

WHERE IS AMERICA IN THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS?*

CAROLINE WINTERER

Department of History, Stanford University

E-mail: cwinterer@stanford.edu

Where is America in the republic of letters? This question has formed in my mind over the last four years as I have collaborated on a new project based at Stanford University called Mapping the Republic of Letters. The project aims to enrich our understanding of the intellectual networks of major and minor figures in the republic of letters, the international world of learning that spanned the centuries roughly from 1400 to 1800. By creating visual images based on large digitized data sets, we hope to reveal the hidden structures and conditions that nourished the growth of the republic of letters in the early modern era and the causes of its transformation in the nineteenth century. This task has only recently become feasible with the digitization of the correspondences of major intellectuals such as Benjamin Franklin, John Locke, Athanasius Kircher, and Voltaire, and of libraries, cabinets of artifacts, and Grand Tour itineraries.

This essay has two purposes. The first is to explore how the analytic category of the republic of letters can help to transcend some of the limitations of the Atlantic world, one of early Americanists' currently dominant paradigms. To scholars of Renaissance and early modern Europe, the idea of a republic of letters seems obvious, natural, and well documented. To historians of early America—even intellectual historians—the category is much less familiar. I have often found

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myself asking whether the Americas formed part of this thing we were calling the republic of letters, and, if so, how, and when. This essay examines the ways in which early Americans participated (or hoped to participate) in the ideal of the republic of letters, and the specific geographical, political, religious, and historical circumstances of early America that shaped that participation. Because my own specialty is British America, the major focus will be on that area, but some of the considerations are also applicable to French and Spanish America. Along the way I examine several recent works in the field that open up new questions and methodologies for our consideration.¹

The second purpose is to explore the prospects and limits of digitally mapping the republic of letters. This can mean anything from geographical mapping (such as placing correspondence networks on a map of the Earth) to bar graphs and pie charts (which show things like the popularity of certain books at certain times and places), to a variety of frankly exotic representations that, like Maya glyphs, take some time to learn how to decode. What all these have in common is the ability to reframe our textual archive in a spatial dimension.

We have good reasons to be wary of what digitization and visualization can offer us. The insights of the humanist take years to accumulate; we have a feel for our time period and our people that numbers and graphs and maps simply do not capture, one that is born of long hours spent reading and thinking about the complicated textual and intellectual problems that the past presents to us. Innovations such as Google's NGram—plug in the word *nature* and instantly chart its appearance in millions of texts—both thrill and trouble us. Something is not quite right: but what?

The main problem is that digitizing humanistic data forces black-and-white answers onto the kinds of grey-area questions that historians usually delight in tackling. First, we can only visualize data points, discrete bits of factual information such as location or person or date. Yet much of what we want to learn about the republic of letters is hard to whittle down to a data point. Nationality, for example, which can help us to gauge how multinational a person's letter network might have been, is difficult to assign for the early modern period. Is Thomas Jefferson British? American? British American? British then American? Virginian? Second, greater numerical specificity does not in itself yield greater interpretive insight; it requires a larger numerical context for interpretation. Three thousand books in a private library is a large number for the year 1500, but

¹ The term "British America" is problematic since it seems to anticipate the arrival of "Americans"—that is, of the United States—and it promises attention to Canada that I do not give here. The terms "colonial America" and "early America," however, do not distinguish enough among Britain, France, and Spain's New World empires. So British America it is, for lack of a better term.

not for the year 1800. This means that for visualization projects to be successful, they need to vacuum up enormous data sets: the projects will only yield their most accurate and useful information sometime in the future. A final problem is that visualization forces us to worry more about external aspects of intellectual life (who wrote what letter when) than about the internal ideas (what the letter was about, and why the ideas in it might have mattered so much that someone might die defending them). We cannot just digitize and visualize data; we still need to read texts.

In short, visualization cannot and should not replace the traditional work of the humanist. Visualization in fact is not the goal: the goal is to develop new tools to expose the ephemeral traces of the past. Faced with great gaps in our knowledge about the early modern world, the visualization of a large data set can help us to glimpse large patterns even when many specific bits of information are missing. Digitization and visualization give us a new kind of context for apprehending the ideas of the past. Cambridge University Press's Ideas in Context book series (to take one example) offers one definition of context. "Through detailed studies of the evolution of [intellectual] traditions, and their modification by different audiences," its series website explains, ideas are "set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions."² To Cambridge's intellectual context of ideas and institutions, digitization and visualization offer a different kind of context: numerical and geographical frames of reference. Major interpretive questions such as the existence of a particularly "American" Enlightenment can be more precisely answered if basic factual questions are addressed, such as which "Enlightenment" European texts Americans had in their libraries or which European *philosophes* were personally known to Americans and actively engaged in intellectual conversation with them. The groundbreaking 1976 article by David Lundberg and Henry May, entitled "The Enlightened Reader in America," exemplifies this painstaking process, showing which libraries in America contained which Enlightenment books from Europe.³ But with digitization this kind of context can be established with greater depth and specificity across a broader range of sources, both published and manuscript.

Like a satellite hovering above the Earth, visualization can help us to see the big picture amid bewildering complexity and to detect new patterns over time and space. Whether and how these new patterns matter is our own decision as humanists to make, like the weatherman deciding whether the white spot is just clouds or a potential hurricane.

² This is from the website of Cambridge University Press.

³ David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976), 262–93.

THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS: DEFINITION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

What was the *republic of letters*? This term refers to the intellectual world that thrived before our modern academic disciplines and more nationally bound scholarly institutional practices triumphed in the later nineteenth century. During these earlier centuries, first in Europe and then wherever around the globe Europeans brought their scholarly practices, a more fluid model of intellectual activity engaged learned men and women. This was the great age of the generalist, the polymath, the *polyhistor*, adept in multiple fields of learning, when one could still aspire to know everything. Learned people exchanged books, letters, journals, antiquities, and scientific objects; they organized learned societies, academies, universities, laboratories, botanical gardens, and cabinets. To describe this delicate world, modern historians have seized upon the metaphor of the web. Like spiders, scholars carefully spun learned webs across great distances, hoping to ensnare new ideas and objects, to neutralize rivals and promote friends.⁴

At the time, however, its members called this intellectual community a republic—a striking term given that before the late eighteenth century few of the participant states were in fact political republics in the strict (monarchless) sense of the term. There is much evidence to suggest that members applied the term “republic” loosely, as a social and intellectual ideal of community rather than as a program of political action. In an age of rigid social hierarchies, deadly wars of religion, and emerging state censorship, early modern scholars invoked the idea of republics to engage one another on terms of relative equality and freedom. They grandiosely imagined the community of the republic of letters to be universal in scope, extending beyond political frontiers to create a utopian global literary world, or *orbis litterarius*.⁵ Participants deployed a whole battery of political terms—colony, ruler, frontier—to describe this intellectual community, although it is not always clear whether they were juxtaposing “republic” to monarchy, democracy, aristocracy, or empire. They happily used non-republican terms to praise their favorites. In the sixteenth century, many agreed that Erasmus was the prince of the republic of letters.⁶ By the eighteenth century, Voltaire had been crowned king, a truth that made John Adams grumble from Paris that the

⁴ Laurence W. B. Brockliss, *Calvet's Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York, 2002), vii–viii.

⁵ On the use of the term *orbis litterarius* see Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, *La république des lettres* (Paris, 1997), 23, 63–90.

⁶ Constance Furey, *Erasmus, Contarini, and the Religious Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, 2006); April Shelford, *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650–1720* (Rochester, 2007).

republic of letters had degenerated into monarchy.⁷ Although the precise causal connections between the intellectual community of the republic of letters and the rise of the first enduring modern political republics remain the subject of debate, clearly at some level the rich intellectual setting of the first had something to do with the flourishing of the second.

As these definitions of the republic of letters suggest, there was always slippage between process and place. On the one hand, the republic of letters embodied the airy ideal of egalitarianism. In theory, all learned people could participate in this world of ideas. Yet the realities of sheer distance, the vagaries of travel over seas and roads, imperial and local politics, and institutions and personalities all shaped the day-to-day operation of the disembodied republic of letters. These factors also shaped our modern archive of the republic of letters. Some documents and artifacts were widely and prominently disseminated. Others were either entirely lost or left such ephemeral traces that it is difficult to reconstruct critical aspects of their provenance, such as the precise date on which a letter was sent or received.

For today's scholars of early modern Europe, the republic of letters is a goldmine. In the last two decades, twenty-four books and seven doctoral dissertations on European history have appeared with the words "republic of letters" in the title.⁸ The quantitative organization and spatial mapping of European republic of letters data has been going on for at least fifteen years.⁹ The field is wide open, welcoming both established scholars and new ones. The research program is increasingly global, sending scholars to archives in China, Peru, India, and the Middle East.¹⁰ These books join a host of studies that have focused on smaller units in the republic of letters, be they individual scholars

⁷ John Adams, entry for 16 April 1778, in Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 4, *Autobiography Parts Two and Three 1777–1780* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 62.

⁸ The last twenty years is 1990–2010. Only English-language titles were sampled. For this research I am indebted to Scott Spillman, PhD candidate, Department of History, Stanford University.

⁹ The Electronic Enlightenment Project, University of Oxford (www.e-enlightenment.com); the Cultures of Knowledge Project, University of Oxford (www.history.ox.ac.uk/cofk); and the Circulation of Knowledge project in the Netherlands (ckcc.huygens.knaw.nl). For a useful introduction to scholarship on spatial mapping in the republic of letters see Robert Mayhew, "British Geography's Republic of Letters: Mapping an Imagined Community, 1600–1800," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (April 2004), 251–76.

¹⁰ Liam Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); *idem*, ed., *Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World* (Farnham, 2008); Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago, 2007); and Florence Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and Their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, 2009).

or regions and states.¹¹ The modern scholars who study the European republic of letters are as international as their subject. They include not just American scholars in American universities but European scholars in European universities. They publish in French, Dutch, German, Spanish, Italian, and English, mirroring in their polyglot publications the historical subject they investigate.

Not so for British America. In the last twenty years, the three words “republic of letters” have appeared in the titles of just two books on what might be called British American topics. In other words, ninety-two percent of the English-language books on Euro-American topics with the words “republic of letters” in the title published in the last twenty years are essentially about Europe.¹² Compare this to the term “Atlantic world,” whose use in the titles of English-language books about early America has surged. In the last twenty years, sixty-five books (and nineteen doctoral dissertations) on subjects in the early American field have the words “Atlantic world” in the title.

Put bluntly, the Atlantic world has become an early Americanist’s category, while the republic of letters has become an early modern Europeanist’s category. I have had the opportunity to speculate with some of my colleagues about why this might be so. One reason may be the concept of European history itself: problematic and unstable as it is, the idea of Europe encourages European historians to think across national boundaries and to see Europe as more than the sum of national histories. By contrast, colonial Americanists, always waiting in the wings of the future United States, must wrestle with globalism and empire as qualities that compete with an exclusive American nationalism. Perhaps historians of early modern Europe have also been relatively less smitten by the paradigm of the Atlantic world because of their greater geographical range

¹¹ For a recent overview of the scholarship, see Anthony Grafton, “A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters,” *Republics of Letters* 1 (May 2009), available at <http://rofl.stanford.edu/node/34>.

¹² The two books are Gilman Ostrander, *Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1776–1865* (Madison, 1999); and James Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776–1826*, 3 vols. (New York, 1995). The topic has been treated in shorter formats. See especially the useful essay by David Hall, “Learned Culture in the Eighteenth Century,” in Hugh Amory and David Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2000), 411–33; Ned Landsman, “A Transatlantic ‘Republic of Letters,’” in *idem*, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680–1760* (Ithaca, 1997), 31–56; Norman Fiering, “The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series 33 (Oct. 1976), 642–60. The subject has also been treated influentially in books that play with the wording: Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 1990); and David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

of intellectual options. Early modern Europeanists' intellectual doors open up all over, for example to the Mediterranean and East Asia, whereas for British Americanists the Atlantic remains the intellectual front door until the end of the eighteenth century, when the Pacific and Mediterranean begin to open more widely.¹³

But what if we approach British American intellectual life as part of the republic of letters instead of as part of an Atlantic world? What looks different? What new questions and problems emerge? An example of this kind of work is what has been accomplished in the last thirty years or so with the history of the book, which has helped to enumerate European–American connections with impressive precision.¹⁴ Yet we still know relatively little—in terms of comparative, quantitative data—about many other, more ephemeral features of the British American republic of letters, from the size and shape of individual correspondence networks, to the content and circulation of book and artifact collections, to the specifics of marginalia, to the travels of intellectually inclined Americans in Europe. This essay will probe some of these questions as they have been answered most recently by scholars of the early modern Americas.

ENGLAND AND LONDON

The first feature that stands out when mapping British America in the broader republic of letters is how England-centered it is. The intellectual life of early America is best imagined first as part of a narrowly British American Atlantic *zone* and only second as part of a broader Atlantic *world*.¹⁵ The paradigm of the Atlantic world—embracing the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and the British Isles—has been extraordinarily fruitful for expanding the questions and archives of scholars of early America who study slavery, population migrations, ecological changes, and mercantile networks.

Intellectual historians, while profiting from this work, should, however, handle the Atlantic world with care. The big, broad idea of an Atlantic world can easily overstate the possibilities that were actually available to learned British Americans for sustained intellectual engagement with a larger learned world, as opposed to a

¹³ Thanks to Michael O'Brien for his shrewd thoughts on this matter; email communication to the author, 5 November 2010.

¹⁴ See especially Amory and Hall, *Colonial Book*; Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter, eds., *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst, 2007); Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago, 2006).

¹⁵ Trevor Burnard makes the same point for imperialism more broadly in "The British Atlantic," in Jack Greene and Philip Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York, 2009), 111–36.

larger mercantile or political world (though obviously these overlapped to some degree). These possibilities included the ability to receive new ideas in a regular, timely, reasonably accessible, and predictable way; to disseminate these ideas to others; and to participate in systems of intellectual incentive and recognition, such as patronage, prizes, and institutional membership. The ideas available to early Americans were Atlantic and even global in their subject; some of them derived from serious engagement with and among peoples we might not usually consider to be part of the world of learning. But scholarship does not exist in a vacuum. Learned people might have toiled on the fringes of empires, but finally they needed to exchange their ideas with others in the physical form of books, letters, journals, and objects along the highways of the republic of letters.

For British Americans, many of these intellectual highways converged on England, the commercial, publishing, and political hub of their empire. Speaking broadly, by many relevant measures of intellectual life, England dominated British America: in supplying books and journals to the colonies, in providing an intellectual model of learning in everything from law to science to belles-lettres, in providing financial and cultural patronage for artists—the list could go on. Throughout the period to 1800, in ways both large and small, it was to England that early Americans looked for so much of their intellectual structure and content. Many not only looked but went, such as the erudite planter Eliza Lucas Pinckney of South Carolina, who personally presented birds from her colony to the dowager Princess of Wales.

England's importance to British American intellectual life had a number of consequences. It meant, for example, that the colonies only slowly developed an intercolonial rather than colony-to-Britain intellectual life. Hugh Amory has argued that the first publication with an intercolonial imprint was the *American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (1743–6), which was sold in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, New Haven, and Newport.¹⁶ Susan Scott Parrish has made the case that the first sustained correspondence among intercolonial men of science such as Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Garden did not emerge until the 1740s.¹⁷ Colonists in the British Caribbean—the spectacular example of Alexander Hamilton notwithstanding—by far preferred to send their sons to Britain for university training than to the closer mainland American colonies.¹⁸

These grand pronouncements about the importance of England must immediately be qualified. First, England should be seen as peculiarly but

¹⁶ Hugh Amory, "Reinventing the Colonial Book," in Amory and Hall, *Colonial Books*, 43.

¹⁷ Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 128–35.

¹⁸ Andrew O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 19–27.

not uniquely important in British Americans' intellectual world; British Americans' intellectual links were many and complicated. Some of the more important of these links include the transnational confessional community of the "Protestant international" that stretched from Boston through London and into the Reformation Europe of the Low Countries and Germany.¹⁹ As the eighteenth century passed, the Scottish Enlightenment radiated outward from the universities of Glasgow, Aberdeen, and especially Edinburgh, a city Nicholas Phillipson has called a "real republic of letters" in its own right.²⁰ Learned Scots migrated to various parts of British America, but the flow ran the other way as well; by 1761 so many Virginians were enrolled at Edinburgh's renowned medical school that they formed their own club.²¹ In the American colonies themselves learned pockets supported a thriving, local intellectual life: we should not necessarily think of transatlantic connections as the only measure of British American participation in the broader republic of letters. The dense knot of seventeenth-century Boston–Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, formed a world unto itself, with its impossibly tangled intellectual and family trees.

Moving closer to our map it becomes clear that the core of early American intellectual life was not so much England generally as London specifically. By the middle of the eighteenth century, London had joined Paris as a real behemoth in the republic of letters, the gigantic city that was also a bustling political and intellectual center. Paris in 1750 had a population of around 570,000; London of 750,000.²² These great cities could collect on an unprecedented scale many activities of intellectual life: publishers, scholars, museums, cabinets, salons, gardens, learned societies, and princely patrons. The confluence of urbanization and intellectual life at this massive scale represented a new formation in the republic of letters, which until then had been represented by smaller cities and towns such as Leiden, Louvain, and Heidelberg.

London's importance in British American intellectual life swelled over the course of the eighteenth century as the number of Americans visiting

¹⁹ Mark Peterson, "Theopolis Americana: The City-State of Boston, the Republic of Letters, and the Protestant International, 1689–1739," in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 329–70.

²⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, "Culture and Society in the 18th Century Province: The Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment," in Lawrence Stone, ed., *The University in Society*, vol. 2, *Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the 16th to the 20th Century* (Princeton, 1974), 425.

²¹ Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville, 1978), 1: 363.

²² For city populations see Peter Clark, *European Cities and Towns: 400–2000* (Oxford, 2009), 121.

London rose sharply. Julie Flavell has termed post-1763 London “the capital of America,” the place where Americans from all over the British Empire flocked for commercial, educational, cultural, and diplomatic errands.²³ London’s intellectual supremacy was especially the case in book publishing, which over the course of the seventeenth and, especially, eighteenth centuries emerged as an ever more important river of information dissemination of the republic of letters, supplementing though not displacing other formats such as letter writing. According to James Raven, “Edinburgh, Dublin (at least before 1800), and Glasgow all developed important book export businesses, but London remained the main publishing source for the books, magazines, and other types of print sent out to the British provinces and then to the colonies in North America, the Caribbean, India, the United States, Africa, Australasia, and the Far East.”²⁴ (The literary entrepôt of London often published works that were not necessarily “English,” however: editions of the classics, French and Italian works, and the like.) Elite colonists from the North American mainland and British Caribbean sent their sons for legal training to the Inns of Court in London; Richard Beale Davis counts nearly two hundred Americans at the Inns of Court before the Revolution.²⁵ Catholics too—a persecuted minority in British America—felt the pull of the great intellectual center of London. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Maryland, the Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, received a truly exemplary education, first in the Jesuit schools of France and then in a boring purgatory of common-law training at the Inns of Court (from which he repeatedly begged his father to be released, to no avail).²⁶ Talented colonial painters such as John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West capped their careers by moving to London. Conversely, middling British talents such as John Smibert decamped to the colonies to be “lookt on as at the top.”²⁷

In part because London collected so much intellectual activity, British America retained the townish intellectual pattern of the earlier republic of letters throughout the eighteenth century. In around 1750 the two largest British American cities—Boston and Philadelphia—had populations respectively of

²³ Julie Flavell, *When London Was Capital of America* (New Haven, 2010), 4, 11, 21.

²⁴ James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450–1830* (New Haven, 2007), 9.

²⁵ Davis, *Intellectual Life*, 1: 371.

²⁶ See especially Charles Carroll of Carrollton to Charles Carroll of Annapolis, 10 April 1760, in Ronald Hoffman, ed., *Dear Papa, Dear Charley: The Peregrinations of a Revolutionary Aristocrat* . . . , 3 vols. (Chapel Hill, 2001), 1: 151–3.

²⁷ Quote from Stuart Feld, “In the Latest London Manner,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 21 (May 1963), 308.

approximately 16,000 and 13,000.²⁸ Most of the first colleges founded in British America—Harvard (1636), William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), and the College of New Jersey (1746)—sprouted in such comparatively small towns as to make the idea of rustication seem redundant. British Caribbean planters, lacking almost any educational infrastructure at all, sent children to Britain for education in far larger numbers than did planters from the British American mainland colonies.²⁹

Small as early British American cities were, however, they mirrored the pattern of the larger republic of letters by attracting learned societies. Although the importance of “rural Enlightenment” (to use John Fea’s term) should not be minimized, learned institutions (as opposed to more informal practices) tended to be features of British American cities rather than plantations or villages.³⁰ London had its Royal Society, but Boston could boast an imitation as the sincerest form of flattery: the Philosophical Society founded by Increase Mather and others in 1683. From a similar impulse emerged Philadelphia’s American Philosophical Society (founded 1743), and Boston’s American Academy of Arts and Sciences (founded 1780).

LETTER NETWORKS

Many ligaments tied together the global republic of letters—books, artifacts, travelers—but none were more important than letters. Left to us in the hundreds of thousands, these letters show the boisterous interchange of scholarly ideas at their most personal. More than any other scholarly practice, letters helped to link the republic of letters into a self-conscious community of like-minded people. Although it is difficult to generalize over such a long period as 1400–1800, the trend of letters is steadily upward. By the eighteenth century some of the giants in the republic of letters such as Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson had correspondence totals (letters sent and received) easily numbering over ten thousand.

Analyzing these letter networks is a nightmare. Many letters have been lost; some are known to us only through references in other letters or documents; still others, squirreled away in archives, elude inclusion in major published collections. Digitization demands precision where fuzziness reigns: who is the “author” of a

²⁸ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1742* (New York, 1938), 303. Contrast this with Spanish America, where by 1740 Mexico City had a population of 112,000 and Lima 52,000; see John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, 2006), 262, 204.

²⁹ O’Shaughnessy, *Empire Divided*, 19–27.

³⁰ John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2008).

letter, if in fact a group wrote the letter (as in the case of the American delegation in Paris negotiating treaties with France during the American Revolution)? Who is the “recipient” if a whole bundle of letters intended for different people was stuffed into one packet, as so often was the case? What is more important: the geographical location of the letter writer and recipient (by which we can gauge a network’s geographical spread), or the identities of the writer and recipient (by which we can try to measure a person’s role in a particular letter network)? This last question can be put even more succinctly. What matters more: that many Americans wrote to Europe during the late eighteenth century, or that many of those in Europe to whom they wrote were other Americans? Questions like these can become almost paralyzing during attempts at digitization. We know in our hearts as historians that somehow we are doing violence to our data by forcing it into these rigid categories. Yet it is by analyzing these newly digitized correspondence networks, with all their problems, that we can begin to take the full measure of learned links between the Americas and the rest of the republic of letters.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–90) is a good example of someone with a massive letter network. Franklin probably sent and received somewhere on the order of 15,000 letters during his lifetime; most of these are now accessible to anyone online, thanks to the Packard Humanities Institute’s open-access version of the Benjamin Franklin papers at Yale University.³¹ The sheer volume of Franklin’s network puts him in the big leagues with Voltaire, although accurately counting either of their total letters remains unexpectedly difficult. Thanks in part to the geographic range of his network—which in terms of outgoing correspondence forms in its broadest outlines a triangle stretching between Philadelphia, Paris, and London—Franklin is considered perhaps the most worldly of colonial Americans. In Gordon Wood’s words, Franklin “was undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan” of the American revolutionaries.³² Franklin spent much of the last third of his life in Britain and France at a time when some other of the most influential thinkers of eighteenth-century America (such as James Madison) never left North America. Europeans thought a little more modestly about Franklin: he was not the king of the republic of letters (that was Voltaire) but certainly an “illustrious member,” according to a German correspondent (writing to Franklin in Latin).³³

Franklin’s letter network shows that he was not just a producer of knowledge, the lone genius capturing lightning from the heavens: he was also

³¹ See <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin>.

³² Gordon Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 2004), 9.

³³ Johann Adolf Behrends to B. Franklin, 28 Oct. 1778, in *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 27, ed. Claude Lopez (New Haven, 1988), 656.

a clearinghouse of knowledge, a human switchboard. Franklin connected other people, facilitating information exchange through the republic of letters. He was also in the right place at the right time. During his years in Paris laboring for the American cause, Franklin charmed those great arbiters of success in the republic of letters, the French. Franklin had a knack for writing reasonably lucidly in French to French people, a skill that eluded the reliably gauche John Adams, stationed in Paris at the same time. He honed his French at the fortuitous moment in the evolution of the republic of letters when French was displacing Latin as the international language of learned communication and international diplomacy. Franklin commented on the Latin-to-French shift in a letter to Noah Webster, hoping that English would be the next lingua franca.³⁴

Enmeshed in his rich web of learned political and scholarly correspondents in Europe and British America, Franklin seems to represent the arrival of something quite new for provincial America but for some time well known to the rest of the republic of letters: the philosopher-statesman, someone like Edmund Burke or Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, men who combined a major political role with substantive, internationally influential reflection on a variety of learned matters.

But was Franklin the “cosmopolitan” American really so new? How might we compare Franklin’s correspondence network with that of other British Americans, perhaps equally but just differently members of the larger republic of letters?

Walter Woodward’s richly detailed new book about John Winthrop Jr, *Prospero’s America*, succinctly answers some of these questions and in the process provides us with one of the most illuminating recent examinations of early British America’s place in the broader republic of letters. The son of the better-remembered founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop Jr (1606–76) was born in England exactly a century before Franklin. He became governor of Connecticut as well as a leading alchemist at a time when alchemy loomed as the scientific–religious key to unlocking the mineral wealth of the New World. Woodward shows that Winthrop established a correspondence network within what Woodward calls a “republic of alchemy.”³⁵ In approximately five thousand letters written and received in his lifetime, Winthrop participated in a network that extended to England, the Continent (where Winthrop traveled, forging learned connections with scholars in alchemical centers like Hamburg), the Caribbean, and even the Middle East, where Winthrop met the scholar of Arabic

³⁴ Benjamin Franklin to Noah Webster, 26 Dec. 1789, available at <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin>.

³⁵ Walter Woodward, *Prospero’s America: John Winthrop, Jr., Alchemy, and the Creation of New England Culture, 1606–1676* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 65.

texts Jacob Golius.³⁶ At this time, Latin was still the international language of the republic of letters. To be read on the Continent, even such luminaries as the chemist Robert Boyle had to have their vernacular English works translated into Latin.³⁷

Woodward shows that Winthrop the polyglot thrived in this complicated world because his interests and skills were so varied: he was a kind of jack of all trades in the republic of letters. He read and wrote Latin, Greek, French, and Dutch with ease. He corresponded—often in Latin—with learned Europeans, and annotated some of his roughly a thousand books in Latin.³⁸ He was a skilled politician, maneuvering between the learned world of alchemy and the rough and tumble of early Connecticut politics, then enrolled in fractious imperial disputes.

Placing Winthrop in this complicated political and intellectual context is the real payoff in Woodward's book for our understanding of the republic of letters as a community that straddled the realms of abstract intellectual inquiries and urgent political necessities. Winthrop became the first colonial member of the Royal Society at a time when it formed what Woodward calls "interlocking directorates" with Whitehall, part of Charles II's colonial consolidation campaign that also included the new Navigation Acts of 1660 and the founding of the Board of Trade and the Council for Plantations.³⁹ "Alchemical culture," Woodward writes, "provided a lingua franca and a worldview that united intellectuals across Europe and across the Atlantic."⁴⁰ Here indeed was an American philosopher-statesman, a Franklin *avant ses lettres*.

In this longer, richer context of British American participation in the larger republic of letters that Woodward gives to us, Benjamin Franklin does not stand out as a new, glittering species of American, the lowly provincial rocketed into the international arena of European intellectual and political life. Rather, Franklin takes his place in a long sequence of British American engagements in the republic of letters. What makes Franklin new for America is rather the massive scale of his letter network, its languages, and the role he played in his network. The cases of Winthrop and Franklin show that the more we can discover about these correspondence networks and how they functioned over time and place the more

³⁶ On the estimate of five thousand, I am grateful for the email communication from Walter Woodward, 18 Aug. 2010, who also advises that a number of letters may not have survived. For locations of correspondents see Woodward, *Prospero*, 3, 54, 65.

³⁷ Bots and Waquet, *La republique des lettres*, 147.

³⁸ On his languages see Malcolm Freiberg, ed., *Winthrop Papers*, vol. 6, 1650–1654 (Boston, MA, 1992), x. On annotations in Latin see Charles Browne, "Scientific Notes from the Books and Letters of John Winthrop, Jr. (1606–1676)," *Isis* 11 (Dec. 1928), 325–42, esp. 327.

³⁹ Woodward, *Prospero*, 262, 263, 254.

⁴⁰ Woodward, *Prospero*, 69.

we can begin to take the real measure of the role that letters and letter writers played in the republic of letters.

CENTERS AND PERIPHERIES

If London was a capital of the republic of letters, were the British American colonies peripheries? The question can be put more generally: in what ways were intellectual centers central, and in what ways were intellectual peripheries peripheral? Network mapping can begin to answer some of these questions by visually representing basic quantitative information about the republic of letters, such as where most books were published, who wrote letters to whom, and who possessed which scientific instruments, plants, and artifacts.

But cartographic mapping (that is, placing networks onto a map of the Earth) creates its own illusions and distortions when it comes to centers and peripheries, so we have to be careful. This is especially so for mapping the place of British America—or anywhere physically remote from Europe—in the republic of letters. In a nutshell, this is the problem: because the Atlantic Ocean is so big, placing letter networks onto a cartographic map immediately makes the faraway Americas look more peripheral or exotic or “cosmopolitan” than other peripheries of the republic of letters that are closer to (or even in) Europe, such as Constantinople or Stockholm.

In our project we have experienced this as the Franklin–Voltaire problem. Placed onto a map (Fig. 1), Franklin’s letter network (top) looks strikingly different from Voltaire’s (bottom) simply because many of Franklin’s letters crossed the Atlantic, while only a few of Voltaire’s did (though we recognize that a number of letters have been lost). Depending on how we interpret the maps, we can call Franklin either more peripheral than Voltaire to the republic of letters (since much of his activity emerged from the colonial periphery), or more worldly than Voltaire (since his network reached across the Atlantic). By emphasizing geography, cartographic representations of intellectual networks also conceal the ways in which provinces physically closer to Paris and London might be more peripheral or distant than British America in non-geographical ways, say in their language, institutional infrastructure, or religion. To correct for these geographical illusions, we are working on developing non-geographical visual representations. So-called network graphs, for example, represent intellectual relationships in non-cartographic ways, pushing people further or closer depending on how many letters they exchanged.⁴¹

⁴¹ Thanks to the Sébastien Heymann at Gephi (<http://gephi.org/>) for producing these visualizations for this project.

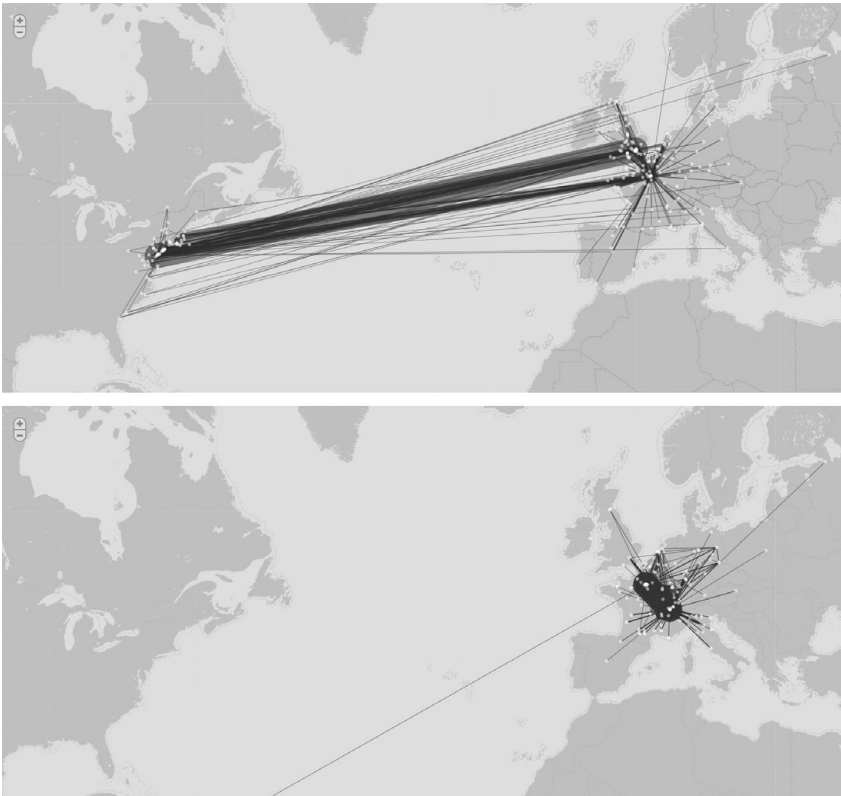


Fig. 1. These two maps compare the correspondence networks, including incoming and outgoing letters, of Benjamin Franklin (top) and Voltaire (bottom). Credit: Giorgio Caviglia of DensityDesign Research Lab in Milan, Italy, for the Mapping the Republic of Letters Project, Stanford University.

The problem of centers and peripheries has long preoccupied historians of the American Enlightenment, who struggle to reconcile British America's arguably peripheral presence with the European Enlightenment while still explaining dazzling eruptions such as the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution.⁴² Some of the most vocal recent participation in this debate has come from historians of Enlightenment science, who have rejected center-periphery models as static and rigid, highlighting instead interconnected and contingent pathways of interaction, both between and across institutions and

⁴² Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976); Robert Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750–1820* (Cambridge, 1994); Caroline Winterer, *The American Enlightenment: Treasures from the Stanford University Libraries* (Stanford, 2011).

empires. They have drawn our attention away from celebrated scientists and intellectuals at the imperial center to the actors at the periphery: sea captains, sailors, surgeon–barbers, Africans, Native Americans, Creoles, and others who helped to create new knowledge that often went unacknowledged in published scientific works of the time.⁴³

Neil Safier's *Measuring the New World* is a recent example of a work in this vein. Although it concerns Spanish America rather than British America, it is useful to consider in more depth because of its methodology and assumptions about how to study intellectual activity in imperial centers and colonial peripheries.⁴⁴ Safier's book charts the attempt by eighteenth-century European scientists to measure the curvature of the earth, a project undertaken largely in equatorial South America, most famously by the French scientist Charles-Marie de La Condamine. Knowledge gathered in Spanish America was then shipped back to Europe, where it was reshaped by French editors and scholars for broader public consumption in encyclopedias, histories, and edited collections. Safier carefully and lucidly charts various episodes in this scientific quest—the creation of maps, the collecting of data, the editing of texts—with the larger goal of debunking the idea that Enlightenment science was a fortress of objectivity built by the single-handed brilliance of eminent European scientists. “By recovering what was invisible in the final versions of European accounts,” he writes, “we recognize Enlightenment science in an age of imperial expansion for what it was: not an omniscient, universal knowledge of the natural world but rather a partial and contingent knowledge, one that silenced and suppressed its sources just as often as it acknowledged and represented them.”⁴⁵ He elaborates in great detail the process by which La Condamine and other Enlightenment figures “suppressed” and “erased” the contributions of others in their accounts.⁴⁶

Safier's book raises two important methodological questions about how historians should interpret the information exchange between colonial periphery and imperial center. The first is how to establish intent: when actors in the metropole received information from the periphery, what did they hope to do with it? How do we interpret the results of their efforts in retrospect, now that we know the cumulative damage of imperialism? Safier is wont to see sinister intent, what he calls “strategic effacement” and “insidious effacement” of “local

⁴³ For recent examples see, in a growing literature, Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, eds., *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (New York, 2007).

⁴⁴ Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago, 2008).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 25.

sources” in French Enlightenment compilations of knowledge imported from South America.⁴⁷ His analysis of the criticisms that eighteenth-century French editors leveled at the 1609 history of the Incas published by Garcilaso de la Vega (El Inca) suggests that these show metropolitans looking askance at native New World inferiorities. French editors charged that Garcilaso had merely heaped up facts in a disorderly way, so that readers struggled to follow a clear historical narrative.⁴⁸ The new French edition of 1744 made a number of changes to Garcilaso’s text, which Safier meticulously charts. But did these alterations really point to sinister metropolitan suppressions, as Safier seems to suggest? In altering Garcilaso’s earlier text, writes Safier, caused French editors “to dismiss entirely a logic that conceivably derived from more local sources.”⁴⁹ But accusations that earlier books were jumbled and outdated mountains of facts were not unique to metropolitans critiquing the indigene. This was the ubiquitous language of marketing a new edition of a book; even the most esteemed subjects beloved of metropolitan nabobs came under attack. Victorian scholars tarred the Frenchman Charles Rollin’s internationally best-selling classical history, the *Histoire ancienne* (1730–38), with basically the same brush, calling it an “omnivorous farrago.”⁵⁰

The second question raised by Safier’s book is how to determine when peripheries have absorbed enough practices of the republic of letters that while physically remote they have become intellectually quite close. Safier calls many of his South American sources “indigenous or local informants.”⁵¹ But by the eighteenth century the Spanish influence in the Andes had been felt for more than two centuries, making the idea of a pure New World “local” or “indigenous” source problematic for all but the most isolated individuals.

A subtler assessment of the intellectual syncretism that emerged in the Spanish American fringe of the republic of letters appears in Sabine MacCormack’s *On the Wings of Time*.⁵² MacCormack portrays Garcilaso de la Vega as an example of the Inca–Spanish cultural syncretism already effected even by 1609. Far from being a representative of a pure Inca local source, Garcilaso emerges in MacCormack’s account as representative of the new, synthetic post-conquest society called Peru. Even though Garcilaso mourned the passing of the Inca Empire, it was the new society of Peru—with both its Spanish and its Inca elements—that gave him the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 199, 223.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 223.

⁵⁰ Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (Baltimore, 2002), 88.

⁵¹ Safier, *Measuring the New World*, 252.

⁵² Sabine MacCormack, *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru* (Princeton, 2007).

intellectual tools to fully imagine an Inca history and to sew it into a larger world history that could be published and then read by the greater republic of letters. Garcilaso's text had unpredictable outcomes, not just prompting French editors' new 1744 edition but also helping to inspire a Peruvian uprising in 1780: the modernized text, that is, became a tool of both metropole and periphery.⁵³ The integration of Greco-Roman historical practices into the Andean world by writers such as Garcilaso, argues MacCormack, was not just an intellectual imposition from the metropole but a way to incorporate the peoples of the Andes and their history into the larger stream of world history. "To compare the Incas and the Romans, to explain events in Peru in light of Roman precedent, and to use the examples of Greek and Roman historiography in order to pinpoint the meaning of events was to incorporate Andean experience into human experience across space and time," she writes. "Those who criticize these writings for imposing—as they perceive it—alien norms on Andean subject matter should consider the alternative: that the Andean world would remain forever separate and secluded from the rest of humanity."⁵⁴

RELIGION

British America differed from much of the republic of letters in still another important way: the comparatively minor presence of Catholicism generally and the Jesuits specifically as conduits of intellectual activity. The Society of Jesus, from its foundation in 1540 to its dissolution in 1773, functioned as the chief global intellectual arm of the early modern Catholic Church. By 1600, its network of educational institutions and erudite priests had spread Catholic theology and European learning to Asia and the New World. Communiqués transmitted back to Europe by the Jesuits and other Catholic orders greatly increased the knowledge available about the world and its peoples.⁵⁵ The Spanish missionary José de Acosta (1539–1600) spent fifteen years in Spanish America and published one of the first books about the New World Indians in 1590. The Italian priest Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) spent a quarter-century in China and linked European and Chinese intellectual developments. The extravagantly erudite German scholar Athanasius Kircher (1602–80) published over forty books on everything from China to volcanoes to contagion to Egyptian hieroglyphics; his correspondence network reached across the globe to New Spain and China. No less important were the intellectual networks forged within Europe by Jesuits with other learned

⁵³ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xvii–xviii.

⁵⁵ Mordechai Feingold, "Jesuits: Savants," *idem*, ed., *Jesuit Science and the Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 1–45.

Europeans. These ties formed major links in the republic at a time when no one drew lines between religious and secular knowledge.⁵⁶

Contrast this with British America, where the Jesuits played a much smaller role. On the eve of American independence, Catholics (often termed papists, a term that sums up the threat they represented) made up only one percent of the population in the thirteen colonies, and they were subjected to the most severe legal disabilities.⁵⁷ Rumors of papist plots trickled through the British American press amid mounting fears of an imperializing Louis XIV and Catholicizing Stuarts.⁵⁸ Even in the most Catholicized regions of British America on the eve of the Revolution—the colony of Maryland, founded by the Catholic Lord Baltimore, and the relatively tolerant city of Philadelphia—there were only about 20,000 to 25,000 Catholics in a total mainland British American population of about 2.3 million.⁵⁹ In Maryland there were never more than five Jesuit priests at any one time during the seventeenth century.⁶⁰ The small school the Jesuits had launched at Newtown in the middle of the seventeenth century closed after the 1688–9 Glorious Revolution that had displaced Catholic James II for Protestant William and Mary. Elite Catholic families in eighteenth-century Maryland such as the Carrolls sent their sons to Jesuit schools on the Continent.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Steven Harris, “Confession-Building, Long-Distance Networks and the Organization of Jesuit Science,” *Early Science and Medicine* 1 (Oct. 1996), 287–318; Steven Harris, “Mapping Jesuit Science: The Role of Travel in the Geography of Knowledge,” in John O’Malley *et al.*, eds., *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto, 1999), 212–40. I am indebted to my colleague Paula Findlen for opportunities to view maps of Kircher’s correspondence network.

⁵⁷ Luca Codignola, “The Holy See and the Conversion of the Indians in French and British North America, 1486–1750,” in Karen Kupperman, ed., *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill, 1995) 195–242, 213.

⁵⁸ Owen Stanwood, “The Protestant Moment: Antipopery, the Revolution of 1688–1689, and the Making of an Anglo-American Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 46 (July 2007), 481–508, esp. 485.

⁵⁹ I arrived at the Catholic population figure by adding the number of Catholics (20,000) in Maryland in 1765 to the number on the eve of Revolution in Philadelphia (1,200)—both figures in Timothy Walch, ed., *Early American Catholicism, 1634–1820: Selected Historical Essays* (New York, 1988), unpaginated introduction (3–4). For American population totals in roughly 1775 see Everts Greene, Virginia Harrington, *et al.*, *American Population before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York, 1932; repr. 1981), 6–7.

⁶⁰ Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY, 1985), 81.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 82. The first permanent Jesuit institution of higher learning in the United States was Georgetown Academy (later a college), founded in 1789. See Kathleen Mahoney, *Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University* (Baltimore, 2003), 11.

Placing early British America in the larger context of the religious republic of letters, in fact, suggests that by comparison with the great Catholic imperial powers of Spain, France, and Portugal, religion in any form played an insignificant part in Protestant Britain's early imperial expansion around the globe. Even the Puritans in the New England colonies made comparatively few efforts to convert the Indians. "Compared to the Iberian experience," writes Luca Codignola, "and even to the more modest French success, whereby New France was virtually kept alive as a colony until the 1650s by the church itself, the practical influence of religion on early English expansion was small and marginal, and Protestant efforts achieved little."⁶²

Alison Games's deeply researched *Web of Empire*—about the many fragile early English forays into a new world of global trade in the years 1560–1660—greatly expands our current knowledge about the activities of religious figures in England's nascent empire. With its global canvas, the book will enable new conversations and comparisons between early Americanists and their early modern European colleagues. Games argues that England was so weak early on that its emissaries—mostly merchants but also chaplains, scholars, ambassadors, and soldiers—purposely cultivated a way of dealing with the world that she calls "cosmopolitanism." This she defines as people's ability "to encounter those unlike themselves with enthusiasm and curiosity" and to "critique their own nation and customs."⁶³ Cosmopolitanism was a learned behavior, she argues, "a posture derived from weakness, and central to English expansion when the kingdom itself was weak."⁶⁴

Although Games treats religion throughout the book, the most systematic appraisal appears in the chapter entitled "The Cosmopolitan Clergy, 1620–1660." English trading outfits such as the Levant Company and East India Company dispatched cadres of learned Protestant ministers to Asian and Mediterranean posts in large part to counter the perceived Jesuit threat. The English "feared the Jesuits above all other religious orders," Games observes, a fear tempered by Protestants' real respect for Jesuit erudition, especially their skills in disputation.⁶⁵ The English sent their best men, a group Games calls "scholar-chaplains." Most of the English chaplains stationed at Istanbul and Smyrna had attended Cambridge University, just as seventy-one percent of the ministers in New England in the 1620s and 1630s were Cambridge men.⁶⁶ But their Protestant numbers were small

⁶² Codignola, "Holy See," 213, quotation at 196.

⁶³ Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660* (New York, 2008), 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 230; "scholar-chaplains" at 231.

by comparison with the armies of Jesuits fanning across the globe: approximately 920 Jesuits participated in the China missions between the sixteenth century and 1800.⁶⁷

What is striking about Games's methodology is that she treats these Protestants first as part of a globalizing imperial project and second as men of the cloth, thereby reversing the usual cart and horse of early American history. Intellectual historians of early America have often put the religious motivations of New England's earliest English settlers first and worked out from there. To take the classic case of Perry Miller, the fact that a New England mind hummed along in a specific place called New England remained first a theological problem ("the wilderness") and only second an imperial problem. Miller's geographies often make more sense as metaphors for intellectual activity than as actual places on a map.⁶⁸ Miller's main business was ideas, the hunger for meaning in a hollow world, what he memorably called the marrow of Puritan divinity. He justified his narrow geographical focus on the New England colonies by arguing that they provided "a laboratory" of "controlled conditions" to see how "the whole" of thought played out in the part. For Miller, the local became the global, the part became the whole, and New England exemplified "the essential characteristics" of "the most importunate problems of the epoch."⁶⁹

By contrast with Perry Miller, Games starts with the global and then goes local. Subsuming the religious category of theology to the imperial category of cosmopolitanism, she points out that the English clergy were so fragmented before 1660 that no single religious vision (let alone a grimly Calvinist New England mind) dominated anywhere in England's early attempts at empire building. Games defines her chaplains less as religiously motivated types than as men who forged a particular brand of cosmopolitanism: "ecumenism, the clerical variation on the merchant's cosmopolitanism."⁷⁰ Famously intolerant of the religions of others around the globe (including the American Indians), these cosmopolitan English clerics nonetheless reached out to the world in other, nonreligious ways, pursuing economic opportunities, governing local laborers, and trying out new social formations.⁷¹

⁶⁷ David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West* (New York, 1999), 37.

⁶⁸ "Northampton was indeed remote, as far from Boston as Kansas City today"; "The way is long from Oxford to Northampton, as far as from the High Street to Main Street." Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA, 1953), 226.

⁶⁹ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1939), ix.

⁷⁰ Games, *Web*, 9–10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Readers will say: this hardly sounds like the New England Puritans, who were not especially known for encountering those unlike themselves with enthusiasm and curiosity. But Games has a place for them as well: among the non-cosmopolitan. She shows that Oliver Cromwell purposely sought intolerant, orthodox New Englanders to colonize Ireland, believing them skilled at forming independent, lay-governed congregations and at quelling internal dissent. “Cromwell sought experienced colonists—but not cosmopolitans,” she writes. “These were, instead, men who preferred stark separations in their worlds, between Christian and heathen, English and Irish, circumspect and profligate, saved (they hoped) and damned. Unlike other travelers, these transplanted puritans from southern New England were not men eager to appreciate the diversity of humanity.” Far from finding in the New England Puritans the seeds of American democracy or anything else so illustrious, she sees them as the obsolescing practitioners of a kind of religious settlement “that was in the process of becoming the most marginalized.”⁷²

The subtitle of Games’s book is “English Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Expansion, 1560–1660,” and among her many achievements is a challenge to historians to think about how to use cosmopolitanism as an analytic tool. What was it? What was it *not*? When was it? Games ventures some answers to these questions. First, she shows how “cosmopolitanism” can expand our vision of early modern history and early America’s place in that narrative. In the specific case of religion, what is gained with her cosmopolitan framework is a glimpse of the Puritans within a larger imperial context: they were not the marquee attraction in the period 1560–1660, but rather bit players in England’s emerging global, mercantile empire. Some might quibble that defining Puritans as “not cosmopolitans” diminishes the other ways in which they arguably were cosmopolitans: their many scholarly links to the Continent, their libraries stacked with polyglot texts, their relentless effort to commune with the minds of the early Church. Here is where scholars of the early modern European republic of letters can usefully contribute their own findings.⁷³ Second, Games offers a time frame for cosmopolitanism, suggesting that it was confined to Britain’s early years of empire building and that over time it was replaced by “racist ideas that called for rigid hierarchies, displacement, separation, and exclusion.”⁷⁴ Other scholars see cosmopolitanism thriving today, as the outpouring of works on cosmopolitanism

⁷² Ibid., 272.

⁷³ See, for example, Margaret Jacobs, *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia, 2006).

⁷⁴ Games, *Web*, 299.

since the 1990s suggests.⁷⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah defines “cosmopolitanism” as the twin ideas “that we have obligations to others” and “that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives,” however different they may be from our own.⁷⁶ He too has his non-cosmopolitans (“counter-cosmopolitans”): like Games’s New England Puritans, they are religious figures, the “neofundamentalists” who embody “universalism without toleration.”⁷⁷ By placing cosmopolitanism far back in time, Games’s book can bring these debates about definition and duration to an audience of historians of early America.

TRANSFORMATION AND CAUSALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

When did the republic of letters end, and why? These are not usually questions American historians ask. For us, the big event of the late eighteenth century is the American Revolution, which banished monarchy and aristocracy and ushered in the modern world’s first successful, long-term republic. The American Revolution had major consequences for American intellectual life, which have been probed in detail. These consequences included the proliferation of books, magazines, and newspapers published under US imprints in the post-Revolutionary era and the self-conscious effort to drum up an “American” nationalist or at least republican sentiment. Everywhere Americans established or nurtured colleges and female academies dedicated to schooling republican citizens. Existing colleges rechristened themselves with republican names: King’s College became Columbia, Queen’s College became Rutgers. Independence from Britain opened new opportunities for hundreds of intellectually ambitious Americans to travel to European universities, museums, churches, and ruins. The new United States witnessed a proliferation of institutions such as museums, clubs, and historical societies dedicated to preserving, promoting, and displaying “American” material and print artifacts, where America was defined as “leading to the United States.”

Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan’s *Men of Letters in the Early Republic* probes the implications of the demanding political conviction of republicanism for early national American intellectuals.⁷⁸ She focuses on the neglected but important early national period (1790–1820), which was like the Cretaceous just before the great meteorite that wiped out the dinosaurs. Old-style polymaths such as

⁷⁵ See, for example, Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, eds., *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, Practice* (Oxford, 2002).

⁷⁶ Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York, 2006), xv.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁷⁸ Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, 2008).

Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson hardly knew what hit them as generalism gave way to specialization and knowledge expanded far beyond the ability of any living person to master. Never again would an American presidential election pit—as it did in 1800—a president of the American Philosophical Society (Jefferson) against a president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Adams). After the shock of revolution came an unexpected new era of viscerally fought party politics. But among the fading Jefferson-style polymaths flourished a vigorous new species: the first professional men of letters in America, who earned their living with their pens, editing journals, founding clubs, publishing novels.

Kaplan traces the quixotic efforts of a group of early national American men (and a few women) of letters to amputate their own intellectual aspirations from what they perceived to be the metastasizing inanities of the new party politics. Kaplan calls these men and women “cultural strivers” who “believed they had something to offer to Europe as well as much to learn from it.”⁷⁹ The striver-in-chief was Elihu Hubbard Smith, energetic member of the Friendly Club in New York, but there were many others who yearned—as Kaplan nicely puts it—to “escape from the new tyranny of one’s endless political relevance and responsibility.”⁸⁰ Kaplan, who is as much a literary scholar as a historian, is at her best capturing with nuance and sophistication the intellectual style of her group of self-described men and women of letters, which was alternately self-glorifying and self-pitying.

Yet she might have probed more forcefully the transatlantic implications of her subject. She is aware of the republic of letters beyond the United States but not particularly inclined to explore American connections to that world. Kaplan states that her men of letters saw themselves not only as US citizens but also as citizens of the “larger republic of letters.”⁸¹ She shows how their panting Anglophilia endured well beyond the Revolutionary era and that American men of letters “rejected the idea of ‘Americanness’ as a meaningful trait.”⁸² There are excellent paragraphs on the particular threat of the French Revolution and the challenge of Haiti; the English philosopher Edmund Burke and the French revolutionary Volney make a few appearances. Yet the larger intellectual world—not just of people but especially of ideas—that made her men of letters objectively republican (as opposed to, say, monarchical) tends to fade from view.

This is important because finally we are left with the questions whether and how politics figures in the republic of letters. The US was among the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁸¹ Ibid., 67.

⁸² Ibid., 200.

first great examples of what we might call sustainable republicanism in the republic of letters. It was a perfect test case for how intellectual life proceeds when freed from monarchical suppressions (or, depending on your perspective, how intellectual life proceeds when deprived of generous monarchical patronage). Kaplan poignantly reminds us that her group of American men of letters has been entirely forgotten, except by academic specialists, and she is to be commended for resurrecting them sympathetically here, with all their hand-wringing and nay-saying about American politics. But we are left with the strange conundrum that the man who gave us the most acute and memorable diagnosis of what democracy in America meant for the life of the mind was not an early national man of letters but a French aristocrat living in a monarchy: Alexis de Tocqueville.

In fact, seen in the broader context of the republic of letters, the specific influences of the American Revolution and republicanism on the deep structures of US intellectual life become more difficult to assert with confidence. These changes include the decline of the polymath as an intellectual ideal; the increasing specialization of intellectual functions and deeper, more methodologically self-conscious research into more precise questions; the collapse of an international language of scholarship (Latin) and the rise of multiple vernaculars; the rising number of colleges and universities and their absorption of intellectual functions that had previously been more widely distributed throughout the republic of letters, such as research, learned libraries, and collecting; the institutional democratization of intellectual life in the form of female and workingmen's academies; the proliferation of learned degrees and their increasing use in the certification and promotion of scholars and scholarship; and the gradual shift in scholarly patronage from the early modern aristocracy to nineteenth-century industrial plutocrats and finally to the modern era's government agencies.

All around Europe and the Americas in the decades after 1800, the pre-national intellectual world of the republic of letters gave way to the international intellectual world of increasingly powerful, nationally based institutions, patronage, and reward structures. For Americans the possibilities for intensive engagement with non-English intellectual centers actually increased during the nineteenth century as London's relative importance dwindled. American missionaries, humanists and scientists fanned out into the Pacific, South America, and the Middle East, publishing "American" works about these areas and in some cases establishing a scholarly institutional presence there. The most influential new center by the late nineteenth century was, of course, Germany, whose academic traditions spurred a wholesale transformation of American educational and scholarly ideals. Gradually the United States itself moved from the periphery of the republic of letters to become a major intellectual center in its own right in the twentieth century.

Did all these changes mark the end of the republic of letters? The answer depends on whom you ask. For historians of early modern Europe, the cutoff for the republic of letters is usually the French Revolution. American historians whose expertise lies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have made a case that some form of the republic of letters was still alive and well and living in the Gilded Age and Progressive eras.⁸³ Their works have shown that features of the older republic of letters remain: a shared culture of honor and reputation, a desire to reach a broad audience and not just a narrow slice of professionals. As scholars we often still feel part of a global republic of letters, though one of course radically changed from the early modern era.

In the end, we are left with the basic questions of definition and causality that define every historical inquiry. What, in fact, was the republic of letters, both to people in the past who felt part of this ephemeral world, and to us, now able with new tools to probe a lost world with greater specificity than ever before? This essay cannot, of course, answer these questions, but simply ask them for a new generation of historians embarking on a vastly changed archival landscape.

⁸³ Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 168, 170; Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York, 2000).