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Contents

Cincinnati in 1800. Lithograph by Strobridge Lithograph Co. from painting by A.J. Swing. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

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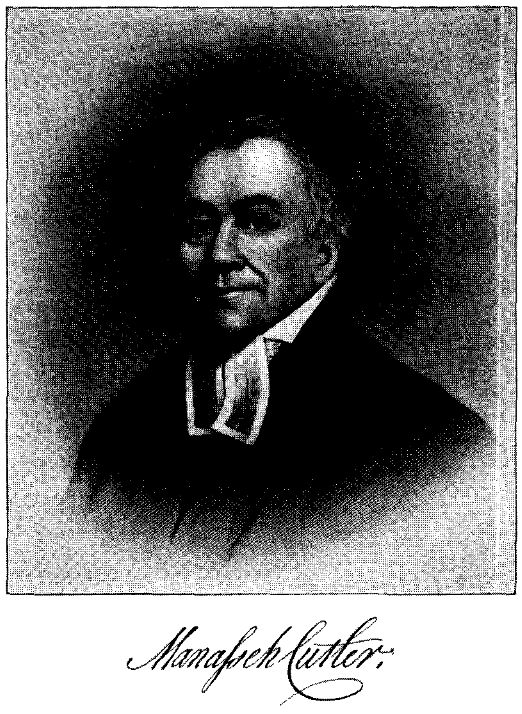
Space and Place on the Early American Frontier: *The Ohio Valley as a Region, 1790-1850*

Kim M. Gruenwald

Perhaps the most enduring image of the Ohio River that informs the national imagination comes from Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*[1] With a pack of hounds in noisy pursuit, a runaway slave named Eliza desperately crosses the ice-choked channel, clutching her child to her breast. The Ohio represented the boundary between slavery and freedom by that time, and for the most part, future historians pushed this understanding of the river as a dividing line, cultural, economic, and of course, political, all the way back to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Recent interest in the backcountry has brought Kentucky history to the fore, and the bicentennial of the ordinance that outlawed slavery north of the river, in most cases, and more recently of the state itself, has made early Ohio a popular topic once more. Yet this updated historical focus has yielded similar interpretive results: historians continue to devote their attentions on one bank of the Ohio River or the other.[2]

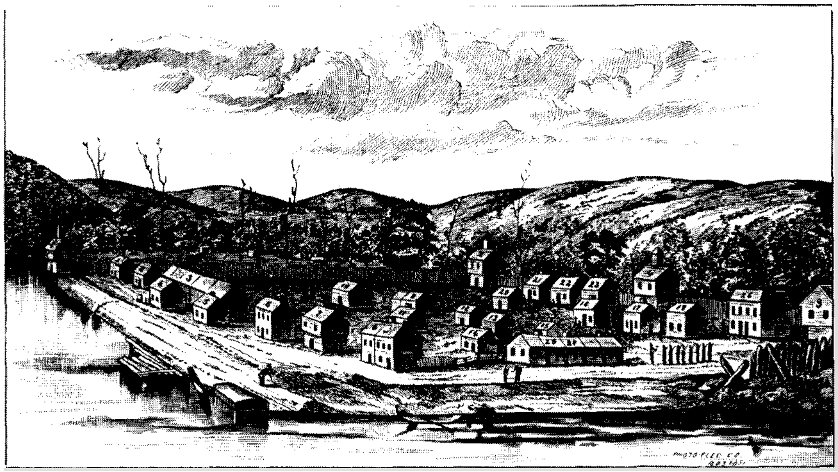


Manasseh Cutler. Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler. *Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

Ironically, such historical division obscures the views of the Ohio Valley's earliest settlers. When one puts aside its function as a political boundary and instead concentrates on the river as a key geographical feature that dominated plans for westward expansion during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a startlingly different picture of the Ohio River's role in American history emerges. As the artery of settlement and commerce, the Ohio River largely united the residents of western Pennsylvania, western Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky into a region known as the "Western Country." And the words and actions of those involved in this early settlement belie the interpretations of later historians of the Ohio Valley having been from the start a social and cultural boundary between the nation's sections.

For Americans of the second half of the eighteenth century, the Ohio River provided a path to the interior of the continent. When they looked west across the mountains, they saw space: an open, unmapped area that "suggest[ed] the future and invite[d] action." Early explorers of Kentucky described it as a Garden of Eden where tilling the soil would undoubtedly yield plentiful crops, and with ease.[3]

After the American Revolution, a group of New England veterans established the Ohio Company of Associates to purchase over a million acres of land from the Confederation Congress at the confluence of the Muskingum and Ohio rivers, 170 miles below Pittsburgh. The man who negotiated the purchase, a Connecticut-born clergyman named Manasseh Cutler, had a decidedly negative view of southerners and hoped that Ohio would fill up with settlers from the North. Eastern policymakers from the North and South found themselves in agreement on many issues: they didn't trust residents of the backcountry, often characterizing them as savages and squatters; they wanted to avoid the overlapping, conflicting land claims of Kentucky; and they wanted to avoid sectional rifts between East and West lest foreign powers lay claim to western lands. Therefore adding a section that outlawed slavery to the new land ordinance to appease Cutler and his colleagues and facilitate the sale of territory to the right sort of settlers was not controversial at the time because an alarming number of people were already drifting north of the Ohio from western Virginia and Kentucky.[4]



MARIETTA IN 1791.
"The Picketed Point."

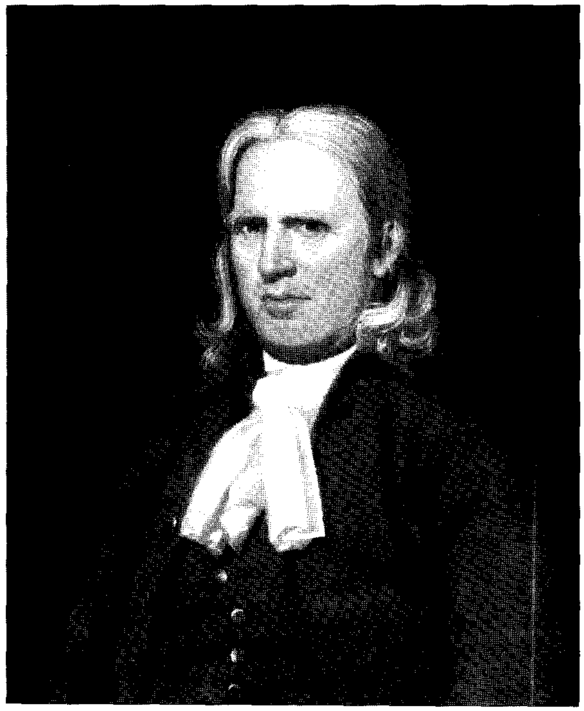
Marietta in 1791. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

But when the Reverend Cutler visited Marietta shortly after the town had been established in 1788, he found neighbors north and south of the river living in harmony. Virginians and New Englanders worshipped together in Marietta on Sunday mornings, Virginian hunters sold the New Englanders corn and meat, and the wife of one of the men living on the southern bank utilized her medical skills to the benefit of all the people in the area. Thus together did men and women from the North and South settle the Ohio Valley.[5]

Indeed, settlers on both sides of the river had their eyes on the main chance. When Brig. Gen. Rufus Putnam, one of the Ohio Company's founders, surveyed their new home across the mountains he declared that the first "market" would be settlers and the army. He made plans for roads to bring produce from farming settlements to the town of Marietta, where merchants would purchase them in exchange for manufactured goods imported from the east and then send western crops and other valued items down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to the Atlantic world. At the other end of the territory, New Jersey judge John Cleves Symmes was thinking along the same lines. Of his purchase he wrote, "From this Egypt on the Miami, in a very few years will be poured down its stream to the Ohio, the products of the country . . . which may be principally collected at a trading town, low down on the banks of that river." A couple of years later, Symmes characterized himself as a man who had "extended the empire of the United States and reclaimed from savage men and beasts a country that may one day prove the brightest jewel in the regalia of the nation."[6]

Market-oriented plans were underway south of the river as well. In 1789, a large-scale landowner in Kentucky sought to establish a gristmill on the Licking River, but local residents opposed his plans. They believed that the mill would disrupt navigation on a key river and keep them from getting their tobacco to an inspection station and on to market down the Ohio. In their eyes, they stood a better chance at turning a profit with tobacco than with corn and cornmeal. The two sides disagreed over whether policy should favor large or small holders, but they shared a similar market orientation.[7]

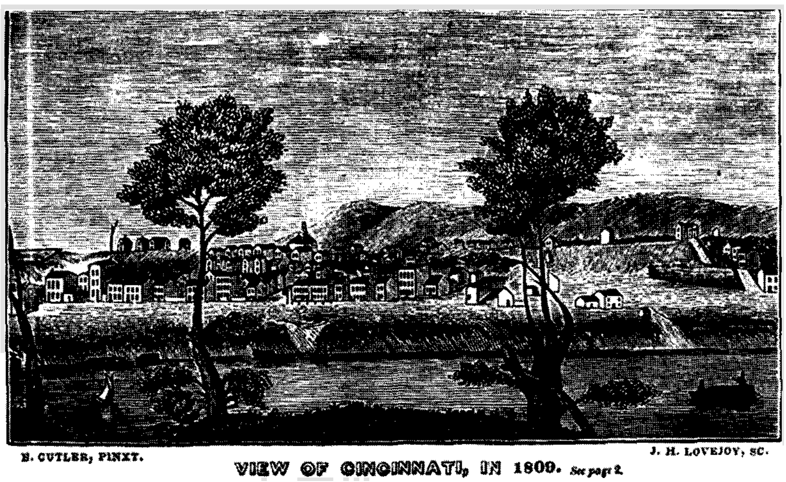
John Cleves Symmes. Oil painting copied from a portrait by Charles Willson Peale. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library



Rather than pushing slowly away from the coast as colonists had done since the seventeenth century, the founders of Pittsburgh, Marietta, Cincinnati, Lexington, and Louisville intended to plant commercial centers hundreds of miles inland to harness a mighty transport system that flowed westward and therefore claim the continent itself. These towns would provide portals between East and West. Farmers looking for land and markets would be led onward, and the ties of commerce would provide links that would bind East and West together as a nation as Americans expanded the boundaries of their new empire.

Getting goods from East to West did not prove to be a simple task. Textiles, tools, crockery, and groceries from Philadelphia came across the mountains on wagons. The trip took three to four weeks and it was dangerous, especially when it came to crossing rivers. One early traveler complained that he and his companions had broken seven axle-trees along the way. The best time to navigate the Ohio came with the spring thaw and fall rains; during the winter settlers would store goods at warehouses in Pittsburgh when the Ohio froze over or ran low. Goods bound for Lexington had a second trip by wagon south on the road from Limestone, as Maysville was first known. Flour and whiskey from western Pennsylvania and Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky went down the Ohio and Mississippi in flatboats and keelboats; items whose prices in relation to their weight justified shipping them back east on the now-empty wagons went in the opposite direction, such as skins and furs for European markets and ginseng, a medicinal plant much in demand in China.[8]

The merchants in Pittsburgh, Lexington, and Cincinnati imported eastern goods and promoted the services and small-scale manufacturing needed to outfit settlers heading for new homes in the West. Merchants in the Ohio Valley's largest towns sold the goods to merchants in their hinterlands, who in turn provided country shopkeepers with the items their customers needed in the smaller villages. The merchants in these medium-sized, sub-regional hubs collected local produce, furs, and salt from their own hinterlands for export. This three-tiered system was built along the rivers and streams of western Virginia, Ohio, and Kentucky. The merchants attracted to Marietta by Rufus Putnam's plans functioned within the hinterland of Pittsburgh and serviced the needs of local residents along Wolf and Duck Creeks, the Muskingum and Little Muskingum Rivers, as well as the Ohio itself. Lexington merchants supplied their Kentucky counterparts in Danville, Greensburgh, and Paris, as well as those in West Union, Ohio, who in turn supplied shopkeepers in their own hinterlands.[9] Merchants established these connections between towns in the Ohio Valley, large and small, during the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth.

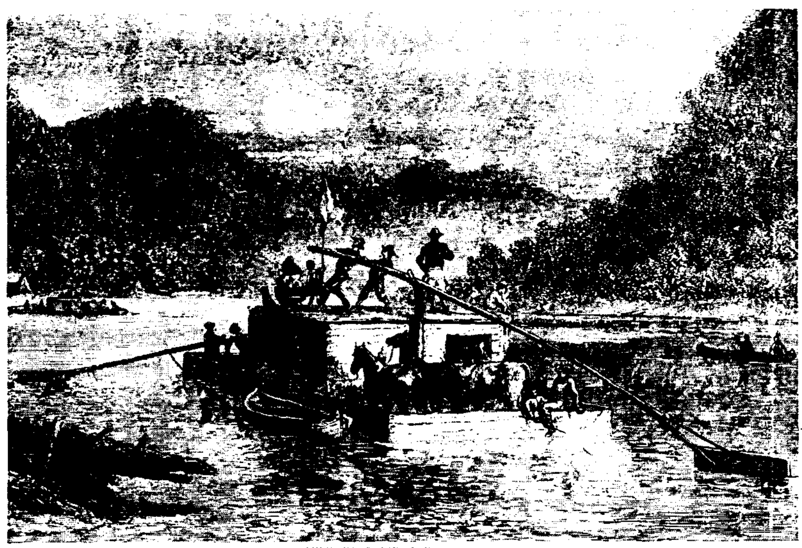


View of Cincinnati in 1809. Engraving by E. Cutler and J. H. Lovejoy. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

A glimpse of this distribution network from the point of view of a Philadelphia merchant can be found in the ledger of Samuel Meeker. Between 1807 and 1810, Meeker provided goods to seventy-seven western firms. Seven did business in Pittsburgh, fourteen to the north downriver, and fifty-seven resided to south of the Ohio. Just over half the firms were located in the urban centers of Cincinnati, Lexington, Nashville, Natchez, New Orleans, and Pittsburgh. Some cash found its way east as payment, as did payments collected by lawyers. A substantial portion of western debts were paid by bills of exchange that westerners from smaller towns received as payment for goods they sold to merchants in the urban centers of the Ohio and

Mississippi valleys rather than shipping the goods all the way to Philadelphia themselves.[10]

As for the farmers north and south of the Ohio River, they did not focus on producing goods exclusively for either use or market. Rather, they did both. They sold the potash left over from felling and burning trees to entrepreneurs who in turn used it to manufacture soap and glass. Ohioans grew wheat to grind into flour and pressed apples and peaches into cider and brandy. Farm wives wove flax into cloth for their families and bartered their surplus "country linen," along with butter and cheese, to merchants in exchange for goods. Merchants were always glad to buy linseed oil for export and farmers grew rye to turn into whiskey for home consumption or sale. Marietta boat-builders, who produced ships for the Atlantic trade before the Embargo of 1807, encouraged farmers in southeastern Ohio and northern Virginia to grow hemp, used for rope and even sails.[11]



EMIGRANTS PASSING DOWN THE OHIO.

A flatboat passing down the Ohio River, from The Backwoodsmen or Tales of the Borders *by Walter W. Spooner, Cincinnati, W. E. Dibble & Co., 1883. The Filson Historical Society*

Hemp was even more important in Kentucky than in Ohio. "Tow linen" made from its fibers found its way into the ledgers of merchants south of the river. Many settlers in western Virginia and Kentucky gathered and dried ginseng for cash. One Kentuckian reminisced about how his family mixed hunting with the processing of saltpeter, a chemical used in the making of gunpowder. He recalled digging nitrates from the soil, boiling it until it crystallized, and then loading it onto packhorses to take to "market." Farmers also paid merchants with tobacco, salt, and the labor of slaves.[12]

Once Americans conquered the Ohio Valley as space, they strove to create a place: a home where people, then as well as now, live, work, and raise families. Part of a people's understanding of the place they call home is "pragmatic," revolving around the way in which their economy functions. The Ohio itself stood at the center of the worldview of westerners as they built a riverine commercial network along its banks and tributaries. Residents on both sides wrote of "the Western country" in letters about land, religion, politics, sickness, markets, and economic opportunities. Even those from the East recognized the existence of this distinctive region. A New York businessman, Isaac Jackson, planned to relocate in 1813 and he convinced friends from New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia to write to merchants in Pittsburgh, Marietta, and Lexington. Each ensured the recipient that Jackson would make a fine addition to "the western country." Travelers on the Ohio River, some who admired the residents' "bustling" spirit and others who described it as a primitive place, referred similarly to the region.[13]

As commercial networks grew, speculators large and small bought and sold huge portions of land and the western population soared. In 1820, the populations of Kentucky and Tennessee barely exceeded the population of the states that the Northwest Ordinance created. With the coming of the War of 1812 and the suppression of international trade, western merchants began to foster stronger ties with one another as their customer bases expanded. Pittsburgh manufacturers shipped hardware, paper, and leather goods and as the city grew it became a market for Ohio cheese and butter as well as Kentucky bacon. The Kanawha Valley of western Virginia supplied residents north and south of the Ohio with the salt necessary for preserving meat. From Lexington, Kentucky, came gunpowder, and Tennessee cotton found its way into the looms of manufacturers in Zanesville, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. White and red lead used in the manufacture of Pittsburgh glass and paint, as well as Ohio pottery, came upstream from settlements on the banks of the Missouri River.[14]

Rufus Putnam. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library

Yet tension did flare at times between residents of both shores. In 1813, a resident of Lexington, Kentucky, teased a friend about attending school in New England, wondering if he intended to "acquire a few of those Yankee tricks . . . which [they] practice with so much success in the western country." For their part, Ohioans at times accused their cross-river neighbors of being lazy and bullheaded. Clearly, though, they interacted regularly. In Marietta, Ohio, the newspapers regularly published election results for the Virginia county on the opposite bank and residents north and south of the river joined together to stage periodic sweeps through the woods to kill wolves, bears, and other predators. Westerners also married others on the opposite shore. The connections of merchants were even more far-reaching; one trio of men combined to run the firms of Duncan, Dobbin and Co. in Louisville, as well as Forsyth, Dobbin and Co. in Wheeling and Duncan, Forsyth and Co. in Pittsburgh.[15]

The feeling of common identity that had evolved over three decades of settlement became very evident in the way westerners responded to the Panic of 1819. In the years after the Revolution, Americans had capitalized on European markets for cotton and other goods while France and Great Britain concentrated their energy on making war with one another. The economy of the United States boomed before and after the War of 1812, land values rose, and Americans were deeply in debt to banks that had loaned them the money they demanded to take advantage of the economic opportunities that expansion brought. But in 1819, four years after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, Europe's economy stabilized and the overextended American economy collapsed.[16]

Western merchants had always bought their goods on six to twelve months credit; it took that long to ship goods from east to west, sell them, collect payment in cash or barter, and export western furs, flour, and whiskey from west to east. Western banks issued notes in an effort to provide more currency but unregulated banks and questionable practices, as well as the distances involved in presenting such notes for payment, meant that their money was not accepted at face value in the East. In 1816, bankers from Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia met in Steubenville, Ohio, to try to come up with a plan of action to address these problems. The following year, bankers from Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana held a similar meeting in Cincinnati. During the panic and the depression that followed, the prices of corn, wheat, flour, whiskey, beef, and pork all fell by two-thirds or more. Western trade stagnated and Ohio Valley residents couldn't pay their debts.[17]

Harmar, Ohio, from the Virginia shore of the Ohio. Historical Collections of Ohio *by Henry Howe. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

Harmar, from the Virginia shore of the Ohio.

Easterners blamed those across the mountains for the troubles on the grounds that their customers had been "extravagant." One Louisville merchant on a buying trip to Philadelphia in 1819 wrote home that there was talk in the city of prosecuting and jailing "everyone from the west." But westerners firmly believed that eastern banking policies were at fault, so much so that one newspaper editorial wrote of a possible "dissolution of the union." "Let nine tenths of these persons reside in a particular section of the union," the *Kentucky Reporter* proclaimed,

[L]et that section be pre-eminently well situated for the formation of a separate government; let the existence of the debt depend on the continuance of the union; let the doctrine be advanced and enforced by every press and every orator . . . that the other states had no just and natural right to the property for which the debt was incurred, while those states insist rigidly on an enforcement of collection; and where will be the bonds be found sufficiently strong to hold us together? They do not exist! No people are more patriotic and firmly attached to the government of the union than those of the west; the idea of a separation has never been indulged; it is literally abhorred; but their patriotism and fidelity are not invincible.[18]

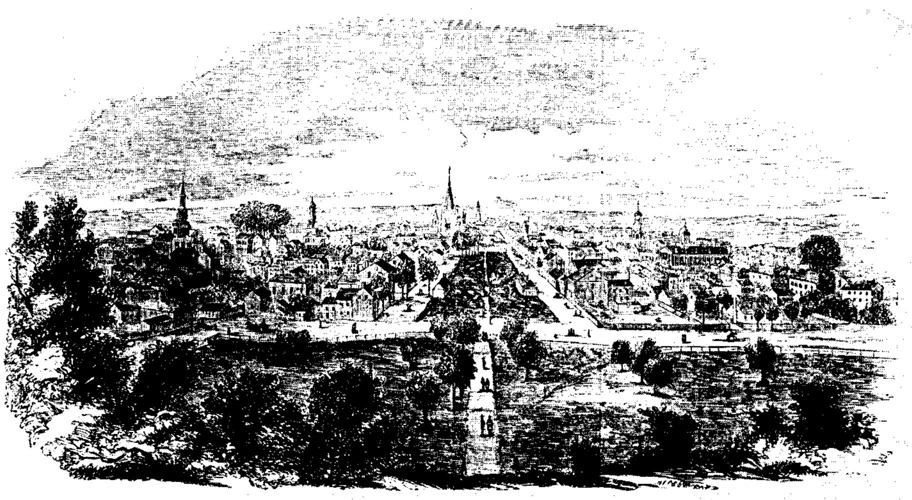
Grist mill on Left Beaver Fork, Floyd County, Ky. The Filson Historical Society

For many in the West, the coming of steamboats represented the chance to rebuild their economy. Americans had been experimenting with steam engines since the 1790s and in 1815 a Lexington newspaper quoted a Cincinnati editorial that had proclaimed, "The invention of the steamboat is intended for US." When inventors tried to claim exclusive rights to the navigation of western waters in order to recoup their development costs, residents of Kentucky and Ohio raised an uproar, stating that rivers were "the *common highway* of the West," and that easterners were threatening their economic freedom.[19] This response, though, would represent the high-water mark of western unity in the nineteenth century.

When artificial transportation networks began to replace rivers at the center of Ohio's economy in the 1830s, a new sense of place arose: a state-oriented sense of place that made it easier to sever ties to those living south of the river when the abolitionist movement swept through the nation. As Ohioans made plans to strengthen ties to eastern markets, they initiated an expensive and visible system of canals. New York's Erie Canal opened for business in 1825, connecting Buffalo on the Great Lakes to Albany on the Hudson River and thus to New York City. That same year, Ohioans began the process of linking their state's economy to that of the burgeoning Great Lakes trade. The Erie Canal brought a wave of people from the northern states who came to settle in northern Ohio and Illinois, and southern Michigan. Utilizing the growing networks of canals, they created new wheat belts far to the north of the Ohio's drainage. Corn, pork, and whiskey from the Ohio Valley continued along their old paths down the river until railroads arrived after mid-century, but wheat, flour, and other produce began making their way farther north before turning east.[20]

During the 1790s and early 1800s, getting crops to market had been slow and dangerous and because everyone shipped when the rivers ran high, gluts and low prices in New Orleans were common. But as canals and steamboats steadily decreased the time it took to export crops, farmers could depend on good prices and getting their flour to market before it spoiled. The canals could carry larger quantities of grain north and east than the keelboats and flatboats had been able to haul downriver, as well. With steamboats ensuring that more eastern goods were available at better prices, the farmers concentrated more energy on cash crops and bought their clothing, candles, and other goods ready-made from an increasing variety of retail stores.[21]

In addition to boosting commercial agriculture, the canals changed the relationships between Ohio's mid-level towns. New sub-regional hubs waxed as older ones waned. Stuebenville on the Ohio between Pittsburgh and Marietta had been the second largest city in Ohio in 1820—by 1850, it ranked only seventh. In the middle of the state, Zanesville and Chillicothe grew rapidly after the Ohio & Erie Canal opened in the early 1830s, and the population of Columbus tripled in the 1840s. Cleveland, on Lake Erie, was home to fewer than 6,100 people in 1840, but by 1860, its population exceeded 43,000. Canals provided waterpower for mills that processed large quantities of flour and lumber. The canals also supported meatpacking plants and distilleries for turning corn into whiskey. These were larger concerns than the small-scale manufacturing of the early 1800s that had existed mostly to provide goods for local residents. The sub-regional hubs on the canals, then, were larger than the river towns had been and in turn their industries attracted labor, all of which resulted in the growing populations providing markets for farmers. All along the canals in Ohio, entrepreneurs began to invest in the manufacture of paper, leather products, and ironware.[22]



VIEW OF LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY.

Print from Ballou's Drawing Room Companion of the city of Lexington, Ky., *circa 1850s. The Filson Historical Society*

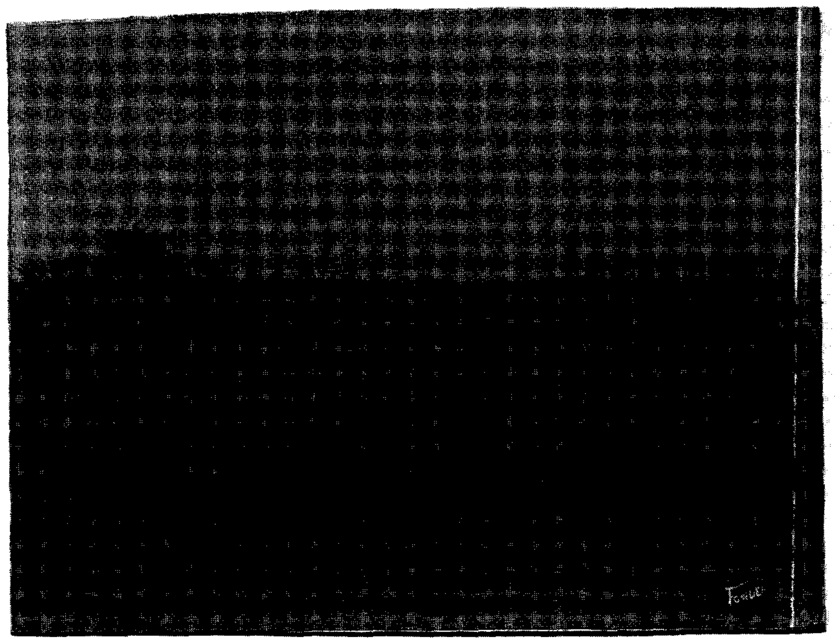
As for the largest towns, the newest, canal-induced, transportation revolution undercut Lexington's role in the region but strengthened that of Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville. These three engaged in the manufacture of steamboats and related industries grew up around them. Cincinnati grew in population, especially, when the canals brought waves of German and Irish immigrants in the 1830s who were looking for work. Manufacturing had foundered in the early West because the cost of labor had been so high; the canals provided a new pool of eager workers.[23]

The canals also altered the flow of goods within the borders of Ohio. Farmers of the Western Reserve in the northeastern corner found markets for their meat and dairy products in the state's growing cities, and the southern counties tripled their shipments of grain and pork north of the Ohio's drainage in the 1840s and 1850s. As for raw materials, Youngstown coal made its way to Cleveland and attracted the attention of ships on the Great Lakes and manufacturers throughout the state purchased their coal from the state's southeastern region, especially around Athens.[24] The canals focused the attention of Ohioans on the development of their state's economy at the expense of that of the region as a whole, one that the Ohio River had defined since the middle of the eighteenth century. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, merchants in sub-regional hubs like Marietta had imported and distributed eastern goods while gathering and exporting the farmers' surpluses. Businessmen in the new sub-regional hubs turned from commerce to manufacturing.

As the arrival of European immigrants demonstrated, the canals changed the composition of Ohio's population in addition to redistributing it. The New England Yankees who arrived by way of the Erie Canal came to an Ohio far different from the one that the Ohio Company had settled some forty years before. Easterners had feared the rising population and political power of western states as they criticized backwoods culture. The canals and steamboats allowed western residents to maintain closer ties to the East than earlier generations had enjoyed and they came west intent on remaking the far country in their own image.[25] They saw no need to build alliances with those living on the southern banks of the Ohio River. As the abolition movement swept through the North it helped destroy the ties between Ohio and Kentucky that the shift from regional, riverine commercial networks to state-oriented industrial plans had already weakened.

African Americans, too, both free and slave, had been part of the history of the Western Country from the first days of settlement. At the turn of the century, they had comprised about one-quarter of the populations of both Lexington and Louisville. Forty-eight African Americans lived in Marietta in 1810, but few were heads of households. Most lived singly or in pairs and trios as servants in the houses of white residents. Black slave labor appeared as payment for debt in Kentucky merchant ledgers and as yearly expenses at saltworks and gunpowder mills. Beginning in 1804, the Ohio legislature passed a series of "Black Laws" aimed at making free blacks unwelcome. Nevertheless, by 1828, over 2,200 of them had formed a community in Cincinnati. The next year, white citizens engaged in rioting to drive them out, followed by more attacks in 1836.[26]

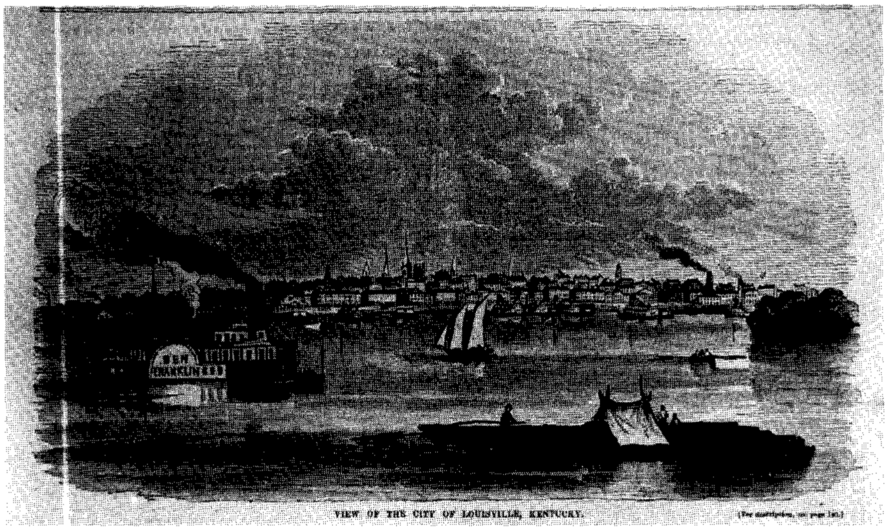
Exceptions had always been a part of the no-slavery clause of the Northwest Ordinance, and some in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio had tried to expand those exceptions all along. During the Panic of 1819, westerners had pulled together, but the Missouri Compromise of the next year engendered new tensions over the issue of slavery. The question of Missouri's statehood was hotly debated in all three northern Ohio Valley states and the Ohio legislature eventually voted against extending slavery to the west. But as more farmers turned to the commercial production of corn along the Ohio's course, many to the north began to clamor for slaves. Though many had been born south of the river, others who sought slaves had moved to Ohio from New England. In the wheat belt to the north, farmers could turn a profit with the labor provided by a large family and seasonal help but the amount of labor needed to produce corn landed somewhere in between the minimal demands of wheat and the labor-intensive demands of tobacco and cotton. As Americans moved westward, they wanted land of their own and avoided working for others whenever possible. Thus as Ohio's economy grew in the 1840s, some argued that slaves should be used to meet the labor demands of the northern banks of the Ohio.[27]



Tobacco field, photograph taken before 1901. The Filson Historical Society

This makes it difficult to characterize the general feeling of those living in the Ohio Valley about slavery because sectional origins did not always indicate which side opponents would choose. Both abolition-minded Englishmen heading for the prairies of Illinois during the 1810s and 1820s and the Yankees who came after remarked favorably and often of the hospitality of Kentucky gentleman and the orderliness that they imposed on the landscape while at once portraying in a much less favorable light the lifestyle of the southern-born poorer sorts who crossed the Ohio River in search of opportunity. An Englishman, Elias Fordham, wrote that while he opposed slavery in principle, it seemed to be the only source of labor for his Indiana lands. "I would not have upon my conscience the moral guilt of extending Slavery over countries now free from it, for the whole North Western Territory," he wrote. "But," he continued, "if it should take place, I do not see why I should not make use of it. If I do not have servants I cannot farm; and there are *no* free labourers here, except a few so worthless, and yet so haughty, that an English Gentleman can do nothing with them."[28]

In fact, for many, opposing slavery had little to do with the welfare of the slaves themselves. The rising tide of sectional division involved the race by southern planters and northern farmers to seize lands west of the Mississippi for themselves and a battle for control in Congress as the North's population rose to challenge the advantage southerners had enjoyed since the enactment of the Constitution's infamous 3/5ths Compromise. As the North's economy evolved, there arose a free-labor ideology aimed at improving the lot of whites.[29]



View of Louisville from the Ohio River, ca. 1854. The Filson Historical Society

Referring to Ohio as the Western Country fell from favor as the reality of nineteenth-century expansion proceeded apace. In 1838, a young man who had been born and raised in Marietta headed west to seek his fortune. In a letter, he urged his younger brother to give up the study of medicine in favor of civil engineering because public improvement projects meant that work could always be had. "If you want to travel—come to the West," William Emerson declared, "if you want to see strange sights, come to Illinois—if you want money, come to the West." In 1842, a young bride arrived in Marietta and wrote to a friend back east that she had not really journeyed very far, certainly not as far as the Rocky Mountains. Another Mariettan echoed these sentiments only a few years later. Born in Massachusetts, Nahum Ward came to Ohio to speculate in land in 1810. His letters to eastern relatives boasted of the doings of the "western branch" of the family until he visited the Rockies in 1846; after that he stopped referring to his home as the "western woods." And of course the California Gold Rush of 1849 lured even more Americans further west.[30]

Many Ohioans—including the young man who brought the bride mentioned above to Marietta—eventually began to refer to their home as the Buckeye State. Early pioneers had built shelters and furniture with the wood of horse-chestnut trees because it was soft and easy to split. The trees' indigestible nuts had a dark center, visible to the naked eye, rimmed with a lighter colored shell, and resembled the eye of a deer, thus earning its colloquial name. The spread of this state nickname can be followed in the names of Ohio's newspapers. In 1799 a Cincinnati entrepreneur initiated the use of the designation "Western" in paper titles with the *Western Spy*, a publication that ran under that name, with some variations, for over twenty years. Nearly fifty other newspapers followed suit in the decades to come. By 1840, however, almost two-thirds of them had ceased to exist, and in 1844, the *Western Herald and Steubenville Gazette* dropped the first part of its title to become simply the *Steubenville Gazette*. Papers in other towns underwent a similar transformation at roughly the same time so that only one "western" paper remained by 1860. In contrast, beginning in 1834, seven antebellum Ohio publishers used "Buckeye" in their newspaper titles, and others did the same after the Civil War.[31]

The transformation of Ohio's nickname and those of other states in the region suggests rising sectional tension in the West. Many of appellations contained two levels of meaning—East vs. West and North vs. South. A woman who descended the Ohio in 1840 took note of the following designations: Ohio "Buckeyes," Michigan "Wolverines," Virginia "Tuckahoes," and Illinois "Suckers." She claimed the vernacular origin of Ohio's nickname but allowed that Illinois's derived from a hardy kind of western fish. Thus she concluded that westerners used these nicknames to indicate local pride. Indeed, Cincinnati offers a case in point. By 1840, the rising numbers of recent New England migrants had begun to challenge the power of the old elite. A rivalry sprang up between Yankees and Buckeyes, the latter included the families of the early New York and New Jersey settlers as well as city residents born in Ohio, Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and Kentucky. Clearly, for these migrants at least, easterners were Yankees and westerners were Buckeyes no matter which side of the river they had been born on.[32]

But despite these indications of regional pride, some of the state nicknames were used in a way that was not meant to be complimentary. Many who used the term "Suckers" to describe residents of southern Illinois were not referring to fish. Instead they compared the poorer sorts who had crossed the river from the south to the parasites that ruined tobacco in the fields and that farmers removed intentionally to leave better plants, implying that the northern states would be better off without them. Using "Hoosier" and "Corncracker" to refer to residents of Indiana and Kentucky also hearkened back to the southern vernacular for the lowliest of their society.[33]

Sectional tension came to a head in Marietta, Ohio, in the mid-1840s and it ended with the Ohioans proclaiming themselves to be Buckeyes and demanding that the Ohio River serve as a boundary between North and South. Among the wave of Yankees heading west by canal was Massachusetts native Beman Gates who settled in Marietta in the late 1830s. He became the editor of the *Marietta Intelligencer* and under his leadership the newspaper began to run stories detailing the horrors of slavery. In early 1844, Gates ran a story about a Pittsburgh man sentenced to death for aiding an escaped slave. He indicated that he knew that talk of abolition made his readers uncomfortable but he warned them sternly not to overlook "legal murder." Over the next year or two, Gates reprinted stories about the abolition movement in Kentucky and the annexation of Texas, as well as accounts of life and death under the yoke of slavery. Residents of Wood County, Virginia, just across the river complained that the *Intelligencer* was an abolitionist press.[34]

Campus Martius, as it appeared in 1791. A Pictorial Description of Ohio *by B. J. Lossing. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

But in the summer of 1845, an event occurred that goaded Mariettans to side with Gates against their long-time neighbors across the river. In mid-July of 1845, six slaves escaped across the Ohio a few miles downstream from town. They belonged to the son of a man whose overseers and plantation accounts had appeared in the ledgers of Marietta businessmen a generation before. A group of sympathetic whites met them on the northern bank but a group of Virginians following the runaways captured five of the slaves, as well as three of the white Ohioans. The latter they took across the river and put them in the Parkersburg jail. Prominent Marietta citizens offered bail but Virginia authorities rebuffed them, as well as the lawyers from Marietta who requested access to the prisoners.[35]

Citizens in Marietta and even in Cincinnati held public meetings to denounce what they called "the invasion of Ohio." Letters expressing outrage filled Marietta's newspaper, one signed by "Buckeyes" and another by "Many a Buckeye." A reader who identified himself as Linkum Fidelus, Jun., wrote an allegory about "The Buckeye State and Her Sisters" that praised Ohio and criticized the actions of the Virginia siblings, echoing the belief of many that the Virginians had abducted their fellow citizens by taking them across the river. One letter from "Many a Buckeye to the Good People of Virginia" stated that neighbors should be friends but that Virginians ought to respect what in this writer's view was the legal river boundaries. "The possession of the shore, therefore, which Virginia allows that we of the Northwest may rightfully claim," the Mariettans wrote, "gives us the entire control of our side of the River, at all stages of water, and for all intents and purposes." The white men were found guilty of assisting runaway slaves in the Wood County Court but later gained their release. Lawyers on both sides of the river filed briefs for years to come but the three men themselves melted into the woods and disappeared from the pages of history.[36]

The controversy stirred up by "the invasion of Ohio" was one indication of the strong abolitionist sentiment felt by many north of the river. But other residents of the Western Country found this sectional strife disturbing. Those engaged in commerce in Louisville and Cincinnati especially resisted the trend, fearful of losing their business contacts along the Ohio. Indeed, it would a westerner from Kentucky, Sen. John J. Crittenden, who tried for a last-minute compromise to preserve the Union as the Civil War approached.[37]

As late as 1861, any such effort was doomed to failure; the Ohio Valley had already split in two. As manufacturing took hold in Ohio and land became available across the Mississippi, many Kentucky non-slaveholding farmers and artisans moved north of the river to escape the political and economic domination of slaveholders in their home state. The transportation revolution had isolated Lexington and as their labor fled, more and more Kentuckians turned to the production of hemp and tobacco and with it, slavery. Life in the western states north and south of the Ohio River looked considerably more different at mid-century than it had in the early 1800s. Still, at least one scholar has concluded that only the experiences of the war itself and the perils of Reconstruction finally convinced many in Kentucky that they were southerners rather than westerners.[38]

As the expansion of the United States created a "new" Northwest in the Dakotas, using the phrase "Old Northwest" to describe the five states created by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 came into use during the 1830s. As the abolition movement spread, the ordinance began to assume greater symbolic significance in how Ohioans defined their place; indeed, they deliberately began to exclude Kentucky and western Virginia. The new Yankees helped create a label that sought to trace the origins of their new home back to the decree that had outlawed slavery north of the river.[39]

In the twenty-first century, scholars need to redefine their approach to the history of the Ohio Valley by looking beyond the assumption that the river served as a border from the first days of settlement. During and after the American Revolution, northerners and southerners settled the region together, in western Pennsylvania and Virginia and in Ohio and Kentucky. The links created between East and West and between North and South demonstrate how residents of the new United States laid the foundations for a continental empire before expansion west of the Mississippi led the nation to Civil War. In addition, understanding the Ohio Valley as a whole allows us to comprehend fully the role commerce played in westward expansion during the decades following the American Revolution. Scholars studying the transition to capitalism in the New England countryside that had been settled for more than a century before the process began generally emphasize clashes between entrepreneurs and farmers; in the Ohio Valley, a different experience occurred. The two sides, for much of the region's history, worked together to make their region grow and fulfill what they perceived to be its promise. At the time of the region's settlement at least, before the divisive influence of slavery, the Ohio River offered no cultural boundary that its settlers could discern from either bank.

1. The themes and data utilized in this article are explored more fully in Kim M. Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1850* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

2. John D. Barnhart, *Valley of Democracy: The Frontier versus the Plantation in the Ohio Valley, 1775-1818* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953); and Beverley W. Bond, Jr., *The Civilization of the Old Northwest: A Study of Political, Social, and Economic Development, 1788-1812* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Andrew R.L. Cayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780-1825* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1986); Andrew R.L. Cayton and Peter Onuf, *The Midwest and the Region: Rethinking the History of an American Region* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Andrew R.L. Cayton, "'Separate Interests and the Nation-State: The Washington Administration and the Origins of Regionalism in the Trans-Appalachian West," *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 39-67; Nicole Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Craig T. Friend, "Merchants and Markethouses: Reflections on Moral Economy in Early Kentucky," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Winter 1997): 553-74; Peter Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Elizabeth A. Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510.

   There are exceptions to the rule, see John A. Jackle, *Images of the Ohio Valley: A Historical Geography of Travel, 1740-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: Pioneer Life in Early Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Lexington, Louisville, and St. Louis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Economic historians have written about the transportation revolution in the West, but in general they begin their history in 1815 and/or fail to address the issue of the river as a border between North and South. See Carville Earle, "Regional Economic Development West of the Appalachians, 1815-1860," in Robert D. Mitchell and Paul A. Groves, eds., *North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987): 172-97; Erik F. Haits, James Mak, and Gary M. Walton, *Western River Transportation: The Era of Early Internal Development, 1810-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949); Hunter, "Studies in the Economic History of the Ohio Valley," *Smith College Studies in American History* 19 (October 1933) and 19 (January 1934): 1-130; and George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart, 1951).

3. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54 (quotation). See also Perkins, *Border Life*, 10; and Daniel Blake Smith, "'This Idea in Heaven': Image and Reality on the Kentucky Frontier," in Craig Thompson Friend, ed., *The Buzzel About Kentuck: Settling the Promised Land* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 77-99.

4. Manasseh Cutler to Winthrop Sargent, 20 April 1786, and Nathan Dare, 16 March 1787, in William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, eds., *Life, Journal, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.*, 2 vols (Cincinnati: R. Clarke and Co., 1888), v. 1, 189, 194; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 2-25; Paul Finkelman, "Slavery and Bondage in the 'Empire of Liberty,'" in Frederick D. Williams, ed., *The Northwest Ordinance: Essays on its Formulation, Provisions, and Legacy* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1989), 66-70; Paul Finkelman, "The Northwest Ordinance: A Constitution for an Empire of Liberty," in *Pathways to the Old Northwest: An Observance of the Bicentennial of*

the Northwest Ordinance (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1988), 4-11; Benjamin Horace Hibbard, *A History of Public Land Policies* (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1924), 32-81; Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 260-67; Onuf, *Statehood and Union*, 1-9, 21-43; Jack N. Rakove, "Ambiguous Achievement: The Northwest Ordinance," in Williams, ed., *The Northwest Ordinance*, 2-15; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10-11; and Gordon T. Stewart, "The Northwest Ordinance and the Balance of Power in North America," in Williams, ed., *The Northwest Ordinance*, 21-34.

5. Manasseh Cutler Journal, August 1788 in Cutler, ed., *Life, Journal, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.*, v. 1, 412-13, 419; Andrew R.L. Cayton, "Marietta and the Ohio Company," in Robert D. Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers: Settlement, Society, & Development in the Preindustrial Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 187-200; S. P. Hildreth, *Pioneer History* (Cincinnati:H.W. Derby and Co., 1848), 352-59; and Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1783-1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 116.

6. Timothy J. Shannon, "The Ohio Company and the Meaning of Opportunity in the American West, 1786-1795," *New England Quarterly* 64 (September 1991): 396-97, 402; Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 2-31; Rufus Putnam to Manasseh Cutler, 16 May 1788, in Cutler, ed., *Life, Journal, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.*, v. 1, 377-79; John Cleves Symmes to Jonathan Dayton, May 18-20, 1789, and John Cleves Symmes to Jonathan Dayton, August 15, 1791, in Beverley W. Bond, Jr., ed., *The Correspondence of John Cleves Symmes: Founder of the Miami Purchase* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 66, 153.

7. Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 116-21. See also Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier," 486-510; and Christopher Waldrep, "Opportunity on the Frontier South of the Green," in Friend, ed., *The Buzzel About Kentuck*, 153-72.

8. Francois Andre Michaux, "Travels to the West of the Allegheny Mountains, in the States of Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee. . . .," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846* (Cleveland: A.H. Clark Co., 1904-1907), v. 3, 156-59; and John Cleves Symmes to Jonathan Dayton, August 21, 1788, in Bond, ed., *The Correspondence of John Cleves Symmes*, 43. See also Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise*, 65-67.

9. Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise*, 43-61; Edward K. Muller, "Selective Urban Growth in the Middle Ohio Valley, 1800-1860," *Geographical Review* 66 (April 1976), 178-99.

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12. James F. Hopkins, *A History of the Hemp Industry in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1951), passim; Paul Woehrmann, ed., "The Autobiography of Abraham Snethen, Frontier Preacher," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 51 (October 1977), 317, 320 (quotations); H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood, "A Trader on the Western Carolina Frontier," in Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers*, 159; Tyrel G. Moore, "Economic Development in Appalachian Kentucky, 1800-1860," in ibid., 222; Michaux, "Travels," 232-33; Perkins, *Border Life*, 215; and Paul Salstrom, "The Agricultural Origins of Economic Dependency, 1840-1880," in Mitchell, ed., *Appalachian Frontiers*, 264; Daniel Halstead Papers, ledger, 1809-1810, and Mason County, Kentucky, Account Book, 1797-1799, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky (hereinafter cited as FHS).

13. Tuan, *Space and Place*, 17, 88. For references to "the western country" in the correspondence of residents, see the following: Ward Family Papers, 1661-1919, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (hereinafter cited as AAS); Backus-Woodbridge Collection and Emerson Family Papers, both at OHS; Gwathmey Family Papers, John Irwin Papers, Green Family Papers, and Buckner Family Papers, all at FHS; Drake Family Papers and John Loving Papers, Department of Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green (hereinafter cited as WKU). For Isaac Jackson, see L. Loomis to R. J. Meigs, March 31, 1813; J. L. Robinson to Joseph Ficklin, March 31, 1813; Kearney Wharton to Samuel Roberts, April 2, 1813; Benjamin B. Howell to John W. Hunt, April 9, 1813; Benjamin B. Howell to Abraham S. Barton, April 9, 1813, all in Isaac H. Jackson Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society, Cincinnati, Ohio. For travelers, see William Coolidge, Jr. Diary and Account Book, 1818-1829, typescript, WKU, and John Sharkey Travel Diary, 1829, FHS.

14. Letterbooks of Dudley Woodbridge, Jr., Backus-Woodbridge Collection, boxes 24 and 36, and Woodbridge Mercantile Company Records, vols. 2-4, Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia (hereinafter cited as WVU). For population figures, see J.D.B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: A.O.P. Nicholson, 1854), 40. For a full analysis of these connections, see Gruenwald, *River of Enterprise*, 81-100.

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16. Cayton, *Frontier Republic*, 125-27.

17. Charles Clifford Huntington, *A History of Banking and Currency in Ohio Before the Civil War* (Columbus: F.J. Heer Printing Co., 1915), 5-37, 43, 51-55; R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1950), v. 1, 124, 130, 577-85; Utter, *Frontier State*, 274-76, 292.

18. Daniel R. Southard to David Starr, July 1, 1819, Daniel R. Southard Papers, FHS; Utter, *Frontier State*, 284; newspaper quoted in Buley, *Old Northwest*, v. 1, 132.

19. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers*, 3-14 (quotations on pp. 4 and 11).

20. Cayton, Frontier Republic, 151-54; Harry N. Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1968; reprint, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987.)

21. Muller, "Selective Urban Growth," 185-92; Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era*, 189.
22. Muller, "Selective Urban Growth," 185-92; Daniel Preston, "Market and Mill Town: Hamilton Ohio, 1795-1860," (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1987), 164-270, 298-311.
23. Wade, *Urban Frontier*, 187-97; Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era*, 187-227; Haites et al., *Western River Transportation*, 1-47, 59-73; Steven J. Ross, *Workers on the Edge: Work, Leisure, and Politics in Industrializing Cincinnati, 1788-1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 3-24, 33-34; and Daniel Aaron, *Cincinnati: Queen City of the West, 1819-1838* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992, 31-37.
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25. Richard Lyle Power, *Planting Corn Belt Culture: The Impress of the Upland Southerner and Yankee in the Old Northwest* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1953), 5-20, 26-31, 37, 51-56, and 92-102. For an excellent recent study of Yankees in the Old Northwest, see Susan E. Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
26. Wade, *Urban Frontier*, 17, 20, 50; Claire Prechtel-Kluskens, comp., *Third Census of the United States, 1810* [microform]*: Population Schedules, Washington County, Ohio* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1994); James L. Dennis, *Washington's Darker Brother: One Hundred Years of Black History in Washington County, Ohio, 1788-1888* (Parkersburg, WV: privately printed, 1986), 7; Mason County, Kentucky, Account Book, FHS; James Weir Ledger, 1813-1815, Greenville, Kentucky, FHS; Donally and Steele, Kanawha Salt Works, Journal (1813-1815), WVU; Gary A. O'Dell, "The Trotter Family, Gunpowder, and Early Kentucky Entrepreneurship, 1784-1833," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 88 (Autumn 1990), 396-422; Joe William Trotter, Jr., *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 24-25; Aaron, *Cincinnati*, 294-314; Wade, *Urban Frontier*, 225-29.
27. Buley, *The Old Northwest*, v. 2, 17-18; Earle, "Regional Economic Development West of the Appalachians," 184-97; and Onuf, *Statehood and Union*, 109-32, 147.
28. Elias Pym Fordham, *Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818*, ed. Frederic Austin Ogg (Cleveland: A.H. Clark Co., 1906), 209-29 (quotation on p. 210); Thomas Hulme, "A Journal Made During a Tour in the Western Countries of America: September 30, 1818-August 7, 1819," in Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, v. 10, 64-65; John Melish, *Travels through the United States of America, in the Years 1806 & 1807, and 1809, 1810, & 1811...* (Philadelphia: By the author, 1812; reprint New York, 1970), 415; Power, *Planting Cornbelt Culture*, 120.
29. Bruce Levine has provided the best synthesis of scholarship on this topic in *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).
30. William Emerson to Charles Emerson, 1838, Emerson Family Papers, microfilm edition, box 1, folder 4, OHS; Harriet Woodbridge to Amelia Oaks, January 4, 1843, Oaks-Woodbridge-Day Family Papers, 1839-1851, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut (hereinafter cited as CHS); Nahum Ward to Thomas and Elizabeth Ward, May 21, 1812, June 7, 1814, June 10, March 4, and November 24, 1832, box 3, folder 2; Nahum Ward to Thomas W. Ward, March 2, 1843, June 21, 1846, December 9, 1846, box 3, folder 3; Nahum Ward to Sarah Putnam, June 25, 1849, box 3, folder 3, all in the Ward Family Papers, AAS.
31. John Woodbridge to Charles Oaks, October 18, 1842; Woodbridge to Adeliue Barnes, December 21, 1842, both in Oaks-Woodbridge-Day Family Papers, 1839-1851, CHS; Stephen Gutgesell, ed., *Guide to Ohio Newspapers, 1793-1973* (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1974), passim. Towns with one or more "western" newspapers: Athens, Batavia, Bellefontaine, Bucyrus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Eaton, Garretsville, Georgetown, Germantown, Hamilton, Hudson, Lancaster, Lima, Lebanon, Lisbon, Mansfield, Marietta, Marion, Mt. Vernon, Piqua, Portsmouth, Putnam, Ravenna, Sidney, Somerset, Steubenville, Tiffin, Urbana, Warren, Williamsburg, Wilmington, Xenia, and Zanesville. Towns with "Buckeye" newspapers: Columbus, Elyria, Gallipolis, Lisbon, Marietta, Marion, and Ravenna.
32. Aaron, *Cincinnati*, 268-70; Buley, *Old Northwest*, v. 1, 360-61; Walter S. Glazer, "Cincinnati in 1840: A Community Profile," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1968), 97-101; Eliza R. Steele, *A Summer Journey in the West* (New York: J.S. Taylor and Co., 1841), 249-50.
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34. H.Z. Williams, *History of Washington County, Ohio* (Cleveland: H.Z. Williams and Bro., 1881), 414-15; *Marietta Intelligencer,* March 20, 1840, February 15, 1844, March 17, 1844, March 21, 1844, April 11, 1844, April 25, 1844, June 6, 1844, June 20, 1844, and July 10, 1845.
35. Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati: State of Ohio, 1888), v. 2, 804.
36. Ibid., v. 2, 732-33, 804; *Marietta Intelligencer*, August 7, 14, September 4, 1845; *Buckeye Newspaper* [Marietta], August 21, 1845.
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