreover, these paintings depicted the message that God had instilled Americans with the energies and powers, in the form of technology, to conquer and settle these lands – potencies that Indian tribes, as Cole emphasized in *Kaaterskill Falls*, not possessed. The depiction of nature, wilderness and settlement in the Hudson River School thus created a rather utopian innocent idea of empire, with America as the legitimate owners of the natural world. As the following chapter shall seek to demonstrate, as westward ambitions came to a climax with the Californian Goldrush of 1848, mythical depictions also inspired Americans to actually experience and consume the idea of empire. Not only did the works of Cole and others stimulate tourism in the Northeast, they also inspired settlers to go beyond – to see, conquer and eventually settle the lands of the West themselves.
FIGURE I

FIGURE II

Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow* (1836).
FIGURE III

FIGURE IV

George Inness, *The Lackawanna Valley* (1855).
THE WILD UNSOCIAL SEA:
“ANTI-CONQUEST”
IN TWO YEARS BEFORE THE MAST

The intense concentration of self in the middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! Who can tell it? Mark, how when sailors in a dead calm bathe in the open sea – mark how closely they hug their ship and only coast along her sides.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

As to Texas I regard it as of very little value compared to California, the richest, the most beautiful and the healthiest country in the world […] with the acquisition of Upper California we should have the same ascendancy on the Pacific […] France and England have had both their eyes upon it.

Waddy Thompson Jr., American minister in Mexico, 1842.

In the early nineteenth-century, America’s symbolic realm expanded with each exploratory expedition. Commercial ships ventured further and further into Pacific, Asian and Southern waters. After naval victories during the Revolutionary War, skirmishes with France, conflicts with the Barbary States, and triumphs in the War of 1812, maritime nationalist excitement fused with ongoing commercial interests. As historian Thomas Philbrick in his analysis of James Fenimore Cooper and the development of American sea fiction underlines, the ending of hostilities with Britain in 1815 commenced “the golden age of American shipping, a period of thirty-five years during which American seamen came to challenge and even to displace the British hegemony of many of the most important areas of maritime activity” (2). This maritime boost is also evident in Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, where he notes that since the American Revolution “the number of Union vessels has increased almost as rapidly as the population” (463). Once freed from restrictive British policies, maritime trade became safer, more profitable and more glamorous. The sea had the same appeal as the continental frontier had after
1850: it offered adventure, the chance to start anew, and freedom from the obligations of society. The sea represented the stage of past glories, the training ground of the national character, and the arena on which wealth and power were to be won for the country.

As naval activities increased in the course of the nineteenth-century, so did the literary production of sea narratives. Although the majority of the sailors remained nameless and faceless, some attempted to publish narratives of their experiences, catering to the era’s taste for adventure tales set at sea or on exotic isles. In the midst of these events, James Fenimore Cooper produced the first American sea novels. For Cooper too, the sea became an instructive space in which national history could be identified and described. Another popular publication was Richard Dana Jr.’s Two Years Before The Mast. His book was, however, different. Whereas other sea narratives, such as Edgar Allan Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1838), and Melville’s Typee (1846), White-Jacket (1850) and Moby-Dick (1851) tended to focus on adventurers on the edge of the sea-frontier, Dana’s Two Years was rather a portrayal of the transforming American trading culture of the 1830s. And as such, indeed, Dana Jr. was a different man: he was a Harvard Law School graduate, a descendant of an eminent colonial family, who would become the champion of the downtrodden. But: Dana was also a man of paradoxes, as Two Years worked as a strong imperialist text.

We can say that the world that Dana Jr. confronted in August 1834 was a rapidly changing one. The early nineteenth-century, in which Dana’s Two Years is set,
saw a rapid expansion into Pacific and Asian markets. Along America’s westcoast whaling and trapping proved to be lucrative ventures, which is apparent in Dana’s *Two Years*. As such, *Two Years* depicts the economic transformation from “classical” or “market capital,” to “monopoly” or “imperial capital” (Jameson 349). By the time Richard Dana Jr. signed on as a sailor on The Pilgrim in the 1830s, the economic world underwent a transformation from use value to exchange value, and wealth began to move into a global market (349). At home, in America, technological inventions transformed the industry and hence, other types of labor were becoming more visible. The market revolution with its rapidly expanding factory and transportation systems, machinery, chemical works, steam engines, also caused labor relations to change. Moreover, surrounded by natural abundance and imbued with the biblical injunction to “fill the earth and subdue it,” more and more land was added to the United States.

In *Two Years Before the Mast* the Pilgrim, the ship that Dana worked on, is a reflection of the complexities of antebellum America. Although it is to be noted that by 1834, the year Dana boarded the ship in Boston, America’s maritime-based economy was about to go in decline, *Two Years* still breathes the pride and excitement associated with

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49 The goal of his journey was indeed economic, as at the center of *Two Years* is the trade in animal hides, which were collected by Indians, Mexicans and missionaries, prepared by the crew of the Pilgrim, and then brought back from California to Boston. 

50 Other factors that contributed to an increased interest in trade along the west coast was the development of safer and faster ships. Vessels needed to be able to safely round the dangerous and turbulent waters of Cape Horn. Especially the development of clippers made such relatively long-distance trade safer and, moreover, faster, and hence, economically sustainable. The early nineteenth-century is often referred to as the Golden Age of Sailing. Clippers were narrow for their length, had multiple masts, square rigging, and a large total sail area. Clippers were mostly built on British and American shipyards, and sailed primarily between Britain and its colonies in the east, the trans-Atlantic trade, and the New York to San Francisco route round Cape Horn. Besides shifting trading interests, exploratory expeditions, such as the Wilkes Expedition of 1838-1842, also added up to an increasing interest in maritime activities. The most influential American expedition was the United States Exploring Expedition, undertaken between 1838 and 1842, under the command of Charles Wilkes. Such expeditions were associated with modernity and progress, and boosted nationalism. Also, James Cook’s travel journals were among the most published travel books in America (Ziff 5).
such an economy. Initially, Dana is positive of life at sea, and his narrative reflects the energy of a developing nation, as he was witness to an remarkable display of American power. For Dana it was of course, in one way or the other, “logical and easy to identify [himself] with this power” (Said, *Culture* 127). In this scheme, the Pilgrim symbolizes the American nation in the early nineteenth-century. It is full of energy, with people working together in a democratic trading nation. Life is exciting, and most sailors onboard are described as masculine and heroic figures, working together to keep the nation going. For Dana and the rest of the crew there are challenges everyday, reaching a climax with the rounding of Cape Horn, when he describes the flavor of business and enterprise, as the Pilgrim moors at the Chilean Juan Fernandez Islands (32-38).

Dana’s description of the journey – with its joys and boredom – turns into a charge against the flogging of seamen carried out by Captain Thompson. Although Dana was not opposed to corporal punishment, flogging was at odds with his sense of justice. One sailor, who questioned the flogging of another, was himself tied to the mast. The Captain “began laying the blows upon his back, swinging half round between each blow, to give it full effect. As he went on, his passion increased, and he danced about the deck calling out as he swung the rope, - ‘If you want to know what I flog you for, I’ll tell you. It’s because I like to do it!’ […] ‘It suits me! That’s what I do it for!’” (152). In Dana’s view, the two flogged crew-members were robbed of their identities: “A man – a human being, made in God’s likeness – fastened up and flogged like a beast! A man, too, whom

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51 During the 1840s and 1850s the land frontier took over as the central feature of the American economy and imagination. This change is reflected in Dana’s “Twenty-Four Years After” postscript (1869), which replaced the original concluding chapter. By this time, the sea no longer had the same significance in America’s sense of national identity.

52 Tocqueville also included a narrative sketch of the “heroic” aspects of the American sailor in his *Democracy in America*: “He [the sailor] sets sail while the storm still rages; by night as well as day he spreads his full canvas to the wind; he repairs his storm-damaged ship while still under way; and when at last he comes to the end of his voyage, he continues to make for the coast at full speed” (465).
I had lived with and eaten with for months, and knew almost as well as brother,” writes Dana (153). His own response to the whipping reveals some confronting truths about America. Dana writes, “I thought of our own situation, living under a tyranny; of the character of the country we were in” (157). If one accepts that Dana writes about the country as a whole (after all, the flogging takes place on an American vessel) Dana’s juxtaposition of tyranny in America is striking. Although Dana’s narrative never dismantled ideological fantasies of American capitalism, we can argue that he certainly believed that capitalism and democracy were failing.

Dana’s disillusions with American capitalism and democracy also appear in the last chapters of Two Years, that reveals the discrepancy between democratic ideals and the inconvenient reality on board, that all men are not equal. Dana – as a Boston man of affluence – uses his social connections to avoid staying in California for another year. Whilst Captain Thompson summons him to stay, Dana pleads that he has “friends and interests enough at home to make them [the crew, and especially Captain Thompson] suffer for any injustice” (350). As a consequence, another sailor, named English Ben takes Dana’s place, with Dana having to provide Ben with thirty dollars and clothes. The event left Dana “with a light heart, but feeling as angry, and as much contempt as I could well contain between my teeth.” Hence, English Ben was sent forward, “looking as though he had received his sentence to be hung” (351). The situation uncovers Dana’s humiliation, as the crew responds. “‘The Captain has let you off, because you are a gentleman’s son, and have got friends, and know the owners; and taken Ben, because he is poor, and has got nobody to say a word for him!’” (351-351).
Although the passage is brief, the situation makes Dana and his readers aware of the discrepancies of the labor relations in antebellum America. As such, as Robert Clark in his essay “American Romance” makes clear, Two Years echoes many social and political conditions that are also noticeable in many nineteenth-century romances. While American romances may offer a society that believes it is “perfect” and “a spiritual example to the less enlightened peoples of the world,” it is also a society “inflected by slavery, genocidal conquest and acute class tensions” (586). In terms of life at sea, all in all, it can be said that Dana confronted his readers with a picture of an emerging American capitalism, with “all the ills and ideals attendant upon that formation” (586). Such expressions largely related to the role that antebellum maritime narratives played in conceptualizing economic and social changes within a developing global market system.

Despite that Dana’s writing reflected his social feelings for the oppressed, with the Californian Gold Rush later in the decade, Two Years mainly became a best-seller for another reason, as the book was one of the few available sources on California. As such, his descriptions exposed an essential paradox in his work, especially in regard to expansionism and imperialism in antebellum America. As said before, Dana was critical of contemporary capitalism and its shortcomings, and, sensitive to the working class – in this case seafarers – who could not get along in America. Dana, as a writer, however, cannot be torn from the capitalist and imperialist culture that was apparent in antebellum America. Rather, literature like Two Years Before the Mast produced in the antebellum, as cultural artifacts of the rising capitalist culture, and imperialism are inseparable.

Culture is “a whole way of life,” says Raymond Williams, that Dana, in his days, simply
could not escape from. Capitalism and imperialism were ideological constructions – a mindset – that Dana wrote with. Such is evident in his descriptions of California.

The battle performed in *Two Years* in terms of domination is not a random tooth-and-claw battle. It is a process that Mary Louise Pratt calls “anti-conquest” (37), as Dana’s descriptions of California were contradictory to openly imperial articulations of conquest and colonization. Rather, domination in *Two Years* is a struggle of values and is achieved predominantly through culture, as “[i]t is through culture that the assumption of the ‘divine right’ of imperial powers to rule is vigorously and authoritatively supported” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 85). In Dana’s vision, Californians were inferior, and culturally backward because they did not match his Boston values. As such, Mexicans and Indians indeed represented the opposite of everything that America stood for. Moreover, Dana’s way of describing Californians inferiority was not to ask questions about this idea, but to “keep [American values and the American empire] more or less in place” (Said *Culture* 88). This pattern can be observed throughout his page-long descriptions of California and its inhabitants that is laced with notions of power and superiority.

Once ashore, Dana labels Indians and Mexicans as “idle, thriftless people, [who] can make nothing for themselves.” And while “the country abounds in grapes, yet they buy, at great price, bad wine made in Boston” (62). The same stance appears in his description of the silver that is in circulation in Monterey. “I never, in my life, saw so much silver at one time as during the week that we were at Monterey,” Dana writes (65). However, he holds his observations to his own standards when he says that “The truth is, they have no credit system, no banks, and no way of investing money but in cattle. Besides silver, they have no circulating medium but hides, which the sailors call
‘California banknotes’” (65). Since the Mexican system not matched his own standards, Dana considered it primitive. The same position can be observed in Dana’s description of the lack of a political and juridical system in Californian Mexico, that he sees as a barbarous failing. Also striking is his how he perceives Mexicans in Biblical terms, as noble savages, when he writes that “sometimes [Mexicans] appeared to me to be a people on whom a curse had fallen, and stripped them of everything” (65). Although he never says it directly, it gets clear that Dana finds the Mexican standards of living, i.e. the Mexican values and their way of doing business, inefficient and crude. In the mid-1830s these conventions lead American imperialists to believe that without American intervention, California’s riches would fall into ruins.

Another important aspect in terms of dominance values are the sexual connotations. We can say that in its description of California, Dana juxtaposes the area to his rather masculine description of life at sea. Edward Said, in his *Orientalism*, particularly explores these facets in his study of western travel narratives of the Middle and Far East. In these narratives, and generally speaking, in the nineteenth-century western male fantasy, women were mostly creatures of a male power-fantasy. Said argues that orientalism “encouraged a peculiarly […] male conception of the world.” In those stories, women “express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (*Orientalism* 178). The oriental woman, in this scheme the Indian or Mexican woman, is a symbol of the “pacified, feminised,” embracing Western imperial penetration and domination (178). Although Dana’s *Two Years* not explicitly describes

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53 Although it is true that *Orientalism* focuses on Western textual constructions of the Orient (Middle and Far-East), it can be argued that these textual constructions can also be discovered in the literary fabrication of other places than the Orient. See for instance Paul Lyons’ *American Pacificism: Oceania in the US Imagination* (2005) that argues that sexual connotations can be discovered in many western textual constructions, including those of the Pacific and Asia.
sexual adventures, we can say that his characterization of women reveals subtle sexual connotations. He is for instance struck with “the fineness of the voices and beauty of the intonations,” with especially the Mexican women speaking “elegant Spanish” (64). Moreover, whereas “The men are thriftless, proud, extravagant, and very much given to gaming,” the women, on the other hand, “have but little education, and a good deal of beauty, and their morality, of course, is none of the best” (143). And, “with the unmarried women, too, great watchfulness is used” (143). California, in Dana’s description is a place of sexual indulgence and temptation. The traveler, then, is in danger of being seduced by a way of life that is the opposite of everything that his own culture represents.

Once constructed and reduced to culturally and morally inferior, Dana’s *Two Years* takes on dominating, imperialist proportions. This happens most clearly in his depiction of the natural wealth of California. He observes the riches of the area, which are, in his understanding, wasted and crying out to be brought under – masculine – American control. “Such are the people who inhabit a country embracing four or five hundred miles of sea-coast, with several good harbours, with fine forests in the north; the waters filled with fish, and the plains covered with thousand of herds of cattle,” Dana writes. California is moreover “blessed with a climate than which there can be no better in the world; free from all manner of diseases, whether epidemic or endemic; and with a soil in which corn yields from seventy to eighty-fold.” It is however possessed by morally wrong and inferior people, who simply cannot comprehend its possibilities. Rather suggestively, Dana continues, “In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! we are ready to say” (144).
As Robert F. Lucid in his article on *Two Years* makes clear, Dana’s *Two Years* was adopted by some mid nineteenth-century labor reform movements as their manifesto. Despite such adoptions, still, however, we can say that Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* captured important aspects of early nineteenth-century imperialism. First, Dana’s *Two Years* performs significant imperialist ideological work, especially in his description of California and its inhabitants. Dana’s sketch of morally corrupted, idle Mexicans, juxtaposed to masculine and “enterprising” Americans, developed a “justificatory regime of self-aggrandizing, self-originating authority interposed between the victim of imperialism and its perpetrator” (Said *Culture* 82). Seen from the sexual perspective of domination, Dana says that the feminine and weak California is owned by the morally wrong people. In this construct, Californians only exist “as shadowy absences” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 96) at the edges of America’s consciousness. This “self-originating authority” simply provided antebellum imperialists with the right arguments and justifications that suited their purpose. Hence, California simply awaited the westward movement of America, as it was depicted by Dana as a defenseless, unintelligent and indecent area that existed for, and in terms of, its American counterpart.

The observations made by Dana massively reinforced notions of the civilizing mission. This is the idea that imperial nations have not only “the right but also the obligation to rule those nations lost in barbarism” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 86). And indeed, it would not take long before Dana’s encouragements and enthusiasm for California, best expressed by the sentence “In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! we are ready to say” (144), were picked-up. In 1846, President Polk, in the wake of the 1845 annexation of Texas, launched a two year imperial war
against Mexico. Polk was foremost interested in territorial expansion, and as a major consequence of the war, Mexico ceded the territories of Alta California and Santa Fe de Nuevo México to the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In 1848 thousands of settlers furthermore spurred to California after gold was found. News soon spread, resulting in around 300,000 men, women and children coming to the west coast. At the cost of most Indian tribes and many Mexicans, the area became known in America as the “California Dream” – indeed a slogan that Richard Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* by its descriptions of the area had promised.

In regard to imperialism in mid nineteenth-century America, it can also be said that Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* provides helpful insights in the complexities of it. As said, the book is a charge against the poor working conditions in antebellum America, but at the same time it contains a strong imperialist message. It is exactly this paradox (as it is most likely that social critical work is more “elevated”) which makes its imperialist message more powerful. Moreover, *Two Years* demonstrates that imperialism remained unchallenged because imperial culture was built upon “assumptions so deep that they never entered into discussions of social reform and justice” (87). It were assumptions that writers talked with, rather than about. As such, Dana’s *Two Years* tells that cultural production has a deep investment in the political character of its society. And this relationship was often invisible, as Dana’s *Two Years* confirms. Edward Said was indeed right, when he says that “culture is not made exclusively or even principally by heroes or radicals all the time, but by great anonymous movements whose function is to keep things going, keep things in being” (qtd. in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 88). Hidden and
wrapped in a social message, Dana’s “anti-conquest” narrative is exactly what makes the ideology of imperialism so uncontested, powerful and effective.

After Dana returned to Boston, he committed himself to the belief that law should be used to balance the excesses of a market economy. His original final chapter reflected this theme, in which he focused on sailors’ rights, and where Dana “puts his faith in laws, with heavy penalties” (469). His position is also made clear in his 1841 publication *The Seaman’s Friend*, a handbook of sailors’ rights, and in his work as lawyer. In 1840, his *Two Years* was published. The success was immediate: critics found it to be a thrilling social documentary. As Robert F. Lucid in his article on *Two Years* makes clear, the informing note of the social criticism was optimism. William Cullen Bryant reviewed it in the *Democratic Review*, writing that “We cannot but hope that the effect of his strong and earnest statements will be seen in greater attention to [the sailors’] comfort, their morals, and their rights” (qtd. in Lucid 393). But Byrant did not stop hoping: he also strongly urged the immediate passage of federal anti-flogging legislation (393). By 1848, when California was not only successfully colonized but also absorbed into the United States, the book enjoyed a second burst of popularity. *Two Years* became an authoritative guide, suggesting what America could do for California. This is strengthened in “Twenty-Two Years After,” Dana’s postscript that replaced his original concluding chapter in later prints. He presented the reader with impressions of a booming economy, but there is also a pointer to regrets how California has changed. Dana observed a people drawn together, but not united, by the gold fever.

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54 Upon return, Charles Wilkes, the leader of the Wilkes Expedition, was court-martialed for the loss of one of his ships, for the mistreatment of his officers, and for excessive punishment of his sailors. Wilkes was acquitted from all charges, except that of illegally punishing men in his squadron.
CONCLUSION

These States are the ampest poem.
Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations,
Here the doings of men correspond with the broadcast doings
of the day and night.
Here is what moves in magnificent masses careless of
 particulars,
Here are the roughs, beards, friendliness, combativeness, the
soul loves,
Here the flowing trains, here the crowds, equality, diversity,
the soul loves.

Walt Whitman, “As I Sat Alone By Blue Ontario’s Shores.”

Around 1842, the Oregon Trail had brought many new settlers to one the most western
places of the North-American continent, a region called Oregon Country. And, for some
time, it seemed that Great-Britain and America would go to war over it, until the border
was peacefully defined in 1846 by the Oregon Treaty. All amidst political discussions
that dominated the Oregon question, a New York journalist by the name of John L.
Sullivan wrote in 1839 that “the far-reaching, the boundless future, will be the era of
American greatness.” Moreover,

In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is
destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to
establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the
Most High – the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere – its
roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an
Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling,
owning no man master, but governed by God’s natural and moral law of
equality, the law of brotherhood – of “peace and good will amongst men.”
(qtd. in Pratt 797)

Here, in O’Sullivan’s words, is the vision of a great and democratic nation that is, importantly, favored by providence. In another article, published in 1845, with the annexation of Texas dominating the national agenda, O’Sullivan used the same language, urging the nation to unite towards its annexation, especially because,

other nations have tried to interlude themselves between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions. (qtd. in Pratt 797-798)

In these two publications, John L. O’Sullivan presented the complete idea which came to be summed up as the words “Manifest Destiny.” In both cases, O’Sullivan’s choice of words, unmistakingly, tapped into a familiar rhetoric. In his words, America was God’s promise of “the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True.” Moreover, America was, in O’Sullivan’s vision, a nation of unique, special liberties, resounding in the words “owning no man master but governed by God’s natural and moral law of equality.” Therefore, as O’Sullivan believed, and with him many mid-nineteenth-century Americans, it was America’s destiny to expand into its
western hinterlands. In a time of national debate over Oregon and Texas, the term was repeated over and over in the public sphere – by both journalists and politicians. As such, we have to see “Manifest Destiny” as the enumeration of a nationalist vocabulary that knitted together Americans in an “imagined community.” Moreover, “Manifest Destiny” was a nationalist rhetoric, inseparably bound up with expansion, deployed to unite Americans around the nation-state, and a utopian, organic justification for westward expansion. As before, in the 1840s, the term was carried into the political debate, and proved to be the perfect summing up of such nationalist and expansionist sentiments.

The energies that enabled Americans to subdue the lands of the west was the combination of liberty and force. One can replace the words “Manifest Destiny” with the term liberty. When Thomas Jefferson used the phrase “Empire for Liberty” to sum up his idea of good government in the early nineteenth-century, he meant that several European powers threatened America in the sphere of its particular liberty. In the north, Great-Britain controlled Canada, and in the southwest the Spanish presence blocked any further American expansion. The American sphere of liberty needed to be defended, and the best way to do this was by taking the whole of the North-American continent, exactly in the name of (American) liberty. Indeed, this process must include the settler colonialism, and also expansion by military means. But most importantly, this whole idea was carried and justified by the idea of liberty, as American liberty was different, unique, and, moreover, morally better. Americans experienced their nation as a place that was far more superior to those of Indian tribes, or those of competing European nations. This self-understanding justified the taking and spreading of American ideals and institutions across the continent.
in the early nineteenth-century. Summed up as exceptionalism, this deeply experienced understanding was nourished not only by a material, but also by an imaginary experience.

Seen from the perspective of destiny and liberty, most Americans perceived westward expansion simply as an innocent, organic and provident historical movement. As a guise, most Americans do not recognize their own history as expansionist. From this perspective, cultural production, i.e. imagination, played a huge role in getting across and emphasizing the innocence of this project, organically helping to forge the idea of the nation. As the second chapter of this dissertation emphasized, discoverers such as Lewis and Clark not only exposed the vastness and riches of the North-American continent, but also made the need for its occupation, through their heroic achievements, seem as something natural. Nation-building without its downsides was further enhanced through a movement of landscape painters around the 1830s, who depicted progress in the American wilderness as a utopian, natural process. By the mid nineteenth-century, as chapter four underlines, imperialism remained unchallenged by reformists movements. By then, expansionist ideology and rhetoric were so deeply chained in society, and had created “an edifice of culture so hugely confident, authoritative and self-congratulatory that its imperial assumptions” that its “complicity in the civilizing mission simply could not be questioned” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 87).

However, we also have to identify real conditions to which exceptionalism represents an imaginary response. America was indeed the first major nation to become a post-colonial one, and furthermore, America had, in contrast to Europe, available “unowned” land, which made it seem the land of open opportunity. It was this combination that made America seem the world’s hope for the future. But, as we have
seen in this dissertation, exceptionalism was also an imaginary response, and therefore a highly problematic one. There was indeed a huge contradiction between the ideology of exceptionalism and the material reality. The taking and occupation of “open land,” for instance, depended on the erasure of Native-Americans, and, although not part of this dissertation, the white man’s world was built in part by the labor of slaves. A second problem of exceptionalism was in its “going beyond the political to the mystical, beyond history, to destiny” (Byers 87).

The point of this reflection is finally this: we can argue that American expansion under the guise of liberty and exceptionalism is an ism, an ideological construction that “selectively define[d] the attributes of the nation in order to justify and celebrate it” (Byers 87). However, to speak in Raymond Williams’ terms, a “false consciousness” it is (Keywords 127). Exceptionalism as an ideological construction, under the guises of “Manifest Destiny,” and later in the nineteenth-century the “Frontier Thesis,” so-called “scientifically determined” (Trachtenberg 17), then forms “a family of ideas – a style of thought, a set of practices and affiliated institutions – which together constitute a broad, interdisciplinary discourse that evolved in the common cultural consciousness of Americans for centuries for the purpose of making an imaginary and actual purchase” on America’s western hinterlands and its inhabitants (Hussein 236). This ideology is not only the essence of thought; rather, it are its determining and limiting structures and figures. However, they are not merely limiting: as this dissertation has demonstrated, they are also, and importantly, productive - in politics, landscape painting, but also in spheres

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55 If indeed, as Lipset says, America “has defined its raison d’être ideologically” (18), exceptionalism is the name for both the content and the process of that self-definition, as it was the conditioning mode of consciousness, a representation of individuals’ imaginary relation to real condition. Rather than having ideologies, as Richard Hofstadter says, it is America’s “fate as a nation […] to be one” (qtd. in Lipset 18).
for social critics. As such, expansion, under the guise of liberty, was also a huge force in covering up the negative aspects of empire.

Finally, we should remember that the “false consciousness” that Manifest Destiny is, and the desire to be seen as a positive force, is still persistent in America today. In October 2001, former President George W. Bush announced the “War On Terror,” which commenced with the invasion of Afghanistan that same month. Less than four weeks after 9/11, the war was enormously popular, and President Bush could draw on deep wells of support, both nationally and internationally. “We are supported by the collective will of the world,” Bush could declare that day (Ferguson 21). In March 2003, a coalition led by America initiated a second war, this time on Iraq, on the assertion that it had the possibility to employ weapons of mass destruction that threatened American security. Also, it was assumed that Iraq harbored terrorist organization al-Qaeda. In the first years after both wars, Americans still perceived themselves and their actions as a positive force. After being accused of fighting neo-imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, former U.S. President George W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld could still proclaim without hesitation on April 29, 2003: “We don’t seek empires. We’re not imperialistic; we never have been” (Ferguson 22).

The guise of innocence started to crumble, as in 2005 accounts of physical, sexual and psychological abuse of Iraqi prisoners came to public attention. It appeared that the bringer and protector of liberty and democracy applied un-democratic laws and methods to suppress its “enemies.” Then, in 2006 two of the main reasons to invade Iraq were undermined when the American led Iraq Survey Group concluded that Iraq had already ended its nuclear program in 1991, and that there was no proof that President
Saddam Hussein supported al-Qaeda. And although Iraq was successfully liberated from his dictatorship, the country is still on the brink of civil war till today. Despite the fact that democratic elections were held in both Iraq and Afghanistan, democracy is, to speak with Thomas Jefferson, not rooted in the soil of both countries at all. Instead, “mission accomplished” is still not proclaimed in Afghanistan. The war continues under the label “The Other War,” quietly gaining the status of the longest war in American history, surpassing even the Vietnam War. Finally, as we speak, the guise of national security, democracy and freedom further crumbles as website WikiLeaks publishes diplomatic documents on the “War on Terror.” The documents tell the story that this is a real war, and that the spreading of democracy and freedom is not glorious: it involves political intrigues, secret diplomacy, immoral and unethical behavior, torture and abuse, and the waste of innocent lives. Above all, we could say that the leaked diplomatic documents signal that living in a “false consciousness” poses a threat to democracy itself. In the meantime, however, the hegemonic “false consciousness” fights back by condemning WikiLeaks for threatening what it is actually fighting for.

All in all, without doubt, we can say that mass media and science increasingly expose the foundations of the collective “false consciousness” of the American “War on Terror,” but also of American history in general. In the end, its foundations proof to be dubious and one-sided. It is however also undeniable that such exposure is difficult and goes not without resistance, as the hegemonic ideology always seeks to protect its “truths” and “realities.” It is the core of its existence. Finally, as such, this dissertation should be taken as proof and reminder that ideological formations, both culturally and politically, have real material effects. In the early nineteenth-century the notion of
“Manifest Destiny” was not merely an apology, but also an energizing force for American expansion, as is today the term “War on Terror.” Obviously, both sorts of “false consciousness” have done far more harm than good. That is the force of liberty.
WORKS-CITED


