PETER FREESE

America(n) Matters

Selected Essays

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

Volume 283






Edited by
MICHAEL MITCHELL
MARKUS WIERSCHEM

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Introduction: America(n) Matters

The essays collected in this volume, originally published over the course of four decades, testify to the extraordinary breadth and depth of Peter Freese's commitment to advancing an understanding of the literature and culture of the United States of America. The grand vista of subjects, writers, concepts, and contexts spread out in these pages – from the enduring myth of the American Dream to new myths created (and undermined) by youth culture and hip hop artists, or from Thomas Pynchon's arcane pursuit of the implications of entropy to the ancient wisdom that enables Tony Hillerman's Navajo detective to solve mysterious crimes – is truly impressive. But for all their diversity, certain constants emerge from these essays. They are the result of diligent scholarship and penetrating close reading, never failing to reveal the heart of the matter, but always allowing that heart to remain beating and alive, and always making manifest why the subject of his studies matters.

While scholarship and close reading are to be expected of one of the pre-eminent voices in German American studies of the past forty years, Peter Freese possesses a far rarer quality: the ability to excite and inspire, and these essays evince these qualities again and again. They are the qualities of a great teacher; and as head of the American Studies department of Paderborn University from its inception in 1979 until 2005 and afterwards as Professor Emeritus, Freese has dedicated his career not only to educating generations of students (not least through two highly successful series of school textbooks, Schöningh's *Texts for English and American Studies* and Langenscheidt's *Viewfinder*, with combined sales of over a million copies) but also to training future teachers. The essays convey something of his unique gift for showing how the study of the literature and culture of America matters.

Why does it matter? The most obvious answer is that the United States, as the dominant world power over the last 100 years, has influenced all our lives in fundamental political, economic and cultural ways. And as we move into an era of increasing global interconnection but concomitant change and uncertainty, it becomes more and more important to try to gain an understanding which can take us beyond cliché or superficial criticism. The best way to do this, as Freese demonstrates, is by paying attention to the nation's culture and arts, in particular its perspicacious writers, and there could be no better guide in this process than the articles collected here, for another salient feature of these essays is the almost uncanny clairvoyance with which Freese highlights aspects of

American society and how the authors he deals with have viewed them, so that he makes phenomena which might at first seem merely baffling comprehensible in their subtle differentiations. In this regard, Freese subscribes to Kurt Vonnegut's view of the social role of art and the artist as a "canary in a coal-mine"[1] sensitive to changes and dangers long before anyone else becomes aware of them. Some may object that art speaks for itself, and it does; yet it does not always do so clearly, and – in an age of constant informational overload and entropic noise – not always unmediated. Hence, to quote another great critic, it may not be "expected of critics as it is of poets that they should help us to make sense of our lives" yet they can certainly help us in "making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives."[2] To listen to subtleties in the arts, then – the how and why of reading literature, for instance – is something that needs to be learned. Good criticism, that is, such criticism as teaches, enlightens, and excites its readers in opening up new horizons – can also be an art form.

Freese helps his readers, in other words, to see what really matters about America and why America matters. At the same time there is no magic about how he does this. The essays provide an exemplary justification for the study of literature, since, for all Freese's attention to culture and the fascinating cultural mosaic that constitutes today's United States, his conviction that writers and imaginative artists have a unique contribution to make constantly comes to the fore. By eschewing the claims of 'theory' – while still aware of its function and merits – and returning to an exact analysis of text and attention to the authors' works themselves, he allows his readers to approach texts they thought they knew with fresh eyes or to embark on the discovery of new paths with a sense of curiosity and adventurous enthusiasm.

At the same time, the essays assembled here, for all their variety and depth of insight, present little more than the tip of the scholarly iceberg. Starting with the 1971 publication (and 1998 reprint) of his now classic study *Die Initiationsreise*, a critical tour de force tracing the evolution of the youthful hero's journey of initiation in American literature, Freese's signature approach has been a mixture of contextual (e.g. historical, social, religious, anthropological) investigation, the analysis of recurrent and evolving cultural themes, and individual interpretation that always

[1] Kurt Vonnegut Jr., "Physicist, Purge Thyself," *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, June 22, 1969, p. 44.
[2] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

puts the text first. In his endeavors, he frequently exhibits, as one American reviewer put it with regard to J. D. Salinger, "much deeper sensitivity to the archetypal elements underlying" his chosen objects "than most American commentators."[3] A number of monographs on the American short story made him a household name in academic and educational circles in Germany. His book *America: Dream or Nightmare?* only served to cement his reputation as an outstanding cultural critic, who, reviewers quickly found, was not averse to the use of 'New Historicism,' either, incorporating "posters, advertisements, films, TV series, and texts of popular songs in its arguments"[4] to demonstrate "that broad concepts such as the American Dream […] are still of great heuristic value for the exploration of complex issues in American Studies."[5] Finally, his groundbreaking and stimulating study of the use of the Second Law of Thermodynamics in American literature and thought still stands as one of those singular examples that truly transcend the divide between science and literature, opening the door to a deeper appreciation of both, while his magisterial survey of the novels of Kurt Vonnegut provided "the most easily grasped approach to revealing Vonnegut's essential and ever-present underlying concern for the human condition,"[6] and has been recognized as "a pinnacle of Vonnegut studies."[7] The essays collected here provide an opportunity to sample in a single volume a broad range of the themes he has turned his attention to over a long and distinguished career. The anthology also gives the reader an impression of Freese's engaging voice: serious, but not without humor; sympathetic, but not without critical distance; incisive, but never simplistic; intellectual, but never dull.

For ease of use, we have arranged the essays into thematic sections. The first of these, **Europe and the American Dream**, examines how certain ideas and concepts which determine how the United States sees itself and others, and is in turn seen by them, have evolved over time. Freese teases out, in a series of judiciously chosen instances, how such ideas often begin in prejudice or misunderstanding. These have a tendency to take on a life of their own, alienated from their original conception, often understood imperfectly even by those who take them as foundational principles. The first of these traces how a "complex philosophi-

[3] Warren French, *J. D. Salinger Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1988), p. 46.
[4] Gerd Hurm, *Kritikon Litterarum*, 19, 1/2 (1992), p. 84.
[5] Jochen Achilles, *Amerikastudien*, 36, 4 (1991), p. 571.
[6] Marc Leeds, *Amerikastudien*, 54, 3 (2009), p. 542**.**
[7] Gilbert McInnis, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 17, 1 (2011), p. 192.

cal notion" originating in the biblical Old Testament and in classical Roman authors mutated into "a widespread popular belief" that civilization and imperial power moved by analogy with the path of the sun from East to West and that the culmination of this process was the establishment and waxing power of the United States. Europe saw in the New World to the west a chance to create a new and ideal society which would eclipse all the civilizations that had come before. Using paintings by Leutze and Melrose and writings from Bishop Berkeley to Josiah Strong, Freese investigates how the movement westwards became a divinely ordained project and building block of American Exceptionalism, which was used to justify hegemonic and imperialist policies.

This is followed by an essay on the 'American Dream', which should be required reading, particularly in Germany, where the idea has such strong resonance that it takes up a central position in all the school English curricula. Freese shows how, ironically, the idea has its historical roots in Europe, before moving on to the multiple meanings, some of them contradictory, which the concept gradually took on. Freese's analysis is a model of clarity and concision. Illustrating the versatility of his approach, a humorous example of the enduring power of national stereotypes is provided in the (German-language) survey of three prejudices about Germans prevalent in the United States: their gluttony, inebriation and cleanliness. Freese closes his remarks with some thoughts about the purpose and effects of such hetero-stereotypes and a warning that we ignore them at our peril. The relationship between America and Europe, particularly that with Great Britain, 'divided by a common language,' is the subject of the final essay in this section. Through American eyes, Europe is viewed with a complex mixture of pity and fascination, especially as consideration of the European Other has also been used by American writers and commentators as a way of reflecting on their own society.

It was Peter Freese, in his extended survey *From Apocalypse to Entropy and Beyond: The Second Law of Thermodynamics in Post-War American Fiction* (1997) who took up the challenge set by C. P. Snow in 1959. Snow had talked about "The Two Cultures:" a cultural divide in which intellectuals in the humanities were unlikely to be able to describe the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and compared this ignorance with a scientist not having read Shakespeare. Freese's book was described by Ansgar Nünning as "interdisciplinary criticism at its very best" and as "essential reading not only for all students of post-war American fiction, but for the growing number of people concerned with the interplay of

science and literature in the twentieth century."[8] In his work, Freese not only showed how the concept of entropy had been dealt with in science, he also pursued the ramifications of its treatment in literature. Against this background our second section, **The Two Cultures: Literature and Science**, elaborates on ideas of entropy and apocalypse in selected fictional works.

The first essay in this section provides an overview of the transition from a religious conception of 'end times' to the 19th century conviction, regarded with no less horror because it was anchored in science, that the universe was doomed to a 'heat-death.' Freese shows how this idea was taken up, popularized, and frequently misunderstood. He points out that creative writers, way ahead of literary critics, pursued the idea of entropy as an increasing state of disorder through Shannon's cybernetic discoveries of the relationship between entropy and information to Prigogine's work on self-ordering systems in order to conclude that artistic creativity offers a realistic alternative to entropic doom.

Thomas Pynchon is an author who, from the beginning of his career, became fascinated by the idea of entropy and consciously worked it into his writing. In a new essay specially combined and reworked for this volume from two previously published texts, Freese contrasts Pynchon's first adaptation of the Second Law in his early short story "Entropy" with his later use of the concept in the dazzling and perplexing novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. This is an excellent example of Freese's exegetical ability to illuminate a difficult text in order to simultaneously explain how the ideas of physics underlie aspects of the novel while also allowing the work's essential mystery to remain intact.

Two essays on Kurt Vonnegut follow in this section. The first, on Vonnegut's invented religions, shows how, in an age where science has rendered traditional religious belief untenable, but in which the advance of science and technology has not guaranteed human progress, it is all the more important to consider how sense-making systems can be developed which can form a framework according to which people might live meaningful and productive lives. An essay on science in Vonnegut's novels serves as a companion piece. Less concerned with the actual use of science than with its ethical and social implications, Vonnegut made use of the genre of science fiction and as a result for a long time failed to be taken seriously by mainstream critics as an important American writer; Freese's essay is a useful corrective to that view. His wide-ranging sur-

[8] Ansgar Nünning, *Anglia* 118, 1 (2000), p. 146.

vey is particularly valuable for its insights into one of Vonnegut's most striking novels, *Cat's Cradle*. The section concludes with three authors' envisioning of 'the way the world ends,' whether as a bang or a whimper. Returning for another look at Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, Freese contrasts it with close analyses of *God's Grace* by Bernard Malamud and *Galápagos* by Kurt Vonnegut. His conclusion to this comparative study may be surprising, as, all evidence to the contrary, and in the face of apocalyptic visions, he finds their authors still leave room for hope.

The third section, **Changing Forms and Shifting Perspectives**, comprises four essays spanning the period 1977 through 2015, in which Freese turns his attention to ways in which the study of literature has been affected by wider changes in thought and society, but shows that literature, in particular imaginative fiction, has become even more relevant. The first essay, in German, examines the short story genre in the postmodern era. Having morphed from a conservative form – plot-driven, realistic, dependent on Joycean epiphany or O.Henry twist – the story, according to Freese, has taken on the aspects of the postmodern avant-garde. Though some critics condemned this as a step to nihilism and the aporia of relativism, Freese is able to show the new ways in which stories have been used to provide a convincing antidote to existential meaninglessness, in which the reader becomes an active participant in the narration of realities that no longer conform to traditional patterns or explanations. In a similar way, the next essay shows how the historical novel, in the hands of E. L. Doctorow, becomes less a historical fiction and more a fiction of historiography. Here, Freese argues, the reader is invited to participate in the subjective recreation of the past, and thus in an instrument of epistemological enquiry. This essay is another example of how intimate knowledge of an author's œuvre combined with wide-ranging contextual references serves to sharpen the reader's sense of orientation and appreciation of literary production.

One of the major shifts in perception which has taken place during the period covered by these essays concerns the 'canon debate,' that is, the controversial discussion about the works and authors generally regarded as essential reading for American studies. Approaching the subject from the point of view of the teacher in Germany, Freese gives a survey of the developments in the so-called 'culture wars' with battle-lines drawn under the banners of ethnocentric particularism versus a pluralistic defense of the universal power of literature to speak across cultural and ethnic divides. While applauding the need for a shift away from long-standing representational imbalances and the hegemonic silencing of

voices outside the dominant discourses, in this battle Freese takes a clear and courageous stance, as might be expected; on the basis of his belief that literature matters, he makes a convincing case in the final essay of this section for the educational use of stories about growing up in the diverse and often marginalized cultures within the United States. Studying stories such as these offers the opportunity to increase the intercultural awareness and sensitivity of students at school and university, helping them realize that America does not consist of a single monolithic culture, as is frequently projected to them through the distorted images of media and advertising. Instead, such stories encourage students to use imagination and empathy to understand what matters to the many communities that really form the mosaic of today's United States, and even to bring that knowledge back to inform their view of their own diverse societies in Europe.

Finally, the fourth section, **Textual Kaleidoscopes: American Identities**, continues along similar lines. It presents a cornucopia of literary scholarship assembling eight critical essays dealing with a variety of writers, male and female, from different geographic, ethnic, and sociocultural backgrounds. Here, Freese demonstrates how, through the distinct vision of each of these authors, American identity emerges as a glittering mosaic. In *Less than Zero*, the apprentice novel of literary *enfant terrible* Bret Easton Ellis, this identity is represented through the eyes of rich and vapid Los Angeles youth on the hunt for the next distraction from the vacuum of their lives, which, Freese shows, is inexorably bound up with the contemporary fear and inability to actually communicate in a meaningful manner. He goes on to compare Ellis' first novel with his much later return to the same characters in *Imperial Bedrooms*, an extraordinary fusion of fiction and fact interwoven with popular culture made more topical by recent revelations about the Hollywood casting couch. In what is certainly one of the more surprising inclusions in this anthology, these issues are likewise at the forefront of Jay-Z's New York rap-anthem "Empire State of Mind," which Freese explores in a close reading that is as much an exercise in literary cryptography as it is respectful of the history of the unique language of this black genre of music and its more critical potentials. Popular music and TV culture also play a role in his reading of Bobbie Ann Mason's 'K Mart realist' novel, which emphasizes a young Southern woman's struggle to come to terms with the collective American trauma of Vietnam as a part of the process of 'growing up.'

The war trauma of a young man caught on the threshold between cultures is also an issue in Leslie Marmon Silko's Native American masterpiece *Ceremony*, whose complicated time structure, ritual implications, and confrontation between ethnocentrism and universality Freese unfolds with exhaustive depth. In contrast, Tony Hillerman's novels about ethnic detective Joe Leaphorn might seem a somewhat lighter affair, yet Freese's analysis is no less engaging in its probing of Navajo culture, this time presented through the deeply appreciative eyes of a white American male, who lived among them and became known as a "Special Friend of the Dineh."

The complicated history of race-relations between African Americans and Jews in the U.S. is a focal point in Freese's analysis of Bernard Malamud's metafictional novel *The Tenants*. Taking up Malamud's suggestion that "All men are Jews, except that they don't know it," which the Jewish humanist articulated as "a metaphoric way of indicating how history, sooner or later, treats all men,"[9] Freese's careful investigation is a testament to the potential of literature to reflect and, at its best, cross racial division to articulate universally human experiences. In a different vein, the essay on John Kennedy Toole's highly inventive *A Confederacy of Dunces* not only explores in colorful detail the history and ethnic and subcultural make-up of 1960s New Orleans, but provides an illuminating study of how genres like the modern picaresque can serve as gateways for the interrogation of clashing identities and weltanschauungen.

Finally, the artist as canary in the coal-mine, and the critic as prescient social observer emerge in all their contours in Freese's reading of T. C. Boyle's 1995 novel *The Tortilla Curtain*; contrasting the allegorical travails of the Mexican illegals América and Cándido, Boyle's modern Candide, with the slow collapse of ignorant, unreflecting liberal values into xenophobia and reactionary isolationism in a well-to-do gated community, Freese's analysis brings the appeal of the American dream back into the limelight, while offering a penetrating gaze at the issues which came to the fore in the American Presidential election of 2016.

The publication of this anthology a year after Donald Trump's election is a timely reminder of another reason why this kind of study of America matters. We are often told that we have entered a 'post-truth age.' It is an age of the emotional response that we often term 'populist,' where wanting to believe something is more important than whether it is

[9] Lawrence Lasher (ed.), *Conversations with Bernard Malamud* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), p. 39.

true. If, as James Baldwin said, "the past is all that makes the present coherent,"[10] but the past is subject to multiple 'alternative facts' and the present ceases to cohere, the danger grows of autocratic strongmen using bizarre inventions and brazen denials to nurture the idea that 'everybody lies and nothing matters.' Yet the postmodern recognition of the plurality of truth is not the same as the acceptance of the lie. If nothing else, the work of writers and artists and the way their work is dealt with in these essays make this abundantly clear. Indeed, the most surprising of Freese's choices of subject matter, the song "Empire State of Mind" by Jay-Z and Alicia Keys, is a metonymic example: on the surface it appears to be a feel-good emotional anthem in praise of New York, but Freese's masterly exegesis reveals its underlying darker and more complex message. To make sense of times like these we need both the imagination of the artist to express the plurality and the painstaking analytical skills of the scholar to find the truth. This anthology gives the reader access to both in the best liberal humanist tradition, conveyed by an inspirational teacher. And if we are asking why this, too, matters, Kurt Vonnegut gives a characteristically lighthearted reply:

> Well, I've worried some about, you know, why write books … why are we teaching people to write books when presidents and senators do not read them, and generals do not read them. […] And it's been the university experience that taught me that there is a very good reason, that you catch people before they become generals and presidents and so forth and you poison their minds with … humanity, and however you want to poison their minds, it's presumably to encourage them to make a better world.[11]

while Bernard Malamud (quoting Albert Camus) sounds a deeper note of warning: "The purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself."[12] To avoid catastrophe, we do not need walls and borders to try to exclude the Other, but opportunities to come together and understand one another. There are those who say that differences in culture, politics and power render such a meeting impossible. These essays prove the contrary: that if people are willing to listen, to learn and to understand they will be able to explore what matters to other cultures and to gain access to other worlds. If we are prepared to do that, Peter Freese, in these essays, is the best guide we could wish for.

Michael Mitchell and Markus Wierschem

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[10] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), p. 6.
[11] Robert Scholes, "A Talk with Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.," in Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer (eds.), *The Vonnegut Statement* (New York: Delta Books, 1973), p. 107.
[12] Lawrence Lasher (ed.), *Conversations with Bernard Malamud*, p. xix.

"Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way": The *translatio*-Concept in Popular American Writing and Painting

In the beginning, the 'American Dream' was nothing but a bundle of cherished European hopes and dreams, which were projected upon the newly discovered continent and only in the course of time gradually developed into genuinely American beliefs and convictions. It was during this complex process of cultural transfer and emancipation that the ancient historiographical notion of the heliotropic progress of empire, arts, and sciences, known as the concept of *translatio imperii, religionis et studii*, mutated from being a part of that "large and subliminal area of basic assumptions and fundamental myths that underlie the whole [European] image of America"[1] into an expression of American exceptionalism and a popular battle cry for the manifest destiny of the United States.

The origins of the *translatio*-notion are difficult to define, but it is generally assumed that the idea of civilization's westward movement came into being as an analogy to the course of the sun from the East – *ex oriente lux* – toward the unknown western territory beyond the Pillars of Hercules. The writers of classical antiquity thought that this territory contained the realm of immortality and the Islands of Bliss, and since it was unknown, they took it to be both promising and dangerous. This strange realm gradually developed from a "dream land of paradisiac after-life" into a challenge to "men courageous enough to abandon their hopelessly corrupted native lands and sail forth to new shores where a new start could be made toward a better future."[2] Thus, in his sixteenth epode, Horace advised the daring young men of his days to leave the chaos of civil strife in Rome and migrate to the Happy Fields and the Islands of Bliss in the West:

> reddit ubi cererem tellus inarata quotannis
> et inputata floret usque vinea,
> germinat et numquam fallentis termes olivae
> suamque pulla ficus ornat arborem,
> mella cava manant ex ilice, montibus altis
> levis crepante lympha desilit pede.[3]

[1] Harold Jantz, "The Myths About America: Origins and Extensions," *Jahrbuch für Amerikastudien*, 7 (1962), pp. 6-18; here p. 6.
[2] Harold Jantz, "The Myths," p. 11.
[3] Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Oden und Epoden, lateinisch und deutsch*, transl. by Christian Friedrich Karl Herzlieb and Johann Peter Uz (Zürich and München: Artemis, 1981),

In his *Medea*, Seneca offered a famous prophetic passage, which Christopher Columbus cherished and Washington Irving chose as the motto for his *History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. In this passage the chorus declares:

> venient annis saecula seris,
> quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
> laxet et ingens pateat tellus
> Tethysque novos detegat orbes
> nec sit terris ultima Thule.[4]

Later writers would then give the heliotropic quality of civilization's westward movement towards gradually more advanced stages an additional meaning by relating it to the concept of 'the light of reason,' and thus John Edwards, for example, could maintain in 1699 that Greek poets had created the prerequisites for this notion "when they made Phoebus the God of Light and Learning."[5]

But there existed another, and perhaps even more influential, tradition, namely the Biblical notion of *translatio imperii* as going back to the Book of Daniel. In his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and in his own vision, Daniel developed a sequence of four mysterious beasts which later exegetes took to refer to the four empires of antiquity and to the *translatio* of power from each decaying empire to the next in a process leading to the rise of Rome and eventually culminating in the appearance of the Son of Man:

golden head	lion	Babylon
silver breast	bear	Media-Persia

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p. 366. The English translation as provided by Harold Jantz, "The Myths," p. 11, reads: "where every year the land, unploughed, yields corn, and ever blooms the vine unpruned, and buds the shoot of the never-failing olive; honey flows from the hollow oak; from the lofty hill, with plashing foot, lightly leaps the fountain."

[4] Seneca, vol. VIII, *Tragedies*, with an English translation by Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, and London: Heineman, rpt. 1968), pp. 260 and 261. The English translation reads: "There will come an age in the far-off years when Ocean shall unloose the bonds of things, when the whole broad earth shall be revealed, when Tethys shall disclose new worlds and Thule not be the limit of the lands."

[5] Gustav H. Blanke, *Amerika im englischen Schrifttum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Bochum-Langendreer: Heinrich Pöppinghaus, 1962), p. 316. – If not indicated otherwise, further quotations are taken from Blanke's chapter "Missionsgedanke und Westwanderung der Kultur," pp. 315-332, which contains a comprehensive collection of relevant references.

brazen belly and thighs	leopard	Greece
iron legs, iron and clay feet	the fourth beast	Rome[6]

Christian historiographers thus understood the Danielic *translatio* as a prophecy concerning the progress of humankind through a succession of heathen empires towards its predestined fulfillment in the crowning kingdom of God. This tradition was unfolded in ever greater detail by such writers as Augustine, in his *City of God*, or Orosius,[7] and later there arose conflicting national variations such as the *translatio imperii ad Teutonicos*, which held that, with the crowning of Charlemagne, God had instituted a fifth empire and given the sovereignty of nations to the Germans. This version is most clearly expressed in the *Chronica* of Bishop Otto of Freising, where one reads:

> Quator principalia regna, qua inter cetera eminerent, ab exordio munde fuisse in finemque eius secundum legem tocius successive permansura fore ex visione quoque Danielis percipe potest. Horum ergo principes secundum cursum temporis enumeratos, primo scilicet Assirios, post subpressis Chaldeis, quos inter ceteros historiographi ponere dedigantur, Medos et Persas, ad ultimum Grecos et Romanos, posui eorumque nomine usque ad presentem imperatorem subnotavi. [...] Et de potentia quidem humana, qualiter a Babilonius ad Medos et Persa ac inde ad Macedones et post ad Romanos rursumque sub Romano nomine ad Grecos derivatum sit, sat dictum arbitror. Qualiter vero inde ad Francos, qui occidentem inhabitant, translatum fuerit, in hoc opere dicendum restat.[8]

From the Reformation onward, the *translatio*-tradition was variously combined with a belief in racial characteristics, and it was held that, as the Goths had once overthrown the decaying Roman Empire, the German

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[6] See Daniel, chapters 2 and 7.

[7] See Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Danielerzählungen und ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Umfeld* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991).

[8] Quoted from Samuel Kliger, "The Gothic Revival and the German *translatio*," *Modern Philology*, 45 (November 1947), 73-103; here p. 79. The English translation reads: "That there were from the beginning of the world four principal kingdoms which stood out above all the rest, and that they are to endure unto the world's end, succeeding one another in accordance with the law of the universe can be gathered in various ways, in particular from the vision of Daniel. I have therefore set down the rulers of these kingdoms, listed in chronological sequence, first the Assyrians, next (omitting the Chaldeans, whom the writers of history do not deign to include among the others) the Medes and the Persians, finally the Greeks and the Romans. [...] Regarding human power – how it passed from the Babylonians to the Medes and the Persians and then again to the Greeks under the Roman name – I think enough has been said. How it was transferred from the Greeks to the Franks, who dwell in the West, remains to be told in the present book."

Protestants would now put an end to the corrupt rule of the Pope and thus bring about "a rebirth or rejuvenation of the world."[9] Such new convictions, however, were not restricted to Germany but also held sway in other Germanic nations, and Richard De Bury provided an illustrative English example in his *Philobiblion* of 1473, when he argued with patriotic pride that the goddess of learning "has already visited the Indians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians and the Greeks, the Arabs and the Romans. Now she has passed by Paris, and now has happily come to Britain, the most noble of islands."[10]

Against this background it is hardly surprising that the 'discovery' of America gave new momentum to the notion of the westward progress of civilization, for now European Christians felt increasingly called upon to follow the light of the sun into hitherto unchartered regions, there to missionize the 'heathens' of an expanding world. An early example of the new combination of heliotropic progress and Christian mission is provided by Jacques Cartier's *Brief Récit et succincte narration* (1545) about his exploration of Canada, which came out in an English translation in 1580 and in which one reads:

> I consider that the Sun, each day, rises in the Orient and sets in the Occident, thus going round the world in 24 hours. Likewise do we see a Christian prince, the King of Spain and Portugal, expand our faith in the lands so far discovered to the west of his own kingdom, yet still unknown.

However, not only did the heliotropic concept of civilization's westward course become interlinked with the Biblical notion of imperial succession as a fulfillment of divine dispensation, but now competing European nations began to insist that *they* were chosen to accomplish God's predestined course. This resulted in a complex and contradictory web of political, cultural, and religious concepts, which was further complicated by the widespread speculations about whether the Native Americans might not be the Lost Tribes of Israel, whom Biblical prophecy demands should be converted before the Second Coming of Christ.[11]

Thus, in his poem *Doomes-Day* of 1614, Sir William Alexander, a committed worker for the colonization of Nova Scotia, argued that the

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[9] Samuel Kliger, "The Gothic Revival," p. 80.

[10] Quoted from Rexmond C. Cochrane, "Bishop Berkeley and the Progress of Arts and Learning: Notes on a Literary Convention," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 18 (1953), 229-249; here p. 235.

[11] See, e.g., Thomas Thorowgood, *Jewes in America, or, Probabilities That the Americans are of that Race* (London: Printed by W. H. for Tho. Slazer, 1650).

light, which had begun to dim over a demoralized Europe, had moved westward to shine over the New World and that the millennium would finally dawn after the conversion of its indigenous inhabitants. About ten years later, George Herbert sketched a similar development when, at the departure of John Winthrop's fleet for Massachusetts, he wrote his poem *The Church Militant*, in which he referred to the westward course of the sun and argued that in the course of this movement religion was replaced by the arts in Greece, then by empire, and finally by riches, luxury and degeneration, but that now it was in the process of rising triumphantly again in America:

> The course was westward, that the sun might light
> As well our understanding as our sight. [...]
> Religion, like a pilgrime, westward bent,
> Knocking at all doores, even as she went. [...]
> Religion stands on tip-toe in our land,
> Readie to passe to the *American* strand. [...]
> Then shall religion to *America* flee:
> They have their times of Gospel, ev'n as we.[12]

And this argument was extended by Henry Vaughan in his poem *To Christian Religion*, in which he praised George Herbert as the seer who had rightly predicted that the decline of religion in Europe would be counterbalanced by its new rise in America and that

> *West-ward* hence thy [religion's] *Course* will hold:
> And when the day with us is done,
> There fix, and shine a glorious Sun.[13]

It was not only religion, however, that was thought to follow the course of the sun, but also the arts and the sciences. Thus, in his *Instructions for Forraine Travell* of 1642, James Howells speculated about the movement of the arts into the land of the Indians. And a quarter of a century later, Thomas Sprat summed up the belief of the founders of the Royal Society in a westward movement of the sciences by stating that the future growth of the 'manual arts' would probably occur in the non-European regions of the world. In 1668, in his poem *The Progress of Learning*, John Denham traced the course of culture and the increase of light from the deluge and the Chaldeans to England and to America and modified the picture by taking recourse to a competing tradition that con-

[12] *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. with a commentary by F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, rpt. 1972), pp. 190-198.
[13] *The Complete Poetry of Henry Vaughan*, ed., with an introduction, notes, and variants, by French Fogle (New York: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 436f.

ceived of the westward movement not so much as a linear but as a circular development. In 1763, the Yorkshire vicar Daniel Watson preached a sermon in support of the colleges in New York and Philadelphia, in which he took recourse to the notion of the westward course of arts and sciences; in 1774, Horace Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann that Europe would decay and America would emerge as the place of a new Augustan age; and, to quote a final example from a rather unexpected source, as late as 1815 the Reverend John Chetwode Eustace prefaced his *Classical Tour Through Italy* with a "Preliminary Discourse" about the westward movement of power and glory.

It was within this context of a widespread and often fervent hope for the erection of an ideal commonwealth in the New World which would counterbalance the sorely felt decline of the Old World that numerous European thinkers speculated about the degree to which the Native Americans would be amenable to education. Thus the idea of a college for Indians gained prominence and was entertained by people as different as the scientist Boyle and the educator Comenius. Consequently, the notions which the Irish Anglican Bishop George Berkeley expressed in the only poem he ever wrote, and entitled *On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America*, were anything but original, but summed up the hopes and beliefs many of his contemporaries deduced from a venerable tradition. It was Berkeley's poem, however, which allowed crucial aspects of this tradition to cross over to America, where they would turn into a popular belief and be gradually modified to suit new needs.

Berkeley is well known as the philosopher of *esse est percipi*, but his committed work for the missionizing of the American 'savages' has been widely forgotten. He was deeply pessimistic about the corruption of morals in Europe and, having his fears about the abandonment of virtuous conduct confirmed by the catastrophic South Sea Bubble, he wrote "An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain" (1721), in which he deplored "the corrupt degenerate age we live in" and expressed his fear that "the final period of our State approaches."[14] Since his desperation about the decay of the Old World made him set great store in the New, he organized, at considerable personal sacrifice, a movement for the establishment of a college in the Bermudas for the conversion of Native Americans, the aims of which he described in "A Proposal for the better supplying of Churches in our Foreign Plantations, and for Converting the

[14] *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1979; reprint of the edition London and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951), vol. VI, pp. 84f.

Savage Americans, to Christianity, by a College to be erected in the *Summer Islands*, otherwise called *The Isles of Bermuda*" (1725).[15] In June 1725, after long and complicated negotiations, he obtained a royal charter for his college, and on September 6, 1728 he sailed with his newly married wife and some friends[16] to America to demonstrate his determination. However, he did not travel to the Bermudas but chose instead Newport, Rhode Island, as his destination.[17] On January 23, 1729, after a long and trying passage, he arrived in the little town with its 3,843 white, 649 black and 148 Indian inhabitants, in which he would live for thirty-three months. He bought a farm and built a house, acquired and baptized three slaves, collected books for his comprehensive library, preached an occasional sermon, and waited in vain for the king's promised grant of funds. When it became obvious that this grant would never come, Berkeley bestowed his estate and his library of almost 1,000 volumes upon

[15] The "Proposal" is available in *The Works of George Berkeley,* vol. VII, pp. 345-362. Berkeley's motives for his daring project are still a matter of controversy. See, e.g., Harry M. Bracken, "Bishop Berkeley's Messianism," in Richard H. Popkin, ed., *Millennarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650–1800* (New York: Brill, 1988), pp. 65-80, who argues that "the suppressed premise in [Berkeley's] argument is that the Indians are the Lost Tribes of Israel, and in accordance with the New Testament, their conversion is absolutely essential to the millennial era" (p. 80).

[16] One of them was John Smibert, who is generally considered the best-trained painter to come to the American colonies and who did the well-known painting of *The Bermuda Group*. He went from Newport to Boston, where he embarked upon a highly successful career as portrait painter, and stayed until his death in 1751. As to the claim that Berkeley's philosophy influenced, through Smibert, the New England portrait tradition, see Ann Gibson and Lucia Palmer, "George Berkeley's Visual Language and the New England Portrait Tradition," *Centennial Review*, 31 (Spring 1987), 122-145.

[17] Berkeley was totally ignorant of life in the American colonies, and when he published his "Proposal," critics soon pointed out that the Bermuda Isles were the least suitable place for erecting a college. It was probably Berkeley's friend Henry Newman who chose Rhode Island for him, and who did so for reasons which Edwin S. Gaustad, *George Berkeley in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 52, describes as follows: "First, Newman recognized that Bermuda was unsuitable. Secondly, he knew New England best and could most readily assist Berkeley in making the initial contacts and adjustments. Moreover, Newman could appreciate the fact that Rhode Island, unlike Massachusetts and Connecticut, possessed no college. And finally, he saw in Roger Williams's colony the only spot in New England free from Puritan establishment. The presence of a Church of Ireland dean would not embarrass the government of Rhode Island as it might those of her neighbors; at the same time, Berkeley would be spared possible slights or affronts unwittingly offered by a dissenting government."

Yale College and returned to London, where he safely arrived on October 30, 1731.[18]

It was in connection with this abortive scheme that, in the spring of 1726, Berkeley wrote his only poem, which he sent to Lord Percival as the alleged work of "a friend of mine" with the earnest request "to shew it to none but of your own family, and suffer no copy to be taken of it,"[19] since he was afraid that it might prove detrimental to his plans. Almost thirty years later, this poem was first published, with several alterations, in Berkeley's *A Miscellany* (1752):

On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America

The Muse, disgusted at an Age and Clime,
Barren of every glorious Theme,
In distant Lands now waits a better Time,
Producing Subjects worthy Fame:

In happy Climes, where from the genial Sun
And virgin Earth such Scenes ensue,
The Force of Art by Nature seems outdone,
And fancied Beauties by the true:

In happy Climes the Seat of Innocence,
Where Nature guides and Virtue rules,
Where Men shall not impose for Truth and Sense,
The Pedantry of Courts and Schools:

There shall be sung another golden Age,
The rise of Empire and of Arts,
The Good and Great inspiring epic Rage,
The wisest Heads and Noblest Hearts.

Not such as *Europe* breeds in her decay;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heav'nly Flame did animate her Clay,
By future Poets shall be sung.

Westward the Course of Empire takes its Way;
The four first Acts already past,

[18] The earliest treatment of Berkeley's stay in America is a lengthy article in Moses Coit Tyler's *Three Men of Letters* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895); Benjamin Rand's short book about *Berkeley's American Sojourn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1932) is marred by his dependence upon unreliable sources and does not deal with the issue at hand; and Alice Brayton's *George Berkeley in Newport* (Newport, R.I., 1954) is a chatty and irreverent account with numerous illustrations but no documentation. The most recent and most reliable study is Edwin S. Gaustad's *George Berkeley in America*.

[19] *The Works of George Berkeley*, vol. VII, p. 369.

> A fifth shall close the Drama with the Day;
> Time's noblest Offspring is the last.[20]

Berkeley's poem is less important as a piece of art than as a cultural document of momentous importance. In traditional ballad stanzas with four lines that alternate between iambic pentameters and tetrameters and are linked by alternate rhymes, this poem provides a message which combines

> eine Anzahl von primitivistischen Vorstellungen, die Idee vom edlen Wilden, vom Goldenen Zeitalter, vom Kulturverfall, von der Westwanderung der Religion und des Imperiums und [das Gedicht] ist zugleich auch der neuen Idee vom Fortschritt verpflichtet. Es kommt zu dem Schluß, daß des Menschen Hoffnung auf Regeneration in Amerika liegt und die Menschheitsgeschichte dort im fünften und glorreichsten Akt zum Abschluß kommen wird.[21]

Berkeley evokes the notion of the westward movement of culture by having the "disgusted Muse" emigrate from a corrupt Europe, where the lack of "glorious Theme[s]" has put her out of work, into the "distant Lands" of America, there to await "a better Time" and "Subjects worthy [of] Fame." He takes up the crucial art vs. nature tradition by contrasting European "Art" with American "Nature" and the "fancied Beauties" of the Old with "the true [Beauties]" of the New World. In the latter, "the genial Sun" and the "virgin Earth" create the twice-mentioned "happy Climes" which already characterized Horace's Islands of the Blest and will bring forth "Scenes" that easily outdo all that a decaying Europe can produce. The dichotomy between the Old and the New World is then enhanced by the concepts of natural man and noble savage, by the portrayal of America as the country of pristine innocence and of Europe as the region of jaded experience, and by the description of the New World as the seat of "Nature," "Virtue," "Truth and Sense" as opposed to Europe as the land of "the Pedantry of Courts and Schools," a phrase that echoes the quarrel between ancients and moderns.

Then the notion of "another golden Age" as derived from classical antiquity is combined with a belief in progress, and the concept of *translatio imperii* is evoked by predicting "the rise of Empire and of Arts" in the unspoiled hemisphere, where "the wisest Heads and Noblest Hearts" will provide the muse with the material necessary to inspire her "epic Rage"

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[20] *The Works of George Berkeley*, vol. VII, p. 373. – The earlier version, entitled *America or the Muse's Refuge* and subtitled *A Prophecy*, can be found on pp. 369f.
[21] Gustav H. Blanke, *Amerika im englischen Schrifttum des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, p. 332.

and make her produce great literature. This notion is further embellished by yet another reference to a Europe that is in a stage of "decay" and by the claim that the literature of the New World will be as inspiring as European literature once was when the continent was still "fresh and young" and its base material – "clay" – was animated by the "heav'nly Flame" of poetic inspiration. The final stanza, appropriately opening with "westward" and closing with "last," sums up the underlying idea of *translatio imperii* in the famous line that "Westward the Course of Empire[22] takes its Way" and combines the Biblical idea of the succession of four heathen empires as leading up to the fifth empire of the Son of God with the Aristotelian notion of a complete action unfolding in five acts into the statement that "the four first Acts [of human history are] already past," that "the fifth" act is about to begin, that, as a result of a progressive development, time's last offspring is the noblest, and that therefore America will be the place where "the Drama" of human history is to be "close[d]."

On September 3, 1730, that is, at a time when Berkeley's poem was as yet unpublished and its author was still living in Newport, Rhode Island, and waiting in vain for funds for his college in the Bermudas, the *Boston Newsletter* printed an anonymous letter to the editor which reads as follows:

> Plimouth, Massachusetts
>
> SIR,
>
> As there hath been discovered in this our Town a very wonderful Phanomena, I have sent you an Account thereof for the perusal of your curious Readers,
>
> -- Walking last Week with a Friend by a Place where they were about to dig a Cellar, we discovered a Stone, on which there seemed to be Engraven certain Letters, which when we had cleared from the Dirt, we read to our great Astonishment engraven very deep the ensuing Lines,
>
> *The Eastern World enslav'd, It's Glory ends;*
> *And Empire rises where the Sun descends.*
>
> It seemeth to have been buried long in the Earth; but as I intend to bring it with me to Boston [...] and shew it to the curious and learned Gentlemen in that

[22] For Berkeley, of course, the term "empire" was not a political concept, and he was not at all concerned with territorial expansion. For a discussion of the surprising ease with which the revolutionaries could both reject the hateful notion of a British 'empire' demanding their allegiance and submission and look forward to an American 'empire' of their own see Norbert Kilian, "New Wine in Old Skins? American Definitions of Empire and the Emergence of a New Concept," in *New Wine in Old Skins: A Comparative View of Socio-Political Structures and Values Affecting the American Revolution*, ed. by Erich Angermann et al. (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1976), pp. 135-152.

> Place, it seemeth unnecessary to give any further Description thereof at Present.
>
> Your assured friend, &c.[23]

This letter seems to be the first formulation of the *translatio*-notion by a New World writer, and what is important about this summary of the westward course of empire is the incorporation of the ancient European tradition into a genuinely American context by means of locating the stone that allegedly carries the inscription in "Plimouth, Massachusetts" and by thus relating it to Plymouth Rock, on which according to a (factually wrong) folk tradition the Pilgrims stepped ashore in 1620 from their ship, the *Mayflower*. Lemay even argues that the letter evokes two other American folk traditions since it suggests unspoken parallels between the two-liner "engraven" upon an old stone on the one hand and both the rock carvings allegedly left behind by pre-Columbus explorers of America and the puzzling Indian petroglyphs on Dighton Rock at Taunton, Massachusetts, on the other. Interestingly enough, Dighton Rock in Bristol County, about which Cotton Mather wrote several times, was visited in the very year of the letter by none other than George Berkeley. By combining a succinctly phrased version of the *translatio*-concept with an American founding myth and by thus employing the notion of the westward movement of empire as both a welcome remedy against the nagging feeling of colonial inferiority and a prophetic confirmation of American exceptionalism, the anonymous text from the *Boston Newsletter* initiated a fruitful tradition, which some of the following examples will illustrate.

In 1754, King's College was founded in New York by a grant from King George II. This college, for which Berkeley provided detailed recommendations, was meant to be an Anglican fortress against the dissenting colonial religions and to provide the New World with Anglican clergy,[24] and it turned into the major center of Berkeleian idealism when the Irish philosopher's friend and correspondent Samuel Johnson became its first president. It was upon Johnson's recommendation to Benjamin Franklin that the Scottish Anglican and graduate of Aberdeen University, William Smith, who had emigrated to America in 1751, was made the head of the College of Philadelphia. Smith had found Johnson's favor because of a book on the proper education for the New World, which he had published in New York in 1753 and in which he shared Berkeley's

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[23] J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *An Early American Reader* (Washington: United States Information Agency, 1988), p. 39.

[24] See David C. Humphrey, *From King's College to Columbia 1746–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), chapter 2.

dream of a future western empire. In this book, entitled *A General Idea of the College of Mirania* [Wonderland], Smith envisioned a utopian "New-Britannia" looking forward to golden days and brighter historical periods in "sublimer Lays," and he foresaw that not only

> other Bacons, Newtons, Lockes appear;
> And to the Skies our Laureat-Honors rear,

but that even the Native Americans would contribute their share to a better and more advanced civilization:

> Lo! the wild Indian, soften'd by their Song,
> Emerging from his Arbors, bounds along
> The green Savannah patient of the Lore
> Of Dove-ey'd Wisdom – and is rude no more.[25]

When, after the Revolution, King's College needed a new and more patriotic name, Moses Coit Taylor aptly suggested it should be rechristened Berkeley College,[26] but for complicated political and religious reasons his proposal was not realized and King's College adopted instead the more popular name of Columbia University.

Five years after Smith's paean to the golden age of New-Britannia, the tavern keeper, physician, and astronomer Nathaniel Ames from Dedham, Massachusetts, published another volume of his almanac *An Astronomical Diary*, which he had begun in 1725 and which by mid-century turned into the most popular yearbook in colonial New England. In his 1758 volume he included a comment on the progress of civilization in the New World, in which, about thirty years after Berkeley's poem, he, too, employed the *translatio*-concept to foresee great things for what he prophetically called "the Future State of NORTH AMERICA":

> Here we find a vast Stock of proper Materials for the Art and Ingenuity of Man to work upon: – Treasures of immense Worth; conceal'd from the poor ignorant aboriginal Natives! The Curious have observ'd that the Progress of Humane Literature (like the Sun) is from the East to the West; thus has it travelled thro' Asia and Europe, and now is arrived at the Eastern Shore of America. As the Coelestial Light of the Gospel was directed here by the Finger of GOD, it will doubtless, finally drive the long! long! Night of Heathenish Darkness from America: – So Arts and Sciences will change the Face of Nature in their Tour from Hence over the Appalachian Mountains to the Western Ocean; and as they march thro' the vast Desert, the Residence of Wild Beasts will be broken up, and their obscene Howl cease for ever; – Instead of which

[25] Quoted from Edwin S. Gaustad, *George Berkeley in America*, p. 182.
[26] Moses Coit Tyler, *Three Men of Letters*, p. 60.

> the Stones and Trees will dance together at the Music of Orpheus, – the Rocks will disclose their hidden Gems, – and the inestimable Treasures of Gold & Silver be broken up. Huge Mountains of Iron Ore are already discovered; and vast Stores are reserved for future Generations: This Metal more useful than Gold and Silver, will imploy Millions of Hands, not only to form the martial Sword, and peaceful Share, alternately; but an Infinity of Utensils improved in the Exercise of Art, and Handicraft amongst Men. Nature thro' all her Works has stamp'd Authority on this Law, namely, "That all fit Matter shall be improved to its best Purposes." – Shall not then those vast Quarries, that teem with mechanic Stone, – those for Structure be piled into great Cities, – and those for Sculpture into Statues to perpetuate the Honor of renowned Heroes; even those who shall now save their Country. – O! Ye unborn Inhabitants of America! Should this Page escape its destin'd Conflagration at the Year's End, and these Alphabetical Letters remain legible, – when your Eyes behold the Sun after he has rolled the Seasons round for two or three Centuries more, you will know that in Anno Domini 1758, we dream'd of your Times.[27]

Ames takes it for granted that (1) "the Progress of Humane Literature (like the Sun) is from the East to the West" and by now has reached "the Eastern Shore of America;" and that (2) "the Coelestial Light of the Gospel was directed here by the Finger of GOD [and] will doubtless, finally drive the long! long! Night of Heathenish Darkness from America." Thus, with both the arts and sciences and Christian religion having finally reached America, they will – and this is a surprisingly early anticipation of later developments – follow their predestined course and move ever further west, cross the first major obstacle of settlement, "the Appalachian Mountains," and then move on towards "the Western Ocean."[28] In the vast continent to be opened up, savagery will be replaced by civilization,

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[27] *The Essays, Humor, and Poems of Nathaniel Ames*, ed. by Samuel Briggs (Cleveland: Short & Forman, 1891), pp. 285f.

[28] For the controversial political implications which the notion of a future American 'empire' and its westward extension would assume after independence had been won see Hermann Wellenreuther, "'First Principles of Freedom' und die Vereinigten Staaten als Kolonialmacht, 1787 – 1803: Die Northwest Ordinance von 1787 und ihre Verwirklichung im Northwest Territory," *Historische Zeitschrift*, Beiheft 5, *Revolution und Bewahrung* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1979), pp. 89-188, and the extensive literature referred to. – Wellenreuther, p. 129, quotes a letter which David Howell wrote on February 21, 1784 and which takes up Ames's prophecy: "The western world opens an amazing prospect as a national fund, in my opinion; it is equal to our debt. As a source of future population and strength, it is a guaranty to our independence. As its inhabitants will be mostly cultivators of the soil, republicanism looks to them as its guardians. When the states on the eastern shores, or Atlantic, shall have become populous, rich and luxurious, and ready to yield their liberties into the hands of a tyrant, the gods of the mountains will save us, for they will be stronger than the gods of the valleys."