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THE MOVING WEST:

THE FORMATION OF THE AMERICAN MIDWEST THROUGH WESTWARD EXPANSION

By

Erin L. Presson

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of Washington University
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE: EARLY TRANS-ALLEGHENY SETTLEMENT AND THE NORTHWEST TERRITORY.....	12
PART TWO: THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE AND THE “FAR WEST”	32
PART THREE: THE “FAR WEST” AND THE “NORTHWEST” BECOME THE “MIDDLE WEST”	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	83

The Moving West: The Formation of the American Midwest through Westward Expansion

The Webster's New World College Dictionary defines the Midwest as the "region of the north-central U.S. between the Rocky Mountains and the eastern border of Ohio, north of the Ohio River and the southern borders of Kansas and Missouri."¹ The characteristics of the "Midwest" are there: It is not a part of a significant mountain range, it is above the Mason-Dixon Line, it is neither the West nor the North nor the South nor the East. It did not secede from the Union during the Civil War, nor was it a part of the original 13 colonies. But how does a region forge an identity when it is more defined by what it *isn't* than by what it is?

Government directive and literary interpretation might explain how the giant swath of land that covers more than 1.5 million square miles could be America's largest, yet most loosely defined, region. The quick westward movement of American settlement first labeled the region as the "West" but then amended that modifier once more western lands were found on the other side of the Rockies. Changing the descriptor for the area changed the way it was perceived in the American collective imagination – a perception that emerged from the late 18th and early 19th centuries and continues today.

The prerogative of this thesis is to trace the beginning of the modern definition of the Midwest back to its origin during the Westward Expansion period beginning in the late 18th century and extending through the mid-19th century. The challenge here is that the Midwest,

¹ "Midwest", *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed., 2002, 912.

when not being defined by the dictionary, is an amorphous midsection of the country that is broadly defined and without strong regional identity. This characterization includes everything north of the Mason-Dixon Line, west to Denver, east to Pittsburgh, and south of the Canadian border – a regional boundary that is unmatched in size and scope in the U.S. The historical evolution of the region, perhaps, holds the answers. So what *is* the Midwest? Land-wise, it is a region made of puzzle pieces from territories that came from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Culturally, it is a region that is most often thought of as a pure America – a pastoral place where life is simpler and people are more honest. The varied names given to the Midwest – the Great Plains, the heartland, the bread basket – create a specific image of a pastoral place whose main attribute was agriculture. This nomenclature preserves the stereotype of the Midwest as a portion of the country that harbors honest, hardworking Americans, like L. Frank Baum’s Dorothy, Aunt Em, and Uncle Henry as the common perception of Middle Americans; they are “polite, friendly...bright-eyed...a little naïve, and live on a farm...simple, hard-working.”

Agriculture would become a trademark characteristic of the Midwest. Part of what makes the current connotation of the word “Midwest” so uninteresting is that it conjures up a picture of an affectless plain devoid of trees, hills or anything of visual interest. (A drab term like “Great American Desert,” invented within the studied time frame, as a descriptor did not help the cause, either.) According to a study conducted by James R. Shortridge, 62 percent of respondents from a survey in which participants were asked to define key terms that reminded

them of the Midwest connoted the region with agriculture.² Fewer than 5 percent equated the region with industry and urbanization. Respondents not from the states defined in the survey as Middle Western (i.e., Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) closely linked the word “flat” to the region. The roots of these stereotypes about the Midwest grow from these early accounts of the West and particularly the prairies of the Far West across the Mississippi. At a time when travel literature was only recently becoming available for the new American territory and was slow to be produced, the indelible images of outstretched plains attached themselves to the American imagination.³

The shaky foundation of the region’s history does not help its emergence as a strong regional identity. Kent C. Ryden, a regional historian, posited that “the Midwest is not marked by the perpetually refracting presence of a dramatic, Southern-scale past. Instead, it is defined by the absence of a past, a sort of temporal emptiness.”⁴ This is not to imply that things never happened in the history of the modern Midwest, as the Great Plains states of Kansas and Missouri were key in the battle for slave-owning states in their admittance to the Union. Bisecting the region, the Mississippi River was the focal point of the Louisiana Purchase – a transaction that, by happenstance, granted the U.S. half its then landmass and procured the trans-Mississippi portions of the modern Midwest. Missouri was the launch site for many

² James R. Shortridge. *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*. (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 78.

³ Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, 2, 78.

⁴ Kent C. Ryden. "Writing the Midwest: History, Literature and Regional Identity." *Geographical Review* 89, no. 4. Oct. 1999, 513.

Oregon-bound pioneers, as well as Lewis and Clark's journey up the mighty Missouri River, that it holds a place in the American imagination as the Gateway to the West. The Great Lakes, like the Mississippi, proved valuable for commercial traffic between the East Coast and the western territories. There were several wars against European nations and Native Americans in these spaces for control of the land and its invaluable resources. There is history here, if not the romanticized histories bestowed upon the Wild West and the Puritan East Coast.

History and geography are impossible to separate, an idea especially pertinent when studying the formation of a region and its identity. To have an historical event, the event must have a place, and the significance of a place is given to it by an historical event.⁵ The etymology the 19th century, however, did not label the term "Midwest" definitively until after the Civil War. While the nation moved toward the California coastline, these areas were known as the Northwest or the Far West or simply the West. The Midwest was being forged through these etymological changes. What began as the "Northwest" (Illinois, Indiana, Ohio) became the "Old Northwest," as more lands were settled; the "Far West" (Missouri, Kansas, Iowa) became the "West" until the country's settlement moved sufficiently onto the West Coast. This swath of land between the Rockies and the Appalachians settled for dowdy terms such as the "Great American Desert" or "Old Northwest." Americans of the 19th century – even citizens of the East Coast, which was once a product of the "westward expansion" of Europe – were accustomed to the constant expansion and rebirth of democratic civilization with the advancing frontier line. After all, in 1790 the population center of the country was in eastern Maryland, but that center

⁵ D.W. Meinig, "The Continuous Shaping of America: A Prospectus for Geographers and Historians," *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 5 (Dec. 1978), 1205.

point moved, straight west from Washington, westward at the rate of 5 miles per year.⁶ By 1860, the midpoint of the country was well into Ohio.

To say that Westward Expansion was always in the collective DNA of the early American settlers is an understatement. In fact, it was a kind of westward expansion out of Europe that brought explorers and imperialists to the New World in the first place. The myth of westward movement traces back to the works of Homer, and even in antiquity, the mythic West was the “natural goal of man’s last journey.”⁷ Dating from very early civilizations, the west was seen at times as the location of Elysium in classical Greece; as the combination of both death and happiness in ancient Egypt; or even the place where all seas flow and the destination of the sun’s journey during daylight hours. Basically, all European civilizations had some kind of fable in place that made the West be a kind of Promised Land. The first Christian British explorers sailed west out of the U.K. with a Bible verse, Matthew 24:27, as their guide to their western destiny: “For as the lightening cometh out of the east, and shineth on the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be.”⁸ As the grand “discoverer” of the country, Christopher Columbus’s philosophy was close to that of the Greeks, in that he thought all seas move with the sun from east to west.⁹ He was, after all, in search of a western route to India and instead stumbled upon what he termed as the “West Indies.” With these myriad philosophies in mind –

⁶ Harlow Lindley, "Western Travel, 1800-1820," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Sept. 1919), 167.

⁷ Loren Baritz, "The Idea of the West," *The American Historical Review*, 66, no. 3 (April 1961), 620.

⁸ Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire*, Translated by Herbert H. Rowen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995), 60.

⁹ Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire*, 54.

and with the hope of the Promised Land awaiting them – the westward expansion of Europe onto the shores of North America began.

To study the historical geography of this enormous region, this paper must address the historical events that led to the inflection in regional identity of the Midwest from the untouched wilds to the land of unbridled possibility to the colonized, fertile farmland on the eastern edge of the actual West. This is an exploration in three parts: two periods of acquisition followed by a period of regional integration. Part One is a study of the first major land acquisition of Midwestern lands, the Northwest Ordinance, and how the writers and explorers of the period defined that space as something that was both new and Western, but also as something that showed the early signs of the boundaries of the modern Midwest. Part Two analyzes how writers and explorers understood the trans-Mississippi lands of the Louisiana Purchase in relation to established East Coast society and the growing trans-Appalachian lands east of the Mississippi. In Part Three, the sections of the two land acquisitions, in the face of western colonization pushing to the Pacific coast, show the first signs of coalescing to form the American region we now identify as the Midwest.

These parts span the late 18th and the early-mid 19th centuries, as Part One begins just before the American Revolution and Part Three ends roughly with the California Gold Rush in 1849. At this early period of American region-building, the Midwest as we know it today does not exist in its full, modern expression, but the attributes for the region take root and exist in the written accounts of the region's explorers and travelers. The first two parts are arranged thematically, albeit with a loose chronology, and part three is written chronologically, in order

to follow the changes in attitude and nomenclature in this era. This paper ends at the moment in time where the Midwest – having through history been known by a plethora of names – begins to be named as “middle” instead of an iteration of “Western.” Specifically, the nascent Midwest began to take shape once Americans definitively assigned a West to the farthest western border of the continent, which allowed the intervening area to be understood as something “other.”

It is difficult to find scholarship on the Midwest as a standalone region, as most cultural historians do not differentiate the Midwest from the West in its history. One scholar who is nearly singular in his efforts, James R. Shortridge, wrote extensively about the perception of the Midwest through the eyes of modern American society. His book *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* addresses the modern stereotypes of the rural, agricultural Midwest and how they weathered changes in American society through widespread industrialization. An advantage of Shortridge’s work is that he conducted his own quantitative research about what Midwesterners think of the Midwest and how people living in other American regions perceive this region. Another benefit of Shortridge’s work is that his definition of the Midwest is the same as the dictionary definition, so for the purposes of this paper, there is no disparity between the states he writes about and the region heretofore covered. However, Shortridge spends relatively little time discussing the history of the region and how the Midwest grew from parcels of uninhabited land into a section of the United States, so he therefore does not directly address the genesis of the Midwest’s unique history. To him, the Midwest was a modern construct, defined around the turn of the 20th century when the term “Midwest” became fashionable as the region hit its zenith in popularity, industry and population.

Any student of Westward Expansion is remiss if he or she does not incorporate Frederick Jackson Turner's seminal work *The Frontier in American History*. For a paper on the Midwest, Turner's book is important on a few levels. First, Turner was a native of Wisconsin, so his perspective on Westward Expansion and American regionality never forgets a Midwestern axis. Much of this paper centers on the first three sentences he wrote in a chapter titled "The Middle West": "American sectional nomenclature is still confused. Once 'the West' described the whole region beyond the Alleghenies; but the term has hopelessly lost its definiteness. The rapidity of the spread of settlement has broken down old usage, and as yet no substitute has been generally accepted."¹⁰ He also defines the states of the Midwest in the same way that Shortridge does, so between these two works, there is still a unified sense of which states are Midwestern. Ultimately, though, Turner's opinion of what really unites the states of the Midwest – states that he readily admits are spacious and diverse – is industry; given that he wrote this book in 1921, he notes 20th-century industries such as coal, iron, and railroads that unify the region. (These same industries would ultimately unite in betraying the region, too, once the demand for such products ceased.) In his study of the Midwest, though, he stops short of assigning meaning to the integration of the land of the Northwest Ordinance and the Louisiana Purchase into an American region through the advancement of population to the West Coast.

The structure of portions of this paper is modeled after another crucial work in the understanding of American psychology of western movement, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*:

¹⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 126.

The American West as Symbol and Myth.¹¹ The book is predominately structured thematically , but within the themes there is a loose chronology. This thesis notes what is “Western” in order to assign meaning to how the existence of those symbols creates its own kind of connotation. His method is important to this paper for the opposite reason, as the absence of Western symbols is significant to the Midwestern identity. Smith, through literature of the era, studies these symbols and employs them in a way that they can be defining elements of a region. The shortfall with using this work as the foundation for a project like this is that Smith does not specifically address the Midwest as something separate from the West of the Westward Expansion years. Also, in his analysis of the symbols and resultant myths of the West, he often employs the use of fictional characters to illuminate the mythic products of the American imagination. This paper only focuses on the written accounts of travelers and explorers of the period and the myths and symbols that they themselves create.

Why, though, is it important to study regionalism? Really, it is only noteworthy because of the importance that the American psychological consciousness has assigned to it. The question “Who am I?” can often begin to be answered by the questions “Where am I?” or “Where do I belong?”¹² This identification can be as broad as the country in which you live, or it can be narrowed down to mean a space as small as your neighborhood, or, within that neighborhood, if you live in single-family or multi-family housing. Where and how a person cultivates that sense of “home” assigns to what specific micro-region they belong. Within these

¹¹ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950).

¹² Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon, "A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region," *The Sociological Quarterly*, y 34, no. 1 (1993), 112.

communities, everything from the denseness of the population to the myths and heroes that arise from shared stories in the society works to create the identity of the people in the community. National – or , in this case, American – identity, though, is the most “fundamental and inclusive of collective identities,” because it is an ingrained state of being that is cultivated from natural continuity (i.e., preexisting ethnic identity), conscious manipulation (i.e., a culture’s myths and symbolism) and – perhaps most importantly – a culture’s need for community, which gels the theory together.¹³ After all, the search for a collective psychology is moot if the community does not attach to these three factors.

This thesis ultimately accepts that the Midwest is a region without a strong unifying identity. Settlers, travelers and explorers, as this research suggests, define the West with ease, but that definition moved with them and the frontier line to the Pacific Coast. This left all the former Wests of the United States scrambling for a semblance of a regional identity. With this in mind, the lasting definition of the Midwest was that of social and political loss: loss of characteristically Western life and culture, and loss of the ability to own slaves. Dramatic changes had to happen to turn a place like Ohio from the nexus of the hopes for the future of American civilization to a place that settlers were merely passing through in order to reach more desirable lands to the West. Written accounts from these early Western periods point to the ambiguity and fluidity of the Midwestern collective identity. This paper hopes to pinpoint the region’s genesis.

¹³ Karen A. Cerulo, "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997), 391.

PART ONE: EARLY TRANS-ALLEGHENY SETTLEMENT AND THE NORTHWEST TERRITORY

Understanding how the Midwest became the middle ground between eastern and western cultures and societies requires insight into the era in which the easternmost expanses of the Midwest, in present day, were the westernmost lands of the United States. Through legislation that gave the U.S. control over the space north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi, the perimeter of the embryonic nation bowed west into land that had only vaguely been surveyed and was only populated by solitary fur traders, most of whom were not American. This acquisition was the first part of a two-piece jigsaw puzzle that came together to create the regional boundary of what we now know as the Midwest. However, before American culture could create the Midwest of today, the eastern portion of the region – the part discussed in this chapter – existed as the mythic West, or the frontier land of cowboys and Indians that would forever be analogous to a West that certainly is no longer associated with places as far east as Ohio. In the late 1700s, the Ohio River valley was the stereotypical West, and the accounts of explorers and very early settlers planted the seed of the modern Midwest.

Exploration and curiosity about what lay west of the Appalachian Mountains started in advance of the American Revolution. Dating back to the 17th century, French explorer Robert de La Salle scouted inland rivers – particularly the Mississippi – of the United States, which gave France, Britain, and Spain an idea of the great resource that existed in the middle of the continent. Throughout the 18th century, hunters and trappers ventured into the Mississippi and Ohio valley and, outside of a few lonely military outposts of both France and England, they largely comprised the Anglo population of the very early Midwest. European explorers in the

17th and 18th centuries claimed the river for the imperialistic countries of Spain, England and France, and New Orleans, having always been a thriving port city, was controlled by both France and Spain at different points in the 18th century. Although the Anglo population was sparse west of the Alleghenies, small enclaves of population, New Orleans included, dotted the river banks. New Orleans was a shipping town at the mouth of the Mississippi, but others were French-established military forts and settlements to assert French control over the river.

The region had not been properly mapped nor settled, but the controlling interests in Europe knew what was important: The Ohio (or Beautiful) River connected to the Mississippi, which connected to the Gulf of Mexico through the port of New Orleans. A very early temporary settler from Holland, Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, added to the information known from La Salle about the Mississippi Valley of the 18th century by publishing a book that set some high expectations of what a settler could find in the region. In the English-language version published in 1774, he quickly noted in his travels that the Mississippi River divided the country into halves: "It is proper to observe, that in going down the river from St. Antony's Fall, the right hand is the west, the left is the east." This conception still exists but was especially prescient so early on in the exploration of the continent. He described the intersections of the rivers that flow into the Mississippi, and he noted that the land to the east – or, the territory that the U.S. government would acquire in the late 18th century – was quite "natural and striking... the lands are so high in the neighborhood of the river..." Looking at both sides, he opined "both sides of the river had their several advantages; but that the West side is better watered; appeared to be more fruitful both in minerals, and in what relates to agriculture; for which last it seems much more adapted than the East side." The eastern bank had a high bluff

that “would have been a very commodious situation for a fine palace”; the western bank, a “small hill, all bare and parched... the bottom of the hill was not so barren, and the adjacent country fertile as in other parts.” Overall of the central Mississippi Valley, du Pratz thought it all “the more beautiful and fertile the country.”¹⁴ This narrative gave an early voice to the hopes and expectations anointed to the American West – more specifically, the West on both banks of the Mississippi – well before the land was even officially American.

Gaining the land east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio came in two stages, the first of which resulted from the resolution of the French and Indian War. The French argued that per La Salle’s navigations of the interior of North America and the placement of lead plates by a mid-century French militant on the Ohio, they were the rightful owners of the land.¹⁵ The English referred back to the charter that the Virginia Company received in 1606 for the area, which deeded the land to Great Britain. In 1763, when the two countries stopped fighting in the Appalachian regions of the U.S. and Canada, they signed the Treaty of Paris, which officially granted Canada and the French lands in the modern-day U.S. to Britain. The treaty called for a dividing line between the countries’ territories “drawn along the middle of the river Mississippi from its source to the river Iberville,” which ceded the western side to France the eastern side to America.¹⁶

¹⁴ Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina* (London: T. Becket, 1774), 110, 111, 123, 132, 133, 126.

¹⁵ Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Random House, 2004), 5.

¹⁶ Albert Bushnell Hart and Edward Channing, *Extracts from the Treaty of Paris 1763* (New York: A. Lovell & Co., 1892), 7.

With this treaty, there was a western boundary. But during the era of the Revolution, the Allegheny Mountains created not only a physical boundary but a mental one as well. The mountains conveniently created the first boundary by which writers could start compartmentalizing and differentiating American regions. A short time after the Revolution, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the Allegheny Mountains were “in fact the spine of the country between the Atlantic on one side, and the Missisipi and St. Laurence on the other.”¹⁷ Jefferson was not the first writer of the late 18th century to presume that the Alleghenies divided the country into eastern and western halves. The common theory of the time was that the Alleghenies, or “endless mountains,” cleanly delineated the east, or civilization, from the west, or wilderness. East Coast settlement, as was frequently noted, had a width of about 200 miles westward from the coast.¹⁸ A few years before the American Revolution, Thomas Pownall, one-time governor of Massachusetts, posited that the “continent of America” could be divided into two sections according to the “two very different sorts of circumstances to be found in each tract of the country.”¹⁹ Pownall claimed that, to the colonists’ minds, the country split into the “high level plane” west of the mountains and the large slope down to the ocean on the east.

Even then, Pownall admitted that this worldview might have been simplistic – “By a level plane, I must not be understood, as if I thought there were no hills, or vallies, or mountains in it” – but this philosophy was an attempt at creating two different, uniquely American regions, the western of which he knew to be flat and the other as mountainous and

¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Pritchard and Hall, 1788), 17.

¹⁸ Arthur Young, *Observations on the Present State of the Waste Lands of Great Britain* (London: W. Nicoll, 1773), 9.

¹⁹ Thomas Pownall, *The Administration of the British Colonies* (London: J. Walter, 1774), 178.

sloping. After all, to the European the landmass that created the continent of North America was “such an immense territory,” at which point it would stand to reason that creating regions of a more manageable size would be desirable for early settlers. To commence the understanding of the western lands as a region, the simplest thing was to create a two-part dichotomy of West versus East. Arthur Young, a British writer, laid bare the difference between the regions: “[I]t is necessary to describe the *territory of the Ohio*, as it appears in the writings... We are told that all this country, from the Alligany mountains to the Mississippi is the very reverse of the sea coast.”²⁰

Another barrier, albeit a mental one, stood in between a colonist’s ability to think of the frontier in modern-day Ohio as a place considered inhabitable by Euro-Americans. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan described in his book *Topophilia* the sentiments that plagued early westward movers.²¹ In the late-18th century, the settlements and towns that had been made east of the Appalachians were considered “sacred.” The wilderness, or the West, that existed outside the town’s civilized borders was considered “profane.” Scary, thinly populated, and teeming with Native Americans angry about the use of their land, each movement toward a westward longitude was a step outside a sacred place and into a place that was deemed dirty, uncouth and dangerous. Pownall implored that the British reading his book would consider the two halves of America: one being the East Coast, which was “capable of culture, and is entirely settled,” and one that is the wilderness. “The [wilderness] is nothing but cover for vermin and

²⁰ Young, *Observations on the Present State of the Waste Lands of Great Britain*, 14.

²¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 104.

rapine, a den for wild beasts; and the more wild savages who wander in it.”²² The fear of the wilderness was so overwhelming that in the earliest stages of westward movement in New England, the General Court of Massachusetts passed a law that forced inhabitants of so-called “frontier towns” to stay on the land – punishable by forfeiture of land or by imprisonment.²³ Tuan’s socio-cultural theory that frontier spaces remained profane until a critical mass of settlers and civic amenities were available proved true in all stages of frontier development until the mid-19th century, so this methodology will be applied to other sacred and profane places during the settlement of the modern Midwest.

Of the things aside from established settlement that separated the West from the East, economic potential played a role in differentiating the two, and the early descriptions of the land due west of America’s growing cities established the space that would become the Midwest as the “land of vast fertility” of Young’s assessment. Jedidiah Morse, a geographer, wrote of the spaces in the Ohio Valley as “the finest and most fertile countries in the world.”²⁴ If there was one major hope of Europeans and the East Coast citizens, it was that the new western territory would be the most abundant area of the country. Even of the basically unsettled plains of the Illinois country that lay in the crook of the Mississippi and the Ohio, one surveyor said, “The soil of this country in general is very rich and luxuriant; it produces all sorts of European grains, hops, hemp, flax, cotton, and tobacco, and the European fruits come to

²² Pownall, *The Administration of the British Colonies*, 185.

²³ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 42.

²⁴ Jedidiah Morse, *Geography Made Easy* (New Haven: Meigs, Bowen and Dana, 1784), 66.

great perfection.”²⁵ “[We] all agree that no part of the territory belonging to the United States combines itself so many advantages, whether of salubrity, fertility, or variety of productions,” wrote Manasseh Cutler about the lands in modern-day Ohio.²⁶ In a sentence that described the perception of the Midwest today, Cutler noted the western lands as “The great level plains which one meets with here and which form natural prairies... These plains have a soil as rich as can be imagined and which with very little labor can be devoted to any species of cultivation which one wishes to give it.”²⁷ Similar to the overblown ideal of the fertility of the region, other writers attributed this territory as being equally outrageous weather-wise: the space has “a dry and clear air, and a serene sky, where the storms, tempests, and hurricanes of America are unknown.”²⁸

These kinds of claims, though, could still be made because the land was still, essentially, unsettled. English surveyor Philip Pittman spent five years on the Mississippi in the mid-18th century, and he wrote that the European settlements on the river were merely comprehending the Mississippi Valley. High expectations existed because the land west of the Alleghenies could only be traveled via the rivers, because the “continent of America, as it really is; a wilderness of woods and mountains, incapable of land carriage in its present natural wrought form.” For commerce and for settlement, the rivers were everything. The Mississippi, though, was, with the exception of New Orleans, basically unsettled; Americans, both citizens and politicians,

²⁵ Philip Pittman, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi* (London: J. Nourse, 1770), 51.

²⁶ Manasseh Cutler, *Ohio in 1788* (Columbus: A.H. Smythe, 1888), 37

²⁷ Cutler, *Ohio in 1788*, 39.

²⁸ Young, *Observations on the Present State of the Waste Lands of Great Britain*, 26.

knew the river existed generally did not know much else. Pittman noted “there are people still existing, who pretend to have been” to the headwaters, and he described St. Louis in one paragraph as an outpost that had only been in existence for six years, consisted of 40 houses, and subsisted only on trade with the Indians of the Missouri River.²⁹ With the Mississippi only known as the furthest westward boundary of the nation, attention turned to the Ohio, which was the thoroughfare destined to change the lands of the west. Young noted that the river’s access was “a matter of great importance; for if the country on the Ohio, how rich and pleasant soever, is unconnected from the sea... for the importation of manufactures, and with the sea for the export of staples raised, would be impracticable, and of course, the whole country entirely useless.”

Like the seemingly endless miles of cultivatable land, water was a powerful motivator for settlement of the Midwest, and the waterways also suggested a kind of sectionalism for the otherwise unbroken area west of the Alleghenies. Pownall noticed that the western lands were well-covered in various rivers, but that these rivers made the intervening land “(detached from, and independent of each other,) into many separate detached tracts... the settlements therefore on this tract of country, would be naturally, as they are actually, divided into numbers of little, weak, unconnected, independent governments.”³⁰ In addition to the rivers, Pownall also mentioned the Great Lakes as a region of both importance and cohesion. “How the watery element claims and holds dominion over this extent of land; that the great lakes which lie upon its bosom on one hand, and the great river Mississippi and the multitude of waters which run

²⁹ Pittman, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi*, 1.

³⁰ Pownall, *The Administration of the British Colonies*, 184-185, 182-183.

into it, form there a communication, -- and alliance or dominion of the watrey element, that commands throughout the whole – that these great lakes appear to be *the throne*, the *centre of a dominion...*”

Dividing the land with rivers and mountains was an adequate step toward the sectionalization of the western United States into disparate regions, and the divisions remain into current day. Two rivers, the Mississippi and the Ohio, and the Great Lakes created the boundaries of the United States’ newest land procurement. The second crucial stage in the land acquisition to the formation of the Midwest came in the form of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. To make sense of the land that now lie to the west, the Continental Congress met to devise a plan for apportioning the trans-Allegheny land for settlement. For this, the Continental Congress established the Ordinance of 1787, also known as “An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States Northwest of the River Ohio.” Also called the Northwest Ordinance, it was a piece of legislation that not only outlined the way in which this frontier land would be incorporated into the established states of the east, but also laid the political foundation for the qualities that would eventually make the modern Midwest distinct from its surrounding regions. It established the western lands as their own territory and not an extension of East Coast states. After all, Jefferson described Virginia’s borders pre-Ordinance as stretching to the confluence of the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers. Because any states established out of the Ordinance land could not share a name or a government with the East Coast states, the new land, if it had not already temporally done so, separated itself from the rest of the established country politically as well.

Perhaps most importantly, though, a provision in this Northwest Ordinance over a divisive social issue established another socio-political dichotomy between the territory between the rivers and some of the original states. The Ordinance outlawed slavery in the new Northwest Territory by proclaiming: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said Territory, otherwise than in crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."³¹ The battle over slavery in the U.S. had hardly begun, but this ordinance marked an important point in history, which would divide the current Midwest that lies east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio: A state becomes less Midwestern if it is historically viewed as a slave state.³² This philosophy became clearer during the Civil War, at which point the actual secession of states denotes either allegiance to the South or to another category, which was, in this case, the Midwest.

Once the Continental Congress ratified the Northwest Ordinance, the citizens of the United States had a formalized, wholly American territory to mold, and the area started gaining population. All along the Ohio's banks, stripes of civilization began to form, each with a different provenance from the country's original eastern states. Until the early part of the 19th century, the current state of Ohio would harbor most of the incoming population.³³ New England populated the eastern regions of modern Ohio. The Mid-Atlantic states filled in what is now the Cincinnati region, and the upland South states crept into what is now southern Indiana

³¹ "The Ordinance of 1787," In *The Constitutions of Ohio: Amendments, and Proposed Amendments*, edited by Isaac Franklin Patterson (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1787), 52.

³² Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, 106.

³³ Beverley W. Bond Jr, "American Civilization Comes to the Old Northwest," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (June 1932), 3.

and Southern Illinois. This created, rightly so, a varied and motley society, as the Eastern cultures combined to make something culturally original. The hunters and trappers living off the land tempered the urbane Bostonians who came to govern and settle there. To the easterners, this meant disorder; even Jefferson commented that Westerners were “halfway between savages and tractable people.”³⁴ Written by a Cincinnati-dweller, Westerners had “a vigor, an energy, a recklessness of manner and form, but a racy freshness of matter, which smacks strongly of our peculiar character and position.”³⁵

Mixing Eastern and pioneer sensibilities, the personality of the Midwest’s settlers defined itself as different from the outset of permanent settlement in the region. This was apparent from the men who peopled the first lasting colony on the Ohio, named Marietta. A group of 48 men from the Ohio Company – an organization founded to help facilitate settlement in the Western Territory – established Marietta, Ohio at the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio rivers. According to the Superintendent of Affairs for the Ohio Company Rufus Putnam, the folks who had set up camp to make Marietta a reality comprised the only white families living in modern-day Ohio.³⁶ George Washington referred to the Marietta project in correspondence to a friend: “No colony in America was ever settled under such favorable auspices, as that which has just commenced at the Muskingum. Information, property, and strength, will be its characteristics. I know many of the settlers personally, and that there never

³⁴ Robert P. Swierenga, "The Settlement of the Old Northwest: Ethnic Pluralism in a Featureless Plain," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9, no. 1 (1989), 74.

³⁵ Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*. 15.

³⁶ Rufus Putnam, *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence*,. Edited by Rowena Buell (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1903), 107.

were men better calculated to promote the welfare of such a community."³⁷ From this planned group, the population included carpenters, blacksmiths, surveyors, boat builders and "common workmen." Washington knew some of the Marietta workers personally, because many of the new recruits from the Ohio Company were Revolutionary War veterans who were too poor to stay in East Coast society or the sons of Revolutionary veterans, their fathers hobbled by military service and unable to embark on a western adventure.³⁸

Marietta, being a carefully planned city from which to facilitate an organized land-grab for Ohio-region lands, was merely the first in a region soon to be bursting with speculators, opportunists and all varieties of emigrant looking for a new life in the West. These places, as they came to be, were populated by individualists and lacked the stratified social structure and entrenched institutions of the East Coast states.³⁹ Those unaccustomed to frontier life went dejected back to the East Coast. Colonel John May, an official sent to apportion town lots within Marietta, described attrition from the work team: "A number of poor devils – five in all – took their departure homeward this morning. They came from home moneyless and brainless, and have returned as they came."⁴⁰ Other writers contemporary to Marietta lumped pioneers into a similar, inconsiderate group. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur wrote a monograph in 1782 called *Letters from an American Farmer*, which defined this kind of American: the pioneer.

³⁷ George Washington, *Writings of George Washington*,. Edited by Lawrence B. Evans (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 510.

³⁸ Jacob Burnet, *Notes on the Early Settlement of the North-western Territory*. (Cincinnati: Derby, Bradley & Co., 1847), 42.

³⁹ Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Contours of Power in a Frontier Town: Marietta, Ohio, 1788-1803," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (1986), 104.

⁴⁰ John May, *Journal and Letters of Col. John May of Boston*, (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1873), 59-67.

“There, remote from the power of example and check of shame, many families exhibit the most hideous parts of society. ... In that space, prosperity will polish some, vice and law will drive off the rest, who, uniting again with others like themselves, will recede still farther, making room for more industrious people, who will finish their improvements... [and] will change, in a few years, that hitherto-barbarous country into a fine, fertile, well-regulated district. Such is our progress, such is the march of the Europeans toward the interior parts of this continent. In all societies, there are off-casts. This impure pare serves as our precursors or pioneers.”

This type of American, to Crèvecoeur, was bold but rough – obviously an important part of American westward advancement, but perhaps someone he’d rather not be or associate with. Furthermore of the pioneer kind, Crèvecoeur noted: “[Man] cannot live in solitude, he must belong to some community, bound by some ties, however imperfect.”⁴¹

River travel, as it had been throughout the young history of the U.S., was predominant, but the inland reaches of this newly acquired territory remained difficult for travel and largely “profane.” George Washington himself, who explored the Ohio River pre-Revolution, pointed out the obstacles of being in such untamed territory: “The land in the [the] western country, or that on the Ohio, like all others, has its advantages and disadvantages. The neighborhood of the savages, and the difficulty of transportation, were the great objections.”⁴² An East Coast farmer in the early 1790s “had received many proposals to quit his little farm and go to the Ohio, where the soil was more grateful and infinitely easier to cultivate, but very wisely, had rejected all such proposals, for many of his neighbors who had gone there, heartily repented their change, and some had returned nearly ruined.”⁴³ Explorer Francis Baily wrote “We were

⁴¹ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: Thomas Davies and Lockyer Davis, 1783), 57, 271.

⁴² Washington, *Writings of George Washington*, 510.

⁴³ Lindor, “Poor Ned: A Historiette,” *The Massachusetts Magazine* (September 1792), 560.

travelling without any other guide than what little knowledge of the country the men had acquired by hunting over it. ... I could not but with pleasure behold with what expedition the pioneers in front cleared the way for the wagon.”⁴⁴

Indian attacks, as well, were a reality of life on the Ohio River, and the skirmishes between American settlers and Native Americans typified the pioneer’s struggle against frontier life. Early settler in the Western Territory, Luke Foster, recorded an Indian assault as “Obediah, was taken nearly to the town, there shot by one of his captors; who alleged it to have been an accident; but they cut off his head, & skinned his body, below the breast. ... After this, surprises were frequent, deaths & captures often.”⁴⁵ Poet Freeman Hearsey wrote in 1791 “An Elegiac Poem” about a massacre “on the distant Ohio” in which he specifically writes about New Englanders dying in the new West: “Of those *brave Men* who thus were slain, on the Ohio *Fields*, where they Expected for to win the day...Many that dwelt on Boston’s Shore, Are swept away, they are no more...”⁴⁶

In accordance with Crèvecoeur’s description, those who easily adjusted to life on the Ohio became part of a mythic strain of pioneers in the Western Territory. Variations on the legendary “hero” of the West would proliferate as the country moved toward the Pacific. But this hero left an impression that would stick with the region always: He was a self-made man, reliant on no one, unafraid of hard work and solidarity. Similarly, because the Northwest

⁴⁴ Francis Baily, *Journal of a Tour in Unsettled Parts of North America in 1796 and 1797* (London: Baily Brothers, Royal Exchange Buildings, 1856), 205.

⁴⁵ Emily Foster, ed. *The Ohio Frontier: An Anthology of Early Writings* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 80.

⁴⁶ Freeman Hearsey, *An Elegiac Poem* (Boston: Ezekiel Russell, 1791).

Territory had been made anti-slavery by the Ordinance of 1787, a focus was placed on the self-made farmer and his farm, which was generally smaller than the plantation of the South – a provision of several land acts passed by Congress in the late 18th century.⁴⁷ Through these acts, the reputation for the Midwest as a hard-working, non-industrial region became a hallmark for the region in the American imagination. This expectation existed, as aforementioned, since before the Revolution and before the land was certainly American.

One man who fit this existed as a mythic figurehead for the typical Midwesterner of the colonization of the Western Territory: Daniel Boone. Ever the prototypical westward pioneer, Boone was an explorer of the late 18th century in the trans-Appalachian lands of modern-day Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Missouri. Boone – though he didn't live in traditionally Midwestern lands until his move across the Mississippi into Missouri – was typified at the time as the kind of western pioneer that represented the stalwart settlers of the wilds west of the Alleghenies. He led a group of settlers across the Appalachians, he protected settlements against Indian attacks, and he was a man of Eastern provenance (specifically, Pennsylvania) but with the Western need for adventure and space. In the early 19th century, a publication in Baltimore sung Boone's praises for his "personal bravery" on the frontier and reprinted sections of his story, in which today's Midwest exhibited many symbols of the West: herds of buffalo, uncultivated vistas, a heroic Boone walking right into a land characterized as "a dangerous,

⁴⁷ Bond Jr., "American Civilization Comes to the Old Northwest," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 7.

helpless situation, exposed daily to perils and death, amongst savages and wild beasts, not a whiteman in the country but ourselves.”⁴⁸

Boone was both a civilizer and a part of the uncivilized. Hardly a single working farmer was canonized for their legwork as the actual settlers of the modern Midwest, but Boone was a hero for blazing the first trail west so that the agricultural settlers could follow. He was hailed as the kind of man who wanted to live somewhere just long enough for other enterprising Americans to settle in the area, and then he was compelled to move on. (History would show, however, that Boone’s motivation to continue moving west had more to do with his inattentiveness to registering his land claims, and on more than one occasion, he was kicked off his homestead for faulty ownership.)⁴⁹ He symbolized a kind of pioneer who, as one historian put it, “hewed the timbers for his cabin and on the clearing planted his first crop... Society soon [came] knocking at his door, urging him to move once more into the wilderness.”⁵⁰

In a post-Ordinance of 1787 America – a place where westward motion was on the rise because of the great economic opportunities that could be found west of the Alleghenies – the image of the self-made man on the prairies was perpetuated by perhaps the West’s most powerful supporter: Thomas Jefferson. Cities on the eastern seaboard grew larger and more crowded with the promise of industrialized labor and manufacturing jobs. Jefferson, who was president in the first decade of the 19th century and therefore situated at the very inception of

⁴⁸ "Interesting Biography: Colonel Daniel Boone," *Weekly Register* (March 20, 1813), 33.

⁴⁹ David Hamilton Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001), 27.

⁵⁰ Lindley, "Western Travel, 1800-1820," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 169.

the Industrial Revolution on the East Coast, was not a proponent of growing America in this fashion. “The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body,” said Jefferson.⁵¹ Moreover, he lauded American agriculture as the brightest economic future for the United States, and he disparaged labor advancements: “Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.”

In that way, Boone was the Western pioneer prototype for the beliefs Jefferson espoused. Jefferson preached that a man gets a certain level of pride from providing for himself, so there’s an additional mental benefit to being reliant on oneself as opposed to the machine of manufacturing. Boldly, Jefferson claimed, “Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.” Jefferson argued that Europe was geographically disadvantaged against the United States and that American citizens should count themselves lucky to have at their disposal abundant land to keep the nation’s agribusiness the keystone of society: “While we have land to labor then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry; but for general operations of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles.” He feared his America would turn completely outward to trade and industrialization instead of focusing on the inward economy that would

⁵¹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 175.

not only benefit the country more but would also make the citizens happier: agriculture.

Industrialization, he thought, would “divert us from agriculture, which is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness.”⁵²

The only way that Jefferson could ensure that this vision he had of a self-sufficient and agrarian America would exist was to push westward into open land that had yet to be industrialized. Even while he was living in France in the 1780s, Jefferson had the western expanses of the country in mind. Therefore, once he was inaugurated in 1801, he set to work on obtaining the land west of the Mississippi that he thought would be a strategic boon for the country. In correspondence to James Madison, Jefferson wrote, “I will venture to say, that the act which abandons the navigation of the Mississippi, is an act of separation between eastern and western country. It is a relinquishment of five parts out of eight of the territory of the United States; an abandonment of the fairest subject for the payment of our public debts, and the chaining those debts on our own necks, *in perpetuum*.” Jefferson felt that as long as there was land and the freedom of Americans to go there, yeoman farmers would have the ability to be independent and self-sustaining.⁵³

The U.S. had no intention of stopping its westward movement with the Ohio River valley. From the accounts like La Salle’s and du Plat’s, the U.S. government knew the geographical basis for what they strove to occupy. Pre-presidency, Jefferson wrote that the Mississippi River “will be one of the principal channels of future commerce for the country

⁵² Thomas Jefferson, *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Edited by Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Vol. 2. (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830), 223, 87.

⁵³ Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth*, 18.

westward of the Alleghaney.”⁵⁴ There were not many people living in close proximity to the Mississippi River at the time; as a magazine’s roundup in 1800 of the 1790 census bluntly put it: “The present jurisdiction of the State, nominally extends to the Mississippi... The rest is either desolate or occupied by savages.”⁵⁵ From this article, the “North-Western Territory” had an official white-person count of 8,000 people, this area being “a wilderness, either wholly desolate, or inhabited by wild beasts and by Indians.”

Despite its small population, no one in Washington underplayed the region’s importance to the country as a whole. Because of the changes in land ownership in a short amount of time, it was crucial that the U.S. stake its territorial claim to the main channels through the interior of the country. George Washington recognized this. In a letter to a congressman, he wrote: “In my judgment it is a matter of very serious concern to the well-being of the [Atlantic states] to make it the interest of the [Western Territory] to trade with them... Whenever the new States become so populous and so extended to the westward, as to really need it, there will be no power which can deprive them of the use of the Mississippi”, which implied that if the U.S. didn’t make the Mississippi River its own, the Western Territory, pre-statehood, would align more closely with the French or the Spanish who occupied the trans-Mississippi west and much of the river.⁵⁶ Even when the American outpost at Marietta was in the process of being settled, Rufus Putnam was looking ahead to the necessity of the Mississippi to the United States: “[T]herefore it is absolutely necessary that the people of the

⁵⁴ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 5.

⁵⁵ “Population of the United States,” *The Monthly Magazine, and American Review* (January 1800), 13.

⁵⁶ Washington, *Writings of George Washington*, 499-500.

Western Country, in Some way or other, at a proper period, Should be possessed of the free navigation of the Mississippi River.”⁵⁷

The future of the region sat in the next great acquisition of the Mississippi River and subsequent valley. A poet, Philip Morin Freneau, wrote a poem around the time of the Northwest Ordinance called “Stanzas on the Emigration to America, and Peopling of the Western Country.” In this piece, he wrote about what the Midwest was, apart from its East Coast neighbor, and he additionally touched upon the American hopes that would make this region grand. This poem had all the elements defining the space. Freneau described the topography (“western woods, and lonely plains”); he described the unique fertility of the land (“these fair plains, these rural feats”); and he described the powerful rivers that allowed for commerce and settlement (“What charming scenes attract the eye, on wild Ohio’s savage stream!”). However, Freneau employed a scathing binary between the new territory and the East, in terms of human rights. He composed, “The *east* is half to slaves consign’d, And half to slavery more refin’d.” He hoped that “when reason shall enforce her sway” the new regions would not be a place where an African American “mourns his yet unbroken chains.” Out of the unformed territory was bound to be disparate and independent statehood destined to be greater than the ones before them: “What wonders there shall freedom show, What mighty *States* successive grow!” To him, the Western Territory was a place where the wrongs of established society on the East Coast could be remedied: “Far brighter scenes, a future age, The

⁵⁷ Putnam, *The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam and Certain Official Papers and Correspondence*, 234-235.

muse predicts, these States shall hail,... And happier systems bring to view Than all the eastern stages knew.”⁵⁸

PART TWO: THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE AND THE “FAR WEST”

The second stage of Midwestern development came in the form of another grand land acquisition on par with the Northwest Ordinance. The Louisiana Purchase, transacted in 1803, doubled the landmass of the United States while simultaneously adding the second half of what would join the Western Territory of the Ohio as the region of the Midwest. Because this land, prior to its sale to the U.S., had almost no Anglo inhabitants, the accounts of the region during Jefferson’s presidential years to the Missouri Compromise in 1820 were mainly that of the explorer, as defining and surveying the region was the primary objective. Perhaps the most important of these accounts were the narratives of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, the leaders of a team that surveyed the Missouri and pushed westward to the Oregon coast, and the narrative of Zebulon Pike, an explorer charged with navigating the upper Mississippi as well as the Great Plains states to the Rocky Mountains. As other explorers reported back to the world, the lands of the Far West took shape, and through the definition of the Far West, these accounts in tandem began reconfiguring the mythic West of the Western Territory. Common threads, though, ran through the written words of how the Western Territory and the Far West welcomed their first settlers. Adding more western country to the United States’ land arsenal was the impetus for beginning to redefine the growing Western Territory.

⁵⁸ Philip Morin Freneau, *The Poems of Philip Freneau* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1786), 378-380.

In the year 1800 – the same year that Thomas Jefferson won the election to be President of the United States – the center of the country’s population was just a few miles north of Washington D.C.⁵⁹ Two western states had the population for admission to the Union: Kentucky in 1792 and Ohio in 1802. The 1790 census determined that about 5% of the U.S. population lived west of the Alleghenies. Much farther west, sea captain Robert Gray sailed 10 months from Boston to the Oregon coast, where he was the first American merchant to witness the Columbia River – a feat that in 1792 made the U.S. government quiver with delight over the natural resources that existed on the west coast. This discovery allowed the American imagination to envision a West on the continent far beyond any that had been navigated by land or river to that point.

The land west of the Mississippi had been contentious for decades. Having been at several points in history claimed by France, Spain and Britain (with military outposts of all three enduring no matter whom the governing body was), this parcel of land, in 1803, was in the possession of France. Napoleon Bonaparte, France’s emperor, wanted to enforce control of and aid in the administration of the island of Sainte Domingue in the Caribbean, at which point Bonaparte possessed American land for a launching pad on the continent for goods of the island. However, slave revolts on the island in the name of independence made French control of Sainte Domingue impossible.⁶⁰ He did not need his North American holdings anymore, so he quickly sold them off to Jefferson and the U.S. Congress. Jefferson laid down \$15 million dollars

⁵⁹ Lindley, "Western Travel, 1800-1820," 167.

⁶⁰ Peter J. Kastor, "'What Are the Advantages of the Acquisition?': Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic," *American Quarterly* (December 2008), 1013.

for the land – an act that doubled the country’s landmass.⁶¹ He wrote, “[T]o be prepared against the occupation of Louisiana by a powerful and enterprising people, it is important that, setting less value on interior extension of purchases from the Indians, we bend our whole views to the purchase and settlement of the country on the Mississippi, from its mouth to its northern regions, that we may be able to present as strong a front on our western as on our eastern border, and plant on the Mississippi itself the means of its own defence.”⁶² Jefferson transacted the Louisiana Purchase on April 30, 1803, which brought into the fold of American lands the second half of what would become the Midwestern region.⁶³

Just as the wilderness that lay outside the boundaries of civilization in the Northwest Territory was considered profane, so were the newly acquired lands on the western edge of the Mississippi. In order to make sense of the new lands and to, in some way, prove their value to the American people, Jefferson directed Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to navigate the largely unknown Missouri River basin, the goal of which was to find an all-water route to the Pacific. Jefferson also sent a man named Zebulon Pike to the headwaters of the Mississippi, and once he returned from that mission, Jefferson asked that Pike go west into the Rocky Mountains and the Southwest region. What interested Jefferson were the possibilities of the natural resources this land parcel held. Both Lewis and Clark and Pike were sent with the directive to learn more about the landforms, Indians and wildlife that survived in the gigantic

⁶¹ Stephen Aron, *American Confluence* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 113.

⁶² Thomas Jefferson, Joyce Oldham Appleby, and Terrence Ball, *Thomas Jefferson: Political Writings* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 525.

⁶³ David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Manifest Destiny* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), 6.

amount of terrain west of the Mississippi, though none of them considered themselves to be naturalists.⁶⁴ As military men, their primary objective was to explore trade options to the Pacific and to research the Native Americans that could stand in the way of American economic progress on the western frontier. These men, as storytellers, were more apt to deliver rote facts about their trips than they were to analyze much of what they found.⁶⁵ The description of the Indians that these men encountered on their trips becomes similarly afflicted with banal, perfunctory details about Indian interactions.

Lewis and Clark and Pike took the responsibility of being the first to give the space meaning and context for the American government and the American public. At times, the scene they described of Midwestern land was not far removed from the narrative of the founding of the Northwest Territory. After all, the Louisiana Purchase was not popular with all Americans, and to prove its monetary worth, the space would have to deliver considerable natural resources in order to ameliorate the critics. The price tag for the purchase was an astounding amount of money for a plot of land that most Americans feared desolate and worthless. One clever publication sought to put the purchase into context by printing this: "A man must have less brains than a loon if he thinks this is the way to cancel our debts... Supposing this immense sum to be piled up dollar by dollar, and allowing one inch for nine in altitude, it would make a pile more than three miles in height."⁶⁶ Moreover, Americans had

⁶⁴ Robert S. Cox, Domenic Vitiello, S.D. Kimmel, John W. Jengo, Brett Mizelle, and Andrew J. Lewis, "The Shortest and Most Convenient Route: Lewis and Clark in Context," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* (2004), 215.

⁶⁵ Kastor, "'What Are the Advantages of the Acquisition?': Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic," *American Quarterly*, 1022-1023.

⁶⁶ *The Port-Folio* (Aug. 13, 1803), 263.

reservations about what kind of security could be afforded to the settlers of this new Western territory. These men delivered accounts of the various parcels of the Purchase that were both in keeping with the myth that it was as fertile as the Northwest Territory and in direct competition with that claim.

In describing the modern-day state of Missouri, Lewis and Clark wrote of the river lands, “On the north [of the river] the land is higher and better calculated for farms than that on the south, which ascends more gradually, but is still rich and pleasant.” They, more so than Pike, believed in the ability of the well-watered Louisiana Purchase land around the Missouri River. Often, these men used the existence of trees to indicate fertility, but Lewis and Clark, even in the absence of tree growth, considered the land they explored to be universally fertile. A few miles outside of St. Louis, they considered “very fertile” and balked at the incapability of French settlers to cultivate it, as “the surrounding country, therefore, though rich, is not, in general well cultivated.” When they reached the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas rivers, they wrote that “on all sides the country is fine.” Even in the Dakotas, they noted some “level fertile plains” that they found wholly “without timber.”⁶⁷

Pike, too, notated the possibility of the new western lands to be cultivated and prosperous. Of the area between the Gasconade and Osage rivers in Missouri, he noted that both the northern and the southern shores are “well timbered” and overall found “the shores consisting of a rich soil, and very proper for the cultivation of all the productions of our middle

⁶⁷ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *Travels to the Source of the Missouri River across the American Continent to the Pacific Ocean* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815), 21-22, 6, 25, 245.

and western states.”⁶⁸ Pike traveled via keel boat up the Mississippi from St. Louis to the headwaters in modern-day Minnesota. On his journey, he was standard in his description of the “rich prairie” of the region he witnessed, but his observations came with an unwritten footnote. Because traveling upstream on the Mississippi allowed him to see both the established land of the United States and that of its new acquisition, Pike created a subtle difference between the two halves of the Midwest. To the east, he frequently noted that it had “a rich sandy soil, and has many eligible situations for cultivation.” Aside from fertility, he seemed to think that the eastern side of the Mississippi was preferable in several ways. Aesthetically, the eastern shore has “beautiful cedar-cliffs,” and the west had “rich low soil.” For settlement, the eastern side “has generally the preference as to situations for building.” Pike tempered his description of the two sides with enough descriptions of the “beautiful prairies on the west, and in some places very rich land” to make the upper portions of the Louisiana Purchase palatable, but he would not show the same courtesy to the land of the Great Plains that he additionally journaled.

When Pike journeyed southwest of St. Louis through the Great Plains of Kansas and eastern Colorado, his descriptors of the Far West were not quite so complimentary about the region’s landscapes. Pike proliferated the message that the lands on the western side of the Mississippi were measureless and barren. He described the “internal deserts” as such: “In that vast country of which we speak, we find the soil generally dry, sandy, with gravel” and that they “may become in time equally celebrated with the sandy deserts of Africa.” Ultimately, Pike thought it his duty to report “publicity to what few lights my examination of those internal

⁶⁸ Zebulon Montgomery Pike, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1811), 155

deserts has enabled me to acquire.” Using the existence of timber as a barometer, Pike said upfront that it was a big reason why this region might never succeed: “But the wood now in the country would not be sufficient for a moderate population more than fifteen years, and then it would be out of the question to think of using any of it in manufactories...”⁶⁹ His trip on the Mississippi, though not overly familiar, was less foreign than his trip deep into the Louisiana Purchase territory, and with this portrayal of the Great Plains, he painted with a broad brush a perception of the plains that would endure.

The “desert,” along with the Rocky Mountains, might provide a natural border to a perhaps too-rapidly expanding American civilization. “But from these immense prairies may arise one great advantage to the United States, viz. the restriction of our population to some certain limits, and thereby a continuation of our union,” Pike wrote, referencing the inhabitability of the plains of the Far West. Perhaps with Pike’s rhetoric about the lack of agricultural promise in what would become the Great Plains states of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and portions of Colorado, Iowa, and Missouri was the implication that this amount of undesirable land would, for starters, be a great place to relegate Native American populations, a sentiment shared by Thomas Jefferson.⁷⁰ He concluded his argument with a nod to Westward Expansion by saying: “Our citizens being so prone to rambling, and extending themselves on the frontiers, will, through necessity, be constrained to limit their extent on the

⁶⁹ Pike, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America*, 248.

⁷⁰ Stephanie LeMenager, *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 24.

west to the borders of the Missouri and Mississippi, while they leave the prairies, incapable of cultivation, to the wandering and uncivilized Aborigines of the country.”⁷¹

Although the plains and prairies of the Far West did not resemble the cultivable land to the east, the American people were conditioned to think that what lie in the West were lands that were meant to be conquered, both economically and agriculturally. Despite early grim reports that the Far West held dry and infertile land, Americans chose to believe that something of value rested within the Louisiana Purchase land; if it could not be plantation-style agriculture, then it would be ranching and fur trade. No matter what, the Western settler was self-sufficient and non-industrial – a noble hallmark of the West that separated it from its eastern counterpart. Another early traveler into the Far West, John Bradbury agreed with part of Pike’s assessment, but ultimately debunked his argument that the land was uninhabitable and infertile:

“In an agricultural point of view, the vast tract of prairie extending through all these regions, is an important object of consideration. Amongst intelligent Americans, the question of – whether it can or cannot be peopled by civilized man? has often been agitated. Accustomed, as they are, to a profusion of timber, for buildings, fuel, and fences, they are not aware of the small quantity of that article which may be dispensed with, in a country abounding in another substance for fuel; nor can they conceive, that fences, and even buildings, may be constructed with the application of a very small portion of timber. Under these impressions, the belief in America is, that the prairie cannot be inhabited by the whites... My own opinion is, that it can be cultivated; and that, in process of time, it will not only be peopled and cultivated, but that it will be one of the most beautiful countries in the world.”⁷²

⁷¹ Pike, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America*, 249.

⁷² John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* (London: Sheewood, Neely, and Jones, 1817), 272.

The combined Northwest Territory and the Far West, albeit in slightly different topographies, both fostered the myth of the self-reliant yeoman, a solitary pioneer that hopes for wealth and independence on the plains.

In the narratives of the expeditions of both Lewis and Clark and Pike, Indians were an inimitable symbol of the Western frontier. From the earliest stages of western movement from the East Coast, entering a frontier populated with Indians was risky and undesirable, something Crevecoeur wrote about in the 1780s. Pike's account of his occasional encounters with the native peoples of the Upper Mississippi read less like a goodwill mission and more like an imperialistic directive to the U.S. government about how to manipulate the Indian populations into relinquishing more of their land, which would allow for settlement, and engaging in freer trade solely with American merchants in the Far West.⁷³ A letter sent to Pike from James Wilkinson, then-governor of the Louisiana Territory, explained to Pike that the U.S. government found it "interesting" where the Indians resided on the river and through which means they most successfully bartered – Pike was to search this out in the name of fair commerce – and in a postscript in the same letter, Wilkinson added what may have been the most honest assessment of what Pike's mission was to be: "In addition to the preceding orders, you will be pleased to obtain permission from the Indians, who claim the ground, for the erection of military posts and trading houses."⁷⁴ The directive that was given to Meriwether Lewis from Thomas Jefferson for Lewis and Clark's great western trek had an almost identical objective.

⁷³ Kastor, "What Are the Advantages of the Acquisition?": Inventing Expansion in the Early American Republic," *American Quarterly*, 1011.

⁷⁴ Pike, *Exploratory Travels through the Western Territories of North America*, xii-xiii.

From these correspondences and their resultant expeditions, the native communities in newly acquired U.S. lands were accounted for only for trade, settlement, and safety issues and never for cultural knowledge or assimilation.⁷⁵ Indians, like the West, were meant to be conquered.

One New England publication wrote at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, “We are, however, much inclined to supposed that ‘oppressed humanity’ will first be offered an ‘asylum’ in this extensive country, and the hardy sons of New England will be called in defence of the new dominion or in suppressing insurrections... If we have found it difficult and even impracticable to defend the former territory of the United States, we have fears, to us apparently well founded, that the addition of an immense wilderness, peopled by uncivilized nations, will by no means favour the possibility of affording general security and protection.”⁷⁶

From these fears regarding Indians – and from the American government’s decision to harbor those fears into legislation – an unfortunate stereotype of the Midwest was born. The modern Midwest, at its worst, is seen as homogeneous and parochial, despite the reality of the urban Midwest being in direct competition with this idea. Racial integration and diversity is not a strong hallmark of the region, quite like the assimilation of Mexican and American culture is of the modern American Southwest.⁷⁷ Jefferson, looking to ease some of the tension in the Northwestern Territory between Indians and settlers, saw the trans-Mississippi land as a refuge for Native Americans. To the then Indiana Territory governor William Henry Harrison, Jefferson wrote, “In this way our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians, and

⁷⁵ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xxv.

⁷⁶ “*The New England Repertory* speaks of the Louisiana Purchase,” *The New England Repertory* (Nov. 15, 1803), 46.

⁷⁷ Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture*, 99.

they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the United States, or remove beyond the Mississippi.”⁷⁸

The American public, particularly with regard to the placement of Indians, found sectionalization increasingly important. With the influence he could wield in written word, Pike attempted to sectionalize, or separate, portions of an enormous space into smaller, more distinct regions according to landforms, a tendency that Americans had been wont to do since the country was founded. Both the 1790 – America’s first official census of its population – and the 1800 census wanted to make sense of the state, territorial and otherwise unknown regions of the nation. The census of 1790 appointed official census-takers to all of the states admitted to the union, as well as Kentucky, and tried to do a less formal poll of the new Western Territory.⁷⁹ Mostly, this was a count of the “Persons in the Territory of the United States of America, South of the River Ohio,” in which case the census missed its opportunity to try to count the people living in the Northwest Territory.⁸⁰ (The tallies of the states and territories of the U.S. did include slaves, but it had no count of how many free Native Americans occupied the land during the census.) By 1800, the census more keenly focused its efforts on counting the settlers in the western lands such as the “Territory N.W. river Ohio”, the Indiana Territory, and the Mississippi Territory.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Jefferson, Appleby, and Ball, *Thomas Jefferson: Political Writings*, 525.

⁷⁹ United States, *Act Providing for the Enumeration* (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1790).

⁸⁰ United States, *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within the Several Districts of the United States* (Philadelphia: J. Phillips, 1793), 1.

⁸¹ United States, *Return of the Whole Number of Persons within Several Districts of the United States* (Washington City: The Apollo Press, 1802), 84.

In regard to the first census in 1790, American geographer, Jedidiah Morse, again attempted to write to the burgeoning American regionalism by publishing an *The American Geography*. In this work, Morse parsed out the “divisions” of North America, and they were as follows: the original 13 colonies; Vermont, Kentucky, and the Western Territory, places that Morse grouped together as “separate gov’ts in the United States”; and then the other regions such as Nova Scotia, Quebec and Louisiana, which were all controlled by European nations outside U.S. control.⁸² This was serviceable, but the divisions had little to do with American personality of region, as these were predominantly political delineations. From a nomenclature standpoint, Morse, as well as the American public, consistently excluded Kentucky from any talk of the “Western Territory.” Although it was sufficiently western, Kentucky was frequently referred to as “Kentucky” or the “Kentucky Territory” instead of being combined with the rest of the Ohio Valley to the north. Because the state was always pro-slavery and because it was more a product of Virginia than of any of the so-called Middle States, this state, from the late 18th century, was not ever a candidate for being Midwestern. Although the state of Missouri shared the moral ambiguity of slave-holding, Kentucky, socially and geographically, defined itself as something other than the Midwest from its inception.

An article in *The American Review* called “The American Universal Geography” discussed Morse’s divisions but distilled it down to states by geographic sections: “The grand division of the United States is into northern or eastern; middle and southern.”⁸³ The northern territory

⁸² Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography; or a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (Dublin: John Jones, 1792), 33.

⁸³ “The American Universal Geography,” *The American Review, and Literary Journal* (1 April 1802), 457.

was identified as New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island); the middle country named as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the “country north-west of the Ohio”; and the southern country was Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, and the Indiana and Mississippi territories. Although it is significant that the article mentions that the Northwest Territory was part of the “middle” territory, it is also an important distinction that Morse extracted the Indiana Territory from this grouping and put into the Southern category. The Indiana Territory began as part of the Northwest Territory but was settled by mostly upland Southerners, and in this instance, it is recognized as being a part of a region from which it did not cleave.

Before the turn of the 19th century, there existed, largely, just two American regions: East and West, commonly per the geographical divide of the Allegheny Mountains, or in du Plat’s case, the Mississippi River. The Southeast, as it would eventually be known, still maintained an Eastern reputation. The West, even from the days of Crèvecoeur, had a reputation for being something “other” than the highly stratified and well-organized eastern seaboard. As populations increased and societies started to become more complex, these delineations, naturally, began to get more complex. Economically, the states south of Washington D.C. parceled out land in large plots in order to facilitate cash crops and the plantation business model. Then the U.S. government incorporated the Northwest Territory, which created an unruly, profane West that was both reviled and romanticized in the culture east of the Alleghenies. As Americans from all the portions of the East Coast settled the Northwest Territory, the mixing and reinventing of the different subcultures, both economically speaking and European-nationality-based, created something different in the West. A

combination of forces – the advancing population not being the least of them – started the change in nomenclature of the Western, or Northwestern, Territory. First of all, the directional terms applied to the region were no longer relevant; with the new acquisition of the Louisiana Territory, the Northwestern Territory failed to be the northwestern corner of America's land holdings, and the Western Territory became decidedly less western in the light of farther western lands. The resultant shift in the American lexicon, and ultimately the collective imagination of the country, created a new place: the Far West. By naming the Louisiana Purchase lands the Far West, this allowed the Western Territory to become, simply, the West.⁸⁴

On the eastern side of the Mississippi, the Western Territory's population expanded from census to census. The Northwest Ordinance granted a territorial governor to the Northwest Territory, but shortly after the turn of the century and with the acceptance of Ohio's official statehood, the Congress renamed the remaining parcels of the Northwest Territory as the Indiana Territory. Before the first decade of the 1800s ended, the Illinois Territory split off from the Indiana Territory; unsurprisingly, the Illinois and Indiana territories occupied the same space that the current states of Illinois and Indiana. All of these splits and changes were, of course, contingent upon the territories having a critical mass of population to be first considered a free-standing territory and to then be considered for statehood. (Both Indiana and Illinois achieved acceptance into the Union in 1816 and 1818 respectively.) Ohio, having already garnered statehood, now looked to increase its own urban and semi-urban populations. The second decade of the 19th century saw the U.S. government sponsor the clearing of a road from

⁸⁴ Frederick Jackson Turner, "Geographic Sectionalism in American History," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (June 1926), 87-88.

Washington into the Northwest Territory called the Cumberland Road. Because of the increased ease of transportation, by the 1830 census, Cincinnati ranked as one of the ten largest cities in the United States.⁸⁵ The only city in the West previous to Cincinnati to make the list was the old port city of New Orleans.

Comparatively, other regions of the country developed during this time as well. The Southern states west of the coastline states of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia gained population through migration from the seaside states, just as the Mid-Atlantic states had settled into the middle of the Northwestern Territory.⁸⁶ The core states of the modern Southeast gained statehood prior to the Missouri Compromise; the U.S. government granted statehood to Tennessee in 1796, Louisiana in 1812, Mississippi in 1817, and Alabama in 1819.⁸⁷ A writer, to be discussed later, in 1818 noted that people were “on the move” to the frontier of Alabama.⁸⁸ For original inhabitants of the southernmost 13 colonies, the allure of the western lands of the South was that they could, of course, get more land upon which to continue pro-slavery plantations, a practice that was becoming outlawed in the more fertile lands to the north. After the transactions of the Louisiana Purchase, which gave the U.S. control over the port of New Orleans, and the War of 1812, which gave the U.S. control over the port of Mobile, plantation farming in the South became more attractive than ever for the settlers of the new states.

⁸⁵ *Fast Facts: 1830*. U.S. Census Bureau, 01 Mar. 2010. Web. 02 Mar. 2010. <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1830_3.html>.

⁸⁶ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 139.

⁸⁷ Heidler and Heidler, *Manifest Destiny*, xx-xxi.

⁸⁸ Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), 214.

As for the nation's most southwest corner, these territories (including modern-day states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California) were still part of Mexico, which was still part of Spain. Often called New Spain by Americans, the area southwest of the Louisiana Purchase land was "principally Spanish creoles; some French, some Americans, and a few civilized Indians", per Zebulon Pike, who traversed the region and took notes about the condition of, what he called, the Province of Texas. Trade from New Spain to American states was forbidden, and although there were almost no permanent Anglo-American settlers, the territory was on the U.S. government's radar. (Pike pointed out that under Spanish rule the inhabitants of this part of New Spain, "in national energy, or patriotism,... they are perhaps the most deficient.") In 1819, the U.S., in an effort to claim the succulent Oregon Territory lands of Lewis and Clark lore, signed away any claims to the New Spain lands as part of the Transcontinental Treaty.⁸⁹ The U.S. Southwest ended, in this period, on the westernmost border of the state of Louisiana.

Travelers and explorers set out over the vast prairie expanses – many of which will become so emblematic of the Midwestern culture – of the Far West, and they gave the American public an idea of what the new Far West was like. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was a naturalist – a geologist by trade – and he, in 1818, started his "tour where other travelers have ended theirs, on the confines of the wilderness, and at the last village of white inhabitants, between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean." Schoolcraft's frontier that he references is modern-day Potosi, Missouri – a town that is roughly 70 miles southwest of St. Louis. Unlike the narrative of Lewis and Clark (and demonstrably more conversational than their terse

⁸⁹ Heidler and Heidler, *Manifest Destiny*, 11.

accounts), Schoolcraft traveled not on a river, but rather taking an overland route into the Missouri Territory.

He was unimpressed with the landscape of the interior lands of the Louisiana Purchase. Often, he employed the words “sterile” and “barren” in his description, such as this excerpt: “We now entered on a high, rough, and barren tract of country, consisting of a succession of ridges running nearly at right angles...” After leaving a valley, he commented that he “immediately entered on a hilly barren tract, covered with high grass, and here and there clumps of oak-trees.” Using the trees-as-prosperity template, Schoolcraft mentioned many times about how the lack of tree growth made the trip more difficult; he noted that, “Our route lay for the first eight miles across a barren prairie country, with little wood and no water,” and he said, “One of the greatest inconveniences we experience in travelling in this region, arises from the difficulty of finding, at the proper time, a place of encampment affording wood and water... This is a difficulty which attends us this evening, having been compelled to stop in an open prairie, where wood is very scarce.”⁹⁰

Pike’s published his description of similar plains a few years prior to Schoolcraft, and the two seem parallel in their assuredness that the land could not host large populations. The description that Schoolcraft gave for the area that is now the state of Missouri was equal parts bucolic and boring, sterile and abundant. For example, he, within a three-day span of his journal, depicted Missouri as “Some good bottom lands are found on its banks, but the adjoining hills are stony and barren, covered with little timber and high grass” and “a highly

⁹⁰ Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas* (London: Sir Richard Phillips and Co., 1821), 3, 5, 7, 9.

interesting section of the country, and which affords some of the most picturesque and sublime views of rural scenery which I have ever beheld.” Within the same paragraph about a river valley, he portrayed it as being “a strip of alluvion running parallel with the river, and bordered by hills, whose stony aspect forbids the approach of the farmer” and as “the district of tillable land is much more extensive, however, than has generally been supposed, and is capable of supporting a considerable population.”⁹¹ For each comment about the infertility of the soil, he commented about the profusion of wild game.

In a moment that contrasted the new West to the old West, Schoolcraft pitted the physiognomy of the Missouri Territory against the lands of the Northwest Ordinance: “It is a level woodless barren covered with wild grass, and resembling the natural meadows or prairies of the western country in appearance, but lacks their fertility, their wood, and their remarkable equality of surface.” The excitement and newness of the Northwest Territory was beginning to fade, and English traveler Henry Bradshaw Fearon documented the literary and social changes that encompassed the land to the east of the Mississippi. He wrote a book aimed at British citizens who felt compelled to immigrate to the United States, and for this reason, he wrote with a speculator’s eye on where American society was and where it was headed. In keeping with today’s modern definition of the Midwest, he considered himself “fairly entered upon the western country” as he left Pittsburgh and headed down the Ohio.⁹² Of the land he traversed from Ohio to the Illinois Territory, he said, “Along the route I have travelled in this State, there is scarcely an elevation which can be called a hill.” Of the Illinois country, he noted that there

⁹¹ Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas*, 7-10, 5.

⁹² Fearon, *Sketches of America*, 218, 256, 219.

were a “vast number of *prairies*, of boundless extent” and that these “natural meadows are generally destitute of trees.” He found the views from his river journey on the Ohio occasionally tedious, as evidenced by this unhappy notation: “The dreary monotony of limited views of such endless uniformity produces sensations of the most depressing melancholy.” This same feeling would be echoed by travelers, particularly the English, after Fearon.

Perhaps the most perceptive thing that Fearon detects is the actual social movement of populations and settlement from places that used to be the West into lands farther westward. On his journey away from Pittsburgh into Ohio, he wrote, “Left Pittsburgh for Ohio – the State in which every emigrant I saw on the Alleghenies told me he designed settling; while there the inhabitants are on ‘the move’ for Alabama and Missouri.”⁹³ When he arrived in Cincinnati, he speculated that the population stood at 10,000, and that he thought “not improbable” that the town could grow to be like Philadelphia in size and stature. He wrote that the city “must astonish every traveller when he recollects how recently it has been established,” but then he turned critical: “Does this town offer substantial inducement to settlers? I think not; it has advanced rapidly, but it cannot continue to do so... Property is as high here as in Philadelphia, and all occupations are filled.” He documented the trend in other cities on the riverways of the Western Territory and the Mississippi: “Lexington was, a short time since, the general magnet; its advances towards prosperity have now, however, ceased to be rapid and property there has become stationary in value, whilst at Louisville it is rising prodigiously. This last-mentioned place, with St. Louis on the Missouri, promise to be ranked among the first towns in the western States.”

⁹³ Fearon, *Sketches of America*, 213-214, 281.

The prevalence of the action of westward movement in Fearon's writings indicated that he knew that the fortunes of the country would eventually pass over the space that had been designated as the land of economic opportunity: the Western Territory. "Emigration in this country is always in motion," he wrote, "and for ever changing in the points of its attraction." The center of population, he noted, was moving quickly westward, and to him, this spurred talk of moving the U.S. capitol to someplace more central to the U.S. population: "[Washington D.C.] is central, or rather that it *was* so; for the recent addition of new States has removed the centre very far west, so much so indeed that the inhabitants of Lexington affirm, that *their* town must on that ground soon become the capital; and even the people of St. Louis, in the Missouri, put in their claim, that city being said to be geographically the exact centre of the Union." In the early 19th century, though, it was uncommon for someone to think of St. Louis as being "central" in the United States, as it is known in modern day. This is because Fearon foresaw that American settlement would hardly stop with the Louisiana Purchase or stagnate over the Great Plains. He wrote, "On the road, every emigrant tells you he is going to Ohio; when you arrive in Ohio, its inhabitants are 'moving' to Missouri and Alabama; thus it is that the point for final settlement is for ever receding as you advance, and thus it will hereafter proceed, and only be terminated by that effectual barrier – the Pacific Ocean."⁹⁴

More legislative action, though, would have to be done to hew the modern Midwest from the regions that surrounded it. In 1819, Missouri requested to be admitted to the Union as a slave state, a conundrum that had not come up in the lands of either the Northwest

⁹⁴ Fearon, *Sketches of America*, 214, 288, 234.

Territory or the Far West due to small populations in the Far West and to the provision in the Northwest Ordinance that forbade slavery in the states carved out of the Northwest Territory. Culturally, native Southerners were the ones migrating to the Missouri Territory, so the state held values in line with its fellow slave states.⁹⁵ Adding to the pressure, the U.S., in 1819, had an equal proportion of slave-holding and non-slave-holding states, and fearing that the admission of Missouri as a slave state would tip the balance of the U.S. to be majority slave-holding, the Congress bitterly fought against the state's request. The great compromise was this: Missouri would get both its statehood and its freedom of slavery as long as a new state, Maine, would also be admitted to the Union as a free state. This action would serve a few causes. First, it would cement Missouri's status as a state that is surrounded by Midwestern states but has never fit neatly into the same category as them; Missouri was always an anomaly. Second, it would start an important sectionalization process that began to break up the lands west of the Mississippi. The Missouri Compromise specified that no land admitted as a state above the latitude line of 36°30' in the Louisiana Purchase could legally be a slave state, except the land within the proposed boundary of the state of Missouri.

The Missouri Compromise set up an important dichotomy between states that allowed slavery and those that didn't and the new territories that would eventually apply for statehood in the U.S. In the same year – 1821 – that the U.S. government accepted Missouri as a slave state into the Union, Schoolcraft published an epic poem about the advancing Westward Expansion into the trans-Mississippi lands. This poem, "Transallegania or The Groans of Missouri", was an epic that described the unbridled optimism that Americans felt toward the

⁹⁵ Heidler and Heidler. *Manifest Destiny*, 45, 12.

space that was then considered the settled American West. The title, aptly for this project, is an ode to everything west of the Alleghenies, as well as to the Missouri land, or the landscape that makes up the definition of the Midwest. The poem captures a kind of excitement for the adventure of the plains and prairies of the modern Midwest as well as a sense of possibility for the kind of American progress that could be made through continued western colonization:

“When wilds that were lately the panther’s retreat,
Were turned to plantations and covered with wheat;
When emigrants thickened, and congress debates,
Turned full on the west, and they cut off new states;...
Nor paused he for river, or mountain, or plain,
Till he reached the frontiers of his golden domain;
There stopped on a mountain, all reeking with heat,
(The Arkansaw winding along at his feet,)
And surveyed with amazement the torrent that prest—
The stream of migration that rolled to the west. ...
They are driving the savage before them amain,
And people each forest, and culture each plain.
He sees how they struggle with fortune and fate,
How toil to be happy, and pant to be great. ...
The exiles of Europe, the poor, the oppress’d,
All, all, they are bending their steps to the west.”⁹⁶

With the admittance of Missouri into American statehood, Schoolcraft’s elegy was even more prescient, having been written and published in the time during which the state’s status in the Union was decided. The Missouri Compromise began several important initiatives that would give definite shape to the otherwise loosely defined Louisiana Purchase territory, as well as resolve political issues that were further sectionalizing the country. History shows that these issues would not die with this legislation, but rather would erupt into the Civil War four decades later. When the Missouri Compromise passed through Congress, Thomas Jefferson correctly diagnosed the problem and the reason why this compromise would not last for the ages: “I

⁹⁶ Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw*, 92-93.

considered [the compromise] at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment, but this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.”⁹⁷ In this moment, however, the Far West of the American continent was a place of unbounded potential and a place that was predestined to become conquered by Anglo Americans. The next stage of settlement, the Manifest Destiny era, integrated the two halves of what morphed into the modern Midwest and began to cultivate a definition for the region and its inhabitants. Fast-moving settlement and economic incentive pushed American society westward, and in the process, it changed the region into something unified by the stereotypes of the West and the realities of the plains and river valleys of the Midwest.

PART THREE: THE “FAR WEST” AND THE “NORTHWEST” BECOME THE “MIDDLE WEST”

In this final stage of integration between the two halves of the defined Midwest, writers in the new West of the United States wrote differently about the territory that shaped itself bit by bit after the Missouri Compromise. Starting after this legislation, explorers and settlers journeyed to the region first predominantly by boat and then later over land to the trans-Mississippi lands. With each published work, though, these authors cultivated meaning in the eyes of the American public about the unexplained terrain of the Louisiana Purchase. Through the use of common elements in the west, these writers reminded readers that the west was

⁹⁷ Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes (April 22, 1820) *Library of Congress*. 12 March 2010, <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/159.html>>.

moving degrees of longitude westward; therefore the existence (or lack thereof) of these representations heralded a new region born of the two formerly disparate lands of the West and the Far West. The movement of the symbols of the West relied upon increased veins of transportation via river and rail. On the rivers, the means of getting to the trans-Mississippi region changed with the advent of the steamboat; over land, the introduction of railroads to the region at once made leisure travel accessible to the citizens living on the eastern seaboard. The Manifest Destiny philosophy, as well as these improved modes of transportation, changed the motivations that settlers had in moving westward. Ultimately, the secession of the states during the Civil War finalized the regional definition of the modern Midwest, but the written accounts of the area between the Alleghenies and the Rockies pushed for a conglomerated view of the Midwestern region.

Even some of the newest and lesser-settled states formed out of the Northwest Ordinance retained some mystery, and these writers gave early accounts of the lands that lay outside the highways of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The narrative of the West before the Missouri Compromise was that of the explorer. Lewis and Clark being prime examples of a classic Western expedition, the written word was often in a concise journal format. Americans gleaned their mental picture of the West from what amounted to not much more than just a ledger of rivers, resources and Indian settlements. However, as the area began to be more explored and settled, the explorer's narrative pushed westward into the plains well west of the Mississippi, and the descriptions of western territory east of the Mississippi included more information about the people, commerce, transportation, and the reality of living in the West as opposed to merely traversing and navigating the West. The difference is distinct and

important, because citizens in other regions of the U.S. began to read a more illuminated, and perhaps more authentic, narrative of the country west of the Alleghenies. Improved transportation to parts of the western states and territories allowed people, for the first time, to travel for leisure to the West, which began a transformation in the region from the frontier to a settled, more approachable West and eventually to the Midwest.

A writer who was particularly insightful about the realities and possibilities of the modern Midwest, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, in addition to having explored west of the Mississippi before the Missouri Compromise, surveyed the Great Lakes areas of the then Michigan Territory and the northern reaches of the states of Ohio and Indiana. Schoolcraft's work *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley* was a particularly good example of a writer who was conscious of the message of this region that he sent to the other regions of the country. About his writing style, Schoolcraft was particularly self-referential. He discussed the limits of his ability to make a reader understand what he experienced: "we shall expect the reader only to see with *our* eyes, and to hear with *our* ears; yet it is proper to apprise him at the outset, that he is not to anticipate all that falls within the scope of our vision, or within the limits of our auditory cycle.... There is always much that is improper to be told, and much that may be told improperly."⁹⁸ To establish how he was going to separate this book from other travelogues about the region, he explained the structure at the book's outset, "A narrative of daily events, will be interspersed with historical, descriptive, and practical observations, with accounts of what the country has been, and speculations respecting what it will be, and with

⁹⁸ Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portion of the Mississippi Valley* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1825), 9, iii, 28, 27.

such 'appliances to boot' as the time or the subject may suggest. With these we shall blend notices of the physical resources of the country; more especially in reference to the sciences of mineralogy, and geology, and such passing remarks on the still imperfectly described manners and customs of Indian tribes, as we can feel a confidence in presenting." With this preface, Schoolcraft set up a narrative of a place that was different and separate from the regions that Americans were used to knowing and understanding.

A symbol that Schoolcraft was fond of was that of the fertile, cultivatable land, a hallmark of the modern Midwest. For Schoolcraft, this symbol had one objective: to reinforce the region's economic ability. Schoolcraft, as he and his group canoed the waterways of the Northwest Territory, focused equally on what was on the land and what could be on the land, given settlement and cultivation. In an open letter to the governor of the Michigan Territory, Schoolcraft wrote about the progress that had been made in the western territories in the span of only a few decades, citing the migration of people and their improvements on the farmable land in the "immense fertile region lying west of the Alleghenies." A town named Maumee caught his attention as a key settlement in the agricultural economy of the Midwest: "Possessing advantages for participating in the commerce of the lakes, and being the natural mart for an extensive and fertile valley, this village may reasonably be expected, to have a gradual and steady increase in population and local importance." To Schoolcraft, this kind of projection of growth was typical to the region, as "such rapid changes are taking place, in most of the incipient towns and villages of the western country."

The Midwest would always be characterized by a rural, agricultural economic base, and Schoolcraft foresaw that this kind of settlement that was destined to creep into the plains. He alluded to the coming of settlement to this portion of the plains by mentioning that the aesthetic of the prairie would change “by the labours of cultivation, or softened by the arbitrary requisitions of taste.” He noticed easily cultivated land between the states of Ohio and Indiana, and he noted, “We have seldom seen a finer district of woodland, and cannot but anticipate the day when it will be laid out into convenient farms, and form one compact and continuous settlement.” When he reached fertile lands without agriculture in Indiana and Illinois, Schoolcraft expressed a kind of disappointment at the lack of settlement and cultivation of land that he deemed appropriate for society. Traveling over land, Schoolcraft dejectedly describes an area in Indiana that is “yet in a state of nature.” Similarly, by the time he reached St. Louis, he was electrified with this town that was maximizing its agricultural and economic potential: “so fertile and extensive a back country, which must resort to it, for the sale of its superfluous produce, and the supply of its foreign commodities.”⁹⁹ Schoolcraft was emblematic of writers who recognized the agricultural potential of the region. It was a common element in the Midwestern narrative, and writers like Schoolcraft reinforced the Midwest-as-garden archetype.

A fellow itinerant Western settler, Timothy Flint, similarly emigrated to the plains of the West. His report of his journeys to the West, to him, “cannot certainly be classed with those writers of travels, who travel post, or are wafted through a country in a steam boat, and

⁹⁹ Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley*, 110, 95, 96, 111, 73.

assume, on the ground of having thus traversed it, to know all about it.”¹⁰⁰ On his journey over the Alleghenies, though, Flint was acutely aware of how this new region differed from New England. His companions on the voyage were “exact samples of the general character of New England emigrants; poor, active, parsimonious, inquisitive, and fully impressed that no country, in moral advantages, could equal the country which they had left.” Very early in the journey, he comments that the word Ohio was “a name which yet sounded in our ears like the land of savages.” He continued about Ohio, “such, you know, even yet, are the impressions of multitudes of the Atlantic people, with respect to that beautiful country.” The longer he traveled through Ohio, the more Flint, as a man who ended up living in the “northern, middle, and southern divisions” of the Mississippi Valley, recognized the difference between Eastern thought and Western reality.

To that end, the way Flint wrote about the West was a step toward the consolidation of the two entities – the Louisiana Purchase land east of the Rockies and the Northwest Territory land west of the Alleghenies – through his written work. In his book about the Indian wars of the West, Flint set up a dichotomy between the West and the Atlantic states but he employed a section of the country that began to resemble the modern definition of the Midwest: “The country... is now called in common parlance the West, and the Mississippi valley, indicating its position in regard to the elder and more populous country on the shores of the Atlantic.”¹⁰¹ Additionally, the “peculiar configuration, climate, physical character, fertility, and modes of communication” united this enormous tract of land together as well as set it apart from its

¹⁰⁰ Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Co., 1826), 3, 5, 7, 9.

¹⁰¹ Timothy Flint, *Indian Wars of the West* (Cincinnati: E.H. Flint, 1833), 3, 4, 12.

Atlantic neighbor, “presenting to the eye of a curious observer sufficiently amusing differences between the people of the Atlantic country and the Mississippi valley.” He imbued the people of this region with a sense of approachability and warmth presumably not found on the East Coast: “sectional feeling will be less likely to arise, as a cause of jealousy, severance, and disunion between the several members of the western confederacy. ... No country has the natural means of such easy and rapid interchange between its remotest extremities, and the inhabitants have every inducement to become a social people.” It is worth noting that Flint’s West, although still hemmed in by the Rockies and the Alleghenies, dropped all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. He even goes so far as to call New Orleans the “chief city of the western country,” which was a common belief before the secession of Southern states cleaved the South from the Midwest in the western territories.¹⁰² In that regard, Flint was wrong to write that there would not be severance in the West, but when he talked about the West, he primarily meant places that fell within the Midwestern definition. He referenced places such as Cincinnati, St. Louis, Zanesville, and Pittsburgh, as well as the typical waterways of the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri.

Like Schoolcraft, Flint saw the present of the western lands, as well as the past and the future. Upon reaching the town of Steubenville, Ohio via boat, he remarked, “Here, too, we saw the most obvious proofs of the advance of this most flourishing country, in population and improvement, the more entire development of which has been so astonishing in the last ten years.”¹⁰³ He addressed this idea earlier on the Ohio, when he, watching the owner of the

¹⁰² Flint, *Indian Wars of the West*, 11.

¹⁰³ Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, 22, 19, 44, 17.

commercial keelboat on which he rode, “indulging in probably golden dreams of easy, certain, and great profits” on the western riverbanks of the Ohio and Mississippi. By the time he traveled the Ohio River to Cincinnati, he said this of Ohio: “If its progress for the future should correspond with that of the past, in one century it will probably compare with the most populous and cultivated regions of Europe.” As he contemplated the city of Pittsburgh, Flint recognized that the “wealth, business, and glory” of the town were moving farther west to “Cincinnati, to Louisville, and other places on the Ohio.”

Flint’s observation that the fortunes of the West moved gradually westward from their origins cradled near the Allegheny Mountains echoed in the travelogues of other frontier explorers of the era. George Catlin, an artist who primarily painted the Indians of the Far West, pondered the same phenomenon of economic opportunity moving farther West: “Few people even know the true definition of the term ‘West;’ and where is its location?—phantom-like it flies before us as we travel, and on our way is continually gilded, before us, as we approach the setting sun.”¹⁰⁴ Catlin correctly diagnosed that the prospering cities on the outskirts of settlement were beginning to outshine their eastern counterparts. In Cincinnati, a city heralded by many travelers in the early-mid 19th century, citizens told Catlin that the city’s best days were behind it because “it is not far enough West.” From the same state he noted that “hundreds were selling their farms and going—to the West.” Catlin’s investigation into the meaning of the West and where it was moving brought him to a couple of conclusions: that there was a “*classic West*” that inspired “feelings of admiration,” and that there was civilization.

¹⁰⁴ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian* (London: David Bogue, 1844), 62, 60, 251.

Opposite his contemporaries, Catlin believed that the former was “in its state of original nature” and the latter was “civilized contamination.” To him, the West was large enough to include both urbanization and wilderness, but the “classic west” continued to push farther west, which left a settled new West – or Midwest – in its wake.

Nomenclature of the region was fluid and inconsistent. Often, the “Far West” still described the space west of the Mississippi, but more frequently described places such as the Yellowstone River in modern-day Wyoming and Montana. Catlin indicated that he was in the “Great Far West” when he was at the mouth of the Teton River in modern-day Idaho. When explorer Edmund Flagg named his 1830 book *The Far West*, he traveled only through Ohio and around the immediate St. Louis vicinity but also proclaimed that the Mississippi River was “the grand Central River of the continent,” which conceded that the river ran through the centralmost region of the country that he was still accustomed to calling the “Far West.”¹⁰⁵ Flint, like Catlin, noted that the states that were formerly firmly in the West were now something other. In one article, he parsed the differences between the preaching styles of three main regions: northern, middle, and southern. In his analysis of the “middle” region, he included Ohio in with Pennsylvania and New York.¹⁰⁶ He also wrote in another article that the port of Cincinnati was an “internal mart” with a “central position.”¹⁰⁷ To this point, when a writer referenced the “middle states,” he or she meant the Mid-Atlantic states that did not exceed the Allegheny Mountains. Catlin, as well as Flagg, talked about the Indian burial mounds

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Flagg, *The Far West: or, A Tour Beyond the Mountains*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 254.

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Flint, *The Western Monthly*, Vol. 3 (Cincinnati: E.H. Flint, 1830), 642.

¹⁰⁷ Flint, *The Western Monthly*, 513.

that he encountered in the “middle states” along the Mississippi. In 1836, a publication examining the slave issue in the state of Ohio separated the “eastern” states from the “middle” states, which belied a sentiment that some middle states might not be eastern.¹⁰⁸ As the “Far West” inched farther and farther away from the nucleus of the American population and the word “West” interchanged with the term “frontier,” the terms “middle” and “interior” occurred in print to describe places that were not a part of unformed Rocky Mountain or Pacific Coast states.

Many factors contributed to the facilitation of more settlers to points farther westward, but not the least of which was the ease of travel west of the Alleghenies. Mark Twain wrote famously about the steamboat industry on the Mississippi in *Life on the Mississippi* and about his experience watching and being a part of the transportation movement in the western lands. The first kinds of industrial boats on the western rivers were keelboats, which could float downstream but had to be “tediously warped and poled back by hand.”¹⁰⁹ In 1811, the first steamboat floated down the Ohio from Pittsburgh, their speediness in moving both up and downriver made keel boating on the western rivers extinct.¹¹⁰ The 1820s also saw the completion of the Erie Canal, which linked the Atlantic through the Great Lakes and into the interior of the country. Productivity on the steamboats spiked in the 1820s and 1830s, which furthered the progress of the economy of the west as well as the movement of both travelers

¹⁰⁸ “The Cincinnati Preamble and Resolutions”, *Philanthropist*, Feb.19, 1839, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), 17.

¹¹⁰ James Mak and Gary M. Walton, “Steamboats and the Great Productivity Surge in River Transportation,” *The Journal of Economic History* (Sept. 1972), 620.

and settlers into the region.¹¹¹ In 1838, Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton presented a speech in which he notes that not only did St. Louis' commerce increase four-fold in the 1830s but that the overall land sales in this time period in states serviced and settled on the main rivers of the west (Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio) were higher than in other frontier lands.¹¹²

Similar to steamboats, the steam locomotive began moving people to the region with an over-land rapidity that was not possible before. Concurrently with the advancements in steamboats, the steam locomotives and subsequent rail lines covered the East Coast and began to work westward. Many politicians in the 1830s – Benton included – advocated strongly not only for westward inclusion in rail-building, but also in a transcontinental railroad that would reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Although the railroads would not connect the modern Midwest to the East Coast for a few decades – during a trip in 1859, Horace Greeley noted that a train across the state of Missouri had only been completed that winter in a “hot haste”¹¹³ – railroad travel to eastern cities made the connection to westward-moving steamships quicker. In 1836, the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* noted an idea in regards to how transportation would eventually obliterate the West that did not refer to the West Coast: “The

¹¹¹ Mak and Walton, “Steamboats and the Great Productivity Surge in River Transportation,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 624.

¹¹² Thomas Hart Benton, *Speech of Mr. Benton, of Missouri, on the Bill to Separate the Government from the Banks*. (Washington: The Globe Office, 1838), 4-5.

¹¹³ Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in 1859* (New York: C.M.Saxton, Barker, & Co., 1860), 13.

Pacific will roll back upon us until all intermediate points become lost in the general advancement of the country in Arts and Sciences.”¹¹⁴

The added emphasis on rapid transportation to the West created a new phenomenon west of the Appalachians: the tourist. Before then, the people who ventured into the West or the Far West without the intention of staying were considered explorers. Some tourists ventured only to the settled, urbanizing areas on the rivers, and some chose to venture into the grassy plains that were less developed. Both citizen reporters and accomplished authors strove to look at the West in a new way, as their audiences changed alongside the technological advancements in transportation. Because tourism was an industry that was only in its genesis, travel accounts were in high demand for citizens, or armchair travelers, who did not have the means to travel. Famous writers’ accounts of their journeys helped to show the modern Midwest to other regions and the world, be their opinions complimentary or not.

Washington Irving, by the time he traveled west for writing purposes, spent many years in Europe and decided to return to gain back the admiration of his native land, which he feared had written him off as a defector.¹¹⁵ Irving’s narrative began in what he termed the Far West, or “several hundred miles beyond the Mississippi” in a “vast tract of uninhabited country.”¹¹⁶ He embarked in the year 1832, at which point he considered himself to be skirting the frontier line in western Missouri, as well as the modern states of Kansas and Oklahoma. Right away, Irving

¹¹⁴ Richard V. Francaviglia and Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr., “‘Are We Chimerical in This Opinion?’ Visions of a Pacific Railroad and Westward Expansion before 1845”, *The Pacific Historical Review* (May 2002), 185.

¹¹⁵ Guy Reynolds, “The Winning of the West: Washington Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies*” *The Yearbook of English Studies* (2004), 88.

¹¹⁶ Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies* (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1835), 1, 3, 181.

set up a cultural duality between the frontier and what the men he traveled with left behind on the East Coast: “The greater part of his days had been passed in the bosom of his family, and the society of deacons, elders, and select men... when suddenly he had been called to mount his steed, shoulder his rifle, and mingle among stark hunters, backwoodsmen, and naked savages, on the trackless wilds of the far West.”

Irving’s description of the Great Plains reinforced an earlier theory of the west side of the Mississippi that Zebulon Pike enunciated several decades before, which was the supposition that east of the Rockies laid the Great American Desert. Much of this depended on the vocabulary that he used to describe the modern Central Plains region. On page one, he summed up the western territories as “great grassy plains, interspersed with forests and groves and clumps of trees,” which is a complimentary description compared to the “scorched desert” that he referred to after a few hundred miles on the plains. Common among the terms that Irving used to describe the landscape of this sector of the West were “desert,” a word he commonly used to compare the plains with African deserts; “wastes”; and “dry.” Irving, in his account of traveling through the prairies of the Great Plains, called the wastes of the plains “vast and beautiful... boundless and fertile.”¹¹⁷

Conversely, he also wrote of them as “mere sandy wastes, formed from the detritus of the granite heights... has not been improperly termed the Great American Desert.”¹¹⁸ He predicted that the plains of the Far West would hinder western settlement to the coast: “Such

¹¹⁷ Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies*, 158.

¹¹⁸ Washington Irving, *Astoria* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), 206, 181.

is the nature of this immense wilderness of the far west; which apparently defies cultivation, and the habitation of civilized life. Some portions of it along the rivers may partially be subdued by agriculture, others may form vast pastoral tracts, like those of the east; but it is feared that a great part of it will form a lawless interval between the abodes of civilized man.” Flint, though, provided a counterpoint, as he intentionally addressed the myth of the Great American Desert: “It has been generally asserted, that not far from the shores of the upper Missouri, Kansas, Platte, Yellow Stone, Arkansas, and Red Rivers, the prairies become a sterile and moving sand. More recent discoveries tend to discredit these assertions. The prairies the most remote from rivers are generally found yielding in the season a rank growth of grass, plants, and flowers.”¹¹⁹

Irving, though, tended to fixate on the mythic elements of the West that he heard about while living abroad. To him, the West would make a civilized traveler untamed and adventuresome.¹²⁰ In particular, he honed in on a story that he introduced in the first few pages of *A Tour on the Prairies*: one of “grand scenery and wild habits of the prairies... of Indian braves and Indian beauties, of hunting buffaloes and catching wild horses.” Buffalo seemed to be the element that Irving considered the most “western”; he often referred to the plains region he traversed as the “buffalo prairie” and carefully chronicled his team’s hunting and tracking of buffalo. He even saw the buffalo as an emblem of the Indian population of the Far West and the bee as a symbol of white settlement, insomuch as “in proportion as the bee advances, the

¹¹⁹ Flint, *Indian Wars of the West*, 6.

¹²⁰ William Bedford Clark. "How the West Won: Irving's Comic Inversion of the Westering Myth in *A Tour on the Prairies*." *American Literature* (Nov., 1978), 342.

Indian and the buffalo retire.”¹²¹ Using the buffalo from Irving’s narrative as a symbol for the West, the difference between the Northwest Ordinance land and the space west of the Mississippi became more drastic, as Irving’s contemporary in Western literature Schoolcraft wrote about the lack of this animal on the plains of the Old Northwest. “It is but a few years since [the buffalo] was quite common on these plains,” he wrote. “There is not now an animal of this species existing, in a native state, between the Ohio and the Mississippi, and before the lapse of many years, it will only be known in the recesses of the Rocky mountains, and upon that immense desert-plain.”¹²² Ergo, to Irving, any land that no longer harbored buffalo could also no longer be considered the West.

Irving gravitated toward the authentic pioneer’s experience in the West, but that was not the case with another famous writer: Charles Dickens. Dickens traveled to the United States in 1842 and toured large portions of the East Coast, as well as into the West. His trip westward, in grand literary fashion, brought out Dickens’ most colorful adjectives, which were often anything but complimentary. It is interesting to note that Dickens pioneered European tourists in the interior portions of the country. Like any traveler of the era, Dickens arrived west of the Alleghenies in a combination of steam engine, stagecoach, and the “blowings-up in steamboats and breakings-down in coaches”, common to western travel, did not deter him.¹²³ On his three-day boat trip from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati – in a “western steamboat,” according to him – he presumed that he would be in Cincinnati Monday morning, “barring accidents.”

¹²¹ Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies*, 5, 38.

¹²² Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portion of the Mississippi Valley*, 205-206.

¹²³ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), 88, 109.

Whereas Irving's sliding scale of wilderness to settlement was based on the existence of buffalo, steamboat and river travel were the icons of Dickens' West. Problematic to Dickens was that steamboat travel, aside from hazard, required much time on the rivers of the west, of which he progressively disapproved. When touring the East Coast, Dickens seemed amused by the waterways of America, as he described a river in Massachusetts as "light-headed, thoughtless and brisk a young river... as one would desire to see."¹²⁴ From the East Coast, though, his amusement with the rivers decreases with the closeness to the frontier. On the Ohio near Cincinnati, he described the river as "broad" and "compassionate," but he lost all his goodwill by the time he reached the confluence. At Cairo, Illinois, he wrote: "Nor was the scenery, as we approached the junction of the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers, at all inspiring in its influence. The trees were stunted in their growth; the banks were low and flat; the settlements and log-cabins fewer in number; their inhabitants more wan and wretched than any we had encountered yet. ... At the junction of two rivers, on ground so flat and low, and marshy, that at certain seasons of the year it is inundated to the house-tops, lies a breeding-place for fever, ague, and death. ... the hateful Mississippi circling and eddying before it."

His sentiments about the urbanity and wilderness fit especially well with Tuan's theory that the city was safe and the wilderness profane, because this was Dickens' West. His opinion of the region, and ultimately of America, boomeranged the farther west he went: It was favorable moving westward in Cincinnati ("I have not often seen a place that commends itself so favorably and pleasantly to a stranger at first glance as this does..."), then at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi ("a slimy monster hideous to behold; a hotbed of disease, an ugly

¹²⁴ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 45, 110, 111, 118, 112.

sepulcher, a grave uncheered by any gleam of promise...”), and then ultimately north to St. Louis, which still, though “progressing,” “is not likely ever to vie, in point of elegance or beauty, with Cincinnati.” On his way back east, the change was immediate as he again reached the Ohio; his boat turned off the “hideous waters of the Mississippi” and “were again upon the clear Ohio, never, I trust, to see the Mississippi more, saving in troubled dreams and nightmares.”¹²⁵

He never ventured west of St. Louis, but when he explored the city and its environs, he was not impressed. Of the city, Dickens sneakily insulted the region: “I shall therefore, I have no doubt, be at issue with the inhabitants of St. Louis, in questioning the perfect salubrity of its climate, and in hinting that I think it must rather dispose to fever, in the summer and autumnal seasons. Just adding, that it is very hot, lies among great rivers, and has vast tracts of undrained swampy land around it, I leave the reader to form his own opinion.” He searched for a strong enough adjective to describe the heat of St. Louis, “not to say hot, for the term is weak and lukewarm in its power of conveying an idea of the temperature.” From St. Louis, he traveled with a team back across the river eastward into the prairies of southern Illinois; to get to a place called the Looking-Glass Prairie, he passed through the marshy lowlands of the river bottom, which was unpopulated (“wretched cabins were wide apart and thinly scattered”) and pestilent (“everywhere was stagnant, slimy, rotten, filthy water”). Once he reached his prairie destination, Dickens found himself disappointed at what he felt should have been his seminal western experience. He admitted that his expectations of the prairie were set too high from “having heard and read so much about it,” but his experience was, essentially, this: “It was

¹²⁵ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 129, 121, 123, 125, 126.

lonely and wild, but oppressive in its barren monotony. I felt that, in traversing the Prairies, I could never abandon myself to the scene, forgetful of all else, as I should do instinctively, were the heather under my feet, or an iron-bound coast beyond.”

Dickens reviewed the composition of the Western people with equal parts disgust and an eye toward where they were from and where they were going, not unlike his predecessor of 60 years Crevecoeur. Of the people moving west via boat, he wrote, “The company appeared to be oppressed by the same tremendous concealments, and had as little capacity of enjoyment or light-heartedness.”¹²⁶ Of the people traveling over land to the West, he wrote, “It was a pitiful sight to see one of these [wagons] deep in the mire, the axle-tree broken, the wheel lying idly by its side, the man gone miles away to look for assistance, the woman seated among their wandering household goods... a picture of forlorn, dejected patience.” He typified the people of the West as a couple that he met south of St. Louis as “dry, tough, hard-faced... one of the very many descendents of Cain, proper to this continent, who seem destined from their birth to serve as pioneers in the great human army.” These caricatures of Western people were predominantly people who were continuing westward to populate those lands, so from this narrative, a reader had no choice but to think poorly of the settlers in this region. If Dickens were the loudest European voice speaking about this region, international audiences, as well as his readers in America, could not have had a flattering picture of what eventually became the Midwest.¹²⁷ Dickens’ publisher marketed the book in the U.S., where Americans from the East and the West disliked his review of their country. “We regret that. Mr. Dickens has published

¹²⁶ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 117, 127, 128.

¹²⁷ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 214.

these volumes, for they bear the marks of hasty composition, evince no genius, add nothing to the author's reputation as a writer, and exhibit his moral character in a most undesirable light."¹²⁸

The tourist's perspective of what would become the Midwest was harsher than the explorer's viewpoint, probably because they were not invested in the region in the same way as the explorer or the settler. Margaret Fuller, a traveler from New England, wrote a book about spending a summer in the Great Lakes region of the Midwest. She first felt as though she had "really approached the West" when she saw Indians on the St. Clair River in Michigan.¹²⁹ In fact, Fuller's understanding of the mythic West revolved around the presence of Indians. She did not feel that she had reached the West until she spotted Indian civilization, and in the book when she related the West to the Far West, she puts it in relation to where there are populations of Indians. In an open exclamation to Native Americans, she situated the Far West as the Rocky Mountains. As her boat trip gave way to a stay in Chicago, Fuller was at first disappointed: "At first, the prairie seemed to speak of the very desolation of dullness. After sweeping over the vast monotony of the lakes to come to this monotony of land, with all around a limitless horizon... it was too dreary ... to bear."

Again, here was a known writer scribing an undesirable landscape in a West that was not the romanticized, mountainous Far West. To be fair to her description, Fuller eventually warmed to the scenery of the Midwest, as she cited, "I began to love because I began to know the scene, and shrank no longer from 'the encircling vastness.'" On a short trip through

¹²⁸ "Dickens' Notes on America," *New Englander* (Jan. 1843), 64.

¹²⁹ Sarah Margaret Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes in 1843* (New York: Charles S. Francis and Co., 1844), 18, 34, 68, 53.

northern Illinois parallel to Chicago, she even separated “the West” from the city of Chicago, which put Chicago into a category that was other than the West. Here, she described a sunset in the city of Chicago that was “beyond any we saw at the West.” In a wave of patriotism and enthusiasm, she made a bold comparison between the plains of the Great Lakes states and Europe: “I do believe Rome and Florence are suburbs compared to this capital of nature’s art.”

She remained, though, fairly critical of the society that developed along the frontier line in the West. On the boat that first took her from Niagara Falls into the Great Lakes, she took inventory of the people who were on the boat alongside her. She mentioned that they were almost exclusively New Englanders “seeking their fortunes. ... It was to them a prospect, not of the unfolding nobler energies, but of more ease, and larger accumulation.”¹³⁰ From this, she disapproved of not only the philosophical growth but also physical growth of this region. “I come to the west,” she wrote, “prepared for the distaste I must experience at its mushroom growth.” To her, the growth patterns of the East Coast were more intuitive, “as new joints on a bough.” Fuller rightly diagnosed the difference between East and West – “The torrent of emigration swells very strongly towards this place. During the fine weather, the poor refugees arrive daily, in their national dresses, all travel-soiled and worn.” – because “there are lures enough in the West for people of all kinds; □ the enthusiast and the cunning man; the naturalist, and the lover who needs to be rich for the sake of her he loves.” Twenty years prior, Schoolcraft had taken the same ideals and used them as a positive in the permanent settlement of the Midwest. In northern Ohio Schoolcraft marveled at how different cultures and advanced emigration mixed to create something unique to the West. He wrote: “We are aware that this

¹³⁰ Fuller, *Summer on the Lakes in 1843*, 18, 28, 113, 115.

[combination] is applicable to other sections of the western country, where the novel intermixture of barbarity and refinement, the discrepance of manners and languages, and the progressive state of settlements, bear the most unerring proof of that rage for emigration, whose current is still toward the west: a rage which seems to have impelled a part of the population of the Old States, over the attractive plains of the New..."¹³¹

Fuller fixated on Indians, Indian literature (she used Schoolcraft as a reference for her knowledge of Native Americans), and Indian settlement. She was particularly visionary when she noted that "the power of fate is with the white man, and the Indian feels it." During this period of time in the 1830s and 1840s, the U.S. government forced Indian tribes, found to be particularly problematic to the permanent settlements in the Ohio Valley, into the land west of the Mississippi, as Thomas Jefferson had once imagined. Specifically, the land that now comprises the state of Oklahoma was a receptacle for the Native Americans displaced from the American Southeast, the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes. A few years before Fuller, Washington Irving noticed the same phenomenon, and he even projected what it could mean for frontier settlement: "We are contributing incessantly to swell this singular and heterogeneous cloud of wild population that is to hang about our frontier, by the transfer of whole tribes of savages from the east of the Mississippi to the great wastes of the far west.... Many consider themselves expatriated beings wrongfully exiled from their hereditary homes, and the sepulchres of their fathers, and cherish a deep and abiding animosity against the race that has dispossessed them. Some may gradually become pastoral hordes... others, it is to be

¹³¹ Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portion of the Mississippi Valley*, 31.

apprehended, will become predatory bands... with the open plains for their marauding grounds, and the mountains for their retreats and lurking places.”¹³²

Catlin, who spent most of his career painting the portraits of Indians because he suspected their societies might be in decline, wrote that the government had allowed the Indians’ “rights invaded, their morals corrupted, their lands wrested from them, their customs change, and therefore lost to the world.”¹³³ Regionally, the elimination of Native Americans from the country between the Ohio and the Mississippi and even parts of the immediate trans-Mississippi land allowed the Indians to be an emblem for a West that was not within these boundaries. Common in the mythology of the West, Indians and Indian attacks were a part of the western frontier experience. Indians still existed, and pioneers and Native Americans still skirmished, but that it was not taking place in former “western” lands was significant. Schoolcraft, always a keen observer of Indian affairs, noted that such attacks “are comparatively rare, among the tribes *east* of the Mississippi.”¹³⁴ The extermination of this emblem from the modern-day Midwest brought the region a step closer to establishing itself as being something other than the West.

Whereas the extradition of Indian tribes from eastern land was a political and societal change, other philosophical changes were afoot as well. According to a popular philosophy of the era, Americans could displace Indian populations because it was the divine right of United States citizens to claim all the land on the continent. Popularized in print by columnist John L.

¹³² Irving, *Astoria*, 181.

¹³³ Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian*, 36.

¹³⁴ Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley*, 120.

O’Sullivan, the philosophy of Manifest Destiny stated that no population could “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.”¹³⁵ Here, O’Sullivan referred to the annexation of Texas – a point of contention for those interested in retaining the slave-state versus free-state balance established with the Missouri Compromise. Manifest Destiny was his justification for annexing Texas from Mexico, but the application of this philosophy did not stop with Texas. Not long after *The United States Democratic Review* published this axiom, Manifest Destiny worked its way into the lexicon of the U.S. Congress’s debate over the annexation of the Oregon Territory in the mid-1840s.¹³⁶

The *Democratic Review* article formalized and popularized a philosophy that had been in place for as long as Americans had been moving west, and it had historically been used to disenfranchise Native Americans as well as other European countries with land claims on the continent. It was through Biblical right that the first American settlers sailed westward from Britain and landed at the American East Coast, and it was the first justification in use for pushing Native Americans out of their tribal lands in modern states such as Massachusetts and Virginia. Schoolcraft, in the mid-1820s, wrote, “From the Atlantic the immense tide of our population has rolled steadily, and irresistibly, to the west, sweeping before it the feeble remains of this wretched people.... Providence has given us the strength to restrain and the

¹³⁵ John L. O’Sullivan, "Annexation." *The United States Democratic Review* (1845), 5.

¹³⁶ Nordholt, *The Myth of the West: America as the Last Empire.*, 169.

means to support this wretched people.”¹³⁷ The justification followed the frontier line west until O’Sullivan’s formalization in relation to Texas and, eventually, Oregon. It was just the catalyst needed for the American pioneer to push into lands that might have belonged to an Indian nation or to another country. Fueled by improvements in transportation and by the land hunger of points westward, settlement through the continent to the Pacific coast raced through the plains and over the mountains until emigration to all parts of what was known, in the 1840s, as the Far West was common.

In the late 1840s, the Gold Rush in California hastened the settlement, economic development and transportation routes to the Pacific. Because of this quick settlement that precluded complete civilization in the lands east of the state, the lands of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio valleys – or, the modern Midwest – began to transition into being known as other things. The Missouri River all the way through to its headwaters in Montana provided a direct northwestern route, and the Oregon Territory, since the days of Lewis and Clark, was coveted as U.S. land. In the verbiage of debating Oregon’s place as either owned by the British or by the U.S., the space recognized as the Northwest Territory – the states of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 – now took the moniker “Old Northwest.” Thomas Hart Benton, when arguing for the inclusion of Oregon, referred to it as such in front of the U.S. Senate. Several other senators, in discussing the futures of Oregon and Texas and their slaveholding statuses, talked about the Northwest Ordinance as something that applied to an older version of the Northwest than existed at the time: “[T]here is one little extract from the old ordinance of 1787 – one little proviso which certain of us wish to put into it, just to please our constituents and

¹³⁷ Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley*, 100, 103.

ourselves – something to exclude slavery from that territory, as it was excluded from the old Northwest Territory...”¹³⁸

As the 1830s and 1840s marched on, the “Far West,” though still occasionally being used to describe the western shore of the Mississippi, usually meant the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains. In these years, the usage of “central” or “interior” increased in popularity; a few early uses of the term “middle west” arose in periodicals in the 1840s as well. One article in 1844 termed the Ohio valley as the “‘middle West;’ for the ‘far West’ is a long way west of this.”¹³⁹ Similarly the next year, a preface to a published set of letters to a New England publication admitted, “I can promise you a few letters from this region – once called, *en parlance*, the Far West – but now scarcely far enough off from Boston to be called the Middle West.” These letters, though short, contained an account of travel down the Ohio and up the Mississippi to St. Louis.¹⁴⁰ The regional term “middle west,” in the clear presence of an actual westernmost boundary of the United States, began its rise as the predominant term for the region. It was only in the face of the settlement of Pacific Coast lands and in the absence of things classically Western that the Middle West started a cultivation of its own regional label.

Since the founding of the United States, the West was always synonymous with the unknown. Starting with this point in history, the Middle West was too settled to be considered part of the frontier, and it was too young and unpolished to be assimilated with the East Coast.

¹³⁸ “Congressional,” *National Register* (March 23, 1848), 46.

¹³⁹ “Kentucky Correspondence,” *Christian Watchman* (Oct. 4, 1844), 158.

¹⁴⁰ “Letters from the West, No. 1,” *Christian Reflector* (January 23, 1845), 13.

Some modern Midwesterners have hypothesized that once the frontier line pushed to the Pacific coast, the only settlers that came west and stayed in historically Midwestern cities and states were the underachievers who could not or would not continue on to the golden west. The inception of the term “middle west,” which gained most of its momentum after the Civil War, began the region’s national recognition as being neither here nor there, neither west nor east. Unflattering names like “Great American Desert” and “Old Northwest” did not do much to enhance the image of the region. As evidenced in this paper, the first explorers, travelers and settlers of the region that became the Midwest all described the space as unanimously flat, occasionally desolate, and intermittently cultivatable. Therefore, there is little mystery to the frumpy stereotype that the region enjoys.

The Midwest provenance was a drama in three acts: the acquisition of the Ohio Valley lands in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the acquisition of the land in the Louisiana Purchase, and the integration of the two halves into what morphed from the Far West to the West to the Middle West. The epilogue, following the emergence of the label “middle west,” goes something like this: The Civil War, though it is not discussed at length in this paper, did much to separate the southern half of the Louisiana Purchase from those that did not secede in the anti-slavery region designated by the Missouri Compromise. Due to its status as a neutral state in the Civil War, Missouri would remain a state of questionable regionality through to present day. Another state that remained neutral in the Civil War, Kentucky, became excluded from the Middle West due in part to its slavery-sympathetic history, which it shared with fellow border state Missouri, but when it was omitted from the mandate of the Northwest Ordinance to be slave-free, the state relinquished regional similarity with the states north of the Ohio. The land

cradled between the two major mountain ranges and fed by major rivers grew in size and population until its urbanized cities resembled their East Coast counterparts. Near the turn of the 20th century, the region peaked, so to speak, in popularity, when cities such as Chicago and St. Louis held popular and well-attended World's Fairs. In 1900, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Cleveland were four of the top ten most populous cities in the U.S.; by 1910, the list included Detroit and Pittsburgh. The rapidity with which this region cottoned to new industries and manufacturing helped the proliferation of settled population in the region's cities.

Nothing good, at least in industrial culture, lasts. The rise and fall of steel, vehicle production and railroad trade emptied the cities of the Midwest as quickly as they had brought permanent populations to the region. This movement in population in the Midwest bestowed the region with another unfavorable appellation: the Rust Belt. Joel Garreau, an author with an affinity for North American regionality, did not view the Midwest as one region with the same identity, but rather as two regions split by their economies. East of the Mississippi, Garreau thought the industrial cities of Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and their corresponding states created what he called The Foundry – a region that was primarily industrial and teeming with blue-collar jobs. The other half of the Midwest, though, he considered The Breadbasket, or the antithesis of The Foundry. The Breadbasket, which encompassed the entirety of the plains west of the Mississippi through to the Canadian border, claimed the Midwestern ideal of being “the heartland,” the rural, Jeffersonian space where, to quote famous Midwesterner Garrison Keillor, “all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” St. Louis, ever the exception, fell into three

categories in Garreau's book; the city is the nexus of three historical and economic regions that combine The Breadbasket, The Foundry, and Dixie, a nod to St. Louis' Southern sympathies.¹⁴¹

It is probably unrealistic to think that a parcel of land the size of the dictionary-defined Midwest can have a unified identity. This research project chose to define the Midwest by a combined history of the region, but Garreau's historical-economy definition has merit as a way to sectionalize this large area. Although topography is often a defining characteristic of the region, it is not entirely unified. After all, assuming that Michigan and Kansas are comparable in terrain is an unfair assumption. Another option would be to break the region into topographical sections: Great Lakes and prairies. This would primarily be a north-south division, but it would more accurately separate the green, rocky coastlines of the Great Lakes from the grassy expanses of the plains. Schoolcraft suggested a similar topographic division; when writing about the seam between the Great Lakes region and the rest of the Ohio Valley, he said, "We accordingly find that the northern shores are rocky and sterile, with comparatively scanty and limited tracts of arable soil; while the southern abound in rich plains and prairies, with few prominent asperities of surface, forming a region for the successful operations of farming and grazing; whose richness, variety, and unbroken extent, are rarely paralleled."¹⁴²

True to its history as having formerly been known as the West, the region retained the "west" portion of its name, and even as the population base of the country filled in everything between the coasts and moved on to other western spaces such as Hawaii and Alaska, the vernacular Midwest never became the "Mideast." Once touched by the mythology of the classic

¹⁴¹ Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981).

¹⁴² Schoolcraft, *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley*, 82-83.

West – that of Indian attacks, buffalo herds, sinewy pioneers, and wide-open spaces – the region lost its ability to be completely Eastern. Everything that made these river valleys western, though, longitudinally moved westward, until they hit the western wall of the Rockies. The region left behind, though it did not retain any semblance of cowboy romanticism, has its own genesis and history that sets it apart from the regions around it. This history is no less important than that of other regions, though it is, perhaps, more often overlooked, due to the Midwest's inability to retain any semblance of the identity that was bestowed onto it from the region's frontierland beginnings. Governmental land acquisition and the first impressions of the earliest Midwesterners shaped the gigantic landmass between two mountain ranges into the vital American region that it is today.

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