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Of Land Ordinances and Liberia: Maps as Tools of Early American Territorial Expansion.

Keywords: Cartography, Early America, Africa, Liberia, Transatlantic.

Summary: This article is a comparative study of how the Ohio territory and the nation of Liberia were mapped and settled in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Despite the great distance separating the two, both were perceived of similar minds: early Americans who believed that their interests could be realized through a conscious manipulation of geography and the people who previously inhabited the land they coveted. Ultimately, both Ohio and Liberia are demonstrative of early conceptions of state and nation that would eventually give rise to the territorial empires of the nineteenth century. Prior to the development of geographical systems that accounted for land at the expense of the people who lived there, empires existed as centers and peripheries of power. By replacing the vague borderlands that had allowed indigenous people a degree of self-determination in their exchanges with an imperial presence with defined and precise borderlands, processes of removal and ultimately subjugation were made possible on a scale that increased the power and wealth of those who drew the maps at the expense of those who had previously laid claim to it.

Introduction

In 1794, as rebellion raged in the streets of Paris, on the plantations of the Caribbean islands and the frontiers of North America, the English mysticist William Blake painted his masterpiece “*The Ancient of Days*,” in which a windswept God stoops from his high heaven to take measure of his creation with a divine compass (Figure 1). Blake’s God as geometer was a glorification of order, as imposed from above, as a reaction to the chaos that swirled below. Liberty had unleashed a maelstrom on the currents of the Atlantic, product of the Enlightenment’s genteel notions of an open, egalitarian society replete with knowledge and common understanding among humankind.

The transatlantic ruling classes had sought to limit the effects of the revolutionary disorder ever since world had since been successfully “turned upside down” at Yorktown in 1781. Despite their best efforts, it seemed that by 1794 that disorder was a contagion that threatened long held assumptions of the human condition and the cosmic order in which it existed. With the subsequent reactions to “too much liberty” which manifest particularly among the ruling elites wary of subversion from below in the United States during this period, a return to regularity and order seemed antidote to the malady of chaos that seemed so omnipresent from their privileged perspective.

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Figure 1: William Blake, "The Ancient of Days," 1794.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to examine one of the many systems by which early American political architects sought to reimpose order and reign in the subversive element that had been unleashed in the transatlantic world. That system is the one by which the new nation accounted for its greatest source of both realized and potential wealth: the land. Through examining the maps that accounted for the geographical condition of the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the imposition of hierarchical order over a chaotic circumstance becomes both visually and theoretically evident. By ordering space in a standardized and uniform way, the national map of the United States became an effective tool of control that proved more an extension of European imperial ideology than a challenge to it.

To achieve this, a cartographical model through which power could be projected over territory where little if any actual control existed had to be devised and implemented. The result was a system of geographical accounting that would eventually spread to the western shore of two continents: North America and Africa. In Ohio, territorial expansion was conducted under the pretense of political interest, publically funded and organized. In Liberia, territorial acquisition and expansion was a product of social interests, privately funded and organized. While both trajectories theoretically represented divergent interests, the manner in which they accounted for their geographical claims is remarkably

similar. Ours is to consider this development, keeping in mind the Pythagorean suggestion that geometric lines mean very little, but it is in their syntax, or what falls between those lines, that matters.¹

To Divide Every County Into Hundreds

Prior to the Land Ordinance system of geographical accounting the United States established in 1785, maps with pretensions to imperial power reflected traditional assumptions of power associated with monarchy and centralized power. Geographers refer to this model as a “core-periphery” relationship, meaning simply that power emanating from a central location resonated out onto territory until dissipating. The extent to which centralized power resonated depended on its ability to project itself outward from the center through martial, economic, cultural or political means.² As a result, vaguely articulated borderlands, constantly in flux and defined by external factors like topography, the hostility of indigenous inhabitants, or the presence of another imperial power, shifted with the winds of circumstance on the continent of North America since the sixteenth century.

Antoine-Simon, le Page Du Pratz’s 1757 “La Carte de La Louisiane” exemplifies the geographical manifestation of the imperial core-periphery relationship between the French crown and the land it sought to claim (Figure 2). “La Louisiane,” the French claim to the territory, is superimposed over the whole of the map, which at the same time acknowledges limitations on its power. To the west, “Pays Des Apaches and Padoucas” impede Louisiane’s western progress, reinforced by Spanish claims to “Nouveau Mexique.” To the east, the Du Pratz mapped the limits English claims to the territory east of the Appalachian Mountain range. The presence of native populations, other European imperial powers, and the natural features of the land itself all factored into the degree to which the “core” of French imperial power could resonate into the “periphery.”

By contrast, the English imperial design, informed by a system of medieval land appropriation called “enclosures,” sought to impose firm *borderlines* that sought simultaneously to maximize claims to territory and mitigate any factors, topographical or otherwise, that would undermine the authority of the map, and thereby, imperial assertions of sovereignty.³ Enclosures were essentially the privatization of previously public or “common” lands. By fencing, hedging or otherwise “enclosing” the land, the English ruling classes consolidated both wealth and power, and simultaneously developed a system of governance and authority based on the control of space. John Mitchell’s “Map of the English and French Dominions,” drawn two years before Du Pratz’s, imposes artificial borderlines that do not defer to natural impediments, nor to European or indigenous claims to the territory (Figure 3). The map is an ambitious claim to sovereignty, even by English standards, but is predicated not on the traditionally accepted mode of imperial rule, population, but rather upon English common law which granted Letters Patent to each colony to assert territorial control over the continent as far as “the Western Ocean”.

¹ Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook And Library*, (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1987): 30.

² Martin W. Lewis & Karen E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 124-150.

³ Patricia Seed “Taking Possession and Reading Texts: Establishing the Authority of Overseas Empires,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1992), 189-191.

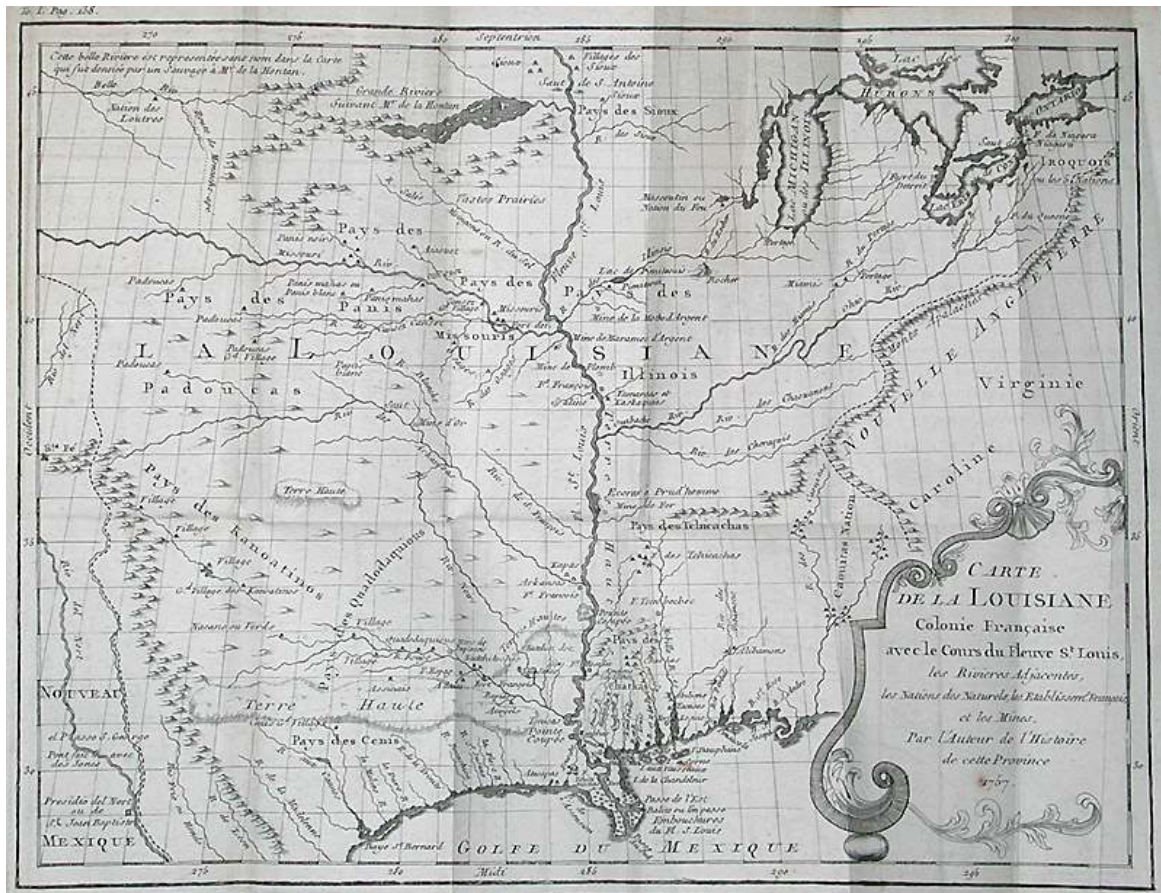


Figure 2: Antoine-Simone, Le Page Du Pratz "Carte De La Louisiane," 1757. American Antiquarian Society.

These competing visions of empire came into direct conflict over the Ohio territory in 1754, when a young Virginia militia captain named George Washington marched a group of Americans and Iroquois to warn off a French detachment from territory being claimed by a group of American and English investors operating under the name "The Ohio Company" (in which Washington was an investor).⁴ The English victory in The Seven Years War resulted in the cession of all French claims in North America, which at the time of the 1763 Treaty of Paris consisted of territory between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian mountain range. The English would spend the next twenty years trying to enforce those borderlines at the expense of native interests, resulting in Pontiac's Rebellion in the Ohio Territory, as well as prospective settlers and land speculators, who were forbidden to cross the Appalachian mountain range or transact any land therein as a result of Pontiac's Rebellion by the Proclamation of 1763.

⁴ Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-66*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 50-56, 106.

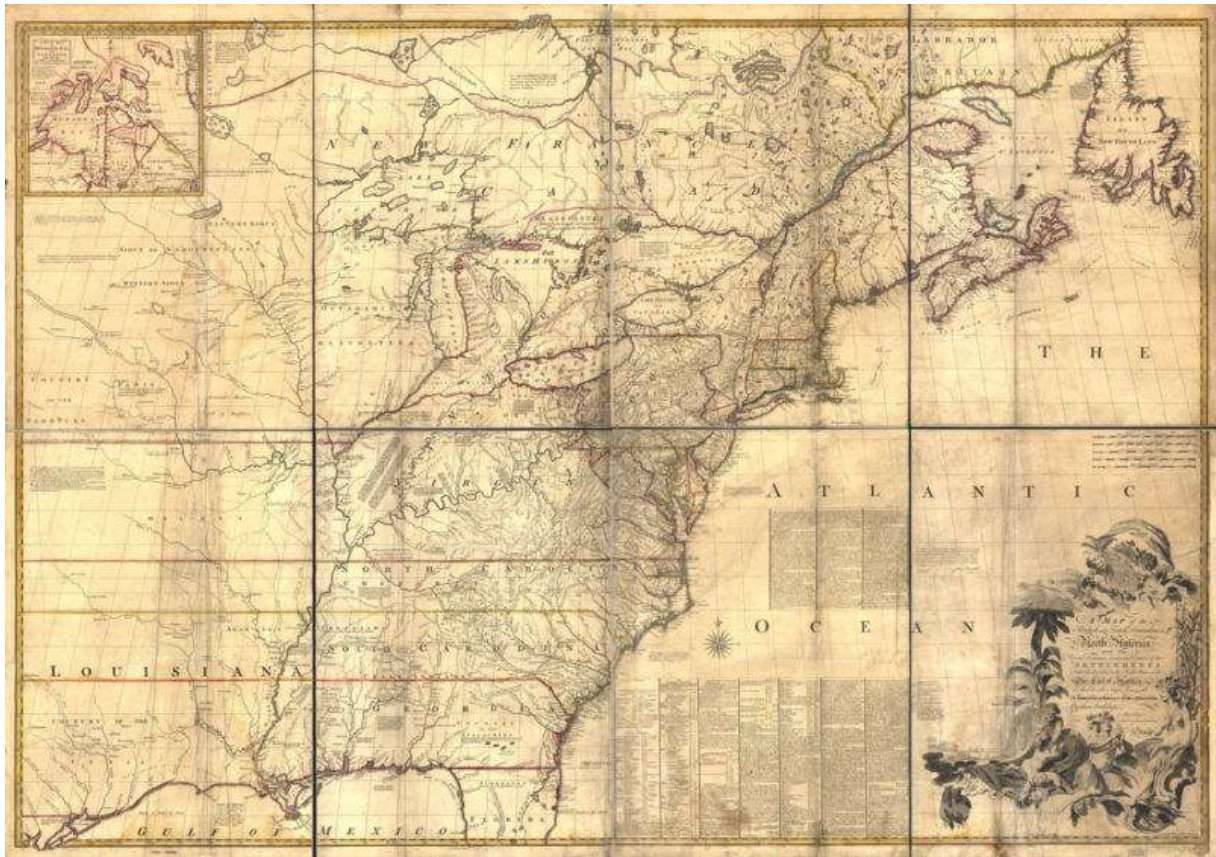


Figure 3: John Mitchell, "A Map of English and French Dominions," 1755. The Newberry Library.

As the United States sought to maximize their claim to the western territories ceded by Great Britain at the 1783 Treaty of Paris (not to be confused with the Treaty of Paris 20 years earlier, when the British were receiving imperial title to the territory rather than ceding it), the American gentry articulated a general understanding that the "disorders" of the frontier which had been the result of the past twenty years would have to be mitigated. George Washington proposed the institution of a borderline similar to the 1763 Proclamation Line to restrain the "scattered settlers" in the Ohio Valley, who he perceived were "an embarrassment of the government." He believed that a firmly delineated boundary would bring their "unrestrained conduct" into form with the "conduct proper...for the Government of Citizens of America, in their Settlement of the Western Country," and believed that it should be "a felony for any person to survey or settle beyond the line."⁵ The geographical ordering of space would bring the new republican government into form, measured from on high, to impose order upon the chaos of the frontier borderlands.

Concurrently, The Continental Congress established a committee in 1784 to "devise and report the most eligible means of disposing of such a part of the Western lands as may be obtained by the Indians under the proposed treaty of peace and for the opening of a land office."⁶ Under the chairmanship of Thomas Jefferson, the committee included Hugh Williamson of North Carolina, David Howell of

⁵ George Washington to James Duane, September 7, 1783 in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington*, XXVII (Washington D.C., United States Printing Office, 1938), 133-4.

⁶ *Journals of the Continental Congress from 1774-1788* (Washington: Way and Gideon, 1823), Vol.1, 155.

Rhode Island, Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, and Jacob Read of South Carolina.⁷ After the lands northwest of the Ohio River were ceded by individual states to the national government for the creation of a “Federal Reserve,” it was the obligation of the committee to divide them into new states that could be incorporated into the confederacy and populated by American citizens.

The committee’s recommendation came in the form of the Ordinance of 1784, which was approved by Congress on April 23rd of that year. The Ordinance stipulated that free male citizens within any district in the territory could organize a temporary government and elect their own representatives. When 20,000 free inhabitants made up any one district, it could then organize a convention and apply for statehood. The committee also agreed system for accounting for the territory in geometric terms, and passed the Land Ordinance of 1785 “To divide every county into hundreds.”⁸

When the Land Ordinance was passed in 1785, it retained its design of a rectilinear grid, but its plan for centuriated division was replaced by a plan for townships of six square miles, each subdivided into thirty-six sections. In defense of the grid, committee chair William Grayson argued that it would be “attended by the least possible expence, there being only two sides of the square to run in almost all cases,” and that there would be “exemption from controversy on account of bounds to the latest ages.”⁹ Grayson was saying that maps produced using the Land Ordinance survey methods would provide an appearance of authority over the newly acquired territory. They would require minimal official presence, be cost effective, and be authoritative to both citizens and foreign powers alike.

These liberal terms unnerved some more conservative elements of the confederated government, who believed that the Ordinance did “not offer the measures which they suggested against the increase of feeble, disorderly and dispersed settlements in those remote and wide extended territories,” and “against the depravity of manners they tend to produce.”¹⁰ George Washington had serious reservations as well: “I had, and still have my doubts of the utility of the plan, but pray devoutly that they never be realized.” Washington believed that “the lands, are of so versatile a nature, that to the end of time they will not, by those who are acquainted therewith, be purchased either in Townships or by square miles.”¹¹

With such concerns in mind, more the hierarchically minded Federalists passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 on July 13th of that year as the Federalist argument for consolidated political power was being hammered out at the Constitutional Conventions. The Ordinance reflected some of the key points of the Federalists’ political, social and economic agenda. Historian Merrill Jensen has extended the consideration of the Constitution as “counterrevolutionary” and applied it specifically to the Ordinance of 1787. He wrote:

⁷ William D. Pattison, *Beginnings of the American Rectangular Land Survey System, 1784-1800*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 4.

⁸ Jefferson to Madison, May 13, 1810, in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (Washington, The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), vol. XII, p.393.

⁹ Grayson to Washington, New York, April 15th 1785, as cited in William D. Pattison, *Beginnings of the American Rectangular Survey System 1784-1800*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.88.

¹⁰ George Washington, “Report by Committee of Indian Affairs,” as cited in Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., “Jefferson, the Ordinance of 1784, and the Origins of the American Territorial System,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Volume 29, Issue 2 (April 1972), 238.

¹¹ Washington to Grayson, August 22, 1785, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1937), vol XXVII, p.234.

“It is too often said, and believed, that the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which repealed the Ordinance of 1784, provided for democracy in the territories of the United States. The reverse is actually true. Jefferson’s Ordinance provided for democratic self government of western territories and for that reason it was abolished in 1787 by...[those who] wanted congressional control of the West so that their interests could be protected from the actions of the inhabitants.”¹²

Passed to replace the largely republican driven Ordinance of 1784, the 1787 Ordinance altered the initial vision for westward expansion dramatically. It provided that “There shall be formed in the said territory, not less than three nor more than five States” rather than the ten states provided for in the 1784 Ordinance. Jefferson objected:

“I find Congress have revised their division of the Western states, and proposed to make them fewer and larger. This is reversing the natural order of things. A tractable people may be governed in large bodies; but in proportion as they depart from this character, the extent of their government must be less... Upon this plan, we treat them as fellow citizens... Upon the other we treat them as subjects, we govern them, and not they themselves...”¹³

Jefferson’s concerns were not mitigated by the 1787 Ordinance’s provision for the appointment of a governor and other key officials in the territories. Whereas the 1784 Ordinance provided for the election of a governor by the voting citizens of the territory, the 1787 Ordinance did not.¹⁴ The reasoning behind this adjustment had everything to do with the level of trust both the republican and federalist factions had in the ability of frontiersmen to govern themselves in a manner consistent with the principals each considered important. For Republicans, government should be a natural extension of “local Habits Feelings, Views & Interests” that, if properly cultivated, would contribute to “purposes of mutual safety and happiness” allowing “the People to govern themselves more easily.”¹⁵ To Federalists, such idealism “was far gone in Utopian speculations” and failed to recognize that “men are ambitious, vindictive and rapacious.”¹⁶ In their view, order imposed from on high would be the most effective way in which to govern potentially chaotic territories and their citizenries.

To control the nature of American expansion into western lands, maps became a tool of development and management, particularly in the Ohio territory. Seth Pease’s, “Map of The Connecticut Western Reserve,” drawn in 1797, is predicated upon the federal government’s authority to subdivide the land into ranges, towns and sections as granted by the Land Ordinance of 1785, but notably shows the rectilinear grid stalled in its westward approach by “Unsurveyed Lands, Subject to Indian Claims” just west of the “Cayahoga” River (Figure 5). By comparison, Almon Ruggles’ 1808 “Map of the Fire Land” shows those Indian lands since surveyed and bound, a result of the Treaty of Fort Industry, which was ceremoniously signed on July 4th of 1805. The treaty granted the United States title to the

¹² Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation; a history of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789*, (New York, Alfred Knopf Publishing, 1950), 354.

¹³ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, July 9, 1786, in Julian P. Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), Vol. X, 112-113.

¹⁴ Phillip R. Shriver and Clarence P. Wunderlin Jr., eds., “The Northwest Ordinance of 1787,” in *The Documentary Heritage of Ohio*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 56-61.

¹⁵ Samuel Adams to Richard Lee, December 3, 1787, in Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Debate on the Constitution: Federalist and Antifederalist speeches, articles, and letters during the struggle over ratification*, (New York: Library of America, 1993), Vol. I, 446.

¹⁶ Alexander Hamilton (Publius), *Federalist VI*, *Independent Journal* (New York) November 14, 1787, in *ibid.*, Vol. I, 311.

last of the Ohio territory where the last of the pan-Indian resistance had maintained a presence since General Anthony Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794. While surveying the swampland in present day Huron County in 1807 that eventually comprised his map, Almon Ruggles wrote in his field journal that "I've traveled the woods for seven years, but never saw so hideous a place as this."¹⁷

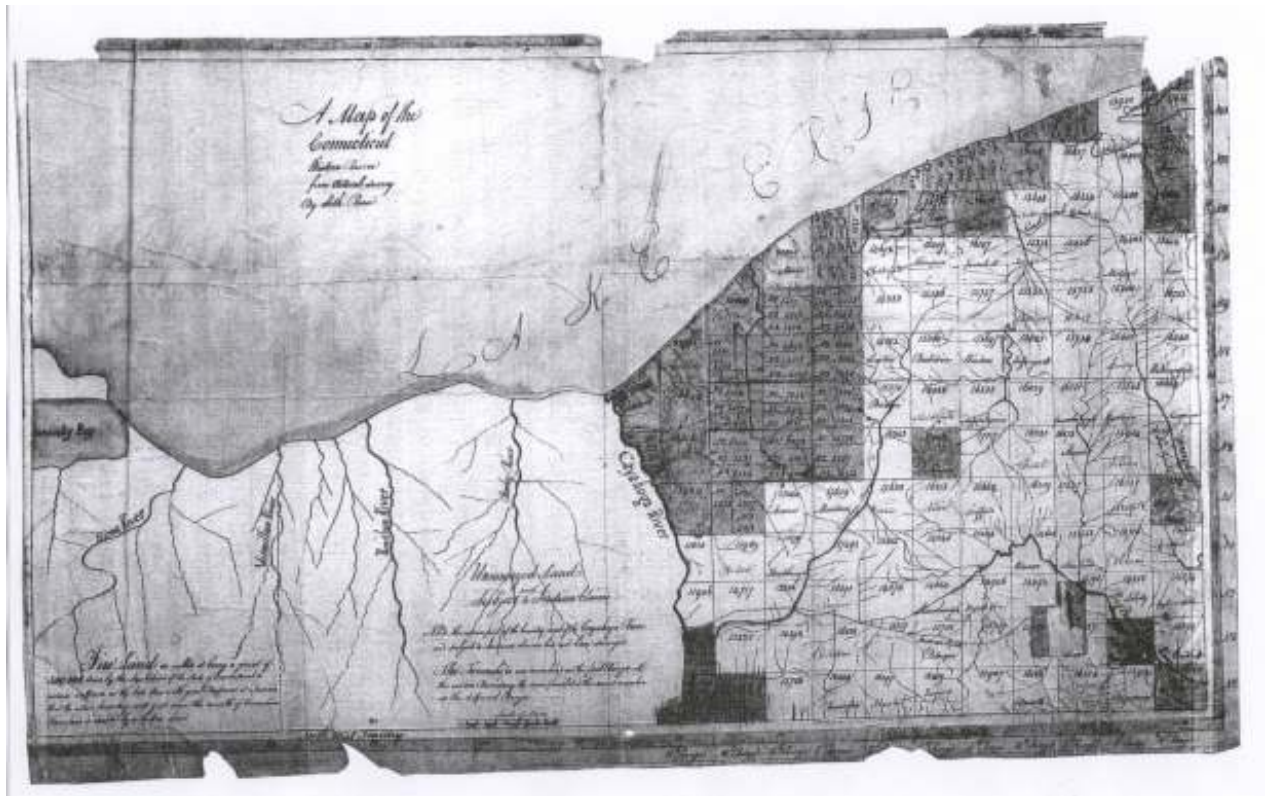


Figure 4: Seth Pease, "A Map of The Connecticut Western Reserve," 1797.
Western Reserve Historical Society.

¹⁷ Ibid, 143.

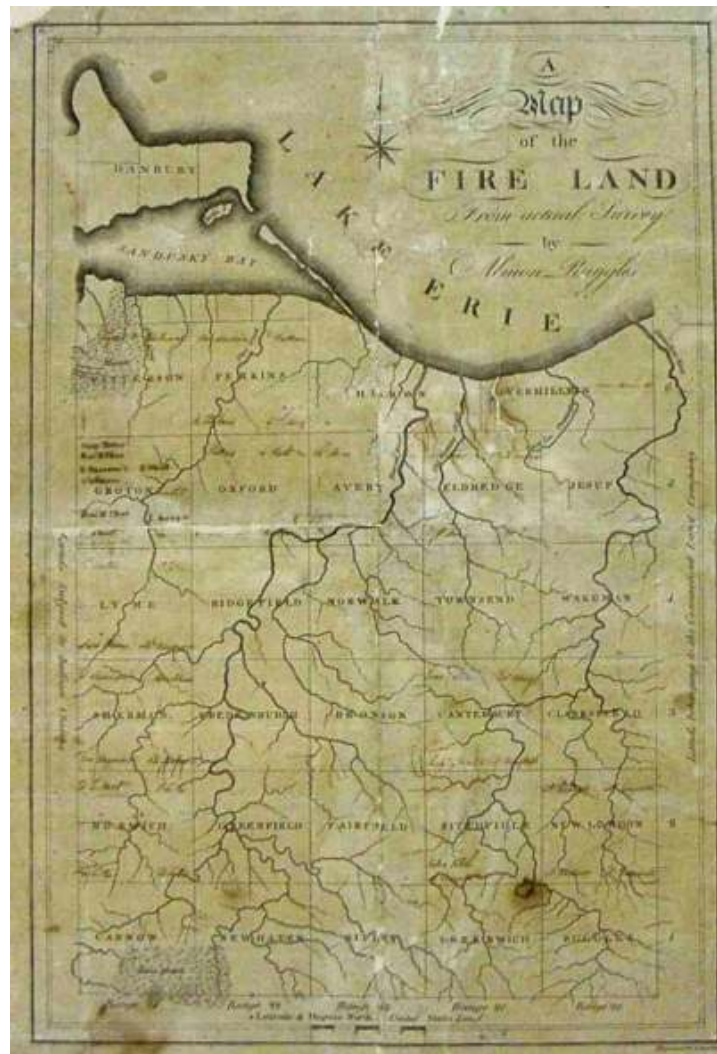


Figure 5: Almon Ruggles, "A Map of the Fire Lands," 1808
Bowling Green State University -Firelands.

Ruggles' map minimizes any territorial features, good or bad, with a rectilinear grid of borderlines bounding the names of counties either reminiscent of prominent investors or appropriated from the people that had since been displaced. Chaos may have been swirling below, among the native populations, westward emigrants, land speculators and federal armies, but the map undoubtedly promotes the appearance of order. As such, its boundaries were enforceable in legal terms that promoted the consolidation of political and economic power. The cartographic ordering of the space for political and economic expedience completed, the national map had become an extension of imperial ideology rather than a challenge to it.

The Establishment of an 'Ohio In Africa'

Inherent in the national model of territorial control was a highly effective mechanism of territorial expansion. Most political theorists from Aristotle onward considered territorial expansion synony-

mous with imperial ambition, within which framework citizens became subjects to consolidated power as government political authority spread beyond its natural limits. The eighteenth century political theorist Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu wrote: “It is natural for a republic to have only a small territory; otherwise it cannot long subsist.” His examples were all classical in origin; Rome and Greece provided idealized examples of his theoretical constructions of representative government. These republican models of relatively small territories were in contrast to his belief that monarchies existed “in a moderate extent” and that “a large empire supposes a despotic authority.”¹⁸ That a government that supposing itself republican would expand beyond a small geographical area was antithetical to thousands of years of political theory, and American identity itself was forged from a resistance to imperial authority. While early American rhetoric articulating “an empire of liberty” seems paradoxical in a historical context, it was under such philosophical auspices that the American Colonization Society was founded on December 28th, 1816 “to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the Free People of Color residing in our country, in Africa, or such other places as Congress shall deem most expedient.”¹⁹ America was to establish its own colony to export what it perceived as a “problem,” not unlike the English colonies of Georgia, Australia and Sierra Leone, and in the process, become an imperial power.

Initially, some Americans thought that the problem of slavery in a nation born in the Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and equality could be resolved in the Ohio territory. An anonymous editorial in the December 1779 edition of “The United States Magazine” suggested that “Thus would I have these black people led out by some generous mind, perhaps beyond the Ohio.”²⁰ When that territory became too valuable to appropriate for such a scheme, white Americans who recognized the problem of slavery but could not conceive of a society in which European and African descendants in America lived amongst each other proposed the return of the American slave population to Africa, and with this idea as its central tenet the American Colonization Society first met in December of 1816.²¹ By 1854, ACS officer David Christy was drumming up support for the colonization project in Ohio by promoting the venture as “the establishment of an ‘Ohio in Africa.’” Christy appealed to his “Christian Brethren” that economic support for “Our ‘Ohio in Africa’” was waning, and “for want of funds,” it would be impossible to secure “the allotment of lands for our colored people.”²²

Over thirty years earlier, in 1821, American Colonization Society member Dr. Eli Ayres, accompanied by United States Naval officer Lieutenant Robert F. Stockton negotiated for rights to territory with the Dey and Bassa people near present day Cape Mesurado in exchange for a supply of trade goods, weapons and rum in a scene that could not have been much different than the many similar ones that had occurred between agents of European imperial powers and native people in North America a few centuries earlier. The agents reported that “Much difficulty in obtaining lands from a

¹⁸ Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, translated by Thomas Nugent, *The Spirit Of The Laws*, New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1949) book VIII, section 16, p.36.

¹⁹ Claude A. Clegg III, *The Price Of Liberty: African Americans And The Making Of Liberia*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 31

²⁰ Anonymous, “Thoughts Upon the Enfranchisement of the Negroes,” *The United States Magazine: A Repository of History, Politics and Literature*, (December 1779), 487.

²¹ James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), xi

²² David Christy, “African colonization by the free colored people of the United States, an indispensable auxiliary to African missons: a lecture,” (Cincinnati: J.A. and U.P. James, 1854), 57-63

people to whom it was of little or no value, in exchange for such articles as were most important and desirable to them, could not reasonably be expected,” and indeed oral accounts of this initial exchange among African descendents of the Dey and Bassa even suggest that the American Colonization Society agents punctuated a threat of force with guns during the negotiations, and official society papers seem to confirm this.²³

An undated manuscript map of the Liberian coastline drawn by Methodist Episcopal missionary John Seys shows territory tenuously demarcated as Careysburg surrounded by tribal claims (Figure 6). Along the way up the St. Paul’s River, Seys comments on the potential for agriculture in the region, noting “very inferior farmlands” just off the coast and “undulating and well watered” lands just to the west of Careysburg in “Qucah Country.” This map is not unlike a manuscript map drawn by Moravian missionary John Heckewelder of the Ohio territory that also simultaneously recognizes indigenous territories and their agricultural potential (Figure 7). Here, Heckewelder particularly notices swamp lands, which, once drained, “will make good meadows.” About his geographical subject, Heckewelder wrote, “Altho the Country in general containeth both airable Land & good Pasturage: yet there are particular spots far preferable to others; not only on account of the land being here superior in quality: but also on account of the many advantages presenting themselves.”²⁴

Seys resonates historically as a Methodist Minister with political ambitions in Liberia.²⁵ His map projecting the potential of the land in commercial, agricultural terms was largely a result of protestant constructions of geographical “improvement,” linked closely with the Biblical concept of “dominion” in the book of Genesis. This idea that unproductive, chaotic spaces could be manipulated, controlled, and in essence domesticated was inherently bound up with the direction of capitalism and nascent industrialization in the early 19th century. Heckewelder also believed that the potential for making land productive was linked to the “saving” of human souls. He wrote during a visit to Fairfield in 1798 “we were now happy to find ourselves on missionary ground. May we, all our brethren who crossed these hills, be animated by same zeal for the enlargement of our Saviour’s kingdom... They traversed this country when still a perfect wilderness; now it affords the necessary comforts of life.”²⁶

²³ “The fourth annual report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States: with an appendix,” (Washington: Davis and Force, 1821), 9

²⁴ John Heckewelder: “Description and account concerning the lands depicted on his map.” 1/12/1796. WRHS Manuscript Collection. 5/110 (Microform 54:2).

²⁵ James Wesley Smith, *Sojourners in Search of Freedom: The Settlement of Liberia by Black Americans*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 179-80

²⁶ Paul A.W. Wallace, ed., *Thirty Thousand Miles With John Heckewelder*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958), 344.

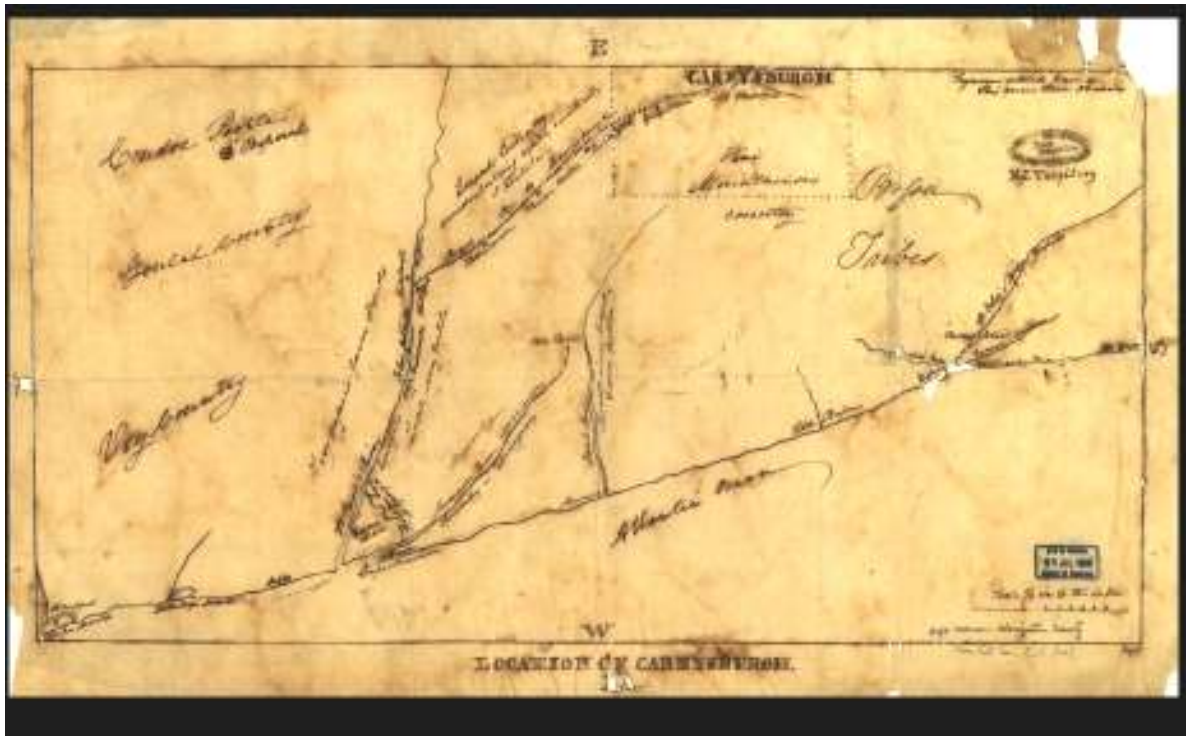


Figure 6: John Seys, "Location of Careysburgh," 18--. Library of Congress.

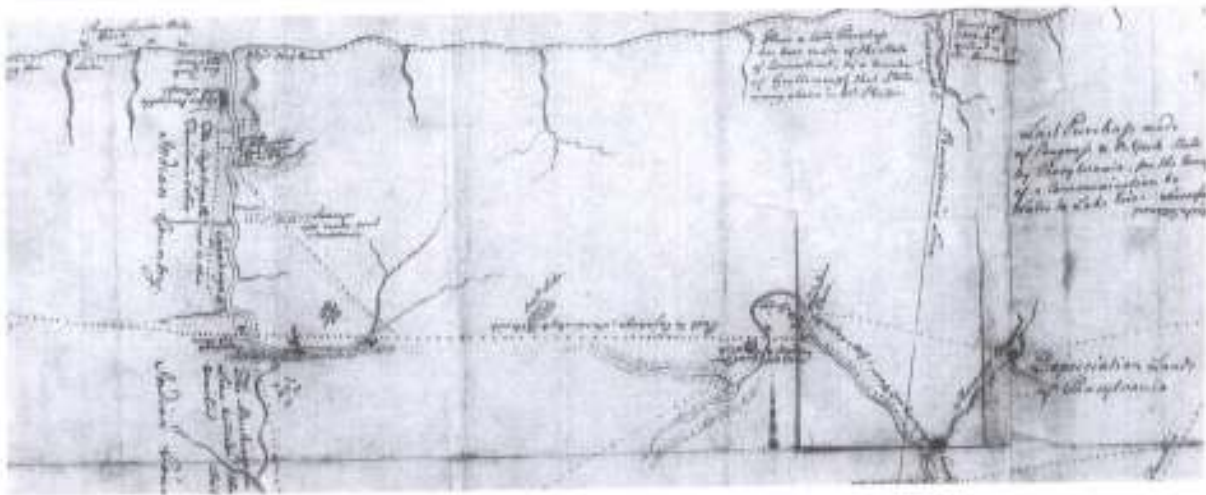


Figure 7: John Heckewelder, Untitled Manuscript Map, 1796.
Western Reserve Historical Society.

Religious sentiment notwithstanding, much of the American Colonization Society's initial work was to acquire rights to land in Liberia from the native populations and begin the work of settlement. Upon dubiously procuring a stretch of land near Cape Mesurado, the American Colonization Society

appointed Jehudi Ashmun colonial administrator in 1822.²⁷ His two immediate tasks were to develop a colonial infrastructure and organize defenses to protect the colony from growing indigenous hostility. In doing so, he established a colonial center at Monrovia and imposed a gridded ordering of space there, creating by proxy the first Liberian frontier (Figure 8). Here, the delineated space in the capital stood in sharp contrast to the vaguely defined eastern borderlands that predominate the map.

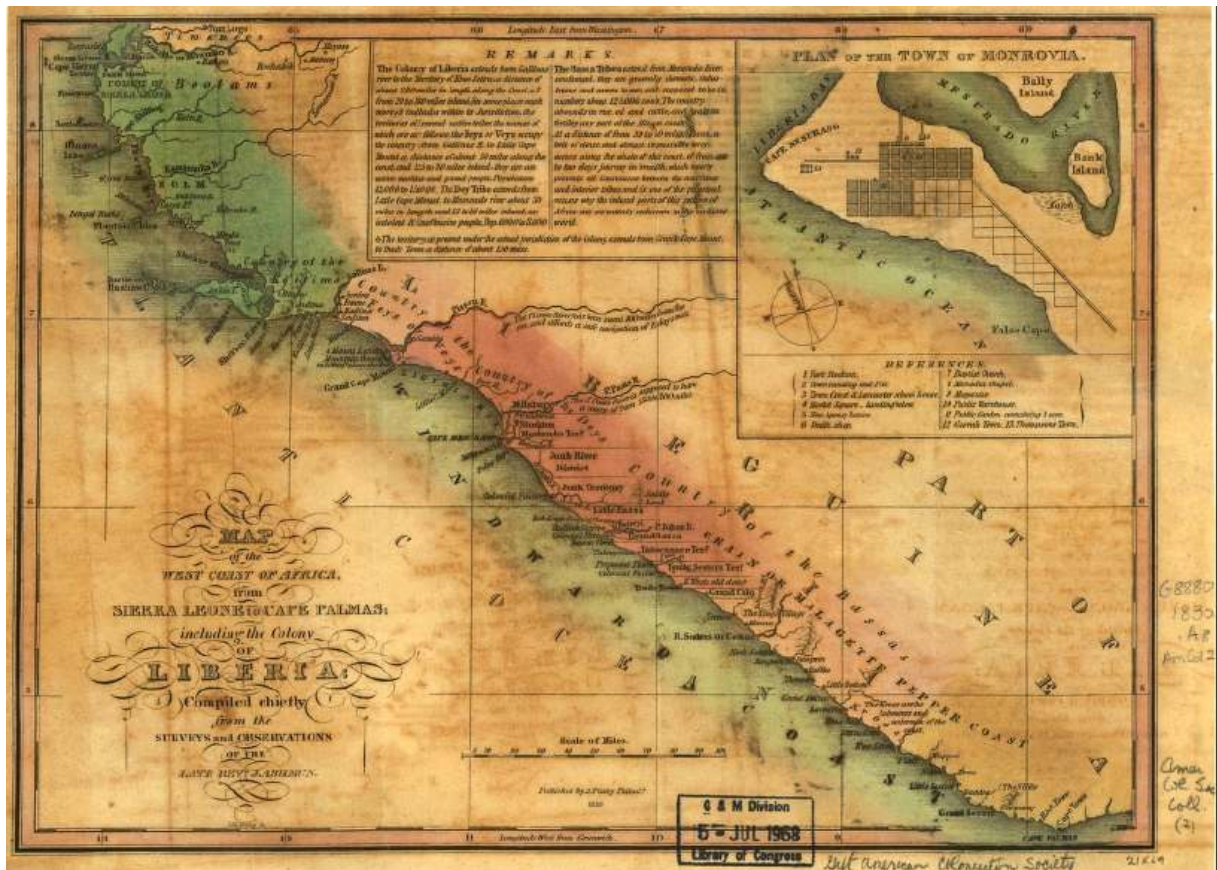


Figure 8: Anthony Finley, “Map of the West Coast of Africa,” 1830. Library of Congress.

The position of the capital, chosen for its defensible position facing east into the Bassa lands and its accessibility to transatlantic trade from the west, resonates with the early modern imperial tones of martial confrontation and nascent capitalism. The tenth annual report of the American Colonization Society suggests that “no efforts have been spared to place the Colony in a state of adequate defence.” While it was “regarded as perfectly safe from native forces,” the ACS suggested that it was equally necessary to protect Monrovia from “piratical assaults” which could potentially hamper the trade and ultimately the sustainability of the experiment.²⁸

A map drawn sometime in the early 1830’s by G.F. Nesbitt shows the extent to which natives predominated the landscape of early Liberia, delineating tribal territories to which extent could be sur-

²⁷ C. Abayomi Cassell, *Liberia: History of the First African Republic*, (New York: Fountainhead Publishers, 1970) 81

²⁸ Tenth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society (Washington: Way & Gideon, 1827), 42-3.

mised, in effect drawing borderlines where arguably borderlands persisted. (Figure 9). Nevertheless, such articulations of bordered space allowed for a systematic imposition of borderlines to eventually be drawn. Much like 18th century English maps that minimized divergent claims to territory, early maps of Liberia challenged the geographical presence of “other” claimants by excluding them in cartographic terms. By matter of course, the oppositional force simply disappears from the map. B.W. Thayer’s 1840’s map does not recognize any tribal presence (Figure 10). Not unlike the previous succession of Ohio maps, the silence of the map with regard to the indigenous condition seems problematic.

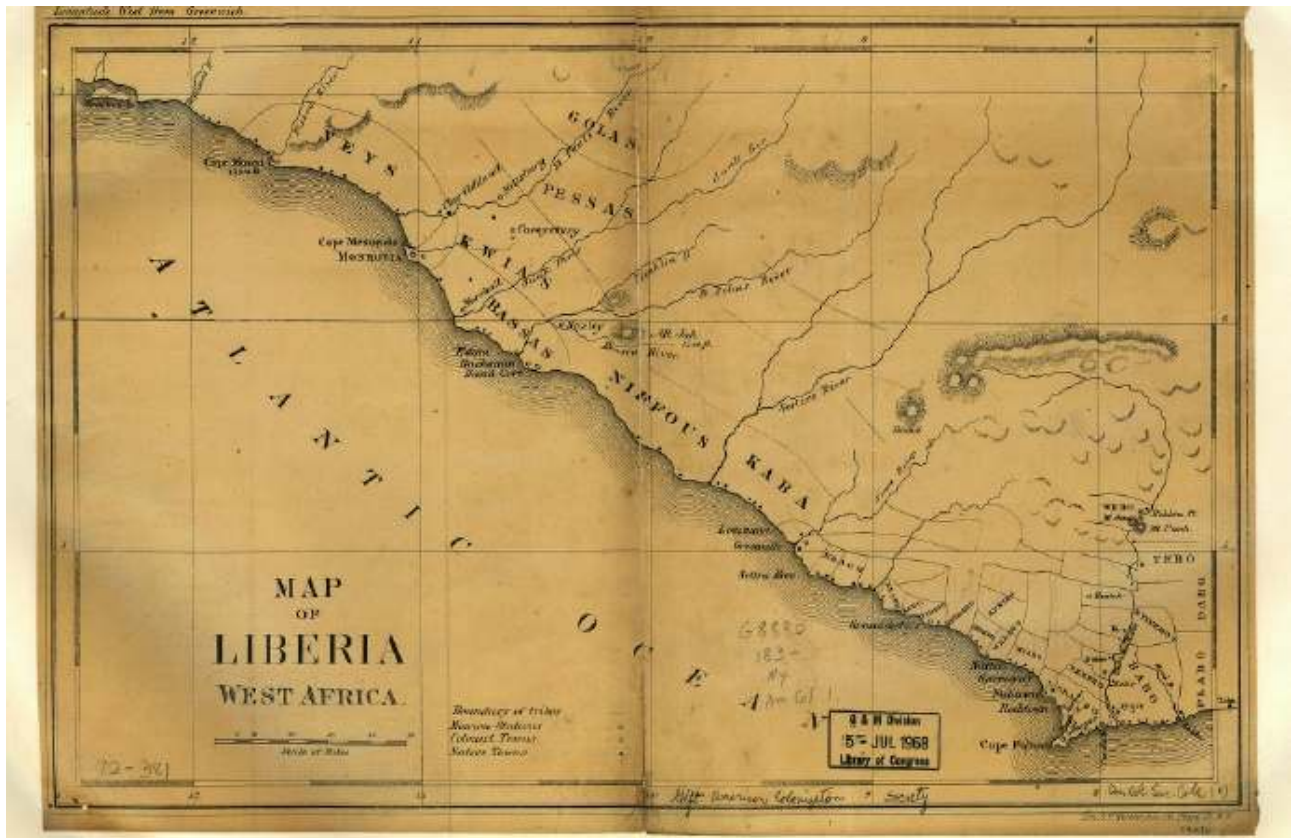


Figure 9: G.F. Nesbitt, “Map of Liberia, West Africa,” 183-. Library of Congress

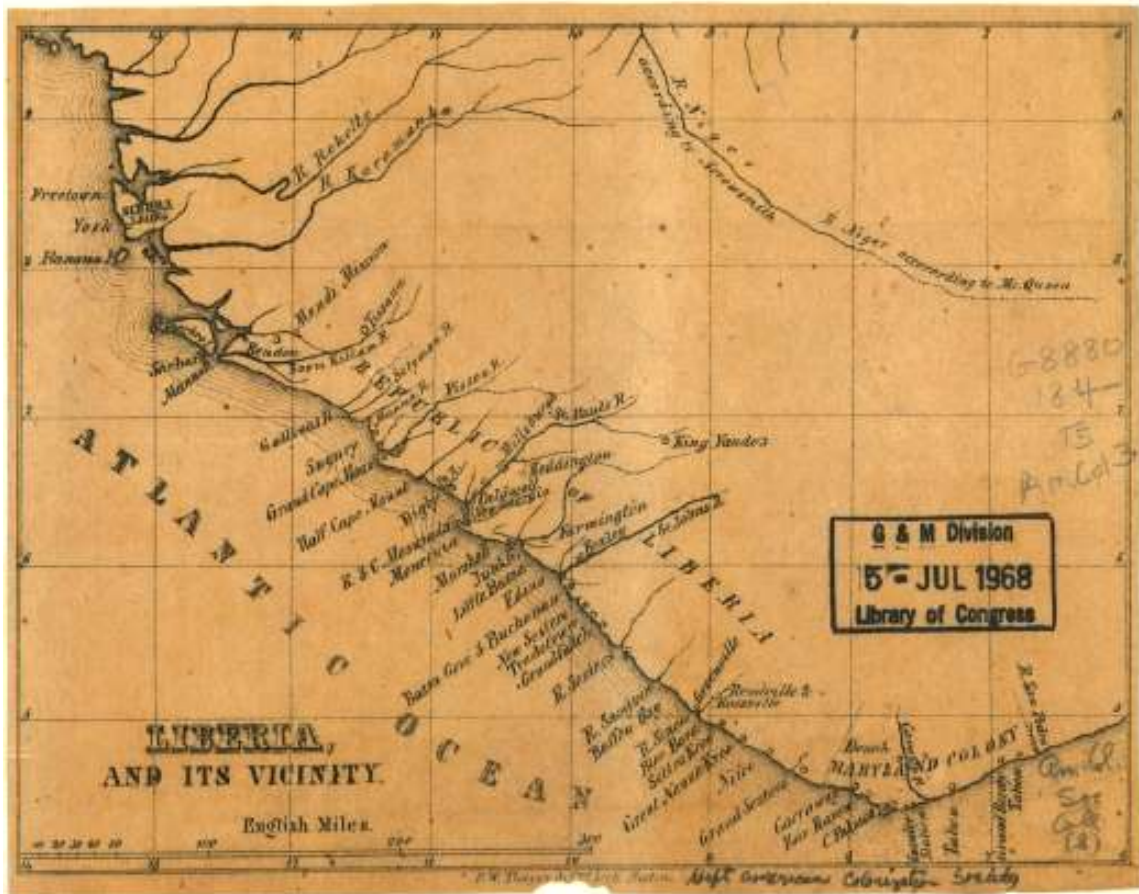


Figure 10: B.W. Thayer, "Liberia And Its Vicinity," 184-. Library of Congress.

D. McLelland's 1850 map allows for some insight as to the nature of resistance and displacement during this tumultuous period on the west coast of Africa (Figure 11). Careful reading shows indigenous names appear in two types of circumstances. Former indigenous territories that have since been pacified, or its original inhabitants removed further east, are identified as counties bearing the names of the people who previously inhabited the land. This is the case for Bassa and Sinou Counties. Where conflict and tension with indigenous populations had not yet been resolved, typically further east to the interior, the letter "R" is added to the word "county," to spell "country," identifying those places as still under the auspices of the people who initially laid claim to then when the first Liberian colonists arrived some thirty years earlier. This is the case with Vey Country, Queah Country, Sah-Bo Country, and the like.

Much like the Ohio territory, the citizens of Liberia were prevented from engaging in participatory government while the political, economic and social space was not yet fully hegemonized. As the American Colonization Society was a private enterprise, there were no pretensions to democratic obligations at the onset of colonization. The ACS, like the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, appointed a governor rather than allowing the territorial inhabitants to elect one. Jehudi Ashmun, the Society's "governing representative" was shortly run out of Liberia by armed settlers who believed he was conducting the affairs of the colony in a less than beneficent manner. While Ashmun ultimately returned,

a system of administration that led to a Constitution and codified laws, and ultimately the Liberian Declaration of Independence in 1847, which neither the American Colonization Society nor the United States immediately recognized.

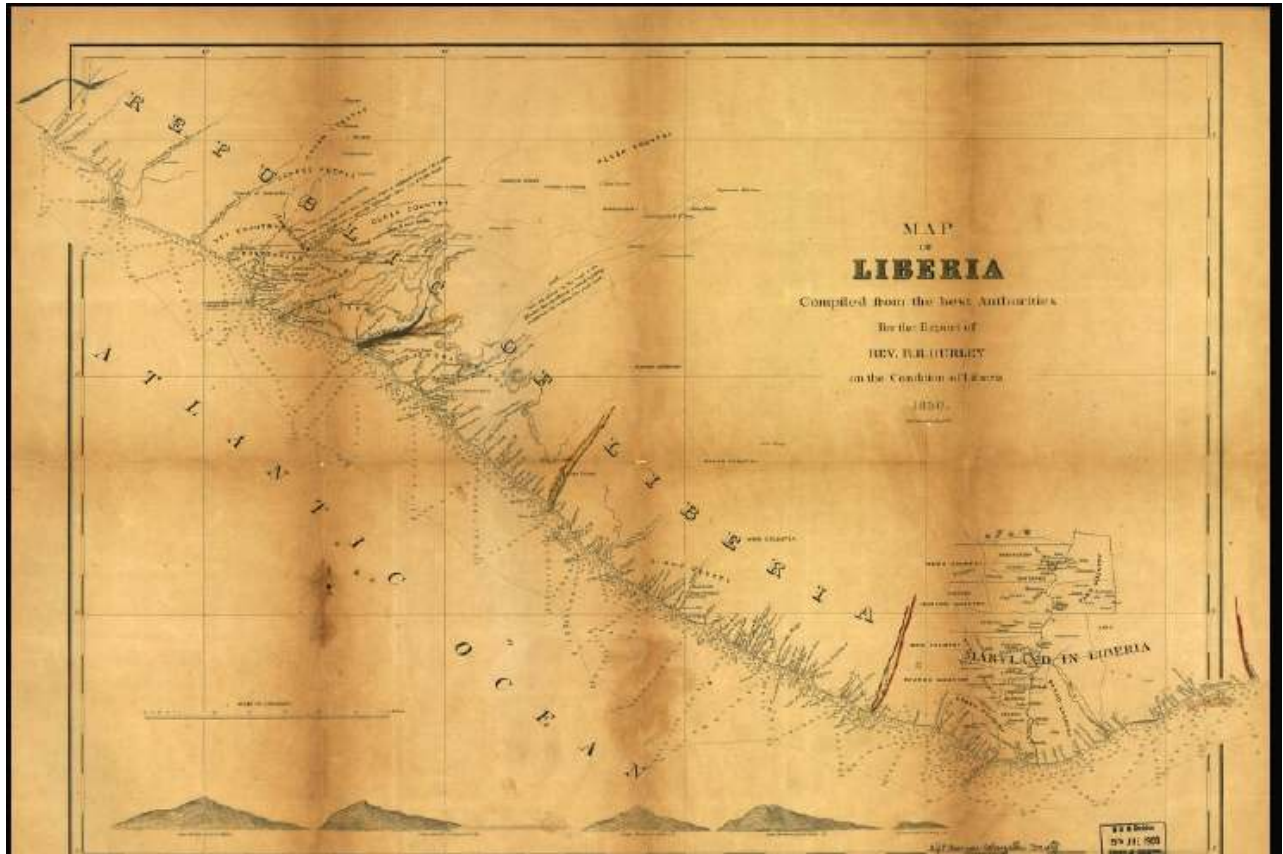


Figure 11: D. McLelland, “Map of Liberia” 1850. Library of Congress.

Eventually, the nation of Liberia developed into its modern borders that define it today. Its counties have since assumed the names of the peoples that were once sovereign over the land they demarcate, not unlike Ohio’s Huron, Erie, and Wyandot counties to name a few. The land systematically expropriated from underneath them through a complex pattern of trade, accommodation, cultural imposition, bribery and violence, their names serve as ironic memorial to the conditions of the land in times before maps were drawn of them.

Conclusion

Ultimately, architects of a distinct form of “republican empire” used cartography to impose their understandings of social and political order over territory in North America and Africa. As William Blake’s God as Geometer measured creation from above, so too were these maps articulated from positions of power. Mapmakers, as agents and proponents of the state, were part of a developing infrastructure that wielded a great deal of political, economic and martial authority in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As tools of territorial control, maps became tactical weapons in the pursuit

of authority in the contested spaces of both the North American and African continents. Maps effectively triangulated frontiers in economic, political, cultural and martial terms as adversarial entities to be neutralized and overcome. In doing so, they imposed geographical homogeneity through the geometrisation of space, extinguishing all local uniqueness and replacing it with the systemization of the state and its attendant economic forces.

Maps connect territory with the social order.²⁹ Hierarchical order, in the interest of economic and political consolidation, was marked on both sides of the Atlantic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The maps produced both by and within these circumstances are thereby reflections of them. That national and imperial maps alike took on symbolic dimensions of the political, social and economic systems they represented is more than mere coincidence. As geographical historian J. Brian Harley recognized, "Maps are ineluctably a cultural system. Cartography has never been an autonomous and hermetic form of knowledge, nor is it ever above the politics of knowledge."³⁰

Given this, the maps of the early American republic and the territory they sought to convey on both sides of the Atlantic become representative of the systems that produced them. It has long been understood that such designs were exclusive, but by refracting such circumstances through the visual medium of cartography, we begin to understand just how pervasive the systematic exclusion was. Their appropriation, a means of legitimizing presence through establishing borderlines and naming, seems token in retrospect, yet offers a thread, that if pulled, unravels a great deal in understanding the nature of the territorial competition that defined the eighteenth and nineteenth century transatlantic.

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²⁹ D. Turnbull, 'Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces,' *Imago Mundi*, 48 (1996), 7.

³⁰ J. Brian Harley "Deconstructing the Map," in Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory, eds., *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry*, (London: Arnold Press, 1997), 155.

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