Landscape and identity in North America’s southern colonies from 1660 to 1745
[introduction]

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Landscape and Identity in North America’s Southern Colonies from 1660 to 1745
Introduction

The themes of this book are threefold. It examines the intersection between landscape, identity and print culture in order to discover whether American settlers developed a unique colonial or provincial identity prior to 1745. This book has been influenced by six historical movements or moments, and will be reacting to some, borrowing methods from others and challenging yet more. Intellectual and social history defined the subject during the last half of the twentieth century. The tools that these approaches to the Atlantic provide the scholar have been invaluable, but inevitably, the latest scholarship defines itself in reaction to these schools of thought rather than as part of them. The approaches of Atlantic history and borderlands history are the latest trends within the twenty-first century discipline and cannot be ignored by any serious scholar of America. Moving outside the discipline of history, this book has also been influenced by work done by archaeologists and architectural historians, borrowing theoretical approaches from the former, and subject knowledge from the latter.

Intellectual and Social History

Throughout the twentieth century, scholars attempted to define the origins of a uniquely American state of mind and identity. Starting from the point that Americans are exceptional and perhaps even superior to anyone else, historians have wondered about whether these differences can be traced to the colonial period. Most assumed that they could and so wilfully saw the origins of modern American traits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Intellectual historians chose to examine aspects such as education and book readership and the rise of polite society to define a uniquely American character. Merle Curti was the pioneer in this field with his ground breaking study, *The Growth of American Thought*, which argued that America’s unique social environment had allowed the development of unique ways of thinking. My book will test this thesis. More recently, Richard Brown’s 1989 book *Knowledge is Power*, traced the way that news and information
were disseminated in early America, focusing on the learned Puritan scholars in New England and the classically educated elite of the south. To Brown, the great port cities of the north, Philadelphia, Boston and New York, were the foci of the transmission of news, although he did acknowledge that information reached those lower in the social strata via almanacs. It is this examination of the print cultural context as a holistic entity that has influenced my book. These approaches were challenged as it became obvious that a homogenous colonial past based on the New England Puritans was atypical in the American experience and contributed only a small part towards the development of an American identity. The south has not been entirely neglected by intellectual historians, as revealed by Richard Davis’s mammoth three-volume work *The Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*. But this exhaustive survey draws few conclusions about the resultant relationship with Britain or with the rest of the American colonies. However, Ned Landsman’s 1997 book *From Colonials to Provincials* does just that and has been a significant influence on this book. His ideas about the development of a provincial identity within the colonies inspired me to search for the same theme by exploring contemporary landscape interpretation.

Social historians have explored the ways that servants were able to gain land, and how migrants lost their unique national characteristics in the melting pot of American society. In both aspects, the south was seen as an anomaly with the northern example, especially that of New England, and Boston in particular, seen as the social and intellectual model on which American nationhood was based. As David Hackett Fischer controversially showed in his 1989 book *Albion’s Seed*, four folkways (or spheres of social and cultural influence) were traced back to the mother country as East Anglia, the South of England, the Midlands and the Scottish borders were acknowledged as the colonial seedbeds for American life for four different migrations between 1607 and 1776. In contrast to Fisher, Allan Kulikoff’s detailed portrayal of the social history of land use in North America in *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (2000) uses Thomas Jefferson’s praise of the yeoman farmer as its jumping off point and argues that the experiences of farmers throughout the colonies were similar to one another and that the threats to their livelihoods came from speculators and the colonial government. Kulikoff believes that the situation they encountered on the ground in America defined the social lives of the settlers far more than their particular origins in the Old World.
The cultural turn in scholarship of the late twentieth century encouraged historians to challenge the approach adopted by social and economic historians to interpret the lives of the poor through a straightforward reading of records such as ships’ logs and court accounts. It also challenged intellectual historians’ approach to the understanding of identity purely through the mores of the elite and instead adopted techniques of close reading to reveal a linguistic system of representation. It shied away from trying to expose a historical reality and focused instead on undertaking subtler analyses to get behind the surface meaning of a text. In practical terms, the cultural turn allowed scholars to interpret sources in a more literary and anthropological way, ‘mining’ them for evidence of mentalité. Most scholars would claim to be influenced by this development, but particularly important for my work has been the pioneering use of agricultural sources by Drew Gilpin Faust in her article ‘Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture’ for the *Journal of Southern History* in 1979.

The problem with many of these approaches has been that they have chosen to look ‘the wrong way down the telescope’. They have started with what they perceive to be American exceptionalism and have looked for its origins. This is due partly to an institutional hiatus in the academy. Until recently historians of the United States (i.e. postcolonial North America) rarely talked to historians of early modern Europe and so putting the two parts of the story together was troublesome. In fact, it is problematic that scholars see the cultural story of North America as being divided into ‘colonial’ and ‘national’ eras with a stark difference between the two. Although it is clear that the development of a unique political identity happened relatively late, close to the Revolution, this book seeks to prove that culturally at least, the change from colony to nation was beginning much earlier than 1776.

**Material culture: archaeology and architecture**

While this book could not hope to be comprehensive in its scope if it attempted to master, as well as the history of the period, two entirely separate disciplines, the methods employed by archaeologists and scholars of architecture have influenced its development. In their refusal to accept American myths but to seek material evidence, archaeologists have united the study of the three main cultures that interacted in colonial North America: native, African-American and European-American. Using photographs and personal memory
alongside the written record, historical archaeologists tell the story of people at all levels of society, rather than solely the literate elites, by examining what James Deetz has called ‘folk culture’ (essentially traditional and local) and ‘popular culture’ (rapidly changing and homogenous).\(^1\) Archaeologists recognise that these groups shared a landscape and while that landscape may have meant different things to each group, the boundaries which historians imagine were erected to prevent cross-cultural permutation, were often non-existent. This cultural mixing meant, for example, that white settlers and the black slaves adapted equally well to their new landscape, due to the encounter of the two races in the plantation south. The work of Leland Ferguson in his 1992 book *Uncommon Ground* reinforces this assertion, as does John Vlach’s *Back of the Big House* published the following year.

Especially in the southern colonies, landscape use and interpretation by those of European origin was defined by their interaction with the ‘other’. In fact, these ‘others’ were intrinsic to the definition of this world as ‘American’: it wouldn’t really have become American without them. Sociologist Mechal Sobel reinforces this point in her book, the aptly titled *The World They Made Together* (1987). Her findings represent an interesting contrast with much of the evidence that emerged from contemporary written texts, which showed settlers of European origin attempting to metaphorically and physically distance themselves from their black and native neighbours. Archaeologists’ findings are an important caveat that raise the question that perhaps these attempts at distancing were not as successful and thorough as we had once thought and perhaps the denial of landscape sharing that we find in much of the print culture is, to borrow from Shakespeare, evidence that the settler ‘doth protest too much’.

Scholars of architecture have pulled the study of material culture in the opposite direction. They begin with the blueprint of architectural development in Europe and then try to fit the American narrative into that model. Many have found that it does not always fit. Of course, it is straightforward to position mansions such as Green Spring in Virginia in the trajectory of classical architecture, but for the most part the built environment in America does not simply mirror trends from Europe. It reacts to material conditions and the

particular desires of the people living there. Even when architecture in North America seems similar to that of Europe, traditional styles take on a new meaning when situated in a new environment. This is especially true of the southern colonies which did not develop along the town and village model imported from the old world, nor did most of the houses and estates look anything like those built by their contemporaries in Europe. So this book adopts the methods of architecture scholars in examining the built environment, but transcends the theories in which they enclose their material. It would be naive to deny the influence of the architecture of Europe, but in categorising houses only in so far as they match or move away from these models, architectural historians can tell us little about the ways that people in the past understood their built environment and reveal more about post-Enlightenment academia that study colonial North America. Examples of this traditional approach are in the work of H.C.Forman in the 1940s that argued that southern architecture was essentially stuck in a ‘medieval mode’ and in that of Hugh Morrison in the 1950s that traced the gradual adoption of the ‘Georgian’ style in the 18th century. More recently, architectural historians have turned their focus to the development of the urban environment, such as James Kornwolf’s monumental three volume survey of Architecture and Town Planning (Johns Hopkins, 2002), which is innovative because it utilises comparisons in Canada and New Spain, briefly discusses native and slave contributions and places each building in its historical context, but the book remains traditional in its attempt to restore the great masters of European architecture to their place on a pedestal. In my examinations of the textual representations of the natural landscape and the built environment, I have integrated the approaches of scholars within these fields with the most recent historical thinking.

Atlantic and Borderlands

In the last twenty years two trends have influenced the study of the colonial southeast to such an extent that it could now be argued that they define the field and, without evidence of engagement with these topics, few books and articles are published. That is not to say that they hold all the answers or that they are unproblematic for the study of this period. Atlantic History is an approach that considers the entire Atlantic world, Europe, Africa and
America, holistically. British North America is seen as only part of the story, alongside Spanish, French and Dutch colonies and even these must not be considered in isolation from the connections with Africa. The entire Atlantic Ocean is seen as a zone of contact and conflict. While it has proved very difficult to undertake an entire history of the Atlantic in the vein of Braudel’s attempt to document the Mediterranean, individual case studies are framed to contribute to the discussions begun under the auspices of the Atlantic history label, and this is what my book intends to do. Although it does not attempt to use evidence from the Spanish, Dutch, French or Portuguese Atlantics, this book suggests that the relationship between Europe and the Americas was far more complex than has hitherto been suggested in transatlantic studies. Cultural transfer was not simply moving one way and then the other across the ocean but behaved rather more erratically, bringing in influences from Africa and the Native American world as well as from the Caribbean. The Atlantic approach teaches historians of North America that while the relationship with Britain is a fascinating prism through which to examine the colonial period, it certainly is not the way to understand the region.

However, this approach is problematic in many ways, not least because of the methodological difficulties of mastering such a large area of study. It has been argued that contemporaries saw the Atlantic as a holistic entity and so modern historians are merely mirroring that mentality. However, it could also be claimed that the newly emerging discipline of global history presents a challenge to this model. In early modern England, for example, interests in the Middle East, the Far East and Russia operated alongside concerns in the Atlantic world. Can we really pigeonhole the Atlantic as being a discrete entity? Attempting a survey of the perception of landscape in the entire Atlantic would not only be folly, but would also be intellectually unsound. The documents with which I have worked guided me towards accommodating Atlantic history methodology but not subject matter. This is not to deny that, in the future, comparative work might be done to further illuminate this topic. An example of the fruitful way in which the concept of the Atlantic can be used, without broadening a study out to encompass every facet of the region, is the volume edited by David D. Hall and Hugh Amory in 2000, *A History of the Book in America: the colonial book in the Atlantic World* in which the ‘Atlantic World’ described the myriad intellectual and economic connections between the old and new worlds and represented
this milieu as a single culture rather than two competing or exclusive domains. Another example is Emma Hart’s 2010 book *Building Charleston* in which she situates that single city in the British Atlantic world, showing that it is not ‘a city apart’ but rather an integral part of the Atlantic system.²

The term ‘Borderlands’ provides scholars a different way of thinking about ‘frontiers’. The study of borderlands has been led by scholars of Native American history, who believe that frontier history rendered the Indians as passive victims of white activity. Examining borderlands, we can see that the agency of Indians and African Americans is vitally important during the crucial developmental period that this book covers. It also reminds us that the story of the British Atlantic is not satisfactorily explained by examining the lives of Anglo-Americans and that Spanish and French played an equally important role in colonial creation in the south east. An article discussing this historical approach, written by Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron in 1999 in *American Historical Review*, cemented borderlands as a significant field of study in the history of the south eastern United States.³ Borderlands can be areas of cooperation and of conflict simultaneously. The British and French, and the Natives and Europeans, were at once trading and living together and stealing from and fighting one another. A borderlands approach allows us to track the ebbs and flows of these trends by examining how power and authority worked in these contested regions. My book also argues that this approach opens up another avenue of research: that these regions were metaphorically contested between settlers on the ground and colonial authorities back in Europe. Although nominally ‘on the same side’, in practice the settlers found that their understanding of the world in which they lived clashed dramatically with the world in which imperial authorities at home thought they lived or wanted them to live.

**Why this book?**

Of all the books that I could have written, this one has emerged. The period chosen for study, 1660 to 1745, represents a time of great change but also provides significant

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evidence of continuity. In 1660 in England, the Stuart monarchy was restored and Charles II, while not wholly fascinated by the New World, saw it as a venue in which he could exercise his patronage and expand his coffers. At this time colonists began turning southwards and westwards from Virginia, so it can be seen as the end of the exploration and establishment phase of the first colonies, and the start of the era of expansion. My choice of 1745 as the end date was influenced by the primary source evidence. Examining newspapers and magazines, a stark difference emerges in reporting after 1745, when the siege and capture of Louisbourg changed the focus of news about America. English and American commentators turned away from the more general strategic reporting about the conflicted colonial situation, to more specific, detailed discussions of tactics and events at Louisbourg. The siege so captured the imagination of those on both sides of the Atlantic that I see it as the beginning of a new phase in the representation of America in print. The year also represents a significant point for the Stuart monarchy as the Jacobite rebellion failed in 1745.

Why this period?

Findings developed from my earlier research contrast the representations in this period with those of the period 1607-1660 covered in my first book. It is important to highlight the differences and similarities between the two. Despite struggles with the environment, Natives, slaves and other Europeans, the British exuded more confidence about their security within the landscape during this period. Earlier, the vulnerability of the settlements, especially their economically precarious position with the threat of starvation never far away, was a key concern for many authors. By the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, under the aegis of the Stuart government, the colonies were part of an interlocking system of Atlantic trade in which the transmission of goods, and people and ideas, was more secure. Although the struggle for survival was not entirely won, enough leisure time was permitted to allow the development of cultural output and this led to the emergence of a sense of American residents being similar to or different from European residents. Finally, linked to this developing identity, their sense of the understanding of the landscape changed. Authors resident in the American colonies no longer felt in constant fear

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of their surroundings. Developments in scientific knowledge, begun earlier in the seventeenth century, continued apace until authors felt that they had the measure of their environment because they could quantify and define it. The emergence of a flourishing print culture in the eighteenth century is of paramount importance. In the earlier period, most of the literature about America was in the form of small promotional pamphlets or larger collections of travel narratives. The range of source material due to the proliferation of print in the later period allows for greater comparison across genres. The way in which I will use print culture will be explored in more depth later in this introduction.

However, there are significant similarities between the patterns in the literature between this period and of that covered in my previous book. Over optimism about the potential of the American landscape by visitors and commentators and cynicism from those living in Britain are characteristics shared by literature of both periods. Also common to both periods was the feeling that American settlers had to defend their reputation, and that of their societies and landscape, in response to negative reports from Britain. The problem of the slow sharing of news and information was also a constant complaint although, by the later seventeenth century, transatlantic voyages were more regular and reliable, allowing easier sharing of ideas.

**Why the south?**

The region of south-east was chosen for study because South Carolina and Georgia were newsworthy colonies in this period offering a rich source of printed and archival literature. It would be churlish to deny Pennsylvania and New Jersey their influence, especially in their prolific production of print but I felt that despite the efforts of historians from W.F Craven onwards, the colonial south is still neglected, still seen as an anomaly, especially in cultural terms. The outpourings, first of Puritan New England and then of proto-capitalist Philadelphia and New York are seen as the normative narratives in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the southern colonists relegated to being seen as somewhat archaic, anachronistic remnants of a feudal age. Two scholars who have been influential in the development of my ideas about the south-east, and who have shown that this region does have a claim to be considered culturally interesting on a par with the northern and
middle colonies, are Joyce Chaplin and S. Max Edelson. Chaplin’s An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation in the Lower South 1730-1815, reissued in 1996, encouraged me to look for forerunners of the concept she identified, that far from being culturally and economically moribund, ideas of progress and modernity were vital to the perceptions that Carolinians and East Floridians had of themselves. Although chronologically Chaplin’s work commences later, I argue that the antecedents of her themes are visible in the sources that I examined. Although Chaplin works on a period in which the plantation system of the south was more financially secure, whereas my focus is on the nascent period, her assertion that the southern settlers had to constantly defend their way of life in the face of outside criticism also emerges strongly in my book. My interpretation is that the settlers’ relationship with their landscape and climate was central and that they used it to defend their lifestyle choices, a finding that is echoed in Chaplin’s work.\(^5\) Chaplin also shows that settlers were not acting alone in increasing their knowledge of their landscape. Information was also contributed by scientific observers from Europe, publishing their findings in journals such as the *Philosophical Transactions*, and also by black slaves.\(^6\) This sharing of knowledge and the understanding that print culture was only one of the media through which settlers developed a sense of regional identity, agrees with my findings.

Edelson’s *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (published in 2006) encouraged me to see the plantation south as a contested, dynamic landscape, one in which settlers had to constantly struggle for dominance over the environment and to control the slaves and Indians in that landscape. Edelson shows that, despite protestations to the contrary in printed literature produced by many settlers, those resident in the south did not feel confident that their permanence in the landscape was assured. Fear and uncertainty, both of the nature of the land itself and the motives of its native inhabitants and even settlers of other regions, combined with over enthusiasm or cynicism from the mother country produced a tentative understanding of identity. The successful cultivation of a rice staple crop using the knowledge of their African slaves allowed a subtle change to take place

\(^5\) Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South 1730-1815* (Chapel Hill, 1993), pp. 72, 93. Edelson also reiterates this point about the significance of knowledge from slaves.

\(^6\) Ibid, pp. 138, 156.
and encouraged a closer association between settlers and their land. However, much of Edelson’s interpretation of South Carolina plantation culture examines only the relationship between imperial and economic factors. I will expand this by looking at the struggle between scientific and religious interpretations and also legal and local political ones.

The choice of South Carolina and Georgia as the case studies for this book reflects more than a desire to rescue the colonial south from historians’ neglect or misinterpretation. I do not wish to present the southern colonial story as an alternative to the New England narrative that prevailed for generations as the standard. Neither one should be recognised as the sole representative of the origins of American nationhood. However, both together can be considered aspects of the origins of nation and of the construction of the Atlantic system. One could not have survived without the other. Jack Greene pioneered a regional approach to the development of the colonial world and, in his *Pursuits of Happiness* he considers the southern colonies to be vital in the entire story of the Atlantic world. Contrary to assertions by scholars examining, for example, the early development of libraries or printing in America that the southern colonies are merely peripheral, they must be examined alongside the rest of North America in order to understand how regional differences and unity can exist together.

The period of study saw many new colonies being founded and, among others, I could have selected Pennsylvania and New Jersey as a model. But the cultural particularities of the southern colonies encouraged me to believe that my focus ought to rest there. In telling the stories of South Carolina and Georgia, the parallel and intertwined accounts of natives, slaves, French and Spanish played a part. While these are not foremost in my account but are presented for comparative and contextual purposes, their contribution to the *milieu* of South Carolina and Georgia gives a unique perspective on the colonies’ relationships with one another and with Britain. The concerns of these two colonies are not unique; in fact, they are typical. They reveal how both local and transnational factors affected the way that the settlers understood their landscape. Colonists tried both to separate themselves from the policies of the metropolis and to imitate its cultural output.

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This is especially visible in the sources emerging from the Chesapeake and the south during this period. Examining South Carolina also seems pertinent when considering another of Jack Greene’s assertions, that by 1720 the North American colonies were becoming more alike. South Carolina, infamously different with its Barbadian cultural hearth and its slave majority, is a good proving ground for such an assertion, something that this book aims to accomplish.

The interpretation of the colonial south must be undertaken with caution because of the impact that the subsequent history of the region has on our understanding. The antebellum, civil war, lost cause and civil rights eras have all altered the way that twenty-first century commentators understand the south. It difficult to ignore these historical episodes and to access the colonial south without looking through these lenses. According to C.Vann Woodward, the study of the south has been coloured by the failure, poverty and guilt of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries that set the south’s history apart from the north. Twentieth-century southern culture was thought by many scholars to be a parochial and irrelevant throwback, and this affected the way that the colonial south was understood. While the colonial period may have seen the early flourishing of the planter elite, this elite was much less entrenched and did not wholly define the south during this period as it did in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this earlier period the settlers had different uncertainties and insecurities, and so this study of their relationship to the landscape and how they defined their own identity is crucial to our understanding of the south as a whole.

My book will focus mostly on the colonies of Carolina and Georgia, with supplementary examples borrowed from Virginia, Maryland and Louisiana. It will explore the textual representation of the landscape of these colonies in print and manuscript in a wide range of source, including laws, letters, diaries, promotional literature, colonial and land records, newspapers and almanacs. It will argue that there are six ways of interpreting this diverse output and that by exploring the representation of landscape through the prism of these themes, a new understanding will emerge of the trisection of landscape, print and

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identity in the colonial Atlantic. It will show the region as an area of struggle, in which
tensions between the resident groups and between settlers and the mother country
generated a distinct identity, but also where these disparate groups working together
produced a composite interpretation of the landscape and climate. The six themes are:
religion, science, empire, politics, law and economy and they can be seen as three related
pairs. Religion and science may seem, in our post-Enlightenment understanding,
contradictory ways of examining the relationship between landscape and identity but this
was not the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both were adopted together
by settlers and commentators trying to understand the new world. Religious interpretations
were often imposed by outsiders, such as visiting clergy or missionaries, who perceived their
role as saviours of vulnerable settlers, as well as their slaves and Native Americans. But as in
the period of initial settlement of North America, some religious migrants were moved with
such strong beliefs that they defined their landscape entirely through the prism of religion.
The challenge of trying to maintain those theoretical visions created before reaching
America, with the realities of the landscape on arrival, produced some of the most
fascinating of the religious interpretations. Some of the scientific interpretation of the
landscape was also done by outsiders, and this coloured the way that they understood the
landscape of North America. Although transatlantic communities of correspondence existed
and America residents were centrally involved, the demands of the European system and
hierarchy that drove natural history discoveries.

The empire and politics sections of the book can also be seen as ‘two sides of the
same coin’. An imperial understanding of the landscape described it in terms of its
usefulness to the mother country and showed that, especially in the eighteenth century,
settlers were, to some extent, pawns in the larger games of empire. The concept of empire
was developing throughout this period and so is not a static conceptual device, meaning
that settlers and commentators in London were constantly renegotiating what they meant
by the imperial relationship. The chapter on political representations examines the settlers’
understanding of their political position from a local and regional point of view. This was
often viewed from the frontier or borderland, a space that contemporaries knew was
contested and troubled but also could be a site of economic and political benefit.
Commentators in London were not the only ones who defined the British colonies as
different to those of the French or Spanish; settlers on the ground in America did so with
gusto, but their interpretation of events in North America often caused disagreements with
their own government.

The final two sections on legal and economic representations are again closely
related and illustrate how different the perceptions of the settlers and the British residents
were. The inadequacy of the colonial structures to respond to the fast changing situation in
North America reveals itself most forcefully when examining the ways that land was
surveyed, sold and distributed. As during the drive westwards in the nineteenth century,
those living in the new regions of North America and the lawmakers back east had a
different understanding of the landscape. All the forms of representation discussed in this
book are to some extent economic, but this theme deserves its own section because it was
through the human impact on the landscape, in making a settlement or introducing an
agricultural crop, that the colonies became viable, and contemporary commentators
understood this. It set the British colonies apart from their French and Spanish counterparts,
who did not intend to cultivate the land or to build towns or villages, or to offer an example
and thus bring civilisation to the backward natives.

Using these six approaches I will answer the following key questions: In what ways
does the textual representation of the American landscape change significantly from 1660
to 1745? Are the relationships that Carolinians and Georgians had with the landscape
different from those of Virginians and New Englanders in the 17th century? Does the choice
of print or manuscript as a medium affect the representation? Does the status of the author
as a resident, visitor or outside commentator change their understanding? Do they
acknowledge the influence of the ‘other’, such as natives or slaves? And finally, what impact
does this have on the development of an American identity? To answer these questions,
three themes need elucidating: landscape, identity and print.

Landscape

Since the days of Frederick Jackson Turner, the American historical profession has been
defined by its interpretation of the relationship of the people of the United States to its
land. Turner’s famous ‘frontier thesis’, which argues that American identity was formed by
the response of the people to an ever-moving frontier and that once the entire continent
was conquered Americans would become moribund if they did not find another frontier to conquer, has found sympathetic hearings from historians of early America, nineteenth century expansion, American imperialism and the space races of the mid-twentieth century. The work of Louis B. Wright, whose 1955 book *Culture of the Moving Frontier* expounded Turner’s frontier thesis for the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Chesapeake planters, has been influential for scholars of the colonial period. He illustrated that, for contemporaries, environmental determinism was a real way of understanding their world. William Byrd, for example, claimed that a fertile soil and good climate made the people in backwoods Virginia lazy. Wright argued that the frontier culture represented a constant struggle against isolation and the environmental threat and that this was more pertinent in the Chesapeake and the southern colonies because of thinly spread settlement and the lack of an urban culture. **11** He believed that the struggle against the malign influences of the landscape were more straightforward in the north east where people lived closer together, although the evidence from the captivity narratives of this period contradicts Wright’s assertions.

Geographers such as H. Roy Merrens spent their careers grappling with similar theories of geographical determinism, debating whether land defines human behaviour or *vice versa*. Pure geographical determinism, such as the concept that the Appalachian Mountains were a significant barrier to expansion as was the presence of the ‘fall line’ along the rivers, is easy to challenge. Human beings with greed and ingenuity can easily overcome such barriers. **12** According to Merrens, the problem faced by geographers was an inability to use the tools of history subtly enough. D.W. Meinig’s work changed that when he traced the development of Atlantic empires from colonial to regional to national identity. It is clear that the settlement patterns and the societies that they created have been heavily influenced by the landscape. As Henry A.M. Smith said in regard to South Carolina, geography ‘powerfully shaped’ history by dictating placement of villages, plantations, roads, mills and rice crops. **13**

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**12** H. Roy Merrens, ‘Historical Geography and Early American History’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1965, pp. 533, 534.

Mirroring his namesake John Smith, whose book *A Map of Virginia* in 1612 named the native groups of the region after the river next to which they lived, more than three hundred and fifty years later, Henry Smith delineated the early settlers of Carolina through their relationship to the river on which they settled.\(^\text{14}\)

Having explored the connection between geography and history, it is important to think about the ways that representations of landscape can fit into our understanding of cultural and historical change. This book is not examining whether the land itself changed the way settlers behaved, but rather whether their behaviour was changed by the way that they perceived the landscape. Here I borrow a subtle distinction from Peter Fritzell. He considered ‘land’ to be the actual, physical, geographical reality, and ‘landscape’ to be the ideas, representations and methods of understanding the land. Fritzell argued that concern with landscape among settlers ebbed and flowed so that, initially, settlers were too busy surviving to be ‘concerned with conceptualising or representing the land’ and that, in New England, it was not until after the recovery, following King Philip’s War, that residents began expressing the qualities of their land.\(^\text{15}\) The models, used to conceptualise the landscape during the first century of settlement, defined the settlers’ relationship to their world long after these models ceased to bear any resemblance to the geographical reality. ‘Wilderness’, ‘desert’ and ‘garden’ were symbolically important ideas and, as Michael Kraus argued, during the eighteenth century the landscape of America was always seen as a stimulus to the imagination with the flourishing of novels of the sea, travel accounts and the development of romanticism through ideas of the noble savage in his wild landscape.\(^\text{16}\) Leo Marx reiterated this in his examination of *The American Revolution and the American Landscape*. He argued that the potential of space was the most important attribute of landscape appreciation by Europeans. But America also fulfilled the primordial urge to find an ideal place, a retreat and a sanctuary and to define it as something new: according to Marx an impulse present from Columbus onwards.\(^\text{17}\) However, the colonial American

\(^{14}\text{Ibid, p. Xvii.}\)

\(^{15}\text{Peter Fritzell, ‘The Wilderness and the Garden’, *Forest History*, 1968, pp. 16-18.}\)


\(^{17}\text{Leo Marx, *The American Revolution and the American Landscape* (Washington, 1974), p. 2.}\)
landscape also represented something hideous and frightening and, in many examples of
the literature, attraction and revulsion are present in equal measure. Anthropologist Yi-Fu
Tuan described how ‘landscapes of fear’ dominate the human relationship with the natural
world. The fear of the unknown among humans leads them to attempt to control nature
using sacrifice, ritual and the spirit world. Although American settlers rejected many of
these approaches in favour of scientific attempts to record nature, the desire to bring a
frightening place under man’s control was still behind this enterprise. And the spiritual
attempts to define a chaotic landscape did linger in North America where, as late as 1793, it
was believed that the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia was heralded by the strange
portents of lightening and a hailstorm.18 But as Marx explained, by the Revolutionary
period, thinkers were trying to overcome these negative aspects and portrayed the
American landscape as the norm of nature. As John Locke put it ‘in the beginning all the
world was America’.19

The burgeoning sciences of geography and surveying also offered a means to
reinforce the colonial identity as unique. Martin Bruckner argued that geography was the
discourse through which Americans interpreted their own place in the landscape. He
believed that in North America the realities of the land did not overwhelm the individual as
Tuan argued, but rather that geography provided the tool through which both American
identity and English nationalism emerged. This change happened because land surveys were
a ‘literary phenomenon’ that reinforced people’s sense of community and identity and this
benefitted American settlers and was also advantageous to the colonial masters in London
who felt that they were able to make the colonies more governable by surveying them.20

This development was reinforced by the change in educational values that stated
that active observation rather than book learning was the most important way of
developing knowledge about the natural world. The American elites were especially keen to
be active participants in scientific investigation by contributing to the collection of

18 Yi-Fu Tuan, Landscapes of Fear (New York, 1979), p. 95.
19 Ibid, p. 17.
knowledge rather than learning from others. This allowed American correspondents and English visitors to America the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with the landscape. They saw themselves as active within the natural world rather than passive victims of its whims. As W. Hughes wrote in his *The American Physician* published in 1672: ‘nor was this written in a closet or study in the corner of a house amongst many books but the most of it ...was taken with many other observations rather in travelling the woods and other parts.’

The development of a scientific relationship with the landscape led to a transatlantic partnership with English and American enthusiasts working together to develop a shared knowledge of the New World landscape. Instead of developing oppositional views of how the land ought to be recorded and used, correspondents worked in partnership to aid the development of agriculture in the colonies and to discover new botanical treasures that might unlock secrets to cure diseases. Much of this activity was centred on networks of transatlantic discussion through New England, New York or Philadelphia, while the southern colonies of Carolina and Georgia were considered ‘closer to the soil’ and ‘less intellectual’. The southern colonies were disadvantaged because of the lack of educated natural historians but advantaged because of the immediacy of the colonists’ relationship to and awareness of the land.

While the intellectual environment of Charleston and Williamsburg may not have flourished in the same way as that of Boston and Philadelphia, the settlers in those regions still contributed to the discussions of natural historians. The cities of the south were criticised by contemporaries who did not recognise, in Charleston, the sort of urban environment they were used to and often placed towns in a hierarchy based simply on the number of dwellings. However, during the eighteenth century, Charleston was a thriving

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23 Ibid, p. 50.

24 See Andrew Burnaby, *Travels through the Middle Settlements in North America in the years 1759 and 1760* (London, 1775) as an example.
commercial town drawing traders from up to three hundred miles away. Later in the eighteenth century, numerous small commercial towns such as Camden (125 miles northwest of Charleston) emerged in the Carolina hinterland. These towns had little in common with the rich low country and the emergence of the local elite in places like Camden helped to formulate the divisions that came to define Carolina politics from the Regulator movement onwards. Similar patterns emerged in North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland, where New Bern competed with Charleston for trade and reputation and in Virginia ports such as Norfolk developed their own Caribbean trade. So while the overwhelming reference to the landscape in the literature refers to a rural landscape, the settlers and visitors, and commentators in England also had a keen association with the urban landscapes and small towns.

Identity

The intertwining of interpretation of landscape with people’s definition of their own identity underpins this enquiry. I will be asking whether the act of moving to or visiting America resulted in the development of a unique identity. But how is it possible to tell when an individual stops being British and starts becoming American? Were they ever ‘British’ in the first place? Might they not have considered themselves English (or Scottish or Welsh or Irish)? Or might they have defined themselves in relation to their region, county or town? I acknowledge that there is no single composite British identity but, even so, it is still possible to examine the way that the understanding of the landscape and the corresponding sense of self, differ among settlers in, visitors to, and commentators about, America. Is it also possible to see evidence of an ‘American’ identity during this period? Might authors influenced by local concerns not have considered themselves ‘southern’ or, for example, ‘South Carolinians’ rather than ‘American’? This book will show that the concept of a single,


26 For more on this see Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: the Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill, 1990).
unified national identity is anachronistic for this period and that settlers’ self-perception was multi-layered and could mutate depending on circumstances.

Perhaps it is more realistic to consider the identity of everyone concerned with America as ‘colonial’ or even ‘Atlantic’? A useful concept to consider is that of the ‘creole’. Traditionally used to describe the rise of a native-born white elite to political maturity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spanish America or, confusingly, the American-born slave or free black populations of the Caribbean and South America, this term is controversial when applied to ‘Anglo-Americans’ because their descendants have considered themselves to be culturally different, even exceptional. I think it is relevant to my enquiry because it highlights the complexities of identity preservation and transfer, and will help me to illustrate that the unique identity formed in the colonies, by the 1740s, was not wholly separate from Britishness but not wholly identical to it either.

Traditionally, historians of America have looked at the immigration of its people and examined the way that external traditions arrived and merged to form a composite ‘American’ identity. The adoption of a national identity of America as a nation of immigrants is a recent phenomenon but one that has also been used to understand the development of identity in the colonial period.27 This oversimplified understanding of a merging of disparate national identities into one identity, as a form of cultural assimilation, has been shown to be erroneous when applied to mass migration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it is also problematic for the colonial period. What made the British colonies unique from the French and Spanish was their willingness to take in migrants from other European nations, but it is unclear whether each of these migrant groups contributed equally, and in the same way, to the development of a new mentality. In this book I am examining the state of mind of the English-speaking (in fact, the English-writing) migrants, visitors and commentators. Some historians, such as Thomas Archdeacon, saw the story of colonial America as a triumph of the English settlers in North America, but I do not perceive the transmission of cultural values in such a simplistic manner.28 The development of a unique identity was gradual and complex, at first barely noticed, and only later challenged.

28 Ibid, p. 4.
Also important is the idea that cultural change was not solely one way. Scholars of the Atlantic world have shown that the Americas changed Europe as much as Europe changed the Americas. This is another reason for contrasting the views of authors resident in America with those in Britain. It is important to show how people who had never been to America understood the American landscape and how their outlook could be influenced by those who had. Michael Kraus stated in 1966 that in the colonial period American colonies were cultural givers as well as receivers.²⁹ This exchange took place in the marts and coffee houses of London and in the pages of newspapers published in both Britain and her colonies. Migrants and visitors became a crucial part of the exchange of ideas as their impressions and information were transmitted around the Atlantic world. Material goods defining the British and American identity as one of luxury and progress also travelled both ways across the Atlantic. These goods were not always frivolous, as Addison recorded in The Spectator in 1711: ‘we [in England] repair our bodies by the drugs of America’.³⁰ A reason for this cultural exchange was the development of improved communications. Although the common assumption is that Atlantic communications were ‘slow, infrequent and dangerous’, by this time, as Ian Steele has shown, the Atlantic world was shrinking due to the expansion of shipping that was better able to cope with the westerly headwind on the outward journey and by an increase in postal services and distribution of newspapers. This development was crucial for both Carolina and Georgia as, by 1730, Charleston had become the port having the most contact with Britain.³¹

So rather than contrasting the experiences of British migrants with those of other national origins, I shall compare the views of those British people who came to settle, with those who visited and those who commented without leaving the Old World. This will illuminate the effect that travel and relocation has on one’s comprehension of the landscape and of identity. But how does one define a settler or a visitor? Does someone who stays in America for a number of years and then returns to England become a settler or

³⁰ Ibid, p. 201.
remain a visitor? For the purposes of this book, I define a settler or resident as someone who spent more of their life in America than outside it.

Janis Stout has discussed the importance of the ‘journey’ in the development of an American identity in literature. She argued that the journey symbolises personal progress or a quest, usually undertaken for one of three reasons: exploration, escape or home founding. She also suggested that there is an inevitable desire to keep on moving once travel has been undertaken.³² The journey, as a metaphor for spiritual awakening, appeared in literature from the early seventeenth century Puritan jeremiads onwards. William Bradford, for example, framed his narrative as a journey from being lost to finding redemption. If we are to understand the way that travel and migration affected the interpretation of the landscape and thus the development of a unique identity, we must focus on the conflicted colonial period rather than simply imagining a gradual drift towards a fixed American national identity. Merle Curti argued that the different physical and social environment of America meant that European culture had to be almost immediately adapted on reaching the American shores. However, he saw the cornerstones that underpinned this adaptation as coming from European culture. American thought was not something new, but rather an amendment of the thinking of the old world. The Christian tradition was the most important of these cornerstones. Curti believed that an English-speaking tradition was very important, with literary models all emanating from London and also that mercantile and legal frameworks were also defined by Britain. However, as Curti acknowledged, contact with Spanish, French and Native Americans in the colonial borderlands also affected the development of American thought, and I would add that the presence of African-Americans had a bearing on the self-perception of southern residents.³³

This book will explore two distinct aspects of identity formation. Perceived identity, the development of a self-conscious identification with the landscape operated alongside embedded identity, formed subconsciously by a shared set of experiences and values. Debates over whether settlers undertook a conscious imitation of European life or whether

they subconsciously adopted a European culture are complex, partly because there was a difference between the frontier and elite and between rich and poor. Richard Gummere argued that in the eighteenth century the classical tradition was consciously used by American elites to reconnect with their peers back in England. He quoted George Mason, who in turn quoted Horace and wrote in 1766 that ‘in crossing the Atlantic Ocean we have only changed our climate, not our minds, our natures and dispositions remain unaltered.’

Mason was obviously keen to align himself with the interests of English gentlemen and to distance himself from the identity of the common American man. The methods of education in the colonial south are an important consideration when querying whether they produced pupils with an intellectual life different to that of their European peers. Even students who did not go to Britain to undertake their formal education were entirely steeped in the British tradition of religious and legal education. The act to found the first school in South Carolina was passed in 1694, around the time that William and Mary, the first university in the region, was built, but many people educated their children privately as shown by the advertisements for private tutors that were regularly placed in the London newspapers.

Despite the foundation of the university at Williamsburg, it was common for pupils to undertake their higher education at Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh or Aberdeen Universities. But those who did stay at Williamsburg received what was considered a good English education because tutors at William and Mary did little different from their fellows at English or Scottish institutions. Education formed the lives of the elite of the south, but also opened up the world of print to a larger number of people than ever before. Simple literacy allowed American settlers to participate in a shared print and manuscript culture, shared with their immediate neighbours, with their fellow settlers throughout the colonial world, and with their friends and relations back in England.

**Print Culture**

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In the earliest days of settlement of Virginia, John Donne metaphorically linked printing and travelling, and in 1666 George Alsop reiterated this connection in his tract on Maryland. Alsop, writing to merchants based in London and to sailors bound for the colonies, explained that ‘you are both adventurers, the one of estate, the other of life. I could tell you I am an adventurer too, if I durst presume to come into your company. I have ventured to come abroad in print’, and ‘I have had so large a journey and so heavy a burden to bring Maryland into England that I am almost out of breath.’ So, with authors symbolically linking printing and travelling, what impact did this burgeoning print culture have on understandings of landscape and identity?

Much of the discussion about colonial American print culture has naturally centred on New England and Philadelphia. Iconic figures such as Benjamin Franklin who, as early as 1722, wrote about the freedom of the press, operated as a lynchpin of the northern print networks. Traditionally the colonial South has been portrayed as retarded in the development of the printing industries. As Calhoun Winton acknowledges, by 1700, only Annapolis, Maryland of all the southern colonies had a printer until, in the early eighteenth century, Williamsburg and Charleston followed suit. Newspapers and almanacs were the most important printed goods produced in the south, but the importation of printed material from other colonies and from Europe meant that the south was not retarded in its consumption of print culture. Printed materials were especially important in developing an inter-colonial communication network. Until recently book history of colonial America has focused on the methods and practitioners of production, especially of newspapers, which have been given a prime place in the development of American democracy. They expanded rapidly in the eighteenth century because of the increase in population, wealth and an improvement in the transport system. During the period covered by this study, three newspapers were founded in the southern colonies; the Maryland Gazette in 1727, quickly followed in 1735 by the Virginia Gazette when the Annapolis printer William Parks moved to

Williamsburg. The *South Carolina Gazette* emerged in 1732. Information found in colonial newspapers was varied: royal proclamations, reviews of books, natural phenomena, descriptions of moral principles, travel accounts, poems and literary essays and news taken from other newspapers. Advertisements played a large part in the content of newspapers from the very earliest days. Richard Merritt highlighted the problem of using newspapers as a gauge of public opinion. He argued that moderate voices were liable to be lost and that it was difficult to access the voices of the ordinary men and women. However, newspapers were important not only as transmitters of information but also in regulating the calendar because they appeared regularly. Almanacs were also hugely popular on both sides of the Atlantic but did not appear regularly. Like newspapers they were considered ephemeral items but they also created a sense of community unity. As Lily Santoro has shown, in the period leading up to the Revolution, almanacs were important in swaying public opinion towards the rebels’ cause. They did this by using techniques such as replacing the accounts of British history with timelines of American events.

While the focus on printers enabled scholars to challenge the idea that the author of a text is the sole creator of its meaning, the distribution and consumption of printed material are also important parts of the story. Examining reader response in the colonial period is challenging and is, as Richard Beale Davis has said, like looking for a needle in a haystack. Assumptions and guesses have to be made as to the audience of a particular book based upon its materiality rather than on concrete information that a particular person consumed its contents. Gentlemen’s libraries in the elite houses of the south can sometimes offer documentary evidence of reading habits, as can subscription libraries during the second half of the eighteenth century. But understanding how each reader

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interpreted a book is even more of a dilemma. According to Hugh Jones in 1724, reading was decidedly out of fashion in the south as men were keen to be more active, but other accounts profess that books were luxury goods and ownership of them was an activity that many southerners took pleasure in. Davis argues that southern readers were similar in their tastes to northern ones, acquiring books on history, politics and law, religion and belles lettres. But the southern bookshelf was also characterised by books useful to a man and woman in charge of an agricultural estate. 44 By the mid-eighteenth century popular print culture was also emerging that had little connection with the elite literary circles that imitated the Parisian salons. This popular print outside the canon transcended any simplistic class divide and was popular with rich and poor alike. It often reinforced a nascent national identity and related text to visual images. 45 Book buying was not always about consuming the latest artefact as older works were still sort after and colonial readers used London agents to try to acquire them. Authors used material from older writers when producing their own work, as in Beverley’s History and Present State of Virginia, which was published in 1705 but drew on sources from nearly a century earlier. 46

Not all residents of the southern colonies belonged to and participated in this world of print culture. Although literacy rates were higher in the colonies as a whole than in Europe, and as Davis argues, literacy rates were similar in the south compared to those in the north, this still excludes a significant proportion of people living in the colonies including slaves, Native Americans and the frontier poor. Even debates over literacy rates among the white population are contentious and results depend on which measure of literacy one adopts. Literacy rates based on signatures were often low until a community’s population became dense enough to justify the development of a school. Robert Gallman reported that the initial literacy rate actually fell as settlers were absorbed into the emergency of frontier life during which time resources had to be diverted elsewhere. Gallman’s argument was that


the conflicted lives of the borderland residents meant that their consumption and production of literary texts would have been diminished. 47

Many scholars, such as Michael Warner, look to the Enlightenment as the period when a real reading community, a 'public' who could consume the printed word emerged. 48 In England, the emergence of an informed citizenry who used print culture to define their own religious and political identity and to absorb new information into their world-view appeared around the middle of the seventeenth century. The emergence of a coffeehouse culture, in which a proliferation of the press contributed to the development of ideas outside the authority of the state frightened Charles II so much that he tried to close all coffeehouses but this was impracticable. 49 However, this cannot be understood to mean that a reading public emerged fully formed on either side of the Atlantic with no precursors. In this book I shall trace the consumers of the world of print in the southern colonies and explore how they interpreted the works that they read and also contributed to others. Charles Clark argued that initially the public sphere that emerged around American print defined its readers as ‘provincial Britons’ and not as uniquely American. 50 My work will aim to show if and when ‘provincial Britons’ began to morph into ‘Americans’.

An intertextual print cultural circuit is at work here, where readers become authors and vice versa. Reading, letter writing and discussion meant that this world of print operated alongside oral and manuscript traditions rather than directly replacing them. According to Rhys Isaac, oral culture still predominated in the south in the early eighteenth century but that it did not exist as an alternative to book learning but rather was integrated into the same system. Isaac describes ‘speaking books’ as being so important to colonial culture that they transcended the world of the reader and entered the realm of oral

49 Brown, The Strength of a People, p. 3.
In the great houses of the south and even in gentry homes, the oral transmission of news from within the colonies and from overseas, acquired via letters or print, was central to the bonding of the family group, including women and children and sometimes slaves could be included in this information sharing. But information also flowed the other way, with oral and manuscript news influencing the content of printed texts.

Until now, the worlds of print on either side of the Atlantic have been considered independently from one another as national entities, but in reality, these industries and cultures were part of one holistic system. Authors based in the colonies took their texts to London, Edinburgh or Dublin to be published, meaning that their work reached a wider audience. From 1722 onwards, shipments of bound or unbound books from Jamaica, New York or Philadelphia arrived in London, but information travelled eastwards across the Atlantic mostly in the form of oral accounts or manuscript letters. From the 1730s, colonial printers were becoming more commercially shrewd in their outlook and involved themselves in the Atlantic print culture, just as printers and booksellers in York or Bristol did. Books on America were very popular in Britain but, by the second half of the seventeenth century, because of the wealth of British America, Britain also became a significant exporter of books on America. According to James Raven, between 1700 and 1780, forty-five percent of English book exports went to North America and the West Indies, with many book exporters suffering losses, both at sea and because their American correspondents had defaulted on credit agreements. During this period, sensational pamphlets about kidnappings, piracy and weather phenomena were among the most common, although religious tracts maintained their place as the most commonly distributed.

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55 James Raven, 'Importation of Books', in ibid, p. 183.
text on both sides of the Atlantic. Clark has argued that the audience of the London press was country-wide whereas I would argue that it was actually empire-wide. By the turn of the eighteenth century England’s postal networks, with London at their hub, had expanded to include the colonies. An inter-colonial postal service began in 1690, responding to a growth in transatlantic shipping and an increase in the amount of post and newspapers to be carried. This development meant that the colonies and the mother-country became culturally closer. The emerging print culture facilitated the development and sharing of the ideas about landscape and identity now to be explored in this book.

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57 Clark, The Public Prints, p. 59.