Southern New Hampshire University

Trans-Appalachian America and the National Road

A Capstone Project Submitted to the College of Online and Continuing Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Master of Arts in History

By

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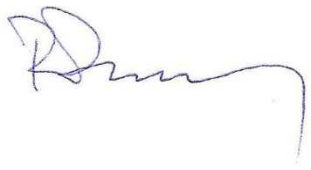

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Abstract

Following the Revolutionary War, the British ceded the Northwest Territory to the United States. This territory was the land north and west of the Ohio River to the Mississippi. The territory corresponds to the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and an eastern portion of Minnesota. With Britain controlling the Great Lakes to the north and Spain to the south and west, this remained a landlocked territory whose only access to the eastern seaboard was over rugged mountain trails. In 1784, George Washington wrote of the need to link the western territory to the eastern states. He proposed an improved road to link an eastern river with the Ohio. Washington's vision was accomplished as Congress enacted legislation during the Jefferson Administration for this infrastructure project. In 1811, work began at Fort Cumberland on the Potomac River in Maryland. The road conquered the mountains and reached the Ohio River in 1818. Originally known as the Cumberland Road, the National Road was eventually extended to Columbus, Ohio, Indianapolis, Indiana and finally Vandalia, Illinois in 1837. The federal funding and oversight of the road faced challenges from narrow readings of constitutional authority. Proponents of the road resorted to alarmist rhetoric, portraying the road as necessary, even vital, to prevent the nation becoming divided and separated by the mountainous terrain. This paper will evaluate the alarmist rhetoric in relation to the potential threats of disunion. Primary and secondary sources will be used in an ethnographical analysis of western culture and nationalism to demonstrate that the western settlers were patriots. The threat of disunion was used to justify federal control and funding for the National Road.

Dedication

For my wife Elizabeth

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Introduction

The history of the National Road and Trans-Appalachian America really began on July 4, 1778. George Rogers Clark, as a militia officer for the Commonwealth of Virginia, led his American force to victory over the British post at Kaskaskia on the Mississippi River in the Illinois Territory. Clark's further victories in the Trans-Appalachian western territories contributed to the United States' possession of the Northwest Territories by the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The territories incorporated the lands north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi. This area generally corresponds to the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and the eastern portion of Minnesota today. This had been a disputed territory between Native Americans, France, and Britain. It had recently been attached to Quebec by British in the Quebec Act in 1774. This action by the British was in response to the Boston Tea Party and growing tension with the American Colonies. This attachment to Quebec added to the conflict between Britain and the colonies, as R. Carlyle Buley states "Virginia, who claimed the land by charter grant, as well as other colonies who felt they were being cut off from westward expansion, regarded the act as one of the 'Intolerable Acts.''[1] After the Treaty of Paris ceded the land of the Northwest Territory to the United States, Virginia and the other states with claims to the lands west of the Ohio River transferred these western territories to the United States government in the 1784 Cession Act.

There had been few British settlers in the territory. D.E. Lindstom notes the constrictions on settlement as "King George III prohibited his subjects from making purchases or settlements

[1] R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period, 1815 – 1840 Vol. I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1950), 17.

in this region because the English Board of Trade wished to confine all new settlements on the Atlantic Coast within easy reach of the trade and commerce of Great Britain."[2] As settlers began to move to the north bank of the Ohio River and filter west through the mountains, the United States government passed legislation such as the Land Ordinance of 1784 and the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 to administer this new American territory. The latter ordinance has been described as such "The Northwest Ordinance ensured a uniform governmental system and guaranteed eventual statehood, although the territorial governments were more authoritarian than most settlers wanted."[3] These ordinances had few stipulations, but important among them was that they were to be free from slavery.

The emigrants to the new territory found it was sparsely populated, with little governmental structure or presence. Historians have referred to the territory as in a state of almost anarchy. The early emigrants settled in river valleys near waterways, leaving regions farther from navigable water largely uninhabited. An early settler, John Reynolds, described the area of Illinois at the turn of the 19th century. He states "During this period, Illinois was isolated from the States, and it was a remote, weak, and desolate colony."[4] The western territories were a vast borderland area. There was conflict between the United States, Native American, and European nations and cultures. It was a place of danger as the new American emigrants invaded the lands that others considered their own.

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[2] D.E. Lindstrom, "The Influence of Race and Culture on the Development of Social Organization in Illinois," *Social Forces,* 13, no. 4, (May, 1935): 569.
[3] Robert P. Swierenga, "The Settlement of the Old Northwest: Ethnic Pluralism in a Featureless Plain," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9, no. 1, (Spring, 1989): 74.
[4] John Reynolds, *My Own Times: Embracing Also, the History of My Life* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1879), 44.

The settlement of this vast territory faced many challenges, one of the chief being that of access. The area was basically landlocked. The Appalachian Mountains separated the Northwest Territories from the established U.S. states on the eastern side of the mountains. To the west of the Mississippi River were the unexplored lands of the Louisiana Territory held by Spain. To the north, the British controlled the Great Lakes, and access to the St. Lawrence Seaway. To the south, the Spanish controlled the lower Mississippi River. The port of New Orleans was essentially closed to American shipping by Spain with an excessive tariff. Even when these waterways were later opened for shipping, transportation was risky. Water transport had to contend with varying water levels, sand bars, snags, ice, pirates and Native American attacks. Robert Ankli noted "Many of the flatboats destined for New Orleans – perhaps as many as one fifth to one fourth – were snagged and never reached the city."[5] The return upstream was also challenging. A shipment by flatboat to New Orleans, and the return trip overland, took approximately six months.

Before the age of steam-powered shipping, water transport on the Mississippi River was essentially one way, and that was downstream. It was difficult to bring manufactured goods north up the Mississippi. Thaddeus Harris explains this stating, " The vessels, therefore, from any of the Atlantic ports in the United States which come to trade at New Orleans, and to receive the produce of the Western Territory there deposited, must come empty; except on those few articles which may be wanted in the island and its immediate vicinity; for, as it is very difficult and expensive to ascend the river, even with small boats, and as the demand for foreign articles is not equal to one twentieth part of the quantity of exports, the people of the upper country will

[5] Robert Ankli, "Agricultural Growth in Antebellum Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society,* 63, no. 4, (Winter, 1970): 388.

always produce their goods either at Washington, Baltimore, or Philadelphia, and have them brought thence in wagons."[6] Western produce could be shipped downstream, but eastern or foreign manufactured goods for the settlers of the Trans-Appalachian territories had to be packed in over the mountain trails.

In 1784, George Washington, accompanied by surveyor Albert Gallatin, explored the Trans-Allegheny region. Washington and Gallatin formed a similar opinion on the need for a means of overland transport through the mountains. The only way to access the new American territory was by mountain trails, limiting goods to what could be carried by a packhorse, about two hundred pounds, per horse. The trails would be doubly difficult when they were choked with snow in the winter or when they turned to mud in the spring. In October, 1784, Washington wrote to Benjamin Harrison of this need to connect the Northwest Territories to the eastern states. His plan was to link a navigable eastern tributary of the Ohio River to a navigable western tributary of the Potomac or James River.[7] In 1803, an act of Congress established this road at Fort Cumberland Maryland at the western navigable waters of the Potomac River. Thusly named the Cumberland Road, it was later known as the National Road.

This road project had broad political and economic support. This was not limited to politicians and merchants. Seymour Dunbar notes "By the year 1800 a country-wide demand for good turnpikes was manifest. So many proposals for work of the character were introduced in every legislature that it became evident the states themselves could not undertake general

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[6] Thaddeus Mason Harris, *The Journal of a Tour into the Territory Northwest of the Alleghany Mountains* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1805), 145.
[7] George Washington to Benjamin Harrison, October 1784. *George Washington Writings*, John Rhodehamel, ed. (New York: Library of America, 1997), 560.

highway construction."[8] There were two main options for a road through the mountains. The old Braddock Road had been cut through the forests and mountains of Pennsylvania in 1775 during the Seven Years War. The Braddock Road had not been maintained for wagon traffic, but it was still in use as a mountain trail. The other option was Daniel Boone's Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap to Kentucky.

A road through the mountains was an expensive multi-state undertaking. It faced challenges mainly of oversight and funding. If left to the individual states, it was unlikely to receive the oversight and funding desperately needed. The only reasonable option was it being a federal project. Albert Gallatin, the young surveyor who had accompanied Washington in 1784 (later Jefferson's Secretary of Treasury) came up with a solution. In 1802, Ohio petitioned for statehood. As a part of this petition, Gallatin proposed that a portion of government land sales be applied to the funding of the road through the mountains to the Ohio River. As there was far more government land available for sale in the Northwest Territories than in the more settled state of Kentucky, the northern route along the old Braddock Road was selected for the project. Federalist politicians such as Hamilton supported a strong central government and internal improvement projects such and road and bridge infrastructure. However, this concept of federal oversight and funding faced challenges from states' rights factions, such as the Democratic Republicans. They feared that expanding federal power to oversee multi-state operations would lead to a federal government continuing to grow in power and authority over the states. In 1800, the Democratic-Republican candidate Thomas Jefferson was elected president. Jefferson found himself in a conflicted position. He and his supporters maintained the position of states' rights,

[8] Seymour Dunbar, *A History of Travel in America* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937), 320.

but he also supported the idea of the National Road. Jefferson, in his terms of office, was able to pass the legislation for the construction of the National Road. He did this by portraying the road as necessary for national security. Jefferson was concerned that the western territories, if not "cemented" to the eastern states, might join with another nation such as Britain or Spain. There was also the possibility that the western settlers could even declare independence from the United States. Jefferson urged the construction of a road as a necessary unifying agent of the nation spatially separated by a mountain range. He was joined in this by other young Democratic-Republican leaders such as John Calhoun and Henry Clay.

Jefferson and other proponents of the road used alarmist rhetoric to emphasize the threat to national unity. This threat in a large part proved persuasive enough to overcome opposition voices and promoted the federal funding and control of the project. Jefferson and other eastern politicians did have cause for legitimate concern. While they may have used alarmist rhetoric, it was an honest attempt to portray the situation as they saw it. However, by the time of the road legislation, they were mistaken in this assessment. *The Act to Regulate the Laying Out and Making a Road from Cumberland, in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio* was not signed into law until 1806. By this time, threats to national security had been sufficiently mitigated to be negligible. The western settlers did have a strong sense of nationalism. They had animosity towards the British and Spanish governments, which would have prevented the western settlers from joining with these other nations. As to their own independence, primary sources indicate the western settlers were patriots, and they maintained a strong sense of individual liberty as well as loyalty to the United States.

The National Road proved to be a considerable factor in overcoming the landlock challenge for the Northwest Territory. It dramatically improving access and communication

over the mountains. By 1818, the road had conquered the mountains of Pennsylvania and reached the Ohio River. By 1837, a letter carried by the post on the National Road would go from Washington, DC to Columbus, Ohio in just forty-five hours. The pack horse, limited to a two-hundred-pound load had been replaced with the Conestoga wagon. This heavy wagon carried a standard load of six thousand pounds, and it could carry up to ten thousand. The trickle of settlers turned into a surge of emigration to the western lands. This flood of settlers resulted in a dramatic change in demographics that transformed the nation. The population center of the United States began to move west. By the time of the Civil War, this formerly sparsely populated territory contributed almost a million soldiers to the Union Army. Close to half of the Union forces came from the states of the former Northwest Territory.

The topic of the oversight and funding of the construction of the National Road is actually quite a complex issue. It addresses constitutional questions and debates. There are domestic and international political issues. It involves the need of a road for commerce, emigration, military logistics and the national mail service. The Democratic Republicans wrestled with states' rights versus the need of federal oversight for multi-state internal improvements. There were questions if the government could fund and oversee the road under constitutional authority such as to establish post roads, as logistic support for the army, or to regulate commerce. Presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe recommended passing an amendment to the Constitution, expanding the authority of the federal government as the best way to overcome this conflict and fund the project. Faced with a Congress unwilling to amend the Constitution, the alarmist rhetoric was used to justify what many states' rights advocates saw as federal overreach.

The historiography of the National Road presents the proponents such as Washington and Jefferson as being genuinely concerned of a threat to national unity. Many sources cite the above-mentioned Washington letter to Harrison, as Washington also stated in this letter, "I need not remark to you Sir, that the flanks & rear of the United States are possessed by other powers - & formidable ones, too; nor how necessary it is to apply the cement of interest, to bind all part of the Union together by indissoluble bonds – especially that part of it, which lies immediately west of us, with the middle States."[9] He goes on to say, "The Western settlers, (I speak now from my own observation) stand as it were upon a pivot – the touch of a feather, would turn them any way…because they have no other means of coming to us but by a long Land transportation and unimproved roads."[10] The historiography also often cites Jefferson, usually noting a passage in his Sixth Annual Message where he echoed Washington's letter as he promoted transportation improvements, stating, "By these operations new channels of communication will be opened between the States; the lines of separation will disappear, their interests will be identified, and their union cemented by new and indissoluble ties."[11] Washington and Jefferson both used the phrase that the road was needed to "cement" the nation into a whole. These two passages find their way into much of the historiography, portraying the belief that the road was a necessary agent in national unity.

Perhaps the strongest language was used by Henry Clay. He referred to the question of funding the extension of the road in 1824 in a speech as related by the *Niles Register*, "Yet he would say thus much: that he considered the question, as to the existence and the exercise of a

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[9] Letter to Benjamin Harrison October 10, 1784, *George Washington Writings*, John Rhodehamel ed. (New York: The Library of America, 1997), 562.
[10] Washington Letter to Harrison, 563.
[11] Thomas Jefferson, "Sixth Annual Message" *Jefferson: Autobiography, Notes on the State of Virginia, Public and Private Papers, Addresses, Letters* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 529.

power in the government to carry into effect a system of internal improvements, *as amounting to the question whether the union of these states should be preserved or not*...(italics mine)."[12] The article continues as Clay speaks of common origin, language and law writing, "But, asked Mr. C., have we not seen, in at least one instance in history, that all these have not been strong enough to prevent a total and lasting separation….Among the causes which go to increase the tendencies to separation, in such a system as ours, may be enumerated the lofty mountains which separates different parts of our country – the extended space over which our population and government are spread, together with the different scenes to which commercial pursuits lead the citizens of different districts of the union."[13] Here is Henry Clay using strong words that the question of funding the National Road was in essence a question of preserving the union of the states.

The historiography on the National Road is limited. There are surprisingly few scholarly books written on the National Road. Most of the books are from the early or middle of the 20th century. Theodore Sky's 2011 contribution *The National Road and the Difficult Path to Sustainable National Investment* is the only book published in the last twenty years.[14] The books that have been published generally echo these statements by the proponents of the road, Washington, Jefferson and Clay. The historiography agrees that these political leaders feared that the mountainous terrain had the potential to cause the Northwest Territory to break away from the rest of the United States. In addition to the above quotes, writers often cite the Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania in the 1790's or the Aaron Burr Conspiracy in the Ohio

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[12] "Mr. Clay's Speech," *Niles' Register* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 5, 1825. 357.
[13] "Mr. Clay's Speech," 359.
[14] Theodore Sky, *The National Road and the Difficult Path to Sustainable National Investment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), all pages.

Valley in 1805 as incidents that were held to be indicators of a territory in danger of intrigue and revolt.

My objective is to add to the existing historiography by presenting the perspective of the western settlers. In particular, this paper will examine the question as to whether there were actual threats to national unity, and it will examine the question of these threats from the Trans-Appalachian, western perspective. The western settlers were also avid proponents of the National Road. They too wanted better ties with the east that a road over the mountains would provide. Rather than seeing danger from the western intrigues and rebellions, there is a case to be made that these intrigues failed largely because of the strong loyalty of the western citizens. Before the opening of the National Road, the western settlers were largely a mix of the earlier French and British settlers, joined with the Federalist New Englanders and Upper South Democratic Republicans. They had conflicts among themselves, and grievances against the federal government, but they were still loyal citizens. The rhetoric used by Jefferson and others was effective in attaining the objective of federal oversight, but it did not paint an accurate picture of the political climate in the Trans-Appalachian region.

Chapter 1: Historiography

The National Road terminated at Vandalia, Illinois in 1837, but the first history of the road was not written until much later. Thomas Searight grew up alongside the road in Fayette County in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. In 1894 he self-published his book *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, With Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon*, to fill this void in the historiography. The first one hundred or so pages of his book consist of Congressional records including reports, bills and speeches. Searight's compilation of documents provides the reader with the essential government records on the construction of the National Road. His work includes copies of legislation such as the 1806 *Act to Regulate the Laying Out and Making a Road from Cumberland, in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio*. This and other documents are included in their entirety. Some of these records are rather routine and mundane, such as accounts of funds received and spent. However, the inclusion of this quantitative data illustrates the comprehensiveness of his efforts to collect the Congressional documents on the National Road.

The rest of Searight's book is a collection of stories about the people and travel along the National Road. These include descriptions of the taverns and inns, the wagon drivers, the travelers and the emigrants. He includes photographs of surviving taverns, bridges and people, such as wagon drivers who worked on the road. This book is not a historical analysis, rather it is a collection. As such, it is a valuable resource for future readers and historians of the National Road.

Searight does not address the questions of western nationalism or the conflict over federal funding or oversight. His work, as the first foundation book of the historiography, merely states

in his introduction, "It was a highway at once so grand and imposing, an artery so largely instrumental in promoting the early growth and development of our country's wonderful resources, so influential in strengthening the bonds of the American Union, and at the same time so replete with important events and interesting incidents, that the writer of these pages has long cherished a hope that some capable hand would write its history and collect and preserve its legends, and no one having come forward to perform the task, he has ventured upon it himself, with unaffected diffidence and a full knowledge of his inability to do justice to the subject."[1] This mention of "strengthening the bonds" is his only allusion to the National Road's role in "cementing" the national regions together.

While Searight's book is not an actual historical analysis, he does present his observations as a faithful account of the history of the road. His descriptions allude to cultural attitudes such as racism. He writes of seeing slaves, stating, "The writer has seen them driven over the road, arranged in couples and fastened to a long, thick rope or cable like horses. This may seem incredible to a majority of persons now living along the road, but it is true, and was a very common sight in the early history of the road and evoked no expression of surprise, or words of censure."[2] Searight's comments show a willingness on his part to present the comprehensive history, including what his contemporaries would find offensive. He does not omit certain topics to glorify the history of his own homeland. His work, as the first history of the road, told the bad as well as the good. As a historian, it's likely he was familiar with a history of treason and threat of disunion in Trans-Appalachian Pennsylvania, but he does not

[1] Thomas B. Searight, *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, With Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon* (Uniontown PA, Searight, 1894), 13.
[2] Searight, *The Old Pike*, 109.

mention this in his book. In his stories of the people and the life along the road, Searight attempts to provide an accurate portrayal of the cultural view of the people of the western states and territories. Conspiracy and disunion are not a part of his portrayal of the western communities.

At the turn of the 20th century, three historians fulfilled Searight's wish that others would write the history of the National Road. In 1901, History Professor Archer Butler Hulbert added his contribution. His article "The Old National Road: The Historic Highway of America," was published in *The Ohio Archaeological and Historic Publications*.[3] This article was just one of several of his Historic Highways of America series. As such, they were targeted for the general reader of American History. Hulbert's objective was to demonstrate how the Cumberland Road was one of the most important aspects of western expansion. Though written for the popular audience, it is a scholarly work. It includes citations from government documents, maps, and quantitative data. Hulbert briefly discusses several aspects of the road that were not in Searight's earlier work. He has chapters on the political conflicts and the actual building of the road. He describes how it transformed the western territories increasing communication, such as through improved mail service. He also describes how freight and passenger transport were improved by the road.

While Searight only briefly touched on the national unifying impact of the road, Hulbert makes a much stronger emphasis on this topic. He describes the road as, "…a thoroughfare which should, in one generation, bind distant and half-acquainted states together in bonds of

[3] Archer Butler Hulbert, "The Old National Road: The Historic Highway of America," *The Ohio Archaeological and Historic Publications* vol IX, (1901): 404-519.

common interest, sympathy and ambition."[4] In referring to the new territory, he says, "So patriotic and so thoroughly American is the central west today, that is also difficult to realize by what a slender thread it hung to the fragile republic east of the mountains during the two decades succeeding the Revolutionary War. The whole world looked upon the east and west as realms distinct as Italy and France, and for the same geographical reasons."[5] As to the nationalism of the western settlers, Hulbert states "Through all those years, when Burr and others 'played fast and loose with conspiracy', the loyalty of the west was far less sure than one can easily believe."[6] Hulbert uses these statements to emphasize the agency of the National Road in unifying the country. These statements echo the fears of the earlier proponents of the road such as Washington, Jefferson and Clay. Hulbert's work is perhaps the first scholarly analysis of the National Road. His emphasis of the fragile national ties between east and west will be echoed by the historiography for the remainder of the 20th century.

Another early work is the doctoral dissertation *The Cumberland National Road* by History Professor Edwin Erle Sparks.[7] As a past president of Penn State University, the university library has a collection of Sparks' papers. A draft of this unpublished dissertation is found in these Penn State Archives. The draft is undated, but it would fall somewhere between 1888 and 1902. As to the earlier date, Sparks cites Burke Aaron Hinsdale's 1888 book *The Old Northwest.*[8] A slightly later date for Sparks' work is likely as he enrolled in the doctoral program at the University of Chicago in 1895. An additional point is that Thomas Searight had

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[4] Hulbert, *Old National Road,* 406.
[5] Hulbert, *Old National Road,* 406.
[6] Hulbert, *Old National Road,* 407.
[7] Edwin Erle Sparks, *The Cumberland National Road* (Penn State University Libraries, Edwin Erle Sparks paper 1870 – 1940, Writings), all pages.
[8] Burke Aaron Hinsdale, *The Old Northwest: With a View of the Thirteen Colonies as Constituted by the Royal Charters* (New York: Townsend, Mac Coun, 1888), all pages.

collected a considerable amount of information for his 1894 book, and Searight was not familiar with Sparks' work. It is more likely that Searight's book influenced Sparks to write a historical analysis of the subject. Also, as to the later date of the manuscript, it was mentioned in the preface of another history of the National Road dated 1902.

Hulbert's work was published in 1901, so the Sparks manuscript may vie with Hulbert as the first scholarly analysis of the National Road. Unlike Hulbert's work, Sparks manuscript was not written as a popular work. It was his dissertation for his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. Sparks work is a comprehensive history of the road, from the early migrations and transportation history in the nation. He discusses the political process, the construction, maintenance and oversight of the National Road until it was surpassed by the railroads and turned over to the administration of the states. Sparks speaks of the unifying aspect of the road throughout his paper. He refers to the mountains and how they threatened disunion stating, "The treatment of the western states in earlier days when the question of the free navigation of the Mississippi threatened to dismember the infant republic was freely aired in these sectional discussions and the natural tendency toward secession which intervening mountains engender was often dwelt upon."[9] Sparks does not address threats due to domestic or international intrigues, rather he notes the geographical obstacles and how the road mitigated this threat and became a unifying agent for the nation.

In 1902, Jeremiah Young presented his contribution with his Doctoral dissertation, *A Political and Constitutional Study of the Cumberland Road*.[10] Young's work as a dissertation

[9] Sparks, *Cumberland National Road*, 38.
[10] Jeremiah Simeon Young, *A Political and Constitutional Study of the Cumberland Road: A Dissertation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), all pages.

was also a scholarly analysis of the topic. This was the 1902 work that made the passing reference to the Sparks manuscript. Young also mentions the works by Searight and Hulbert. Young's objective was to present the history of the origin and administration of the Cumberland Road with special attention to the political and constitutional aspects. Young, like many later writers, discussed the backstory of Washington's interest in the road. Young also describes the role of Gallatin and his influence as Secretary of the Treasury to promote the legislation for the road. Much of the historiography discusses how the road was financed through the sale of western lands. As a political analysis, Young's book also introduces this new political aspect. He describes the maneuverings for funding, stating, "Appropriations for the Cumberland Road were usually made under the fiction of 'advances' from the federal treasury, reimbursable from the '2 percent fund,' and were special in most cases."[11]. This interesting aspect illustrates that the majority in Congress, while debating the propriety of federal control, were quite committed to the idea of the National Road.

On the point of national unity, Young discusses the Whiskey Rebellion and Aaron Burr, adding the 1784 State of Franklin movement in Tennessee. In addition to these threats, he also notes the geography of the mountain range as a threat of disunion. These three works by Hulbert, Sparks and Young, completed at the turn of the century, establish the historiography of the National Road as a project that was necessary to mitigate a threat of disunion of a nation. These threats came from domestic as well as international forces, and they were largely due to the geographical separation at the Appalachians Mountains. Hulbert and Young in particular introduce the proponents Washington, Gallatin, Jefferson and Clay into the role of champions, or

[11] Young, *Political and Constitutional* Study, 33.

fathers, of the road. The statements and positions of these four political leaders on the threat to disunity are established in the historiography by these two works.

Additional books on the National Road echo this threat of disunity, often using the same geographical observations, domestic and international intrigues, and the same quotes of the proponents. Philip D. Jordan wrote *The National Road* in 1948 as part of The American Trails Series for the general reader of American History.[12] While this is not necessarily an academic work, it's actually well cited and has a good bibliography. Much of the book is devoted to stories of life along the road. He describes the "shake guts" wagons that transported passengers, the freight haulers, the drovers, as well as the establishments along the road. As to the question of whether the road was needed because of threats of disunion, Jordan agrees with the earlier historiography. He states, "Good roads were necessary if Ohio was to cement itself into the expanding Union. A nation of sections with no adequate means of communication among them was apt to develop prejudices that might well lead to disunion."[13] Jordon does not mention the intrigues, but he agrees that the mountains could lead to disunion.

In 1990, Merritt Ierley wrote *Traveling the National Road: Across the Centuries on America's First Highway*.[14] Ierley's book is largely a collection of first-hand accounts from the personal journals of people who recorded their travel over the National Road, although Ierley does include some background history in this book as well. He agrees with the general historiography as to the road being necessary for national unity. He describes the conflict of the Whiskey Rebellion and states, "A few years later, a still broadening conception of federal

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[12] Phillip D. Jordan, *The National Road* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948), all pages.
[13] Jordan, *The National Road,* 71.
[14] Merritt Ierley, *Traveling the National Road: Across the Centuries on America's First Highway* (Woodstock, NY, Overlook Press, 1990), all pages.

authority would be expressed in the building of a national road simply because it served a national purpose – a road that would help keep in check this potentially troublesome frontier as well as provide for more efficient transportation of good to market."[15] In his assessment, he too describes how the nation was divided by the mountainous terrain. He notes how in Europe, such a long mountain range as the Appalachians would serve as a natural boundary, dividing the continent into separate nations.

One of the most significant additions to the historiography was *The National Road,* edited by Karl Raitz in 1996.[16] This was published as the first of a two-part set with its sister volume *A Guide to The National Road*, the latter being a description of the route and sights of the road.[17] In this first volume, Raitz and fellow contributors present a historical appraisal of the National Road, including its cultural impact. The book covers a wide variety of topics including sectional conflicts, regional routes of emigration, and the political challenges to building the road. As to the question of the road being needed for national unity, this book also agrees with the existing historiography. It presents the Whiskey Rebellion and the Burr Conspiracy as potential threats to national unity. In his contribution, Joseph Wood states, "With such goings-on, it was no political impossibility, many in the period of the early republic believed, for the Mississippi Valley to separate eventually from the eastern seaboard."[18] This welcome and scholarly addition to the historiography at the end of the century is in agreement with those of the previous one hundred years.

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[15] Ierley, *Traveling the National Road,* 24.
[16] Karl Raitz, *The National Road* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), all pages.
[17] Karl Raitz*, A Guide to the National Road* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), all pages.
[18] Joseph S. Wood, "The Idea of a National Road," *The National Road*, Raitz, ed., 109.

Shorter books, pamphlets and articles throughout the century echoed similar sentiments. Lee Burns, writing in 1919 of the National Road in Indiana, mentions George Washington stating, "He was convinced that unless some better means were found for communication with the east, the western settlers might find it to their interests to form an alliance with the Spaniards at New Orleans, which was readily accessible to them by water."[19] Norris F. Schneider wrote *The National Road: Main Street of America*. for the Ohio Historical Society in 1975.[20] This short book is a brief but well-presented history of the National Road. Schneider describes the roles of the three key early backers of the road being Washington, Jefferson and Gallatin. He cites Washington's letter to Harrison that expressed his view of the Trans-Alleghany being on a pivot, in danger of turning to Britain or Spain. He also cites Jefferson's statement that the road is needed to "cement" the nation together. The resulting road he notes, has been described as the Appian Way of America. Harry Black, writing of the need for the road in 1984, states, "Washington said there was no other tie by which the rapidly growing country west of the mountains could be held for the Federal Union."[21] Short works such as these agree with the established historiography that the early proponents feared disunion due to the mountains and secession.

The latest addition to the historiography is Theodore Sky's *The National Road and the Difficult Path to Sustainable National Investment*, published in 2011.[22] Sky's book was written to mark the 200th anniversary of the National Road. This scholarly work uses political and economic lenses to analyze the impact of the road on the nation. He provides a general history

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[19] Lee Burns, "The National Road In Indiana" *Indiana Historical Society Publications* 7, No. 4 (1919), 211.
[20] Norris F. Schneider, *The National Road: Main Street of America* (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1975) all pages.
[21] Harry Black, *Pictorial Americana: The National Road* (Hammond, IN: HMB Publications, 1984), 19.
[22] Theodore Sky, *The National Road*, all pages.

of the road, but his emphasis is on the political history. His analysis is more in-depth than many of the other works. He describes Thomas Jefferson's quandary of his value conflict of the Democratic-Republican belief in limited federal government with his equally important belief in the need to support the badly needed internal improvements. Sky's work continues through the further administrations as Madison, Monroe, Adams and Jackson struggle with the questions of federal funding and control. These questions continued to be an issue of the constitutional limits on federal power.

Sky's work stands out from the rest of the historiography as he briefly challenges the idea of the road unifying the nation. He asks, "Was this vision of national unity achieved through a transportation artery real or mythical?"[23] With his conclusion being, "if the national unity that Jefferson and his successors so fervently invoked through the powerful symbol of the National Road – sometimes eluded them, it was not because they failed to seek it or to appreciate the blessings that it would bring to their America. For them, despite the tension and the limited duration of the road as a federal enterprise, it stood as a symbol of unity achieved and yet to be achieved."[24] Sky and the other principal writers of the historiography of the National Road agree that the history of the road must include its role in unifying the nation.

There is no disputing the geographic challenge presented by the mountains. The Appalachians severely restricted transportation for emigration, commerce, communication and military response. As to the political challenges to national unity, most of the historiography of the National Road presents the views of the key proponents. They cite the same or similar statements that describe how that the road was needed to mitigate disunion. The historiography

[23] Sky, *The National Road,* 184
[24] Sky, *The National Road,* 186-7.

agrees that the proponents were sincere in their concern for the nation. If the proponents used alarmist rhetoric, it was because they believed they had good cause for their alarm.

Figure 1: Corduroy Timber from National Road in Illinois (National Road Interpretive Center; Vandalia, IL).

Chapter 2: George Washington, Perspective of a Leader

George Washington, as a leader, had a unique perspective on the Trans-Appalachian territory. As a native of Virginia, his state claimed much of the territory west of the mountains. His early life was spent as a surveyor, giving him an eye trained to study the topography of the land. In 1753 at the age of twenty-one, he was a colonial British officer. In one of his first assignments, he commanded an expedition to deliver a message to the French commander at Fort Le Boeuf in the northwest corner of Pennsylvania near modern day Erie. He crossed the mountains again in 1754 at the beginning of the Seven-Years War. This time he engaged the French in battle and was captured at Fort Necessity in southwest Pennsylvania. He was with the Braddock expedition as they cut the road across the mountains of Pennsylvania in 1755. In 1758, he again crossed the mountains in the military action against the French at Fort Duquesne at modern day Pittsburgh. Washington had crossed the mountains of Pennsylvania no less than four times in five years. By the time he was appointed Commander in Chief of the American forces during the Revolutionary War, Washington had developed a solid understanding of the difficulties in moving troops through hard terrain. As a surveyor, soldier, and political leader, Washington's training and experience contributed to his advocacy for a road through the mountains as an agency of national unity.

Washington, in his much quoted 1784 letter to Harrison noted "…that the flanks and rear of the United States are possessed by other powers - and formidable ones, too…"[1] The timing of this letter in 1784 is significant. It follows Washington and Gallatin's tour of the Trans-

[1] Washington Letter to Harrison 562.

Alleghany region and the events of western territories of that year. At the time of this letter, the Southwest Territory, south of the Ohio River was much more populated that was the area north of the river. Washington understood the territorial threats posed by the British and Spain as well as the Native American nations. He also understood that the people of the western lands were accustomed to looking to their own local authority and communities for direction. Paul Fink notes this stating, "A Federal Constitution had not yet been adopted, and the people of the West had no illusions as to the strength of the government. During the Revolution they had received no aid from Congress, neither men nor money, for protection against incursions by hostile Indians, incited by British agents. On the contrary, they themselves with their long rifles and at their own expense, had acted as the rear-guard of the Revolution."[2]

During the war, the Americans living in the southern colonies had been deeply divided between Loyalist and Patriot factions. The Battle of Waxhams in western South Carolina in May of 1780 energized this divide. The British, under commander Banastre Tarleton, massacred patriot soldiers who threw down their weapons and attempted to surrender. The backlash of the massacre was disastrous for the British who were dependent on the support of the local communities. In October of that year, the Patriot Militia retaliated as they crushed the British Loyalist Militia at the Battle of King's Mountain with the rallying cry of "Tarleton's Quarter." This battle ended the British 1780 Carolina campaign under Cornwallis, impacting the whole course of the war. There remained deep animosity towards the British. The people of the

[2] Paul M. Fink, "Some Phases of the History of the State of Franklin," *Tennessee Historical Society,* 16, no. 3, (September 1957): 196.

southwest were not likely to look to the British, but with their sense of local authority, they could turn to Spain.

The Cessation Act of 1784 resulted in the eastern states turning their western territories over the administration of the federal government. The nation was organized at that time under the Articles of Confederation, as the United States Constitution would not be adopted until 1788. The limited funds and authority of the federal government under the Articles limited its ability to function at all, let alone administer the western territories. The States of Virginia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and New York may have extended their governmental protection and services to the western territories. The federal government, limited by the Articles of Confederation, did not.

In this same year of 1784, the western region provided an example of local authority. A faction in this back country, in what was originally part of North Carolina, and today is located in eastern Tennessee, despaired of getting assistance for protection or rights of navigation from the federal government. Instead, they formed what they called the State of Franklin. This political entity was composed of eight counties of the Washington District located in territory that North Carolina had turned over to the federal government in the 1784 Cessation Act. The separatists of this region originally intended for this collection of counties to become the fourteenth state of the union. Later on, a faction proclaimed Franklin as a completely autonomous nation, with its own governor and constitution. The area witnessed sharp conflict between this separatist faction and those who retained their national loyalty. North Carolina responded by rescinding their cessation of the territory to the national government and

reassumed control of these counties. By the first part of March 1788, the North Carolina militia had arrested the Franklin governor John Sevier and quickly reasserted control over the territory.

Washington's letter also noted that Spain could be a threat to national unity of the western territories. Spain, as an ally of France, had a better reputation in the west, as Spain had assisted the Americans in their war for independence. Spain did retain claims to lands on the eastern banks of the Mississippi, as well as possessing the port of New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory. Spain also was concerned with the growing presence and strength of the United States. Spain sought to contain this growth by restricting navigation of the Mississippi, arming and encouraging Native American resistance, and encouraging American emigrants to settle in Spanish territory. Spain still had a stronger military presence in the Mississippi Valley than did the Americans. Spain controlled the port city of New Orleans and also had an established, prominent trade center in the city of St. Louis at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. In 1780 during the Revolutionary War, the British had sent a force against St. Louis and Cahokia on the Mississippi River. The British were defeated at both points. In 1781, the Spanish retaliated across the Illinois Territory, successfully raiding a British outpost at the southern end of Lake Superior. Spain had proved that they had the strongest military presence in the Mississippi Valley.

An early settler in the Northwest Territory, John Reynolds, mentioned the strong Spanish presence in his personal memoirs. Reynolds related how his family in 1800 considered settling west of the Mississippi. He states, "The Spanish Government, to afford protection to their frontiers from the Indians and the British in Canada, encouraged the Americans to emigrate and

settle in their domains, west of the Mississippi."[3] Spain was the powerhouse in the Mississippi Valley. As such, they were in the best position to offer governmental services and protection to the settlers. Spain also appealed to American settlers with the offer of land to those who would emigrate to their territory. An even greater incentive to settle west of the Mississippi was that Spain also controlled the city and port of New Orleans. Spanish subjects could ship their products to international markets down the Mississippi and through New Orleans. Americans could only export their products over the mountains by pack train to the east.

Though Spain was reluctant to take direct action against the Americans, they were open to dealing with American traitors. Following the collapse of the State of Franklin, some of the involved parties did look to Spain as Washington had feared. At one point in the late 1780's, Spain entertained the conspirators who sought to detach the territory that had been the State of Franklin from the United States and align it with Spain. This incident is known as the Spanish Conspiracy. If successful, it would have extended Spanish control to the eastern point of the current state of Tennessee. This area, south of the Cumberland Gap, bordered Daniel Boone's Wilderness Road. Boone's road was the main access point at that time across the southern Appalachian Mountains. Not only would Spain control territory up to the mountains, they could also put pressure on passage through the Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Road. The Northwest Territories would then be even more landlocked with the British to the north, Spain to the south as well as the west, and the Appalachian Mountains to the east.

The Spanish conspiracy was instigated by a doctor and former North Carolina congressman, James White. Kentucky statesman and military leader James Wilkerson was also

[3] John Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 13.

known to have secretly sworn fealty to the Spanish Crown. The reasons for the intrigue were based on several factors. Certainly, those involved were looking to advance their own personal interests. Other reasons include certain Tennessee River valley bottom lands that were coveted by land speculators. These lands were claimed by Native American nations, a claim honored by the United States. If the conspirators could attach this land to Spain, they could claim these rich bottom lands. Another factor was Spanish protection against conflict with the Native American nations who claimed these lands. Up to this point, Spain had provided weapons to the Native Americans who were attempting to check American emigration. An alliance with Spain would turn an antagonist into an ally.

Perhaps the strongest argument for Spanish control of the area would be that the region could ship exports down the Mississippi River and through the port of New Orleans. As Kevin Barksdale states, "Eastern political leaders opposed to opening the Mississippi River to American commercial traffic argued that it would further escalate the tremendously expensive Indian wars, result in the loss of tax revenue, and could sever the United States into two competing sections."[4] This again illustrates the fear held by eastern leaders of a national schism along the mountains. Rather than pressure Spain to open the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans, the eastern leadership deemed it wiser to keep the Trans-Appalachian region accessible only through the mountainous trails. This strategy of the eastern politicians antagonized the western settlers. If it were to backfire, the people of the western settlements could choose to look to Spain instead of the United States.

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[4] Kevin T. Barksdale, "The Spanish Conspiracy on the Trans-Appalachian Borderlands, 1786-1789." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, 13, no. ½, (Spring, 2007): 104-5.

Washington's concern regarding the western settlers looking south to Spain could have been tempered by several factors. There were several aspects of Spanish Louisiana that had prevented even more emigration prior to these events. The Spanish control of the lower Mississippi and treatment of Americans had caused some hard feelings. Edwin Sparks relates one example "Thomas Amis, a North Carolina trader, in 1786, had ventured in a flatboat, loaded with small wares, down the Mississippi river below the Spanish boundary line. He was seized and imprisoned; his goods were confiscated; and he was at length turned loose to tramp his weary way back to his home…He left a trail of hostility to Spain all along his journey."[5] Such treatment of American traders caused long lasting resentment towards the Spanish.

Many American settlers did cross the Mississippi River to settle in the Spanish held Louisiana Territory. This migration across the Mississippi slowed considerably by 1795 due to several factors. In this year, the Pickney treaty finally opened the port of New Orleans to American shipping. This year also marked the end of the Northwest Indian Wars. This war started ominously for the United States as General St. Clair suffered a disastrous defeat at the Battle of the Wabash of 1791. St. Clair's losses of over ninety percent of his force had set an ominous tone for future of western emigration. Three years later, General "Mad Anthony" Wayne's victory at the 1794 Battle of Fallen Timbers was the deciding battle. The ensuing 1795 Treaty of Greenville resulted in Native American Nations ceding large amounts of territory for American emigration. With the Native Americans defeated, and the Mississippi open to shipping, the Spanish threat was generally mitigated.

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[5] Edwin Erle Sparks, *The Expansion of the American People: Social and Territorial* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1901), 189.

There were other reasons why more emigrants did not settle in Spanish territory. As with Britain, Spain was a monarchy. Freedom loving, independent Americans took their liberty and self-determination seriously. They did not want to return to the status of being a subject of a European monarch. Reynolds, again from his memoirs, states one further important reason why some refused to settle in Spanish lands. His family and many others decided to settle in the Northwest Territory on the east side of the Mississippi. He states "In the permit to settle in the Domains of Spain, it was required that my father should raise his children in the Roman Catholic Church. This pledge was a requisition of the Government in all cases, and my father refused to agree to it."[6] The question of religion was too much for many of the Protestant settlers. While some may have been willing to offer at least a tepid allegiance to the Spanish King, they were not willing to convert to Catholicism. In spite of these objections, Spain posed problems for the southwest territories. While the British had limited influence south of the Ohio River, they were still a concern in the Northwest Territories.

Washington's letter noted his fear that the westerners might look to the British in the north. While the settlers in the Southwestern Territory still held a great deal of animosity from the war, the British had limited military operations in the Northwest Territories. Unlike the Spanish, the British and the Americans shared a common heritage and language. Washington's fears of Americans joining with the British was certainly justified as some communities in New England looked favorably towards the north. Washington himself had been betrayed by his general Benedict Arnold who had defected to the British in 1780, again just four years prior to this letter. Arnold had distinguished himself as a Patriot General in the Battle of Saratoga in

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[6] Reynolds, *My Own Times,* 18.

1777 that ended Burgoyne's campaign in New York. Previous to this battle Arnold had joined with Ethan Allen to take Fort Ticonderoga in 1775. Arnold defected during the Revolutionary War. Following the war, Vermont's Ethan Allen and his brothers Ira and Levi also looked north towards the British in Canada.

Before becoming the fourteenth state in 1791, the Vermont Republic was divided over the question of its becoming a part of the United States or of its joining with Canada. Vermont, like the Trans-Appalachian region, was separated from eastern ports by difficult mountainous terrain. It was easier for Vermont farmers to ship their produce north by water on Lake Champlain to the British controlled St Lawrence River. S.F. Bemis describes the situation, "The position of Vermont in this respect closely resembles the relation of the Kentucky and Tennessee settlements to the closure of the Mississippi Navigation, and was productive of much the same result…a strong party in the Sovereign State of Vermont was against joining the Union, and favored an alliance with Great Britain, or even return to British Rule."[7] Levi Allen, brother of Ethan, even went to London to pursue an alliance between Vermont and Great Britain. London was cool to the Allen brothers and their faction, preferring to be cautious with the Americas due to a Pacific Coast incident with Spain at the time of Levi's visit. The actions of the former Patriot commanders Arnold and Allen demonstrate how some who had been known patriots could choose to side with the British.

Washington's concern of the westerner settlers looking to the British could be tempered by a better understanding of the western view. John Reynolds, in his memoirs of Illinois,

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[7] S.F. Bemis, "Relations between the Vermont Separatists and Great Britain, 1789 – 1971," T*he American Historical Review,* 21, no. 3, (April 1916): 547.

provides insights such as at a shooting match in 1804. He states "Aged matrons frequently attended these shooting matches, with a neat clean keg of metheglin to sell…The old lady often had her knitting or sewing with her and would relate horrid stories of the Tories in the Revolution in North Carolina, as well as to sell her drink."[8] Settlers had come from many areas, including the southwest, bringing the southwestern British resentment with them. Reynold's narrative appears to make such sentiments acceptable to settlers at the turn of the century. In addition to lingering resentment from the war, the people of the Northwest Territories resented British forts on land that was ceded to the Americans in the Treaty of Paris. The British were also known to furnish arms to the Native Americans. This was a particular point of resentment before the end of the Northwest Indian War. Washington did have cause to be concerned about Americans looking to the British, but this was a more likely threat in Federalist New England than it was in the western territories.

Washington served as the first president of the United States from 1789 to 1797. The three states of Vermont, Kentucky and Tennessee, with their histories of domestic and international intrigues, had all achieved statehood and joined the Union under his administration. During his terms of office, the western territories surged with emigrants, including many from Europe. The Northwest Indian Wars had resulted in considerable mitigation of the Native American threat to the settlers. The Pickney Treaty had opened the lower Mississippi and the port of New Orleans to American shipping. Even without the National Road, by the end of his presidency, the western territories had become securely attached to the nation. Washington died

[8] Reynolds, *My Own Times*, 52-3.

in December of 1799, just a few years before the nation acted on his dream of a road through the mountains.

Chapter 3: Albert Gallatin, Perspective of a Problem Solver

Three of the four main proponents of the National Road, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and even the Senator from Kentucky Henry Clay, were from the eastern portion of Virginia. The fourth, Albert Gallatin, was a Swiss immigrant from Geneva. He was born into a well to do family, though orphaned at an early age. As a student at the Academy of Geneva, he was influenced by the works of Voltaire and Rousseau. Henry Adams notes his aptitude as a student stating, "With minds in this process of youthful fermentation, they came out into the world. Albert was graduated in May, 1779, first in his class in mathematics, natural philosophy, and Latin translation."[1] With this background, aptitude, and education, Gallatin, accompanied by his friend Serre, decided to leave Geneva and make their way in the United States.

Gallatin at first spent some time in New England. He struggled to make ends meet by trading in merchandise and teaching French. Gallatin however found the New England Federalism and society distasteful. Edwin Burrows notes, "Gallatin's almost instinctive antipathy to New England is a matter of more than passing interest. On the one hand, it clarifies his decision over the next few years to settle in western Pennsylvania. On the other, it seems in no way to anticipate his emergence, a decade or so later, as a key figure in the Jeffersonian movement."[2]

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[1] Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1880), 16.
[2] Edwin G. Burrows, "'Notes on Settling America:' Albert Gallatin, New England and the American Revolution," *The New England Quarterly* 58, no. 3, (Sept., 1985): 445.

Gallatin became involved in western Pennsylvania politics, serving in the Pennsylvania Assembly. Early in his political career, he was aware of the challenge posed to his state by the lack of good roads. Raymond Walters describes this stating, "As he jogged on horseback along the rough roads and mountain trails that connected his back-country home to the state capital to attend session of the legislature, Gallatin had ample opportunity to reflect on a need keenly felt by all Westerners – better means of transportation."[3] Later, Gallatin represented Pennsylvania in the U.S. Senate and House. His political position was as a Democratic-Republican. While generally aligned with Jefferson, his genius was in his ability to find a pragmatic middle ground between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans.

Gallatin's choice of western Pennsylvania placed him at the heart of an early American conflict. As Michael Hostetler states the situation, "Against great odds independence had been won, but at a great cost. At war's end, the former colonies were politically disunited, indebted, and geographically isolated."[4] In the west, the lack of specie put severe financial strains on the settlers. Most of the money in circulation was held by the wealthy in eastern cities. In 1786, the per capita cash on hand was $1.88, dropping to $0.31 in 1790.[5] The disproportionate amounts of available specie caused widespread foreclosures. This led the western settlers to the conclusion that the policies of the Federalist leaders and the National Bank were enriching the few at the expense of the many.

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[3] Raymond Walters Jr. "Spokesman of Frontier Democracy: Albert Gallatin in the Pennsylvania Assembly," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 1, no. 13, (July, 1946): 178.
[4] Michael J. Hostetler, "The Early American Quest for Internal Improvements: Distance and Debate," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 29, no. 1, (Winter 2011): 53.
[5] Terry Bouton, "A Road Closed: Rural Insurgency in Post-Independence Pennsylvania," *The Journal of American History,* 87, no. 3, (Dec., 2000): 864.

Some in western Pennsylvania responded by exercising their belief, based on the wording of the Pennsylvania Constitution, that they had the right to resist such injustices.[6] They responded by attempting to thwart the foreclosure and collections. Terry Bouton describes many of the strategies they employed: Sheriffs and magistrates would refuse to act on court writs; The members of a community would make roads impassable so that collections agents would not be able to seize property; They would also turn out in force at auctions and prevent bids. Even if someone did buy seized goods, they would not be able to transport them on the blocked roads.

With the passing of the United States Constitution in 1787, the federal government had more power than was held under the Articles of Confederation. The sheriffs and magistrates could now be held accountable for their failure to act. As tensions grew, conflict was sparked by a new excise tax on whiskey. This tax would be used to pay interest on war bonds, held by the wealthy eastern investors. Many of these bonds had been purchased by wealthy speculators at well below face value, but these new bond holders were demanding the government pay interest on the full-face value of the bond.

This tax hit the western settlers hard, as whiskey was their most profitable export. A pack horse could only haul so much weight through the mountain trails. A horse loaded with grain would bring little profit. If the grain were converted to whiskey, the profits would be greater. The new federal tax on whiskey ate up these meager profits, leading some to take firmer action. Boulton describes how collections agents were treated as had those during the Stamp Act protests against the British in 1765. Some collection agents were relieved of their collected taxes

[6] Bouton, "A Road Closed," 866.

as well as their ledgers. Some were tarred and feathered and otherwise abused. Finally, some Whiskey Rebels even assembled as local militias in Braddock's Field and marched in Pittsburgh. This conflict, known as The Whiskey Rebellion, was not limited to western Pennsylvania. Marco Sioli notes, "The same kind of protest was spreading in the Virginia and North Carolina backcountry and in Kentucky."[7] President George Washington weighed several options on how best to respond and decided on firm action. He took the field with government militia troops and quickly restored order. In the face of overwhelming government power, the Whiskey Rebels abandoned their cause and returned to their homes. The leaders were tried and convicted of treason. While they willingly admitted to rioting, they firmly denied the charge of treason. They believed they were patriots, acting within their rights as citizens to oppose what they saw as unjust government overreach.

The Whiskey Rebellion was actually a practical exercise in the question of the citizen's rights versus government authority. Saul Cornell describes the rebellion as "popular constitutionalism" and "plebeian radicalism" with the local militia acting as an agent of the local community. This was another Trans-Appalachian example of local authority, but this time it came in conflict with a stronger federal government. Cornell concludes "Whether framed as a direct challenge to federal power or conceptualized as a passive veto, the notion that the militia might serve as check on unjust federal policies remained a latent force to be reckoned with in early American constitutionalism."[8] Gallatin as a local political leader, was at the epicenter of

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[7] Marco M. Sioli, "The Democratic Republican Societies at the End of the Eighteenth Century: The Western Pennsylvania Experience," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 60, no. 3, (July 1993): 292.
[8] Saul Cornell, "Mobs, Militias and Magistrates: Popular Constitutionalism and the Whiskey Rebellion," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 81, no. 3, (2006): 902.

the rebellion. His response to the crises would set the pattern of his later contribution to the National Road.

The 1787 debate on the United States Constitution faced many issues, among these was that of national unity. Traditional political theory held that self-government could not work over a large territory. People separated by distance would not be able to function as a political body. James Madison in his 1787 essay *The Federalist No. 14* addressed this question while arguing for the advantages of a Republic versus a Democracy for the governing of such a territory. Madison stated "We have seen the necessity of the union as our bulwark against foreign danger, as the conservator of peace among ourselves, as the guardian of our commerce and other common interests, as the only substitute for those military establishments which have subverted the liberties of the old world, and as the proper antidote for the diseases of faction, which have proved fatal to other popular governments, and of which alarming symptoms have been betrayed by our own."[9]

Gallatin, like Madison, was a staunch supporter of the Union. Both saw the Union, not as a threat to plebian liberty, but as the vital element which guaranteed this liberty. Without the strength that comes from a unified nation, the country would face dissolution, and the parts would fall prey to other powers. Gallatin was a voice of moderation during the Whiskey Tax conflict. Gallatin, like many of the Democratic-Republicans, saw the whiskey tax as unjust, but was against armed resistance. He urged his fellow citizens to resort to their existing right under law to bring their grievance to the floor of Congress through their representative government. The power to change what they perceived to be an unjust law is through urging change or repeal

[9]James Madison, "The Federalist No. 14," *Madison Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1999), 168.

of the law, not in armed resistance. The option of rebellion was only to be used as a last resort, not while legal avenues were still available. Gallatin's words proved prophetic as just a few years later what has been called the Revolution of 1800 replaced Federalist John Adams with the Democratic-Republican candidate Thomas Jefferson, partly due to the votes of the western settlers.

In 1801, Jefferson selected Gallatin to serve as his Secretary of the Treasury. As such, Gallatin played an early role in the story of the National Road. His presence as a political leader in western Pennsylvania during the Whiskey Rebellion may have tainted him. Federalists were reluctant to confirm his appointment, so it was delayed until late in the year. However, his training and experience had prepared him for this role. This included his upbringing and education in Europe, his work as a surveyor with Washington in the 1784 Trans-Allegheny region, and his experience as a state and national politician. His pragmatic approach and ability to find common ground enabled him to promote resolutions for this important transportation project.

Gallatin's service as a legislator from western Pennsylvania was a constant reminder of the need for the road as he had made regular trips across the mountains to the Congress in Philadelphia. In January 1801, he made the journey to the new national capital in Washington. His journey to the new capital has been described as "Gallatin was late in arriving. Delayed by personal business, and then detained en route by rain and snow, he finally entered the new capital on January 12, 1801, a very cold, and weary traveler."[10] In his new role as Secretary of the Treasury, he could use his influence and talents to promote a road to the west.

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[10] Richard Mannix, "Albert Gallatin in Washington, 1801 – 1813." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington D.C.* Vo. 71/72, (1971,1972): 60.

Perhaps because western Pennsylvania was a difficult journey, Gallatin took an unusual step for a member of the Cabinet and moved into a house in Washington. This worked to his advantage as Mannix notes, "Because Gallatin was the only member of the Cabinet living near the Capitol, this house naturally became, in the evenings, a center of entertainment and discussion, one of the chief links between the White House and the administration supporters of Congress."[11] Gallatin maintained his house year-round, even when Congress recessed for the summer and others left the city. As the only cabinet minister in town, he would frequently handle routine government duties while forwarding more important matters to the President.[12] In his own way, preferring quiet conversation to speechmaking and society functions, Gallatin was able to influence the direction of the nation.

Gallatin became a cabinet member at a critical time in the nation's development. The nation was sharply divided into Federalist and Democratic-Republican factions, with opposing visions of the course of the new nation. Gallatin was primarily a unionist. He put national unity above party affiliation. Rozann Rothman says of him, "An understanding of Gallatin begins with the recognition that conciliation of at times conflicting objectives was his primary goal."[13] Rothman also notes how Gallatin worked to bring the two factions together, stating, "Gallatin is able to find a middle ground between Hamilton and Jefferson, which as will be shown is in certain respects a new ground."[14]

Gallatin had urged those protesting the Whiskey tax to preserve the union, and address their complaints through their rights as citizens. He likewise urged warring political factions to

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[11] Mannix, "Albert Gallatin in Washington," 69.
[12] Mannix, "Albert Gallatin in Washington," 72.
[13] Rozann Rothmann, "Political Method in the Federal System: Albert Gallatin's Contribution," *Publius* 1 no. 2, (Winter, 1972): 123.
[14] Rothmann, "Political Method," 124.

maintain unity, as this was the only way to preserve liberty. Rothmann concludes, "Gallatin's position was consistent. Both in writings and in his actions, he attempted to harmonize the at times conflicting principles of republicanism and nationalism. When he could balance these principles, the result was an indestructible Union composed of indestructible states."[15] The quiet, analytical Swiss emigrant, who enjoyed evenings at home in quiet conversation, was to become an agent of unity and progress in a new and sharply divided nation. Among Gallatin's achievements was infrastructure and transportation networks such as the National Road.

[15] Rothmann, "Political Method," 140.

Figure 2: Madonna of the Trail Statue at the Old Illinois State House on Gallatin Street in Vandalia, IL.

Chapter 4: Thomas Jefferson, Perspective of a Visionary

Thomas Jefferson had a vision for the United States. His ideal was that of an agrarian nation, composed of communities of family farms expanding westward. The people of the nation living in a republic, governed by the strong states and a limited federal government. The Democratic-Republican view has been expressed as "Personal freedom, human development, and republican virtue, they believed, were most likely to be found in an agrarian 'democratic' republic. Where government increasingly becomes the province of the few (and wealthy), popular government is remade into tyranny."[1] This view was in contrast with that of the Federalists who wanted a stronger central government. In 1800, the voters chose Jefferson over the Federalist Adams, and the Democratic-Republicans were in power.

Jefferson had a long history with the Trans-Appalachian territory. He served as Governor of Virginia, including the state's trans-Appalachian western territory, from June 1878 until June 1881. After this, he was a Virginia delegate to the Congress of the Confederation from November in 1783 to May in 1784. During this time in Congress, he was instrumental in writing the Land Ordinance of 1784. This was the first ordinance that would later evolve into the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. In the 1784 ordinance, Jefferson demonstrates his concern for national unity as he lists his conditions for the territories "First: That they shall for ever remain a part of this confederacy of the United States of America."[2] Other points address how the territories are to be taxed and governed, but national unity tops the list.

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[1] Raymond B. Wrabley Jr. "Nation-Building and the Presidency: Competing National Visions at the Founding," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 22, no. 2, (Spring, 1992): 270.
[2] Report from the Committee for the Western Territory to the United States Congress, March 01, 1784.

After his term in Congress, Jefferson was the United States Minister to France from May 1885 to September 1889. This placed him in Paris at the beginning of the French Revolution. He was present in France when the Bastille fell. This then, was the second time that Jefferson was present at a national revolution. Jefferson, like the Swiss born Gallatin, had first-hand observation of how mountainous geography marked natural lines for political states. Mountain chains like the Alps and the Pyrenees marked the separation of nations. During this time in Europe, he wrote a letter to James Madison in 1787. In this letter Jefferson speaks as if the separation of the United States was likewise inevitable along the mountainous divide. Writing about the issue of allowing Spain to maintain control of the Mississippi, he states, "And I will venture to say that the act which abandons the navigation of the Mississippi is an act of separation between the Eastern & Western country…If they declare themselves a separate people, we are incapable of a single effort to retain them."[3] Jefferson's concerns for national unity can be traced to these documents well before when he became president.

The election of 1800 was marked by conflict. There were four candidates; the Democratic-Republican candidates were Arron Burr and John Adams' Vice President Thomas Jefferson. The two Federalists were President John Adams, who was running for reelection, and Charles Pinckney. As in 1796, these candidates were not running as a President and Vice President team. The candidate with the most electoral votes would be President, and the candidate with the next highest vote count would be Vice President, regardless of party affiliation. In 1800, Jefferson and Burr tied with 73 electoral votes. The election was determined by the House of Representatives. There were sixteen states in the Union in 1800, and

[3] "Jefferson to Madison January 30, 1787." *Jefferson Writings*, 882-3.

each state had one vote. The eight Democratic-Republican states voted for Jefferson. Federalists, who saw Jefferson as a greater threat to their party and to the nation, cast their eight votes for Burr.

The election itself began to produce grumblings of secession and disunion. Democratic-Republicans saw Federalist manipulation as an attempt to hold onto power. As Joanne Freeman notes, "Contrary to Jefferson's rather rosy depiction of its resolution, there was talk of disunion and civil war, and indeed, two states began to organize their militia to seize the government for Jefferson if Burr prevailed."[4] This political unrest signaled danger for the Federalists. Alexander Hamilton, a long-time opponent of Burr, finally urged the selection of Jefferson. By 1803, the Twelfth Amendment had changed the process of electing the President and Vice President to these persons running as a team. Jefferson became President having first-hand experience of two revolutions, those of America and France. He had been Governor of a state with Trans-Appalachian territories. He had spent time in Europe with its geographically marked borders. Jefferson had considered the danger of such a national split in the United States. Now, as he took office, even his own election was marked by grumblings of disunion.

In his first term of office, Jefferson was faced with a new threat to national unity. At the turn of the 19th century, France was becoming a powerhouse in Europe, as Spanish power was beginning to wane. On October 1, 1800, a new international threat the Trans-Appalachian region remerged as France and Spain traded territories in the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso. Under the terms of this treaty, Spain returned New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory to France. This

[4] Joanne B. Freeman, "The Election of 1800: A Study in the Logic of Political Change," *The Yale Law Journal,* 108, no. 8, (June, 1999): 1963.

transaction was sure to cause concern for Jefferson and other leaders for a number of reasons. Sparks states this as "The rise of Napoleon had startled the world…The news that he had obtained from Spain the Louisiana country produced a powerful effect on America…Indeed, Louisiana might become a starting point for the spread of Napoleonic power over all America."[5] Spain had been struggling to hold territory, France was still expanding.

Unlike Spain, the French were less likely to force Catholicism on their American subjects. The Reign of Terror of the French Revolution had not spared the power of the Church. The Spanish crown had been a champion for the Church, but the revolutionary French had worked to disenfranchise the Church of land and power. In effect, the revolution had to a degree de-Christianized France. American settlers who balked at Spanish insistence of Catholic conversion might be more agreeable to French oversight.

The French, as a people and as a nation, were esteemed by the western settlers. The French, after all, were fellow revolutionaries. The Americans were grateful for French assistance in the American Revolution. Place names in the Northwest Territory honor those Frenchmen who had assisted the American war. These include as Lafayette and his fellow French military leaders Dubois and Fayette. Across the Mississippi were the cities of St. Louis and St. Genevieve. The western shore retained the French influence from earlier settlement. The Mississippi Valley was also home to French Acadian communities. The Acadians were French settlers from eastern Canada and the Maritimes. They had migrated to the Louisiana Territory following the Seven Years War in 1763. When the British took possession of Canada, they

[5]Edwin Erle Sparks, *The Expansion of the American People: Social and Territorial* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1901), 194.

displaced the Acadians into their other North American colonies. Rather than live under British rule, the Acadians made their way to French Louisiana. Only when they arrived and settled in the new land did they discover that the Louisiana Territory had been secretly ceded to Spain by the Treaty of Fontainebleau of 1762.

The Spanish governor did not actually arrive to assume power in New Orleans until 1766. By this time, the French refused to accept Spanish authority. The Acadians rebelled against the Spanish Governor and drove him away. Instead of becoming Spanish subjects, they offered their allegiance to the French king. The leaders of the Louisiana Rebellion claimed this as the right to self-determination, antedating Thomas Paine and the American Revolution by several years. Unfortunately for the Acadian rebellion, Spain returned in force, executed the leaders of the rebellion, and asserted control. The Acadians lived under Spanish rule, but they maintained their own communities. Now in 1800, Jefferson might have wondered how they and the other settlers would react to the return of France to the western territory. The Louisiana French might induce the American settlers to choose self-determination and align themselves with France. Through appeal, coercion or force, the whole Mississippi Valley from the Appalachians to the Rockies could become French Territory.

Napoleon did have aspirations for a North American empire. In 1801 he sent a military force to secure the city of New Orleans. Jefferson responded by sending Robert Livingston to France in an attempt to purchase New Orleans. The Spanish, meanwhile, delayed completing the transaction of ceding the territory to France. As Spain delayed the transfer of the Louisiana Territory to France, Napoleon's North American ambitions ended in disaster. His attempts to quell the slave uprising in Haiti ended in defeat, with great loss of his army. Faced with this

western defeat and a new war with Britain, Napoleon chose to sell the Louisiana Territory to the United States. Spain finalized the transfer of the territory to France on November 30, 1803, and France completed the sale to the United States on December 20 three weeks later. This sale of the Louisiana Territory ended the international threats to the western territory. Rather than Britain or Spain, the French control of the Louisiana Territory would have been the greatest international threat to Trans-Appalachian unity.

In 1804, Jefferson won reelection with his running-mate and new Vice President George Clinton. In 1805, Jefferson had a new reason to fear disunion, accusing his political opponent and former vice president Burr as an agent of disunion. Following his famous duel with Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr relocated to the western territories. There Burr joined with Kentucky leader James Wilkerson, who had survived his past involvement with Spain. Burr and Wilkinson were accused of being involved in a new intrigue. Most likely these two were plotting a filibustering campaign against Spanish control of the lower Mississippi.

When their movements were discovered, Wilkerson ended up denouncing Burr. Thomas Jefferson aggressively pursued a charge of treason. Jefferson explained his reasoning in an address to Congress stating, "Agreeably to the request of the House of Representatives, communicated in their resolution of the sixteenth instant, I proceed to state under the reserve therein expressed, information received touching an illegal combination of private individuals against the peace and safety of the Union, and, a military expedition planned by them against the territories of a power in amity with the United States, with the measures I have pursued for suppressing the same."[6] Burr of course was cleared of treason. Much of the evidence against

[6] "Special Message on the Burr Conspiracy, January 22, 1807." *Jefferson Writings*, 532.

Burr was from Wilkinson whose evidence was based on a document in Wilkinson's own hand that he claimed was copied from Burr's papers. James Lewis, in his book on the Burr Conspiracy states, "More recent works have generally accepted that Burr never intended to divide the union and that no threat existed. Evidence for Burr's intentions is too ambiguous, incomplete, and conflicting to draw solid conclusions. And the fact that his projects never matured places an assessment of their threat in the realm of counterfactual speculation."[7] History has been kinder to Aaron Burr than to James Wilkinson on the topic of loyalty and intrigue. Jefferson used the Burr plot as evidence of the danger of intrigues leading to possible disunion and the need to "cement" the nation together.

Washington and Gallatin had agreed on the need to link the eastern waters to the Ohio River. Jefferson and Gallatin continued this vision. A number of significant events during the Jefferson Administration worked to help make the road a reality. The 1802 petition for Ohio statehood had provided the means as Congress agreed with Gallatin's plan to use a portion of the funds from the sale of Federal lands to finance the project. In 1803, just twenty years after the acquisition of the Northwest Territory, the Louisiana Purchase added approximately 828,000,000 square miles to the nation. This essentially doubled the nation to slightly larger than all of western Europe. While the Louisiana Purchase finally secured the port of New Orleans, this massive amount of new territory raised the level of urgency for infrastructure improvements. In 1804, Lewis and Clark began their epic journey up the Missouri River. In 1805, the Tracy Report examined several possible routes to connect the Ohio River with eastern waterways, concluding that Fort Cumberland on the Potomac River in Maryland was the most practical point

[7] James E. Lewis Jr. *The Burr Conspiracy: Uncovering the Story of an Early American Crisis* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2017), 118.

of access. In 1806, Congress sided with Washington, Gallatin and Jefferson and passed *An Act to Regulate the Laying Out and Making a Road from Cumberland, in the State of Maryland to the State of Ohio*.

Gallatin was the intellectual who analyzed and worked out solutions to the problems of internal improvements. Jefferson used his leadership and vision to garner support. In 1807, Gallatin submitted his comprehensive, national transportation plan entitled *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury: on the subject of Public Roads and Canals: made in pursuance of a Resolution of the Senate, of March 2, 1807*. In his sixth State of the Union address in that same year, Jefferson, in a reference to Burr, denounced "private individuals." But he praised Lewis and Clark for their successful expedition, as well as those led by Zebulon Pike into southern Colorado and Thomas Freeman up the Red River. Jefferson concluded by noting surplus funds in the treasury, and he urged Congress to apply these funds to public improvements. His message included, "By these operations new channels of communications will be opened between the States, the lines of separation will disappear, their interests will be identified, and their union cemented by new and indissoluble ties."[8] Jefferson's rhetoric, joined with Gallatin's analysis, made Washington's dream a reality. Following the Jefferson administration, Gallatin remained as Secretary of the Treasury for President Madison, who continued the work on the National Road. In 1811, construction was finally begun at Fort Cumberland. In 1818, under the Monroe Administration, the National Road finally conquered the mountains and reached the Ohio River.

[8] Jefferson, "Sixth Annual Message," 529.

Chapter 5: Henry Clay, Perspective of a Nation Builder

Following Jefferson's presidency and Gallatin's report, the rhetoric on the National Road changed. Jefferson had spoken of the road as necessary to "cement" the union together. Jefferson's strong vision and leadership had helped change the political character of the nation from John Adam's Federalism to one along more Republican values. Now, under Madison's administration, the influence of the developing Republican values resulted in new threats to the nation's stability and unity. Influential southern politicians such as John Randolph of Virginia had a more conservative view of the direction of the nation. His view, stated as the Principles of '98, believed that the states had the right to reject federal legislation that they believed infringed on the rights of the states. Randolph and others looked to the future, fearing a strong central government would dictate policy to the states on issues such as slavery. Views such as these were popular with the anti-Federalist sentiment prevalent outside of New England. The American Revolution had freed them from a strong central government. As Democratic-Republicans, they were advocates for local and state authority. The National Road, as a federal project, became a target of these conservative Republicans.

The rhetoric on the National Road changed from how the road was needed to "cement" the union to how the road was needed to "preserve" the union. Rather than foreign or domestic threats, the lack of infrastructure itself would lead to disunion. During Jefferson's administration, the nation had almost doubled in size from 864,746 square miles to 1,681,828. This in comparison to Western Europe at 1,583,000 square miles illustrates the vast territory to be administered under a republican system of government. This was a far greater territory than

had ever attempted self-government. This truly was a new self-government experiment on a vast scale. The geographical challenges now became not only the mountains, but the territory itself spanning thousands of miles across a continent. New champions of national unity, a young John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay among them, took up the cause for internal transportation networks.

One of the first instances of the new rhetoric was used by Peter Buell Porter in a speech given during the 11th Congress in 1810.[1] Buell, a New York Congressman, spoke in support of canals linking Atlantic shipping with the Great Lakes. Much of his speech, like that of Gallatin's reports, addressed the economic advantages of improving infrastructure. Buell added alarmist rhetoric as agency for action by the legislature. In his speech he described the need for infrastructure describing it as "…not only an object of the first consequence to the future prosperity of this country, considered as a measure of political economy, but as a measure of State policy it is indispensable to the preservation of the integrity of this Government."[2] The threat to the Government he identifies as the geographical challenge presented by the Appalachians, stating, "This diversity and supposed contrariety of interest and pursuit between the people of these two great divisions of country, and the difference of character to which these occupations give rise, it has been confidently asserted and is still believed by many, will lead to a separation of the United States at no very distant day."[3]

Porter identifies the one, sole way to prevent this division is through links of commerce stating, "…it is by promoting this commerce, by promoting and encouraging this intercourse – it is by producing a mutual dependence of interests between these two great sections, and by these

[1] Phillip Buell Porter, *Canals and Roads 11th* Congress, February 1810.
[2] Porter, *Canals and Roads.*
[3] Porter. *Canals and Roads.*

means only, that the United States can ever be kept together."[4] Michael Hostetler notes this shift in the rhetoric as adding a transcendent aspect to the technical arguments. Hostetler describes this shift as "However, it appears that factual data alone lacked the persuasive and motivational force needed to provoke action. The progression of the debate shows that the facts gained persuasive power when they were rhetorically joined with broader, more transcendent appeals."[5] Porter here shifted the rhetoric from infrastructure being necessary for logistics and as an agency of unity, to infrastructure being the only option to prevent national disunion. As John Randolph and others were using their influence to check federal authority, Porter used the threat of imminent disunion to justify federal spending on transportation.

This debate on infrastructure spending then was part of the greater national debate on the role of the federal government. Everyone agreed on the need for interstate infrastructure, but fears of a growing federal government, with an elite ruling political class, made it difficult to pass funding for transportation projects. Events during the Madison administration impacted the debate on transportation, both for and against. The Jefferson Embargo Act of 1807, in response to British and French infringements on American neutrality caused economic hardship on eastern manufacturers. With no European markets, eastern manufactures desperately needed internal transportation networks as an outlet for their wares. The War of 1812 changed the dynamic on the funding for the National Road. A project like this was seen as generally Federalist legislation. During the war, Federalist manufacturers and exporters in New England were seen as sympathetic to the British. Anti-federalist sentiment fed into the states' rights faction during

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[4] Porter, *Canals and Roads.*
[5] Michael J. Hostetler, "The Early American Quest for Internal Improvements: Distance and Debate," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric,* 29, no. 1, (Winter, 2011): 59.

and after the war. On the one hand, as troop movements had been restricted by bad roads, the war illustrated the need of improved transportation for national security. As these opinions and factions were being formed, two bills introduced in Congress following the war were to have an impact the funding for the National Road.

In 1816, the first of these bills brought on a crisis for Congress. The Compensation Act of 1816, simply put, authorized a fifteen hundred annual stipend for members of Congress. This brought on an unexpected surge of resentment from the voters. The act struck the anti-Federalists as representative of a wealthy, ruling elite they had feared for so long. C. Edward Skeen reports the voter's reaction stating, "In the congressional elections of 1816, widespread public outrage resulted in the ouster of an unprecedented number of incumbents and served as dramatic evidence of declining deference to public officials."[6] About half of the incumbents failed to retain their seats.

Though largely backed by Republicans, the Act was seen as Federalist legislation and the Federalists suffered most heavily at the ballot box. Politicians became acutely aware of their tenuous hold on office, and they became much more attune to sentiments back home. Those who managed to hold their seats along with the new members of Congress became more sectional than previous legislators had been. Funding and oversight of the National Road, among other issues, had to be presented in a way that would be acceptable to their constituents. Politicians from conservative Republican districts in particular, while in favor of internal improvements, were now careful not be labeled as having Federalist sympathies. Instead of using their own

[6] C. Edward Skeen, "'Vox Populi, Vox Dei:' The Compensation Act of 1816 and the Rise of Popular Politics," *The Journal of the Early Republic,* 6, no. 3, (Autumn, 1986): 254.

judgment of whether this or that legislation was worthwhile, those in Congress also had to make sure they could justify their support with their voters.

John C. Calhoun survived the purges of the Compensation Act, and at this point in his political career became an advocate for internal improvements. According to John Larson, Calhoun believed "The political health of the republic was at stake, and the experience of the late war had shown too well how fragmented and particular were the American people."[7] In addition to this fragmented nation, Calhoun was also concerned by the nation's immense size as John Grove notes, "Calhoun was convinced that the greatest threat to political unity and harmony in America was the vast extent of territory."[8] In 1817, a new national bank produced a bonus of funds. Encouraged by the windfall, John Calhoun introduced the Bonus Bill. This bill would earmark certain funds from the new bank for internal improvements. Calhoun proposed these funds to "conquer space." Calhoun was joined by Henry Clay to fight for the passage of this bill. President Madison was also an early supporter of the bill.

The bill met with resistance from strict southern sectionalists such as Thomas Bolling Robertson of Louisiana. The people of Robertson's district would be taxed for improvements like the National Road, while receiving few funds in return. Though his motives were likely sectional, Robertson objected that the bill violated a narrow reading of the Constitution. Calhoun defended the bill with a much broader argument that the Constitution "was meaningful only if it facilitated the survival and practice of the government."[9] Sectionalists were able to modify the

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[7] John Lauritz Larson, "'Bind the Republic Together': The National Union and the Struggle for a System of Internal Improvements," *The Journal of American History,* 74, no. 2, (September, 1987): 378.
[8] John G. Grove, "Binding the Republic Together: The Early Political Thought of John C. Calhoun," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 115, no. 2, (April 2014): 110.
[9] Larson, "Bind the Republic," 379.

Bonus Bill so that the funds, rather than being administered on the federal level, would be allocated to the states proportionally to their populations. Madison, though an early proponent of the bill, now determined the final version as unconstitutional and vetoed it. Larson concludes Calhoun and Clay's role as "Earnest nationalists at this juncture, both men wanted to consolidate the Union with a system of roads and canals, and they would play the game of politics to achieve that end…They genuinely believed that the Union would collapse if its parts were not soon forcibly bound together."[10] Calhoun had made the case that as Hostetler states, "restrictions of federal jurisdiction written into the Constitution could not possibly be construed in such a way as to endanger the union itself."[11] Calhoun's early views of the union were to change over the next few years, but during the Madison Administration, he was a powerful proponent for infrastructure projects such as the National Road as a means of preserving the nation.

Some of the strongest rhetoric for the National Road was spoken by Henry Clay, and at a time when western nationalism seemed secure. Clay was born in eastern Virginia, and his family later moved to Lexington Kentucky. Clay began his political career as a Democratic-Republican. Later, as a founder of the Whig Party, he was a proponent of the American System. With similarities to the earlier Federalism, this was an economic system that promoted protective tariffs, a national bank and infrastructure improvements such as roads and canals. These tools would promote stability for national development, the economy. Primarily, the American System promoted infrastructure to link manufacturing, agriculture for improved internal commerce and communication. The National Road, as an integral part of the infrastructure,

[10] Larson, "Bind the Republic," 383.
[11] Hostetler, "The Early American Quest," 69.

received strong backing by Clay and his supporters. Some of these other supporters of the National Road justified it by citing the General Welfare clause in the Preamble of the Constitution. Other constitutional arguments included federal authority for post roads, national security and commerce. Proponents presented a broad view of the Constitution to support the National Road, and opponents argued against it with a narrow view of the same document. Few opposed the idea of internal improvements, but the question remained federal versus sectional spending and oversight.

Clay, like Gallatin, believed in the necessity of internal improvements. Unlike Gallatin's quiet, intellectual analysis, Clay used his great oratory skills. A contemporary of Clay described his speaking ability as "His greatest forte, among various and other eminent qualities, the gift of eloquence bestowed on him by nature…A person must be present and hear and see him in some of his extraordinary efforts to realize and appreciate his eloquence…The brilliant and illuminated countenance of the orator, his eye flashing inspiration, and his tone and gestures, cannot be conveyed to others who were not present at the scene."[12] Gallatin's report contained logical, technical arguments for internal improvements. Clay's speeches are an example of what Hostetler described as "adding a transcendent aspect" to Gallatin's work.

In 1818, following Madison's veto of the Bonus Bill, Clay made a speech in Congress about internal improvements. In this speech Clay made statements such as "Considering, as I do, the existence of the power as of the first importance, not merely to the preservation of the Union of the States, paramount as that consideration should be above all others, but to the prosperity of

[12] John Reynolds, *My Own Times: Embracing Also, the History of My Life* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1879), 293.

every great interest of the country, agriculture, manufactures, commerce, in peace and in war, it becomes us solemnly, and deliberately, and anxiously to examine the constitution, and not to surrender it, if fairly to be collected from a just interpretation of that instrument."[13] He goes on to state, "We should equally avoid that subtle process of argument which dissipated into air the powers of this government, and that spirit of encroachment which would snatch from the State powers not delegated to the federal government. We shall thus escape both the dangers I have noticed – that of relapsing into the alarming weakness of the confederation, which is described as a mere rope of sand; and also, that other, perhaps not the greatest danger, consolidation. No man deprecates more than I do, the idea of consolidation; yet between separation and consolidation, painful as would be the alternative, I would greatly prefer the latter."[14] Clay, in this speech cautions that a too great emphasis on state authority against central federal power itself endangers the very union of the states. In his opinion, the threat of centralized government power, while potent, is the better alternative of the threat of too much state control.

In 1825, Clay spoke in favor of a funding bill to extend the Cumberland Road. In this speech, he is still cautioning against the danger of disunion of the western states. The Niles' Register reports his speech "Yet he would say thus much; that he considered the question as to the existence and the exercise of a power in the general government to carry into effect a system of internal improvements, as amounting to the question whether the union of these states should be preserved or not – a question which involved the dearest hopes and the brightest prospects of our country."[15] Later in the speech, the Register states, "Mr. C. thought that the principle of

[13] Henry Clay, *Internal Improvements and the Power of Congress*, March 13, 1818.
[14] Clay, *Internal Improvements* 1818.
[15] "Mr. Clay's Speech," *Niles' Register* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 5, 1825. 357.

preservation itself afforded sufficient argument in support of the measure now under construction: He knew, indeed that all questions which glanced at the union of the states, and the possibility of its severance, should be touched lightly, and with a caution hand…I (said Mr. Clay), am not one of those who are in favor of covering our eyes, and concealing from ourselves the dangers to which we may be exposed."[16]

In speeches such as these, Porter, Calhoun and Clay resort to their oratory skills, using alarmist rhetoric, to further their support for internal improvements such as the National Road. As factions formed and established political dogmas for the new century, mere analytical details as found in the Gallatin report could be too easily set aside. The transcendent, fiery speeches were used to keep legislation such as the National Road on the table. These speeches could tend towards exaggerated consequences that while effective, did not portray the true state of affairs in the west.

[16] "Mr. Clay's Speech" 359.

Chapter 6: Perspective of the Western Settlers

The settlers of the Northwest Territories were far from being a homogenous people. Instead, settlement patterns have been referred to as "mosaic." Robert Swierenga describes the settlement as "Over time, particular families from particular staging areas migrated over particular paths to particular destinations, bringing with them as part of their cultural baggage their particular values and folkways."[1] The earliest Europeans in the Northwest Territories were the scattered French trappers, traders and explorers. Following the Seven Years War, France ceded the Northwest Territory, along with Canada, to the British in the 1763 Treaty of Paris. The British denied settlers access to the Northwest Territory in accordance with their alliances with the Native American nations. The British intended to keep the American colonies restricted to the eastern seaboard.

Twenty years later, the 1783 Treaty of Paris ceded the Northwest Territory to the United States, and American settlers gradually began to move into these lands, along several distinct patterns. Robert Swierenga described the three theories to migration patterns.[2] The first being what he calls "latitude-specific." In this pattern people moved on east-west lines as their architecture, clothing, housekeeping and agricultural backgrounds would be easier to adapt to a similar climate. An example of latitude-specific would be settlers from Maryland or New Jersey migrating to the Ohio River Valley. The second pattern are those who sought to travel the least distance. An example of this pattern would be Upper South settlers from Kentucky or Virginia

[1] Robert P. Swierenga, "The Settlement of the Old Northwest: Ethnic Pluralism in a Featureless Plain," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 9, no. 1, (Spring, 1989): 76.
[2] Swierenga, "The Settlement of the Old Northwest," 77.

who merely moved to the north bank of the Ohio River. The third pattern is referred to as "chain-migration." Swierenga describes this as "Once a viable ethnic community took hold in a new locale, letters back home induced more and more relatives and friends to come in an extended migration chain."[3] These chains could have their source in a community from an eastern state or from a foreign nation. The chain migration could also have its source in an affiliation, such as a religious group. Morris Birkbeck helped settle a community of British emigrants along the Wabash River in Illinois. He wrote a number of letters to encourage other British emigrants to join this community. These three primary migration patterns built the "mosaic" of settlement in the Northwest Territory. Many ethnic communities still celebrate their cultural heritage, as some communities have an annual celebration such as Swedish Days, or an Octoberfest.

This migration created a true borderland area as it caused friction with the existing Native American nations and the remaining French communities. Among the early American settlers were veterans of the Revolutionary War. These veterans were awarded portions of military tracts, known as bounty lands, as compensation for their service. John Peck notes the popularity of these tracts among veterans, noting, "Many of the officers and soldiers that accompanied General Clark in his expedition became enamored with the country, returned with their families and formed the early settlements."[4] Jacob Burnet described these veteran settlers stating "The early adventurers to the North-western Territory, were generally men who had spent the prime of their lives in the war of Independence. Many of them had exhausted their fortunes in maintaining the desperate struggle; and retired to the wilderness to conceal their poverty, and

[3] Swierenga. "The Settlement of the Old Northwest," 77.
[4] John Mason Peck, *A Gazetteer of Illinois, in Three Parts* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1837), 87.

avoid companions mortifying to their pride, while struggling to maintain their families and improve their condition."[5] The military tracts provided compensation to the veterans without straining the badly depleted national treasury, and the areas settled by these battle-tested veterans helped to secure the territory. The veterans were rewarded for their service. Those who opted for these lands had a chance for a new start, in a new community, and they established communities of strong militia in the sparsely settled territory.

Most of the early American settlers were the "shortest-distance" emigrants from the Upper South states of Virginia and Kentucky. These settlers merely ferried across the river to make homes along the north bank of the Ohio River valley. These Upper South settlers were soon joined by a steady stream of the two other types of settlers. Those from New England made their way west along the Great Lakes or down the Allegheny to the Ohio River. These were joined by settlers from the Midlands. This region included settlers from New Jersey, Pennsylvania and northern Maryland and Virginia. This latter group made their way west using the mountain trails through Pennsylvania to access the Ohio River at Pittsburgh or Wheeling. The settlers from New England and the Midlands generally migrated using the latitude-specific pattern, sometimes including chain migration as well. Once settlers arrived into the western territories, many moved within and through the new land before finally establishing a permanent home. A community may have recorded a fast or slow overall rate of growth, but voter rolls indicate that the turnover of the citizenship was quite high. This has been described as a

[5] Jacob Burnet, *Notes on the Early Settlement of the North-Western Territory* (New York: D. Appleton & Co. Publishers, 1847), 42.

"swirling sea" of migration, especially in the cities.[6] Over a ten-year period, there would be only a small core of voters who remained from the previous years.

Before the construction of the National Road, the greatest challenge for emigrants was in making it to the Ohio River. The trails were narrow, a horse could only pull a light, narrow wagon, and the few road improvements were often washed away by the rains. One traveler described the path going up the mountain as a "cascade," as it was nothing more than a waterway. In his journal he states, "The only way to enable a single horse to drag after him his load, was, at every one of these petty cascades, to form a temporary inclined plane of stones or wood, or whatever material was nearest at hand; and with all our ingenuity, thrice were we completely stalled, and obligated to unload half our luggage to get on a few yards, and then reload."[7] This description is of a road used for more than western emigration. These mountain trails were also used for commerce between the east and the west as well as for the postal service. Perhaps most important of all, these were the military roads to move troops and supplies to the western territories. The mountainous roads ended at the Ohio River or its northern tributary the Allegheny.

Once settlers reached the river, they could ferry across the river and proceed west on unimproved wagon trails. Most however, descended the river in large flatboats known as Kentucky boats or Arks. These have been described as, "They are square, and flat-bottomed; about forty feet by fifteen, with sides six feet deep; covered with a roof of thin boards and accommodated with a fire-place…They require but four hands to navigate them; carry no sail

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[6] Kenneth J. Winkle, "The Voters of Lincoln's Springfield: Migration and Political Participation in an Antebellum City," *Journal of Social History,* 25, no. 3, (Spring, 1992): 605.

[7] William Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory to the Western States of North America; including a voyage out from Liverpool; the geography and topography of the whole Western country, etc.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819), 72-3.

and are wafted down by the current."[8] These flatboats were usually launched in company with a small group of other boats. Using groups of several boats with their thick, high gunwales was a means of protection against attacks by Native Americans. The flatboats could carry a great deal of weight and material, including horses and livestock.

Common destinations were the Great Miami and Little Miami River Valleys near Cincinnati, Ohio, and the Wabash River Valley along the Indiana and Illinois border. As the Ohio River turned south past the Wabash, many families would land at Shawneetown on the eastern edge of Illinois and cross overland to the rich Mississippi Valley floodplain known as the American Bottom across from St. Louis. A good voyage from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati would take about a week, with delays such as slow water or snags extending the trip up to a month. The boats were too heavy and cumbersome to attempt ascent up the Ohio River tributaries. Smaller craft could be used to row or sail up the tributaries when the currents were not too strong. Once at their destination on the Ohio, the flatboats could be broken apart and sold for lumber or used for building a homestead.

The emigration began slowly, but steadily increased over the years. By 1795, the Greenville Treaty ending the Northwest Indian War had quieted fears and opened up Native American lands to settlers, and the Pickney Treaty with Spain had opened the port of New Orleans to American shipping. As emigration increased, there was a fear that the territories were draining too many laborers away from eastern states. Eastern manufacturers had assumed the settlers would be the lazy and discontents. These would hardly be missed. However, some of

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[8] Thaddeus Mason Harris. *The journal of a tour into the territory northwest of the Alleghany mountains; made in the spring of the year 1803. With a geographical and historical account of the state of Ohio* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1805), 31.

the best classes of laborers and skilled workers began looking for a new life in the west. Europe also began to feel the effects of emigration and were alarmed by the numbers of workers leaving for the American west. As the Napoleonic Wars raged across European, some nations began to check the population losses due to emigration.

In the United States, eastern leaders began to protest the loss of their best workers, and started to use propaganda in an attempt to dissuade emigration. Frederick Ogg relates one incident as "Anti-emigration pamphlets were scattered broadcast, and, after the manner of the day, the leading western enterprises were belabored with much bad verse. A rude cut which gained wide circulation represented a stout, ruddy, well-dressed man on a sleek horse, with a label, 'I am going to Ohio,' meeting a pale and ghastly skeleton of a man in rags on the wreck of what had once been a horse with the label, 'I have been to Ohio'."[9] The western territories had always had always been portrayed as dangerous, and the western settlers as uncivilized. Now the western lands were portrayed as unhealthy as well.

The historical record demonstrates that lawmakers were concerned by several aspects of the Trans-Appalachian territories. In addition to the prospect of national disunion based on geographical terrain, they now faced the problem of the blood and sinew of the young nation moving west at an alarming rate. This migration may have lessened the fear of international interference, but it raised the danger of the western territories someday becoming independent of the United States. Many of the eastern lawmakers saw internal improvements such as roads and canals as an important, if not the only, agent in unifying and "cementing" the union. One question to be addressed is how did the western settlers view national unity? Were the people of

[9] Frederick Austin Ogg, *The Old Northwest* (Washington: Ross & Perry, 1919), 99.

the Trans-Appalachian territory as tenuous in their nationalism as eastern lawmakers portrayed in their speeches? A number of settlers and travelers left a record of their accounts of the western territories. These can be used to sketch an ethnographical account of the western settlers to determine if their national allegiance was as fragile as has been portrayed.

Five works, in particular, some of which have been referenced above, are detailed accounts of western travelers and settlers. Jacob Burnet settled in Ohio in 1796. He produced a book entitled *Notes on the Early Settlement of the North-Western Territory*.[10] John Reynolds was born in Pennsylvania in 1788 to Irish immigrant parents. They moved first to Tennessee, and then in 1800 to Kaskaskia in Illinois. Reynolds left his recollections in his book entitled *My Own Times: Embracing Also, the History of My Life.*[11] Thaddeus Mason Harris was a minister and Harvard librarian. In 1803, he traveled in the Northwest Territory and recorded his observations in a book entitled *The journal of a tour into the territory northwest of the Alleghany mountains; made in the spring of the year 1803. With a geographical and historical account of the state of Ohio*.[12] Morris Birkbeck was an English immigrant who settled on the Illinois side of the Wabash River. He published a collection of his correspondence and a travel journal entitled *Letters from Illinois* and *Notes on a Journey in America*, intending these to encourage other English immigrants to make their home in the territories.[13] William Amphlett was an English immigrant who made his home on the banks of the Ohio river. He wrote *The Emigrant's*

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[10] Jacob Burnet, *Notes on the Early Settlement of the North-Western Territory* (New York: D. Appleton & Co. Publishers, 1847), all pages.
[11] John Reynolds, *My Own Times: Embracing Also, the History of My Life* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1879), all pages.
[12] Thaddeus Mason Harris. *The journal of a tour into the territory northwest of the Alleghany mountains; made in the spring of the year 1803. With a geographical and historical account of the state of Ohio* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1805), all pages.
[13] Morris Birkbeck, *Letters from Illinois and Notes on a Journey in America* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1818), all pages..

Directory to the Western States of North America; including a voyage out from Liverpool; the geography and topography of the whole Western country, etc. as a guide for other British emigrants.[14] These sources represent an aspect of the historiography that are first-hand accounts, intending to give an accurate portrayal of the Trans-Appalachian territories, including history, society and culture. They complement each other on many topics, such as several describe the mounds left by the Mississippian Culture, with speculations as who built them and why. They are generally in agreement as well in descriptions of the politics, culture and society of the American west.

Some of these writers make a point to refute the reports of the west as being unhealthy and uncivilized. William Amphlett in particular addresses the health concern, writing, "I believe that by far the greater part of the reports that represent the lower counties on the Ohio as unhealthy, are altogether untrue; or so exaggerated as to give a very false picture of the real state of the country."[15] Later he writes "Unfavorable reports were industriously circulated last summer, concerning the ill health of the British settlers, but entirely without foundation. With all the privations and fatigues inseparable from a new settlement, there was less disease than might have been expected, if every family had been at their old homes in England."[16]

Morris Birkbeck addressed the belief in the western settlers being uncivilized as he writes "I have good authority for contradicting a supposition that I have met with in England, respecting the inhabitants of Indiana; - that they are lawless, semi-barbarous, vagabonds, dangerous to live among. On the contrary, the laws are respected, and are effectual; and the manners of the people

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[14] William Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory to the Western States of North America; including a voyage out from Liverpool; the geography and topography of the whole Western country, etc.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819).
[15] Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory,* vii-viii.
[16] Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory,* 177.

are kind and gentle to each other, and to strangers."[17] Birkbeck continues "As to the inhabitants of towns, the Americans are much alike, as far as we have had an opportunity of judging. We look in vain, for any striking difference in the general deportment and appearance of the great bulk of Americans, from Norfolk on the eastern coast, to the town of Madison in Indiana."[18]

Amphlett and Birkbeck both attest first-hand experience in the western lands to refute the propaganda that would dissuade further migration to the western territories. These two writers directed their correspondence to their friends in England, but Birkbeck makes another point in his letters, targeting those in the eastern states as he writes "Ignorant as they are in Europe of the inhabitants of the western states, they are fully as much so on the eastern side of this republic."[19] Birkbeck's letter reflects the western view that people of their own nation have a poor understanding of life west of the mountains.

The works left by these writers do more than refute erroneous beliefs, they also describe the culture and values of the western settlers. Their writings support the concept of the western culture as a mosaic rather than a new homogenous culture. While there were diverse elements, some shared cultural traits do emerge. The population was made up of white, African-American and Native-American people. The culture of the dominant white settler was a paradox, as they held to the idea of an egalitarian society while still retaining a distinct caste system. They were racist, with a mix of tolerance. Even among the few abolitionists, their egalitarian views would not extend to other races. The settlers were strongly integrated into their local societies for general wellbeing and security. They were spiritual, but not overtly religious. They were a

[17] Birkbeck, *Letters,* 87.
[18] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 88.
[19] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 96.

society in flux, and they eventually amalgamated themselves into a new national subculture – that of the Midwest, and they were patriots.

The earliest settlers, those from the Upper South, introduced their culture and values as well as their agriculture, architecture and speech patterns to the Ohio Valley. For the most part, the early Upper South culture was similar to most frontier cultures. There was a vibrant local society. People helped each other and were helped by others in turn. They relied on their community as much as on themselves. People were expected to face danger with courage and extend hospitality to those in need. There was an expectation that newcomers would conform to these social ideals.

There were few churches in the early settlements. Baptist or Methodist itinerant missionaries would come through and hold camp meetings, or they would use the local court house for preaching. Services were irregular, but they were well attended. Frederick Ogg speaks of the Upper South migrants saying, "They were not so pious as the New Englanders, though they were capable of great religious enthusiasm, and their morals were probably not inferior. Their houses were poorer; their villages were not so well kept; their dress was more uncouth, and their ways rougher. But they were hardy folk – brave, industrious, hospitable, and generous to a fault."[20] The history and the development of the new western culture has been a subject for the historiography as early as the 1890's when Frederick Jackson Turner proposed his social evolution and his Frontier Thesis. There have been a number of modern scholarly studies on the emerging culture, several of which have been referenced in this paper. However, there are two

[20] Ogg, *The Old* Northwest, 102.

aspects of the new western culture that were instrumental in the development of infrastructure such as the National Road. These are race and western nationalism.

At the time of the first-hand accounts of the western territories, the western culture was beginning to change. The Upper South culture was still entrenched, especially in the southwestern portion of the Northwest Territory. The Upper South culture included a limited caste system with it. This caste system was comparable to the Cracker and Planter societies of the deep south. James Simeone describes how the lower-class whites identified themselves as "white folk" as opposed to the wealthy "big folk." As lower, working-class whites, they saw themselves as of a lower social standing than the wealthy, while still believing themselves superior to African and Native-Americans.[21] There were also social class rules for the Upper South culture. One example was dueling. Nicole Etcheson describe class-acceptable forms of violence saying, "The form that violence took depended on class: Upper-class Southerners dueled and lower-class Southerners brawled. But any engagement in violence was also an affirmation of equality. One may shrug aside an affront from one's social inferior with impunity to one's honor. To fight a man because of an insult implies that one accepts him as an equal."[22] The culture was a bit of a paradox, as in other areas, people had more of an egalitarian view. Birkbeck noted, "…witness the spirit and good sense with which men of all ranks are seen to engage in discussion on politics, history or religion; subjects which have attracted more or less, the attention of every one."[23] In areas of honor, there were distinct social expectations. In the realm of speech and liberty, the society expected equality.

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[21] James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), 6.
[22] Nicole Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996) 30.
[23] Birkbeck, *Letters,* 128.

This spirit of equality did not extend to African-Americans. Some southern emigrants even brought slavery into the territory. The Northwest Ordinance had specifically banned slavery, but the ban was rarely enforced. The courts issued narrow rulings that determined that the ordinance merely precluded bringing new slaves into the territory. The courts based this narrow ruling as recognizing the slaves as property and that the Northwest Ordinance protected property rights as well. Those that did bring in new slaves were allowed to skirt the law by holding slaves under indentured servitude contracts with grossly exaggerated terms of service. These contracts of indenture were enforced by the courts as strongly as any slave would face in the south. Indenture contracts could be bought and sold just as could any slave. This practice was tolerated as it was limited and did not lead to a large slave population as in the south.

While slavery was tolerated, it did not have widespread support. There was a referendum to change the Illinois Constitution in 1824, with the understanding that the new constitution would likely make Illinois a slave state. The people of Illinois voted down the referendum, not because they were against slavery, but primarily for economic reasons. Money was scarce and working people did not want to have to compete against slave labor for jobs. An additional reason they were against slavery was that they did not want to live under the threat of a slave uprising. Instead of slavery, Black Laws were passed to limit the numbers and rights of African-Americans living in the territory.

As the National Road continued to push through the Appalachian Mountains, many more settlers continued to arrive from New England, the Midlands and Europe. This new emigration changed the cultural dynamics, and the question of slavery north of the Ohio River was settled. Abolitionists began to have an impact on the territory and the region was crisscrossed by the underground railroad. The Northwest Ordinance was based largely on Jefferson's Land

Ordinance of 1784. In this earlier ordinance, Jefferson's draft attempted to include slave-free language, similar to that which failed to make its way into the later U.S. Constitution. The 1787 Northwest Ordinance however did finally ban slavery in the territory. Jefferson was a forward-looking leader. When he spoke of the need for a National Road to "cement" the Trans-Appalachian territories, he would have known someday this would result in a number of free states added to the Union.

Political leaders from the southern slave-holding states had supported the National Road during the Jefferson Administration. The Northwest Territories began to increase in population and form into new free states. The formerly dominant Upper South culture began to diminish as the cultural mosaic was balanced by other immigrants. As the new western mosaic culture developed, the southern states' support for the National Road began to wane. The south became concerned with the growing populations and the increased political power of the north. Coupled with this concern, the federal government briefly experienced expanded power following the War of 1812.

To the slave-holding south, federal infrastructure improvements seemed to them as an avenue, not just for transportation, but for federal overreach. If the federal government could exert interstate authority on transportation, it could exert authority on other issues including slavery. Southern leaders began to balk at funding for infrastructure, using the argument that it was unconstitutional. In 1830, two federal infrastructure bills failed to make it through Congress. The interstate Buffalo to Washington to New Orleans Road Bill and the subsequent in-state Kentucky Maysville Road Bill were both blocked by proslavery Southern votes. Appeals to funding infrastructure improvements in order to preserve national unity were not

enough to overcome the southern bloc. Federal funding, oversight and control of the National Road was nearing an end.

From the time of Washington's letter to Harrison until Clay's fiery speeches, political leaders presented a west in danger of disunion. This was a legitimate concern, but it was based on speculation. While there had been some international and domestic intrigues, they never developed into an actual threat of disunion. The western settler's own level of patriotism and nationalism had been sufficient to "cement" the western territories to the eastern states. The early writers, with their first-hand observations, described the settlers as having a strong commitment to liberty, and an attachment to their American heritage.

Morris Birkbeck mentioned the western passion for liberty as an integral part of the culture in a number of his letters. He wrote, "Liberty is no subject of dispute or speculation among us Back-woods men: it is the very atmosphere we breathe."[24] This sentiment is echoed by John Reynolds as he states, "Although the pioneers knew little and cared less about literature, yet, they entertained just and sound principles of liberty. No people delighted in the free and full enjoyment of a free government more than they did. This passion for freedom made strong impressions on them, and governed their actions and conduct to some extent, in almost everything. This idea of liberty gave them a personal independence and confidence in themselves that marked their actions through life."[25]

This commitment to liberty would conflict with the notion of the western settlers becoming political subjects of Spain or Britain. Birkbeck, in his letters to prospective English emigrants wrote at length about the advantages of becoming an American, rather than living

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[24] Birkbeck, *Letters,* 70.
[25] Reynolds, *My Own Times,* 40.

under English rule. One of his strongest arguments was in property rights as he stated in an early letter:

> An English farmer, to which class I had the honour to belong, is in possession of the same rights and privileges with the Villeins of old time, and exhibits for the most part, a suitable political character. He has no voice in the appointment of the legislature unless he happens to possess a freehold of forty shillings a year, and he is then expected to vote in the interest of his landlord: he has no concern with public affairs excepting as a tax-payer, a parish officer, or a militia man.[26]

In contrast to the English farmer who only rents his land, Birkbeck writes how in America the farmer can buy and sell his own ground.[27] Instead of rents rising over time, the land owned by the American farmer will increase in value through appreciation and by improvements. In America, the farmer can invest in his own holding, rather than working and improving land held by the local landowner.

John Reynolds, as the son of Irish immigrant parents also wrote on the anti-British sentiment. He wrote of this stating, "I have alluded to the invincible hatred of my father toward the British government, principally because the same feelings are shared by the vast majority of the Irish people, at this very hour. It was that spirit which impelled the Irish volunteers to seek the front ranks in every forlorn hope of our revolution."[28] This anti-British sentiment was widespread throughout the west. William Amphlett even refers to this as he describes the inns along the road in western Pennsylvania. He mentions the inns and the differences in those run by the Irish, the Germans or the Dutch. Of an English run inn, he states, "One only did we meet with kept by an Englishman, and that a most unhappy man, who had brought over with him all

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[26] Birkbeck, *Journey*, 8.
[27] Birkbeck, *Letters, 58.*
[28] Reynolds, *My Own Times,* 2.

his national pride and prejudice, of which he could not divest himself, and he evidently lived at variance with all his neighbors."[29] The attitude of his neighbors illustrates not only their anti-British sentiment, but also their tolerance of a pro-British innkeeper along the road. Amphlett even noted that a number of British emigrants to Canada reconsidered their choice and made their way south to the Northwest Territories.[30] The western settlers continued to resent British occupation of forts on American territory and the British arming and supplying Native Americans in an effort to keep American expansion in check.

There were anti-Spain sentiments in the western territories as well. Jacob Burnett described the level of resentment towards Spain for restricting access to the lower Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans.[31] He describes Spanish agents on the Ohio River claimed to be merchants. It was noted however that they had a large amount of money and little trade goods. The people suspected that the merchants were in fact agents involved in conspiracy against the United States. One agent was later found murdered on his boat, supposedly by robbers. Burnett writes how settlers met and demanded action from the federal government to open the Mississippi for shipping, threatening to take action themselves if needed. Spanish restrictions on navigation caused considerable resentment. The Spanish Conspiracy by Dr. White and James Wilkerson was the only incident of conspiracy with Spain, and it achieved nothing more than tainting the reputations of these two men. Liberty was too deeply ingrained in the western culture for the western settlers to consider subjecting themselves and their lands to Britain or Spain.

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[29] Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory,* 76.
[30] Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory,* 88.
[31] Burnett, *Notes on the Early Settlement,* 445.

Other western intrigues also failed to coalesce into a real threat to the Union. The Whiskey Rebels had limited support and were quickly scattered. In their defense, they adamantly denied the charge of treason, believing they had acted within their constitutional rights. The State of Franklin had broad local support in their attempt to join the Union as the fourteenth state. When a schism attempted to declare an independent state, the rest of the local faction turned against them. Aaron Burr had been welcomed as a distinguished visitor from the East. When he was accused of being a traitor, the people of the west joined in condemning him. Burnet described this as "…it was amusing to see those men, who had so recently been the most devoted attendants on the Colonel, and the most vocal in his praise, denouncing him as a traitor, and tendering their services to the Governor of the State, to arrest the culprit and bring him to justice."[32] These incidents have been cited as reasons to fear western disunion. In contrast, the reactions of the western settlers, while being a tolerant society, had no place for traitors.

The western citizens celebrated their national heritage. Many of the early place names reflected their ties to the Revolutionary War. Counties were often named after the nation's founders such as Washington, Adams, Franklin, Hamilton and Jefferson. Revolutionary war hero such as Greene, Marion, Warren and Montgomery were honored as well. Even cities were established with names like Union Town, Bunker Hill, and Mount Vernon. The western settlers gathered together to have a holiday celebration on July 4th. Reynolds describes this as "The celebration of the Fourth of July was frequently, in those early times, made by horse-races and other sports, to demonstrate the joy of the people."[33] The west even had its own version of the Liberty Bell for this occasion. When General Clark took the British fort at Kaskaskia on the

[32] Burnett, *Notes on the Early Settlement,* 295.
[33] Reynolds, *My Own Times,* 65.

Mississippi river on July 4, 1778, the citizens rang the bell at the Catholic Church to celebrate. The bell, originally a gift from the French King Louis XV, was then rung annually to celebrate Independence Day. The bell is still housed in a small visitor's center in Kaskaskia. When the National Road finally reached the Ohio river, the Conestoga wagons that transported freight were all panted red, white and blue in honor of the nation's flag. The western citizens celebrated their nationality and heritage as Americans.

The western citizens were separated from the east by distance and terrain, but they were still informed in their nation's politics. There were local newspapers, and Birkbeck noted that the settlers in Illinois received eastern newspapers as well as he states, "We are not quite out of hearing of the world and its bustle, but the sound is rather long in reaching us. We receive the Philadelphia daily papers once a week, about a month after they are published."[34] He described the press as an essential agent of communication between east and west as he later stated, "Not a nerve is touched in the remotest corner of the Union but it vibrates in Washington, the sensorium of this immense and truly living body. From this centre of feeling intelligence, the impression is returned to the extremities with a freshness that is astonishing as it is delightful, through the unwearied activity of an unshackled press."[35] The mountains may have impeded transportation, but they only delayed delivery of newspapers. The media, as much or more than infrastructure, was a vital agency in national unity.

The western people were also involved in their country's politics. Their pride in the political process showed in their quest for statehood. They were anxious to achieve population thresholds and celebrated the day their territory joined the Union as a state of equal standing.

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[34] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 25.
[35] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 106.

The west was strongly Republican, solidly backing Madison, Monroe and Jackson. Ohio was the first to achieve statehood in 1802 and gave its three electoral votes to Jefferson. Indiana and Illinois followed Ohio's lead in voting Republican. It was not until 1836 that the western vote began to drift towards Whig candidates. This political alignment would seem to contradict the benefit the developing states could achieve from Federalist policies which would have promoted more internal improvements and infrastructure spending. As much as the western territories wanted infrastructure improvements, they were jealous of their liberty and suspicious of a strong central federal government. Amphlett explains this as "Respecting their intellectual attainments, I think it is in general restricted to political knowledge, they all know their RIGHTS, and will maintain them; and the frequency of elections is a constant lesson on their importance, as well as the best guarantee of the continuance of their liberty."[36]

The westerner became a type of the American culture. The Americans living east of the mountains were seen as Northern or Southern. The Trans-Appalachian settlers did not fit either of these definitions. While many retained the cultural traits of their origins, they began to take a pride in the identity of being a Westerner. Nicole Etcheson describes this as "Some unifying forces did exist in the Old Northwest. As a new region distinct from New England and the South, the West inspired its residents with a loyalty to its own needs and institutions. Political candidates such as William Henry Harrison, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson attempted to exploit that loyalty by running as Westerners."[37] Being from the west had political advantages. Most of the national votes were in the east, divided into northern and southern factions. Being from the west, the candidates could avoid objection from either of the eastern regions. Clay,

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[36] Amphlett, *The Emigrant's Directory,* 85.
[37] Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest,* 9.

interestingly boasted of his heritage in the west, while at the same time pleading the danger of western disunion.

The diversity of the western mosaic culture was a strength. Emigrants came from the Upper South, New England, the Midlands and from Europe. There was no dominant group. One thing that held these factions together was their country. They were all Americans. Morris Birkbeck left England to become an American. He spoke for many when he stated, "I love this government; and thus, a novel sensation is excited: it is like the development of a new faculty. I am become a patriot in my old age: thus, new virtue will spring up in my bosom."[38] Birkbeck wrote letters home to England to encourage more emigrants. In one of his final letters he writes, "America yet needs muscles and sinews – Europe offers them…If they come in groups and remain so, they will be groups of freemen. Why does America love her government? Will not these men love it for the same reason, and more intensely, from the recollection of the bondage they have quitted?"[39] Birkbeck's new American home was on the Wabash River between Indiana and Illinois. He wrote these words from a remote location, separated by mountains and wilderness from the nation's capital. Yet from his isolated western community, he looks about him and writes that people love their government.

[38] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 29.
[39] Birkbeck, *Letters*, 113

Figure 3: Conestoga Wagon Display (National Road Interpretive Center; Vandalia, IL)

Conclusion

The United States defied conventional political theory to become the first democratic society over a great expanse of territory. There were fears that the political model would fail due to divergent interests of a nation divided by the challenging distance and terrain. People feared disunion as Lewis notes "That the union was fragile was as widely accepted as the idea that it was essential."[1] The proponents of the National Road believed infrastructure improvements could "cement" the distant portions of the nation into a unified people. These proponents sometimes used alarmist rhetoric to force passage of the internal improvement legislation. They were successful in passing such legislation with widespread support.

As southern legislators became alarmed at the growing strength of the North, they feared the waxing power of the free states posed a threat to their southern slave-based economy. They responded by resisting further funding of the National Road by questioning the constitutional authority of the federal government to oversee and fund the road. The later proponents of the road, such as Calhoun and Clay, increased their rhetoric, saying funding of the road was essential to preserve national unity. Stephen Minicucci notes this stating "By 1824, the internal-improvements-as-nation-building argument was an established element of the rhetorical vocabulary of conservative politicians. No major speech in favor of internal improvements neglected to make at least a passing reference to this theme."[2] The rhetoric contested with the southern resistance for funding. Eventually, the age of steam powered shipping diminished the

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[1] Lewis, Burr, 120.
[2] Stephen Minicucci, "The 'Cement of Interest': Interest-Based Models of Nation-Building in the Early Republic," *Social Science History,* 25, No. 2, (Summer 2001): 266.

need for the National Road. In this new age of transportation, the southern bloc proved too strong and the National Road was turned over to the states.

The proponents of the National Road were concerned, well-meaning leaders, and the National Road was a much-needed project, but the perils of western disunion misjudged the true level of nationalism and loyalty of the western citizens. The western settlers were in fact patriots, with little desire to join with another nation or to form their own independent nation. The primary sources of letters and travel journals described the western settlers as anxious to form even stronger ties with the eastern states. The western settlers looked forward to the day when their territory would be elevated to statehood and join the Union.

The real threat, when it came, was not caused by mountains and distance, but by the southern economy, social institutions and cultural beliefs about race. Frederick Ogg notes the economic conflict, writing, "Under play of climatic and industrial forces, the West had itself fallen apart into sections. Foremost was the cleavage between North and South, on a line marked roughly by the Ohio River. Climate, soil, the cotton gin, and slavery combined to make of the southern West a great cotton-raising area, interested in the same things and swayed by the same impulses as the southern seaboard. Similarly, economic conditions combined to make the northern West a land of small farmers, free labor, town-building, and diversified manufactures and trade."[3] The question of slavery had migrated west with the expanding nation.

From the time of the founding of the nation, compromise had held the slavery conflict at bay. In 1857, the Dred Scott decision energized the debate over the future of slavery in America.

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[3] Ogg, *The Old Northwest,* 173.

Following Lincoln's election, disunion finally ruptured the nation. It was not distance or the mountain ranges that divided the nation. It was not caused by domestic or international conspiracy. The greatest challenge to national unity proved to be race and economy.

Appendix: Land Ordinance of 1784[1]

By the **UNITED STATES** *in* **CONGRESS** *Assembled.*

APRIL 23, 1784.

RESOLVED,

THAT so much of the territory ceded, or to be ceded by individual states, to the United State, as is already purchased, or shall be purchased, of the Indian inhabitants, and offered for sale by Congress, shall be divided into distinct states in the following manner, as nearly as such cessions will admit; that is to say, by parallels of latitude, so that each state shall comprehend from north to south two degrees of latitude, beginning to count from the completion of forty-five degrees north of the equator; and by meridians of longitude, one of which shall pass through the lowest point of the rapids of Ohio, and the other through the western cape of the mouth of the great Kanhaway: but the territory eastward of this last meridian, between the Ohio, lake Erie, and Pennsylvania, shall be one state, whatsoever may be its comprehension of latitude. That which may lie beyond the completion of the forty-fifth degree between the said meridian shall make part of the state adjoining it on the south: and that part of the Ohio, which is between the same meridians coinciding nearly with the parallel of thirty-nine degrees, shall be substituted so far in lieu of that parallel as a boundary line.

That the settlers on any territory so purchased and offered for sale, shall either on their own petition, or on the order of Congress, receive authority from them, with appointments of time and place, for their free males of full age, within the limits of their state, to meet together, for the

[1] Library of Congress. Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention 1774 – 1789. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdcc13401))

purpose of establishing a temporary government, to adopt the constitution and laws of any one of the original states; so that such laws nevertheless shall be subject to alteration by their ordinary legislature; and to erect, subject to a like alteration, counties, townships, or other divisions, for the election of members for their legislature.

That when any such state shall have acquired twenty thousand free inhabitants, on giving due proof thereof to Congress, they shall receive from them authority, with appointments of time and place, to call a convention of representatives, to establish a permanent constitution and government for themselves. Provided that both the temporary and governments be established on these principles as their basis.

FIRST. That they shall for ever remain a part of this confederacy of the United States of America.

SECOND. That they shall be subject to the articles of confederation in all those cases, in which the original states shall be so subject; and to all the acts and ordinances of the United States in Congress assembled, conformable thereto.

THIRD. That they in no case shall interfere with the primary disposal of the soil by the United States in Congress assembled; nor with the ordinances and regulations which Congress may find necessary for securing the title in such soil to the bona fide purchasers.

FOURTH. That they shall be subject to pay a part of the federal debts, contracted or to be contracted; to be apportioned on them by Congress, according to the same common rule and measure by which apportionments thereof shall be made on the other states.

FIFTH. That no tax shall be imposed on lands the property of the United States.

SIXTH. That their respective governments shall be republican.

SEVENTH. That the lands of non-resident proprietors shall in no case be taxed higher than those of residents within any new state, before the admission thereof to a vote by its delegates in Congress.

That whensoever any of the said states shall have of free inhabitants, as many as shall then be in any one, the least numerous, of the thirteen original states, such state shall be admitted by its delegates into the Congress of the United States, on an equal footing with the said original states; provided the consent of so many states in Congress is first obtained as may at the time be competent to such admission. And in order to adapt the said articles of confederation to the state of Congress, when its number shall be thus encreased, it shall be proposed to the legislatures of the states, originally parties thereto, to require the assent of two thirds of the United States in Congress assembled, in all those cases, wherein by the said articles, the assent of nine states is now required; which being agreed to by them, shall be binding on the new states. Until such admission by their delegates into Congress, any of the said states after the establishment of their temporary government shall have authority to keep a member in Congress, with a right of debating, but not of voting.

That measures not inconsistent with the principles of the confederation, and necessary for the preservation of peace and good order among the settlers, in any of the said new states, until they shall assume a temporary government as aforesaid, may from time to time be taken by the United States in Congress assembled.

That the preceding articles shall be formed into a charter of compact; shall be duly executed by the president of the United States in Congress assembled, under his hand, and the seal of the United States; shall be promulgated; and shall stand as fundamental constitutions between the thirteen original states, and each of the several states now newly described, unalterable from and

after the sale of any part of the territory of such state, pursuant to this resolve, but by the joint consent of the United states in Congress assembled, and of the particular state within which such alteration is proposed to be made.

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