This thesis discusses the history of English colonization and print culture over the course of the seventeenth century, showing how they came together in geographies, a type of non-fiction that was very popular during this period. Geography books were a uniquely English genre that led readers on a country-by-country journey around the world, describing both the landscape and the peoples. Focusing specifically on representations of four English colonies in the Americas, this thesis will show how geography writers helped enlarge English readers’ sense of their homeland and how these writers promoted notions of Englishness during a period when that concept was in flux.
DIVERSIONS OF EMPIRE: GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BRITISH ATLANTIC, 1589-1700

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Introduction: The Geographical Imagination of Early Modern England

“Variety and Novelty are the most pleasant Entertainments of Mankind, and if so, then certainly nothing can be more divertive than Relations of the New World.”

-R.B., The English Empire in America, 1685

In what seems like a profound coincidence to modern observers, Europeans developed the printing press at roughly the same time they first set out for the Americas. They did not, however, immediately publish book after book about the New World using this new technology. In fact, many Europeans did not seem to be interested particularly in the Americas for a century after Columbus’ voyage. What then, was the connection between the two breakthroughs that arguably brought about the modern era? Some Europeans, like the Dutch, printed maps to transmit knowledge about the New World. The pioneering Spanish published the first traveler’s accounts, but works by writers from other nations quickly followed. Still, these continental nations did not ultimately make the deepest connection between print culture and the Americas during this era. Instead, England, a country that has been seen as lagging behind in both printing technology and in New World colonization, embraced a new genre that presented and interpreted the Americas.

Starting around 1600, the English developed, refined, and consumed geographies, a new literary genre that presented information about distant lands to an expanding reading public. Believing that New World colonization was the sure path to bringing England greater glory, some English men used the geography to promote English expansion. Over the next several decades, authors would hurriedly put together the latest information taken from traveler’s accounts, official reports, and even from their competitors’ works in an effort to produce the best, most comprehensive, and most popular special geography--a book that covered the whole world. Such books proved popular, as English readers seemed particularly to crave news from the outside world, especially the Americas. While the first geographies were of relatively poor quality, by the 1660s, writers and publishers were churning out massive, multivolume accounts of the places and peoples that populated the entire known world. For readers most interested in the New World, however, geographies only partly satisfied their desire for knowledge. To this end, geographies focusing only on the New World or the English colonies proliferated toward the end of the seventeenth century.

Special geographies were books that helped English readers understand the wider world,
its diverse peoples and their own potential role in it. Through them, English readers came to a greater understanding of the newly discovered Americas in particular and England’s efforts there. In no other European country were books on the New World published as frequently as they were England. While many European countries were interested in the Americas, in England reading about the New World proved especially popular. In England, as well, emigration to the New World would take place on a comparatively grand scale. English people were far more likely to read about the world in books written in the vernacular for an audience that was expressly English. Disseminating such knowledge was a stated goal of geographic works, but it was not their only aim. Geographies also were an exercise in articulating Englishness during the politically tumultuous seventeenth century. While asserting nationalism through the written word was nothing new in Europe, the geography book was a peculiarly English way of doing it. In writing about the world beyond their shores, the English also wrote about themselves. In doing so, they harnessed the dynamic power of New World exploration and the printing press in a unique way.

This study will trace the intertwined histories of geography as an academic discipline, early print culture, and English conquest and colonization in the New World to show how these seeming disparate pursuits were indeed bound together in the figure of the geography book. Geography and cartography were practiced throughout Europe, but in England geography became utterly commonplace, and books describing the world written in the vernacular were among the best-selling books there during the seventeenth century. English books also mentioned the Americas far more often than those written elsewhere.

While scholars have lavished attention on maps, far less attention has been placed on textual descriptions, which were equally popular in the seventeenth century and arguably did much more to educate readers about the world. Through them, the growing number of English readers could see their place in the world, and imagine how they might enlarge it. The work of defining first England and next its empire was done in part through print culture. Learning geography was both an intellectual pursuit and a political maneuver.

In early modern Europe, a geographic revolution took place that changed the way the Europeans represented and described the world and altered the way they thought of themselves. Starting in the fifteenth century, navigational techniques improved to the point where ocean crossings and transatlantic contacts became commonplace. Accordingly, Europeans’ sense of
the world was remade through a “shift from a dominant spatial model in which the Mediterranean centre of the world was poised against a liminal, uncivilized and possibly non-human periphery” to one that “transcribed the earthly globe into a vast pictorial frame circumscribing a space ready for European inscription.”

The European discovery of the Americas conjures up images of daring explorers and the monarchs for whom they sailed. This view obscures the extent to which countless others who would never cross the Atlantic or own land in the Americas were also participants in a radical new way of thinking about the world. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the improved accuracy in maps, paired with the spread of print culture, meant that even middling-class people could have access to visual and textual descriptions of the worlds others explored. Rather than merely reflecting a growing interest in geographic knowledge, early modern writing and reading was transformed by these depictions. Various works, including geographies, travel narratives, poetry, and fiction, turned reading into an adventure and lent a sense of spatiality and direction to popular writing. A survey of English literature during this time confirms this connection. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (written around 1603-1606) uses a map as an important rhetorical device, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), Adam surveys the earth, and John Donne’s (1572-1631) poems engage cartographic problems informed by his own voyages. For example, in his “Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed,” Donne compares seeing his lover undress to the discovery of America. Concurrently, a type of non-fiction emerged which concerned itself with accurate representations of the world. Part verbal atlas, part ethnography, geographies described both the world and its peoples. Before the advent of the English novel in the eighteenth century, these sorts of works, which discussed faraway lands, strange peoples, and high-seas adventure, were among the most exciting printed prose materials available to readers. Popular geographies were republished numerous times and new geographies regularly appeared in seventeenth-century England.

There is no present-day correlation to the descriptive geography books of the early modern period. Geography as an academic discipline is no longer about listing places in the

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world. Books that name and describe all of the countries of the world exist, but unlike their early modern counterparts, they are usually written for children. Additionally, these books lack other elements that were integral parts of early modern geography but would today be viewed as not factual, such as fantastic descriptions of wildlife and broad statements about national character. Not only was geography a developing science, but as Benjamin Schmidt has shown, “Americana” was a brand new genre. Through these geographic works, we can come as close as possible to early modern men and women as they “discovered” the new world, struggled to fit it into their mental framework, and then claimed it as their own. The discovery of the New World did more than simply tax cartographers’ prowess. The existence of the Americas changed the way people thought about the world, not just the way they saw it.

**Part I: Geographic Knowledge in Early Modern England**

In 1627, Frances Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater (1585-1636), had an inventory done of her London library. Bridgewater, a noblewoman born into a bookish family, had the inventory updated sporadically for the next five years. The 241 books listed demonstrate the wide-ranging interests of the Countess, which included music and drama, theology and history, and several books in French. The inventory lists the works of Shakespeare and several Bibles, but also books by Tycho Brahe and Tacitus. But the first books of Egerton’s inventory, titled “A Catalogue of my Ladies Bookes at London,” do not fit into conventional categories. They were instead four volumes by John Speed on the history and geography of Britain as well as a copy of his atlas. Speed’s works, moreover, were not the only geographic works owned by the Countess. The inventory also lists books on the Ottoman Empire and Jose de Acosta’s *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies* (1590).4

Bridgewater’s interest in far-away places to which she would never travel was not unusual for her time. Seventeenth-century English men and women were increasingly able to satisfy their curiosity by reading geography books, looking at maps and atlases or owning the myriad array of common items, from tapestries to playing cards, that were made with cartographic motifs. Geography was a discipline that stretched back to antiquity, but the new discoveries made during the early modern period as well as the technology that enabled them made geography as it was practiced in that period very different than the ancient discipline from

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which it was derived. Countess Bridgewater and countless others like her were not direct witnesses to the discovery and colonization of the New World. Instead, they were the beneficiaries of a revolution in thinking that influenced how Europeans represented that New World.

Before books like Bridgewater’s were produced, Europe experienced first a revival of geography, an ancient subject, and then successive oceanic voyages, which led to knowledge of the Americas and increased information about other little-known parts of the world. As new discoveries led to ever-evolving maps of the world, the very idea of what geography was changed as well. Ptolemy’s *Geography*, which postulated the concepts of longitude and latitude, was translated into Latin in 1410. The new availability of this work, paired with the use of the compass (invented centuries before), were two crucial developments that led Europeans to begin to consider the ocean as a thoroughfare rather than a barrier. In addition to Ptolemy’s *Geography*, works by Strabo and Pliny were also translated and even updated to accommodate new knowledge. Early modern thinkers inherited their initial ideas about what geography was from the ancients, but augmented the framework provided by them with information from new discoveries.

In England, geography was added to university curriculum in the late sixteenth century. When geography was first revived, practitioners of it most often imagined it not as a study of the terrestrial globe, as we might think of it today, but as an inquiry into both the heavens and the earth. Such studies, known as cosmographies, were labeled as descriptions of the world, but the word “world” in this period meant something closer to “universe”. Cosmography has no modern equivalent, for it combined astronomy, history, and geography. For example, a book in the geography-cosmography realm from 1550 was titled *A Description of the Sphere or Frame of the World*. As the title indicates, the book is concerned not with any landmass, but with dividing the globe into “circles” (lines of latitude) and explaining the difference between higher and lower latitudes. It does not, however, provide any real-world places to demonstrate these principles. Many sixteenth-century authors were less interested in the Americas (or other countries for that matter) than in writing about celestial elements. Instead, newly available translations of classical

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6 Leslie B. Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities, 1580-1620* (Chicago, 1997).
8 Proclus, *A Description of the Sphere or Frame of the World* (London, 1550).
geographical texts, along with a few newer books on geography, postulated an idea of the world that was not overly concerned with its physical properties.

Book titles demonstrate the gradual shift from a cosmographical to a geographical view. Through the end of the sixteenth century, books in the genre rarely contained the word “geography” in their titles. Of the twenty-three special geographies, or books that described the whole earth, published in English during that period, only two titles contained the word “geography” or some derivation. Both were books that promised to teach the reader about its principles and did not purport to apply those principles to a description of the earth. In the seventeenth century, twenty-six of the seventy-three works printed used the word and most of those promised geographic depictions of the world. Still, authors billed many of their works as cosmographies, and some used both words in their titles. The geography books owned by Countess Bridgewater in the seventeenth century had precedents but no true counterparts in earlier centuries.

Seventeenth-century geographies that explained how the old schema and the new fit together demonstrate the continuing influence of classical works. At the back of Peter Heylen’s Cosmographie (1652) are two indices, one of which lists where in the book Heylen discussed the “tribes and nation” mentioned by “Ptolomie, Strabo, Plinie and the rest of the old Geographers.” Older names for places also persisted, such as “Cathay” for China and “Cipangu” for Japan. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the “new” geography still existed alongside the old. Readers still saw value in knowing ancient geography to understand events like the Peloponnesian War, even as they started demanding something more from a geographical education.

In addition to adopting classical ideas about geography, sixteenth century thinkers incorporated Christian concepts into their work, and placed primacy on an ordered rendering of the universe over an accurate depiction of the world. Many maps in this period were drawn in the T-O style, which reflected an idealized version of the Christian world (fig. 1). In this scheme, Jerusalem, due to its religious significance, is at the center of the world, flanked to the left and right by Europe and Asia, and below by Africa. After the discovery of the Americas, cosmographers still tried to maintain Jerusalem’s prominence, squeezing it in off to the far left,

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10 Peter Heylen, *Cosmographie* (London, 1689), Table II.
leaving the New World with no western coast. Although the discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries finally demonstrated the T-O map’s obsolescence, mapmakers’ initial attempts to refine it to account for new knowledge demonstrate the continued validity of a worldview that, like cosmography, united terrestrial and celestial elements and emphasized a Christian universe.

Figure 1: T-O Map after the discovery of America. From Heinrich Buenting’s *Itinerarium Sacrae Scriptura*, 1581.

A rise in print culture helped the new ideas about geography take hold. By the late fifteenth century, printers were established throughout Europe, running presses that might turn out 1,000 copies for the first run of any particular book. England was by no means an early leader in the production of printed matter, but English print culture was still important and influential among its audience. On the continent, an effective network for book distribution existed by the end of the fifteenth century, but in England books were sold almost exclusively in the London area until the late sixteenth century. English books were also comparatively less sophisticated. In France and Italy, printers were required to pass tests proving their skill before
moving on to higher ranks in the trade, but no such examinations existed in England.\textsuperscript{11} A majority of Cambridge and Oxford stationers, as printers were more commonly called, were in fact foreign-born. In Europe, printers were accorded status and could grow wealthy in their trade. In London, the Worshipful Company of Stationers, the printers’ guild, which controlled book production in England from its establishment in 1557 until the mid-seventeenth century, had a lower status than the poultry sellers’ guild. No early modern English printer achieved the status or riches of his elite counterparts in Italy, Germany, or France.\textsuperscript{12} Even though the stationers exerted great influence through their ability to control what was published, they were not accorded a similar measure of social or financial status.

Despite these apparent disadvantages of England’s print culture, its printers produced a steady output of material by authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Marlowe, as well as works like the King James Bible. With the possible exception of Spain, English stationers printed more works in the vernacular than any other European country. This linguistic peculiarity made English works undesirable in the rest of Europe, where the English language was neither well regarded nor widely spoken. Yet English men and women were reading in English, which undoubtedly encouraged more people to write in the vernacular. Authors also knew that they were addressing an English audience, which, over time, would more easily facilitate the production of works promoting a nationalistic agenda. What was considered at the time to be a sign of provincialism would in fact be a great strength of England’s print culture. The accessibility of works written in English likely ensured a greater number of English readers were becoming engaged in the world through books.

Readers in England, then, had access to a wide variety of books in the vernacular as well as a number of books from the continent in foreign languages, mostly French and Latin. Religious works comprised the largest number, but several other genres were popular, including history, poetry, and medicine. Among these books, were a growing number of maps, atlases, books on geography, and other printed material that described the physical world. Early modern English men and women were thus exposed to geography in many formal and informal ways. In his preface to a translation of Euclid’s Elements of Geometrie, John Dee describes this

\textsuperscript{11} Nigel Wheale, \textit{Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain, 1590-1660} (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 55-6.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, 58. Printers were called stationers, a thirteenth-century term that differentiated stationary from itinerant book-sellers.
phenomenon and considers the variety of reasons that motivated people’s interest in geography. Some like maps for their beauty, he observed, and bought them to adorn their homes, while others wanted to look up locations mentioned in histories “to view the place, the region adjoining, the distance from us, and other such circumstances.” Some were interested in viewing the extent of “the large dominion of the Turke” or the “wide Empire of the Moschovite” while others wanted to retrace the route of their own foreign travels or those of others. “To conclude,” Dee wrote, “some, for one purpose: and some, for an other, liketh, loveth, getteth, and useth, Mappes, Chartes, and Geographick Globes.”

His contemporaries would have also noted Dee’s observation on a rising interest in maps. In the mid-sixteenth century, most English would not have owned or used maps, but by the early seventeenth century, even rural English towns were mapped. Before 1557, Europeans rarely used maps, even for navigation or surveying. In fact, most of the related vocabulary—words like “map,” “atlas,” and “chart”—date only to the sixteenth century. The earliest atlases and maps, like early geography books, came from abroad. Abraham Ortelius (1528-98) and Gerard Mercator (1512-94) produced two of the world’s first modern atlases from the Netherlands—Ortelius’ *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1570) and Mercator’s *Atlas sive cosmographicae meditationes* (1585-95). Ortelius and Mercator both had connections to London, and these books were readily available there. England might have lagged behind in making world atlases, but in between the publishing of these two famous works, something equally innovative appeared. In 1579, Christopher Saxton published the first English atlas, which happened to have also been the first national atlas ever produced. While Saxton had the engraving, and probably the printing, done on the Continent, he oversaw the process and was responsible for the cartography itself, some of the most skilled map work done up to that time. In the seventeenth century, England would continue to rely on maps printed outside the country, while English cartographers—notably John Speed—created atlases of England of increasing quality.

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15 Maps, like written works, were also circulated in manuscript, so others were in existence. The purpose of discussing only published maps, atlases, and books is to give a picture of the most widely available works, rather than ones accessible to only the most elite.
16 Mercator’s work was the first to use the word “atlas” to describe a collection of maps. A “modern” atlas refers not to the inclusion of the New World, but instead to a consistent use of scale.
Textual accounts of the world followed a similar trajectory. Before 1600, no significant traveler’s accounts of Englishmen in Europe appeared in print. Similarly, books on the New World were primarily from Spain, and for most of the sixteenth century none at all were written by Englishmen. Starting in the 1550s, translation of some important works appeared, such as Peter Martyr’s *Decades of the New World* (1555), Andre Thevet’s *Antarticke* (1568) and Nicolas Monardes’ *Joyfull Newes out of a New Found Worlde* (1577). By the first half of the seventeenth century, however, England far outstripped all other European countries in publishing works that were either directly about the New World or made reference to it. For the period 1600-1650, European Americana identifies 2,618 books published in England that reference the Americas in some way, compared to 1,245 published in France, a country that is considered to have had a superior printing industry. In fact, this count does not include the decade of the 1650s, which, after the Civil Wars slowed the book trade in the 1640s, saw a greater number of geography books turned out than in any other decade of the seventeenth century. Edmund Bohun, surveying his field in 1688 wrote, “Geography is an Art, which from very small beginnings, has in our days swelled to a vast bulk, and yet,” he continued, “it is capable of great improvements.”

Bohun’s assessment was on target. From having no works in English on geography, the English went, one hundred years later, to having a variety of geographical subgenres. Many, like the work of George Abbot or Peter Heylen, were descriptive geographies, which offered textual accounts of the history, geography, and people of the world. Bohun’s own work was in this genre but was a bit different as it was a geographical dictionary, which contained briefer listings of places in alphabetical as opposed to the regional order preferred by other books. An older type of work was the atlas, which in the early modern period might contain a good deal of text in

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21 John Alden and Dennis C. Landis, ed. *European Americana: A Chronological Guide to Works Printed in Europe Relating to the Americas, 1493-1776, Volume II: 1601-1650* (New York: Readex Books, 1982), 529-651. The count is my own and is according to the bibliography by country in the back of *European Americana*, which lists any book that references the Americas, not just those that are exclusively or even largely about the New World. It also lists a new entry for every time a book is reprinted. While this might give an inflated sense of the number of new works published, it probably serves to diminish English books, which were almost only published in London, while in other places presses all over the country might publish the exact same books in smaller runs, leading to a greater number of duplicates.
addition to numerous maps. Standalone maps were also widely available for purchase. Other geographic works were concerned more with the science of measuring and mapmaking and, although they appealed to a more narrow audience, were still numerous in this period. All of these types of books, not to mention related works of history or traveler’s accounts were available for purchase in seventeenth century England, and especially in the second half.

When assessing English print culture in general, and geographic works in particular, a certain trend emerges. England was distinctive in that its print culture was more inwardly focused than that of other European countries. An English author was more likely than his continental counterparts to be writing in English about England for an English audience. While even an illiterate person could appreciate a Dutch map, and any educated European could read a book in Latin written by a Frenchman, the authors of English geographic works did more than their continental contemporaries to promote general geographic knowledge to an English audience. By 1650, English writers were producing far more books touching on the New World than other Europeans. Because they had written first about themselves and their own geography, when English geographers described the world, and the New World in particular, they wrote as Englishmen.

By the late sixteenth century, the discipline of geography had three distinct subdisciplines—cosmography, as described above; mathematical geography, which was concerned with accurate measurements and mapping of places; and descriptive geography, which was interested in the terrestrial earth and its people. Among geographic works, books of descriptive geography became preeminent in the seventeenth century. The books in Countess Bridgewater’s library all fall into this category. Despite the popularity of descriptive geography books in the seventeenth century, they have been little studied by scholars. While specific works and writers have indeed received attention, the genre as a whole has been largely ignored.

Books of descriptive geography took many forms. Some were only a few dozen pages, while others had thousands of pages contained in several volumes. Many were relatively affordable, but others were quite costly; some authors included numerous maps, yet others had none. Despite this diversity, these books had much in common, and as the genre came to be better defined, certain features became commonplace. Many geography books had a similar organization. The sections of the book occurred in a certain order and the entries for the various

23 Cormack, Charting an Empire, 15.
countries contained similar types of observations. In fact, this practice of standardization qualified geography as a science in the early modern mindset.

Lengthy special geography books often opened, like many books of the time, with dedicatory remarks to patrons or kings, followed by epistles to readers. In these sections, an author’s background sometimes emerges. For example, we learn in the opening pages of Cosmographie (1652) that Oxford geographer Peter Heylen was a royalist who had all of his possessions, including his books, taken from him during the Civil Wars. It is also in these introductory remarks that geographers might appeal to a reader’s sense of Englishness by discussing famous explorers or other evidence of the greatness of the nation. Next, geographers often included some general remarks on geography, laying out the principles of latitude and longitude and similar ideas, or explaining the genre’s usefulness in understanding the world and increasing trade. Under such a heading, geographers, all of whom were still comfortable with the cosmographical mindset, might discuss the creation of the earth by God, the flood and similar Biblical stories related to geography.

Geographic works that described the whole world were typically divided into four parts that corresponded with the four corners of the earth: Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. It is for this reason that multivolume works usually split into four. The preceding order was the most common, though there were a few exceptions. In A prospect of the most famous parts of the world (1627), John Speed acknowledges that, “Europe may perhaps thinke her selfe much injured to be thus cast back into the third place of my Division.” Speed writes that “Chronologie” dictates Africa and Asia should come first, but that the present state of Europe surpasses them both and Europeans should therefore be satisfied. The description of a particular “corner” usually opened with some information about that part of the world generally and then followed with sections on each country, colony, or other appropriate subdivision. Countries in Europe were often subdivided further into regions. That geographers followed such a format is apparent in Peter Heylen’s Cosmographie when the author explains that he will describe England although he finds the task “superfluous, it being our home, and we therefore no Strangers to it.” Yet Heylen writes that he will do it “for method’s sake.”

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24 John Speed, A prospect of the most famous parts of the world (London, 1627).
Once geographers got to the level of a country, they seem also to have shared ideas about how to proceed. In 1650, Bernhard Varenius wrote *Geographia generalis*, a work in Latin that was translated into English in 1670. Varenius himself never wrote a description of the world; instead, he outlined what such a description should contain. Dividing knowledge about the world into three “particulars,” Varenius listed what each should cover. The first class, the terrestrial comprised:

1. The limits and bounds of the country
2. The longitude and situation of places
3. The figure of the country
4. Its magnitude
5. Its mountains; their names, situations, altitudes, properties, and things contained in them
6. Its mines
7. Its woods and deserts
8. Its waters; as seas, rivers, lakes, marshes, springs; their rise, origin, and breadth; the quantity, quality, and celerity of their waters and their cataracts
9. The fertility, barrenness, and fruits of the country
10. The living creatures

The second class is celestial:

1. The distance of the place from the equator to the pole
2. The obliquity of the motion of the stars above the horizon
3. The length of days and nights
4. The climate and zone
5. The heat and seasons, wind, rain, and other meteors
6. The rising and continuance of the stars above the horizon
7. The starts that pass through the zenith of the place
8. The celerity with which each place revolves, according to the Copernican system

The last group is the human particulars:

1. The stature of the inhabitants; their meat, drink, and origin
2. Their arts, profits, commodities, and trade
3. Their virtues and vices; their capacity and learning
4. Their ceremonies at birth, marriages, and funerals
5. Their speech and language
6. Their political government
7. Their religion and church government
8. Their cities
9. Their memorable histories
10. Their famous men and women, artificers, and inventions

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26 Bernhard Varenius, *Geographia generalis* (Amsterdam, 1650).
While Varenius himself noted that the human particulars were there mostly for “convention and usefulness,” those who actually penned geographies often described the things listed under that category at great length and paid somewhat less attention to the celestial elements, especially as cosmography fell out of favor. The larger geographical works do seem to have more or less followed Verenius’ suggestion, whether they had access to his work or not.

Although geography books shared a standard organization, they were often quite long, so the reader might have had difficulty finding information. Perhaps in acknowledgment of this problem, many geography books contained a table of contents, an index, or both. This does not seem remarkable to us, but at this time such conventions were not yet commonplace. The presence of such finding aids made geography books innovative in this respect. In particular, the geography book would have lent itself to more active consumption, as the reader could move around from one place to another more easily with these tools.

The geographers of the seventeenth century owed a great debt to early writers who helped usher in a new age of geographic thinking and writing. William Camden, an antiquarian and author, penned Britannia in 1586, a book that detailed the geography and history of England. Because of its local focus, Britannia was a work of chorography, a discipline related to geography that focused on smaller areas more intensively. Book 1.1 of Ptolemy’s Geography argues: “the end of Chorography is to deal separately with a part of the whole, as if one were to paint only the eye or the ear by itself. The task of geography is to survey the whole in its just proportions, as one would the entire head.”

Britannia was immensely popular and immediately after it was published, Camden was inundated with letters from people across England, claiming he had left out some important corner of a certain county, and the work was subsequently greatly expanded. It also advanced the image of England as an entirely independent nation, describing it as “a master-piece of Nature, perfom’d when she was in her best and gayest humour; which she placed as a little world by it self, upon the side of the greater, for the diversion of mankind.”

Although Britannia did not deal with the wider world, it was a pivotal work because it created a sense of geographic enthusiasm and national identity among English readers, prerequisites for thinking and writing about the wider world.

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29 William Camden, Camden’s Britannia, Edmund Gibson, ed. (London, 1695). This is an English translation and update of the original work, which was published in Latin. The phrase here does appear in the original 1586 edition.
Another strand of geographical interest was enthusiasm for the New World. The first person to imagine that England could be a naval superpower was John Dee, an Elizabethan scholar with varied interests who studied at one point with cartographers Gemma Frisius and Gerardus Mercator.\footnote{R. Julian Roberts, ‘Dee, John (1527–1609)’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn, May 2010.} Dee was interested in exploration and thought that the English should follow Spain’s lead across the Atlantic. Dee, an imperial theorist, believed that a journey to Florida allegedly undertaken by the Welsh Prince Madoc in 1170 provided a claim for the English to colonize in the New World.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 14.} In his \textit{General and Rare Memorials pertainyng to the Perfecte Arte of Navigation} (1577), he calls for the systematic use of science, such as navigation and geography, and an increase in foreign commerce to rule the seas. The book also contains the first example in print of the term “British Impire”. From Dee, readers got a sense of how geographic works, which at that point were either about the heavens or were a collection of outlandish New World tales, might be made more scientific. Equally importantly, Dee offered a theoretical basis for colonialism.

Richard Hakluyt, an Oxford geographer, among the most forceful agitators for New World voyages. Hakluyt’s elder cousin was a lawyer and member of Parliament whose interest in geography prompted him to ask cartographer Abraham Ortelius to make a map that could fit on a table, since most people did not live in places big enough to unfurl the much larger maps that predominated at the time. It was another map that Hakluyt showed to his cousin that prompted the younger Hakluyt to become a geographer. The elder Hakluyt was confident that English colonization would “spread Protestantism, increase the size of the queen’s realm, find the Northwest Passage, create jobs for indigent English men and women, harvest the spectacular bounties of American forests and fisheries, expand English exports by creating new markets for woolens, and provide greater security for English ships on the high seas.”\footnote{Mancall, \textit{Hakluyt’s Promise}, 164. The list was compiled from an unpublished pamphlet written by the elder Hakluyt, similar to the younger’s “Discourse on Western Planting.”} The younger lectured in geography and promoted exploration and colonization in the Americas and elsewhere. Hakluyt was deeply interested in travel narratives and in 1582 published a compilation of them in \textit{Divers Voyages}. In 1584, he delivered his “Discourse of Western Planting,” to Queen Elizabeth. In 1589, he released \textit{The Principal Voyages}, a twelve-volume work that detailed travels to all parts of the world and emphasized that it was Protestant Englishmen who undertook the expeditions.
The Principal Voyages was by far the most comprehensive collection of information about the world in English, and all seventeenth-century geographers relied upon them to some extent. They were used most extensively by Samuel Purchas, Hakluyt’s successor and rival who titled his own book Purchas His Pilgrims, or Hakluytus Posthumous.

None of the works of these men can be properly called geographies. Camden was an antiquarian, Dee more or less a scientist, the Hakluyts colonial enthusiasts, and Purchas a compiler of travelers’ accounts. Still, the works of these men and others like them were indispensable to those who would write geographies. By providing a foundation for thinking first about England as a geographical entity, independently governed, and second about New World commerce and colonization as a way to bring greater glory to the realm, sixteenth-century writers influenced the way seventeenth-century geographers thought about the world, and especially England and the Americas.

Taking their cue from these men, geographers began to write the first special geographies in English at the close of the sixteenth century. Interestingly, although Europeans continued to learn about the geography of the New World and even that of places such as Ireland, some geography books that were popular at the beginning of the period were also selling strongly toward the end of the seventeenth century. The first true special geography that was reprinted repeatedly was George Abbot’s (1562-1633) A Briefe Description of the Whole World, first published in 1599, expanded in 1605 and 1617 and reprinted in 1620, 1624, 1635, 1636, 1642, 1650, 1656, and 1664. George Abbot, a Master of University College, Oxford, was one of many geographers associated with Oxford, and he wrote the Briefe Description as a text for his students. In addition to writing the Briefe Description, Abbot, who became archbishop of Canterbury in 1611, was a patron of geographer Samuel Purchas. Although later observers derided the book as being more or less a listing of places, the publishing history is a testament to the fact that the book filled some geographic need, and its format was quickly emulated and improved upon by others. This early attempt was indeed brief, and left room for later writers to take Abbot’s ideas and expand them greatly.

Peter Heylen (1599-1662) was a distinguished geographer and author of two popular books on the subject. He was a hard-working Oxford student who by 1618 was giving lectures in cosmography at Magdalen College. In 1621, Heylen published Microcosmus: Or a little

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description of the great world, a 418-page octavo that was based on his lectures. *Microcosmus* was expanded substantially in 1625, and it granted most countries entries twice as long as before. Additional changes were made to the book, which was reprinted several times until 1639 but Heylen wrote that the editions after the second were inferior and not his work at all. For example, later editions had the references removed. Writers losing control of their own work was common, since pirating and copying large segments of another’s work was not illegal at all until 1710 and even when it was made unlawful, pirating was rarely prosecuted. Furthermore, authors’ agreements with printers usually stipulated that the latter owned the rights to it, so a printer was often free to make changes and reprint the work without the consent of the author. 34 In 1659, despite being nearly blind, Heylen published *Cosmographie in four bookees*, an 1100-page folio based on *Microcosmus*. *Cosmographie* was the first large-scale special geography in English and its style was imitated for the next two centuries. The work itself was reprinted perhaps over thirty times, and in 1703 was updated by Edmund Bohun, who was also an author of his own geographies. 35

Another popular geographic work reprinted and updated several times during the seventeenth century was John Speed’s *Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World*, first published in 1627. In contrast to most geographers, who were clergymen and academics, John Speed was a tailor turned cartographer who first became well known for his earlier work *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, which included some of the best regional maps of England. By 1627, John Speed was in poor health and consequently he had little to do with the *Prospect*, which was based largely on Heylen’s *Microcosmus* and had very few maps, unlike his other work. The reason for reprinting Heylen’s work is not entirely clear. It might have been that the printer hoped Speed’s name would bring additional sales. Perhaps the printer hoped to involve Speed before he became ill, or maybe the compiler ran out of time to write something himself and just took portions of Heylen. In any case, it was a successful gamble because, despite its unoriginality, the *Prospect* was reprinted in 1631, 1646, 1662, and 1668 and updated in 1675 and 1676, when it was joined together with the *Theatre*.

34 For example, a publisher could reprint a work nearly unchanged, under another author’s name, and not be guilty of intellectual theft. Although in 1710 the Licensing Act was passed, it still only put some limits on a publisher’s right to an author’s work.

No geographer took up the mantle of these three in the latter part of the seventeenth century. While an increasing number of geographic works were written, they were not large-scale special geographies covering the world. Nor did they go into many editions or get reprinted for decades afterwards. Why exactly this shift occurred remains unclear, but it could simply be that once Heylen’s massive work was published, other writers chose to write more in-depth treatments of smaller areas rather than duplicate or compete with Heylen’s tome. After 1650, for example, many more books focusing exclusively on the Americas appeared. Once the known world was seemingly catalogued, geographers might have been more intrigued to document newly discovered areas that were less familiar. Readers, too, may have shared this interest. Furthermore, these much shorter, and therefore less expensive, books would have been more accessible to a greater number of readers.

Early modern geographers did not do field work. The most ambitious geography books—those that promised descriptions of the whole world—required information gathered from various sources, as few people had traveled extensively around the world. Geographer frequently relied on traveler’s accounts. While such works were often less scholarly than geographies, the geographies necessarily relied on them. Hakluyt sought to make clear in his *Principal Navigations*, a forerunner to the special geographies, the debt the geographer had to the traveler. He believed that by acknowledging the men who had risked their lives in voyages to far-off lands, as well as holding them accountable for an accurate story, new discoveries could unfold more quickly. Traveler’s accounts, as distinct from geographies, usually discussed only one or a few locations to which the author himself had been. They were often short. Those treating New World locations were generally written by people with some sort of investment in the colony—financial or otherwise. Richard Hakluyt, who made the first attempt in English to describe the various parts of the world and to recommend English action abroad, was transparent in his use of the diaries and writings of others to create his *Principal navigations* (1589). In the introduction, he wrote, “Whatsoever testimonie I found in any author of authoritie appertaining to my argument… I have recorded the same word for word, with his particular name and page of booke where it is extant.” His work, which served to acknowledge properly “those men which were the paynefull and personall travellers,” was in opposition to “those wearie volumes bearing the titles

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36 Mentioning sources was a contrast to many other geographers, but also to scientists of Hakluyt’s time and later. Sir Isaac Newton, for example, did not credit the men who did his fieldwork.
of universall Cosmographie which some men that I could name have published as their owne, being in deed most untruly and unprofitablie ramassed and hurled together.” It was not through such poorly constructed cosmographies, Hakluyt wrote, that men would come to a “certayne and full discoverie of the world.”

Later geography writers, including Hakluyt’s successor, Samuel Purchas, were less clear about their sources, though to varying degrees. Most adopted a hybrid approach, sometimes mentioning where their information came from, particularly if from a famous explorer, and other times adopting a more authoritative stance. For example, many authors opened with an account of the “adventurous Voyages, and extream Dangers, some of our brave English Spirits have surmounted in their Discoveries of this New Word,” sometimes giving the reader an idea of the sources used. Yet, in the text that followed, these authors did not name the travelers, unlike Hakluyt.

The relationship between traveler and author, as well as the importance of experience, is laid bare in Robert Devereaux, Sir Philip Sidney, and Secretary Davidson’s 1633 book *Profitable Instructions*. The book opens with an “Epistle to the Reader”:

> It hath bin lately maintained in an Academicall Dispute, That the best travailing is in maps and good Authours: because thereby a man may take a view of the state and manners of the whole world, and never mix with the corruptions of it. A pleasing opinion for solitary prisoners, who may thus travel over the world, though confined to a dungeon. And, indeed, it is a good way to keepe a man innocent; but withal as ignorant. Our sedentary Traveller may passe for a wise man as long as hee converseth either with dead men by reading; or by writing, with men absent.”

The authors go on to admit, however, that traveling can indeed lead to vice. What is really needed is for men who have traveled to collect their wisdom and publish books that can be read by future travelers so that they may benefit. The book itself is not a description of the world, but a list of things a traveler should learn about the place he is visiting. Travelers should note whether the country is “Island or continent; neere or far fro the sea” the number of people, whether few or many, and their quality. They list pages of information that the observant traveler should obtain about the ruler. Though somewhat didactic, *Profitable Instructions* lists the

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37 Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal navigations, voyages, traffiques & discoveries of the English nation*, vol. 1, (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), xxiii-xxiv.


questions that many geographers were answering, whether they were working from a similar list or not.

The practice of “borrowing” so much information from other sources seems less than scholarly today, but early modern writers often took bits and pieces from the work of others without attribution. Authors recycled intriguing stories and anecdotes repeatedly in geographies. An incident taken from Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas’ *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552) was one of the most commonly used. Las Casas related a story of an Indian who had been sentenced to die and, as he was burning alive, was told he could repent and go to Heaven. Geographers not only relied upon travelers for information but also borrowed heavily from their predecessors. In his *Microcosmus* (1621), Peter Heylen notes in the margins the scholarly sources he used, though not the traveler’s accounts on which those authors relied. In turn, John Speed’s *Prospect of the most famous parts of the world* (1627), as shown, relied heavily on *Microcosmus*. Samuel Purchas bought Richard Hakluyt’s source material, so that Hakluyt’s *Voyages of the English Nation* has similar anecdotes to *Purchas His Pilgrims*.

Geographers were not expected to explore these places themselves, and geography was not considered a field science until much later. Mapmakers likewise regularly produced representations of places they had never been, let alone surveyed. Instead, geography was considered a science in the early modern sense, a discipline that relied upon traveler’s accounts and similar sources, rather than one that required actual observation by the writer himself. In this way, geography depended upon experience without demanding it of the scholar. In *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, Anthony Grafton discusses the moment when practical observation replaced learned texts—when “knowledge had burst the bounds of the library.” Rather than merely accepting observation as another method of learning, men such as Galileo Galilei, Rene Descartes, and Francis Bacon believed “practical men and keen observers were often more reliable… than books and book-trained scholars.” Traveler’s accounts were more in line with this notion of learning, but geography was representative of both the older tradition and the newer one.

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40 For example, Spanish cartographers produced a map of the Americas based on questionnaires sent to New Spain.
42 Ibid.
Updating Process

The readers who witnessed the explosion of print culture were not unlike their counterparts currently living in (another) Information Age, in that they expected media to be accurate and up-to-date. To this end, new books were marketed as such while older books were touted as having new prefaces, additional material or other updates. Many books that were advertised as new or revised were not new, demonstrating that the public demand for new material often outstripped printers’ and authors’ ability to provide it. Pirated editions of work could breed errors. In the preface to *Cosmographie*, Peter Heylen wrote that while his *Microcosmus* went into eight editions, he was responsible for only two of them and that he was writing the work at hand in part to “purge (*Microcosmus*) from the errors it had contracted.”

Yet another problem with poorly updated works was the overuse of illustration blocks. A poor-quality block used repeatedly in subsequent editions of a work became blurred, its captions illegible, over time. Studies of Bibles and botany books, which, like geography books, were often illustrated, have shown that overuse of blocks led to misleading information, meaning that successive “newer” editions were increasingly inferior to the original. Geography books were not immune to any of these currents. In fact they may have been more susceptible to it than other types of works, since they were a non-fiction genre that offered news from remote parts of the world and thus needed to be constantly updated.

While most geographers undoubtedly wanted to disseminate accurate information about the world, some geography books actually did the opposite. The pressure to reprint new editions of older work and the practice of borrowing from other authors both led to widespread circulation of erroneous geographic information. One well-known example were the reports of Norumbega, a mythical country allegedly located near present-day Maine. The place name was first published on Giacamo Gastaldi’s 1548 map, *Tierra Nueva*, which was part of Gastaldi’s edition of Ptolemy’s *Geography* (fig. 2).

The name, which was possibly derived from an Algonquian name meaning “quiet place between two rapids”, stuck and was reprinted on maps

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43 Heylen, *Cosmographie*,


until the mid-seventeenth century. Some scholars have overlooked the role of geography books in perpetuating the myth of Norumbega and considering only official knowledge, contend that people knew Norumbega was fictitious by the close of the sixteenth century. Textual descriptions, which elaborated upon the existence of Norumbega much more than maps, helped ensure information about it endured well into the seventeenth century.46

**Figure 2:** Map identifying a portion of the coast as "Tierra de Nurmberg," which later became known as Norumbega. While maps were updated relatively quickly, textual descriptions of Norumbega persisted, demonstrating a disconnect between the two modes of knowledge. Geographies help explain how the myth of Norumbega stayed around long after maps had discarded the name. Giacomo Gastaldi, *Tierra Nueva*, 1548.

It is not striking that the 1627 edition of John Speed’s *A Prospect of the most famous parts of the world*, written when little was known about the area north of Virginia, would have information about Norumbega.47 Subsequent editions, however, largely reprinted exactly the same information, a greater oversight with the passage of time. For example, the 1646 edition did

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47 John Speed, *A Prospect of the most famous parts of the world* (London, 1627).
not mention the Dutch colony of New Netherland, colonized some twenty years before, and briefly described New England as a part of Virginia. After going into great detail about Virginia, the atlas described the land between Virginia and New France thus: “Norumbega on the North of Virginia, lyeth toward the Mare del Nort, and is a very fertile Region. It is inhabited by the Spanish and French. The Seas are shallow and indanger many ships. So full of Fish, that the Boates cannot have free passage, sayeth Maginus.” Yet, during that time, several English colonies were established along the North American coast, and colonists came to know the region well. Any informed cartographer would have known there was no such place as Norumbega at least by the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

The 1662 edition, which had an expanded section on Virginia, contained the same wording concerning Norumbega. Even the redesigned, updated 1668 edition, printed four years after the English took possession of New Netherland, reproduced the section on Norumbega with nothing about the new colony of New York and with the same scant information on New England from several earlier editions. Its continued presence in Speed’s accounts can be attributed to inaction—the men who updated his work added new information in later editions, but left some of the existing text unaltered.

Speed’s geographical works were not the exception, for a second work followed the same pattern. Abbot’s Description also called the land north of Virginia Norumbega and made no mention of New Netherland or New York, even in 1668. Inaccurate information about New York in these geographies, which clearly had a high readership, meant that many English readers were ignorant about their newly acquired colony. While these popular publications might have served to inform readers of the burgeoning English empire, they instead repeatedly circulated a tale of a fantasy colony.

While haphazard updating was a problem that plagued early printing, Elizabeth Eisenstein has demonstrated that it also served to make books more accurate. Before the advent of the printing press, scribes copying books by hand sometime made mistakes, which might then be copied by later scribes. The difference was that after the printed press made books ubiquitous, more readers could see these mistakes and those readers could compare different books to one another much more readily. While printing accelerated the “process of corruption” it also “provided a way of transcending the limits which scribal procedures had imposed upon

48 Speed, Prospect, 10. Maginus refers to the Italian cartographer Giovanni Antonio Magini.
technically proficient masters in the past.” 49 Editors and publishers only interested in profits would still duplicate erroneous material, but others elicited criticism of their works and updated later editions based on the correspondence they received.

Cartographer Abraham Ortelius invited readers to send him corrections or additions to his text in his Theatrum orbis terrarum (1570) and within just three years he had received so many maps from cartographers around the world that he issued a supplement of seventeen maps to the work that became part of later editions. By the time of his death in 1598, “at least twenty-eight editions of the atlas had been published in Latin, Dutch, German, French and Spanish.” 50 In England, William Camden’s 1586 Britannia generated a similar response, as people wrote in with additions to the work.

While none of the most popular geography books have overt requests to readers for additions, several do in fact refer to the network of readers and writers that the printing press engendered. Peter Heylen, for example, mentions in his Cosmographie that he was compelled to write the work after his friends urged him to update his earlier Microcosmus. Edmund Bohun also wrote that he was asked to publish a geographical dictionary and was convinced to do so after seeing how poor the only one on the market was. While geography books were susceptible to the multiplication of errors the printed work engendered, so too did they benefit tremendously from the intellectual network that sprung up after the advent of the printing press and was dedicated to accuracy in books.

The geography book was, then, a new genre particularly suited to an emerging mindset affirming the validity of experience. Geography books also offered information about the New World, making this new genre particularly cutting-edge. These works were a product of their times in other ways, reflecting late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English trends such as a rise in print culture and literacy and the emergence of a middle class. These developments suggest that a wide variety of people likely read geography books and had access to and interest in them from 1580 to 1700 than during the periods before or after.

Geography’s place in English society was also affirmed at the universities. During the late sixteenth century, an increasing number of men from the gentle and merchant classes began to study at English universities, with about 2.5% of seventeen-year-old males attending—a

49 Eisenstein, 82.
percentage not equaled again for over three centuries.\textsuperscript{51} More often than not, these young men planned for “practical” careers, as opposed to aspiring to be academics or theologians. Under the Tudor monarchs, the positions for university-educated men grew rapidly, fueling this trend. These new students were inclined to subjects such as geography, which not only offered useful information about the world, but also could be crucial knowledge for certain careers. Perhaps in response to the needs of this new type of student, around this time geography was incorporated formally into the curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge, although it had been studied informally during the previous decades.

Yet another factor that contributed to the rise of geographic interest was a rise in literacy throughout England. Indeed, scholars have suggested that in Tudor-Stuart England, people at all levels of society were literate at rates unmatched until the late eighteenth century. Literacy rates are difficult to determine, but it is estimated that around 1614 at least half of men in London could read.\textsuperscript{52} Rates in the countryside were lower, but even in rural areas there were schools where children of both sexes learned how to read. These separate trends in the development of education and literacy demonstrate the new type of reader and book collector that emerged in seventeenth-century England, a time when an explosion of print culture coincided with a rise in both literacy and university enrollment. Geography was not merely a subject for royal advisors or transatlantic sailors.

Geography, however, should not be seen as a subject that was only of interest to common people. Rather, it should be considered a discipline with broad appeal, having both a practical side, best expressed in books of descriptive geography, and a scientific one, demonstrated in the work of cartographers and elucidated in books on mathematical geography. Geography relied on a network of men interested in exploration and in those more inclined to studious work. This represents both a continuum of and a break with the past. Historians of science have argued that it was geography, with its insistence on the importance of experience over received wisdom, which ushered in the scientific revolution of the eighteenth century. Exploration, perhaps more than anything else, proved ancient wisdom inadequate. ‘Had I Ptolemy, Strabo, Pliny, or Salinus

\textsuperscript{51} Cormack, \textit{Charting an Empire}, 21.
here,’ mused the Portuguese historian João de Barros (1496-1570), ‘I would put them to shame and confusion.’

A feature of geography books that helped to make them popular was the nature of their content. Early modern English society publicly frowned upon reading less serious works, like plays or romances, though in reality many readers were interested in these works. Samuel Pepys, for example, allowed himself to read the book L’Escole des Filles even though it was a “mighty lewd book” because he thought it was “not amiss for a sober man once to read over to inform himself in the villainy of the world.” He did, however, throw it into the fire as soon as he was done. Certain books allowed the reader to operate under the guise of respectability while still taking in a few salacious stories. If a book was labeled as “history” it could still contain outlandish stories and romances and pass muster. Similarly, the veracity of travel narratives was not questioned and as long as an author did not admit outright that some portions were false, readers could indulge guilt-free. Geography books, which often combined history and geography with seemingly outlandish tales, especially where the new world was concerned, fit perfectly in the category of books that were both improving and divertive.

The exact audience of geography books is difficult to pin down, but there are indications that it was diverse. Many of the geography books were quite long—some well over a thousand pages—and would therefore have been prohibitively expensive for many readers. There were, however, less lengthy books of special geography. Books about just the Americas or one colony could be quite short, putting them in the reach of more people. The anonymous author of one work clearly identified his audience in the title: A Direction for Adventurers with small stock to get Two for One and good land Freely: and for Gentlemen and all Servants, Labourers and Artificers to live plentifully. John Smith addressed his 1612 Map of Virginia to “the world.” Even more interesting, Smith addressed both male and female readers, as he noted that Columbus himself had been funded by Queen Isabella. Not all authors strove to make their work accessible. Peter Heylen, in his massive Cosmographie, wrote that “the greatness of the bulk, and consequently of the price, makes me somewhat confident that none but men of judgement and

53 As quoted in Livingstone, The Geographical Tradition, 34.
55 Altick, English Common Reader, 27.
56 A Direction for Adventurers with small stock to get Two for One and good land Freely (London, 1641), title page.
understanding will peruse these papers.” The variety of geography books available, in terms of size and price, suggests a diverse audience while the number of books that were reprinted indicates that audience was sizable.

Although there was an active community of authors and readers, later scholars who assessed the state of English geographical knowledge usually judged it inferior. A closer investigation reveals that a complex array of factors affected geographic literacy in Europe, some of which have been ignored in recent assessments. A combination of cartographic skill, paranoia, and printing prowess all contributed to a country’s ability and desire to disseminate knowledge widely about its American possessions and explorations. Among early modern imperial powers, the Dutch were arguably the best at representing their colonial holdings geographically. The Low Countries were the site of a cartographic revolution in the sixteenth century. Gerardus Mercator discovered how to render the round earth on a flat map, and Gemma Frisius unlocked the secrets of triangulation, the method used to calculate distances between far-off points until the invention of the computer. The concentration of cartographic skill in the Low Countries and a lively printing industry in Amsterdam ensured that many maps Europeans saw were Dutch. Portuguese sailors and explorers were also good mapmakers, but they lacked the printing capabilities of the Dutch. In contrast, the English are thought to have been less skilled at projecting their image of the Americas because of a dearth of skilled cartographers. Benjamin Schmidt, for example, has detailed how the English often relied on Dutch maps, even going so far as to cross out Dutch place names when necessary. While important, such attention to cartographic ability has obscured the extent to which the English, who had more colonists in the Americas than most other European nations, were able to provide information about the New World in other ways. Specifically, it ignores the importance of written descriptions, which could provide more detailed information than maps. Placing primacy on map accuracy makes sense to modern-day observers, who have grown up looking at maps and think of the world spatially. Yet an accurate map might not have been that important to most seventeenth-century readers, who could not form an image of the world in their mind as we can. An accurate plotting of the coast of Virginia, for example, might not have been very important. It was the idea of Virginia that mattered.

58 Heylen, Cosmographie, “To the Reader”
Scholars looking at early modern geographic knowledge in other countries have focused on the ways in which their governments actively suppressed information. In Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World, Maria Portoundo details how the Spanish Empire, which had the first and best opportunity to present an image of the Americas to Europe, instead tried to keep geographic knowledge about it secret, because its leaders feared that other powers would use the information to seize Spanish colonies. Until at least the first half of the seventeenth century, England, too, worked to limit knowledge in public circulation about the New World to the public and the most accurate information about the colonies remained in manuscript form. Richard Hakluyt, while writing his Principall Navigations, was prohibited from seeing the journals of Sir Francis Drake’s circumnavigation of 1580, since they were purported to have maps so accurate that any ship could easily use them to navigate. Even Drake himself was denied access to the logs, and only Queen Elizabeth and her council could see them. One royal advisor, John Dee, a rather adept mapmaker, included specific geographic information in various writings, and one of his books was likely suppressed as a result.

These comparisons show that geographic knowledge should not be seen simply as being “better” in some early modern countries than in others. Such arguments have often privileged maps. Yet, we need to consider textual information alongside maps when assessing the state of geographic knowledge in a particular place. Also, European powers often had more knowledge than they made available to the public, and much of this consisted of written journals, logs, and reports. What exactly a country knew about the Americas in particular is difficult to assess and there was often a gap between official intelligence and popular understanding of contested areas.

Part II: Geography and Empire

In the 1590s, Richard Bartlett, a cartographer who was also a skilled landscape artist and topographical draftsman, arrived in Ireland as part of an expedition led by the English general Mountjoy. In 1603, Mountjoy achieved his military goal of putting down a decade-long rebellion and Bartlett, one of several cartographers who accompanied the forces, set about making maps of Ireland to celebrate the victory. His maps would emphasize the English presence. While the

60 Maria Portoundo, Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).
62 Ibid., 423.
rebellion itself was subdued, the Irish as a whole were not. Some at least saw a survey of their land by an Englishman as part of their own dispossession. In Donegal, an area of Ireland that was thought unsafe for strangers and consequently still unmapped, just as Bartlett was finishing his survey, the local people beheaded him. In a letter written about the incident, Sir John Davies said he was killed because the people ‘would not have their country discovered.’63

Historians often imagine Ireland to have been a testing ground for England’s colonization of other areas, and English experiences in the New World and Ireland do offer several parallels. Many of the “West Country Men” who helped to colonize Virginia, for example, were first active in Ireland. In geographies, native peoples are often compared to the “wild Irish” and the English colonized both people based on their own assumed moral and cultural superiority. Another experience in Ireland that influenced how the English approached their colonies across the Atlantic was related to geography. In Ireland, the English explored the link between understanding the land and subduing its people. As demonstrated by the death of Bartlett, the Irish, too, understood how valuable geographic knowledge could be. They imagined, as North American Indians must have done, that English intrusions on the land for the sake of surveying it were representative of the greater colonial project.64

As has been shown, geography was a discipline invested in learning about the world, its natural wonders, and its peoples. Descriptive geography books sought to educate readers about far-away places they may have heard about already, as well as inform them of newer discoveries. Cartographers worked to improve the accuracy of their maps, especially those of the New World. Readers wanted to learn about geography both for enjoyment, like Countess Bridgewater, and for practical reasons, like the new students who entered the universities, the prospective colonists or investors, or the city merchants.

Geography, however, was not just an endeavor undertaken for the sake of education or even for profit. Literature about the English colonies was rarely, if ever, written from a neutral standpoint. Geographies did more than benignly inform readers of a world that was simply there, existing outside any political concerns. Much of the published material about New World colonies was promotional tracts and books that encouraged people to move to or invest in the

colonies, and the authors often had a stake themselves. Geography books that surveyed the entire earth, often written by academics, would seem to be more impartial than such works, but they, too, asserted a vision of English domination over colonial holdings. Even in places where claims were tenuous, geography writers sought to advance a vision of English empire, and to promote England’s superiority. Some writers were subtle, others bombastic, but nearly all were eager to report the deeds of their countrymen in New World endeavors.

Geography changed people’s relationships with themselves, with other people, and with their country. When an English person could look at a map of his country, it made him imagine England in a whole new way. Countries, cities and colonies became physical spaces with boundaries and features that could be laid bare on a map. Seeing a representation of a place helped people to associate themselves with it. It was also through geographic thinking, Lesley Cormack argues, that English people came not just to imagine England as a sovereign nation, but also to act accordingly.65 When John Dee first used the term British Empire, he did not mean “empire” in the modern sense but instead referred to England’s independence from other powers, particularly Catholic Rome. The former meaning of the word empire is essential to the latter, just as self-defined political independence is a prerequisite for colonization.

The first mapmakers and geographers could not have known how geography would transform thinking, but early geographers did have some idea that they were contributing to a concept that we might today call nationalism. No doubt early modern cartographers operated at the leading edge of the scientific revolution, when maps came to represent the world as it physically was rather than as an idealized image. While the enormous impact of these cartographers in improving the accuracy of maps cannot be denied, saying that they were engaging strictly in ‘science’ belies the distinct political and religious perspectives with which maps were made. Some scholars have argued that the divide with ‘art’ on one side and ‘science’ on the other is an artificial difference that mapmakers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would not have recognized.66 Examples of maps that blur this line are a map of the Netherlands in the shape of a lion, which was printed during that country’s seventeenth-century fight for independence from Spain and an early modern map of Europe as a queen, with different countries forming certain body parts (fig. 3).

65 Cormack, Charting an Empire.
Figure 3: A map of Europe as a queen challenges the notion that maps in the early modern period were becoming increasingly “accurate” and demonstrates a rather loose connection between a physical place and its representation on a map. Notably, England is not a part of the queen’s body, but is on the periphery, attached to her scepter. *Europa Regina*, from Sebastian Munster’s *Cosmographia*, 1570.

In descriptive geographies, the desire of the author to promote England is much more obvious. In *Enlightenment Geography*, Robert Mayhew argues that geography from ancient times was a political endeavor and that to imagine that there was ever some sort of objective geography is wrong. In most descriptive geographies written by English authors, then, there are obvious attempts to establish England’s claims to New World lands, sometimes above those of other European powers. Furthermore, the authors try to define what exactly it means to be English. In this way, English writers sought to advance both versions of the word ‘empire’ through a variety of approaches.

Scholars have pointed out how early modern literature often worked to mark others as different and to promote a sense of national identity. Geographies, too, helped create a notion of

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Englishness. In most geographies, a description of place was often linked to a discussion of the people who lived there. In this period, most people considered the two to be linked inextricably, and where the place of one’s origin was thought to determine one’s character. For example, in Peter Heylen’s work *Cosmographie*, he describes people from Poland as “studious in all Languages” and “good souldiers generally” while people from China were “much given unto their Bellies, and eat thrice a day” though also “ingenious and excellent in all things which they take in hand.” Through discussions of national character, English readers learned what other people were supposedly like, which in turn helped them to define themselves.

The Englishness espoused by geographers was inextricably linked to Protestantism. It is often assumed that religion played a far greater role in the colonial project of Catholic powers than in Protestant ones. Spain colonized native regions by reading to them the *Requerimiento*, a document that asked conquered peoples to convert to Christianity. In New France, priests were often the only Europeans in a particular area. While English colonization perhaps did not involve such missionary zeal, as the English were less likely to attempt to convert Native Americans, Protestantism did play a part in shaping an imperial ideology. Early English colonial enthusiasts such as Hakluyt and Purchas promoted colonization as a way for Protestant rulers to strengthen their political positions while weakening the influence of Catholic Spain. In fact, it was partially due to men like Hakluyt and Purchas, who wrote about naval battles, that English readers learned details of military conflicts between Spain and England. It was through these texts, some argue, that made English men and women despise Spain and Catholicism.

Geographers were usually clergy, and religious sentiments often shaped their writings. Perhaps more importantly, religious conflict was one of the defining features of early modern Europe. It was difficult for early modern Europeans to think about another country without keeping in mind the religion practiced by its people. In *Cosmographie*, Heylen wrote about the importance of recording not only England’s military victories, but also their spiritual ones. The English, Heylen claimed, were responsible for the conversion of several groups of Europeans, such as the Danes, Germans, and the Scots, “by that means more inlarging Christs Kingdom than they did their own.”

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68 Heylen, *Cosmographie*, 284.
69 Additionally, Hakluyt hoped trade would bring about widespread Christianity and the second coming.
70 Armstrong, *Writing North America*.
71 Heylen, *Cosmographie*, “To the Reader”
Through geography, English writers were able to articulate an idea of their countrymen as temperate, industrious Protestants and their nation as sovereign, independent from Rome and the continent. Geography, which engaged directly in discussions of people and climate, was singularly suited for the task. Describing Spain, Edmund Bohun wrote that it would have been better for them if they had never “heard of the Roman Rites” since the Inquisition had led to loss of life and territory, such as the Netherlands. According to George Meriton, Italy was a land of “hot letchers” for whom passion “makes Treachery, and Murder seem no fault in their Eye.” The women, too, are “unnatural in their Lust” though they “appear modest.”

Geographies usually discussed national characters in the respective country’s entry, but the New World also offered a chance for them to see difference emerge and to make comparisons between European nations by their alleged actions in the Americas. Typically, this exercise involved a recitation of Spanish cruelty in the New World, though English writers occasionally directed their derision at other colonial rivals, such as the Dutch and French. English geographers often wrote about other European rivals in discussion of contested places, like Jamaica or New York. As shown previously, de las Casas’ account of Spanish mistreatment to Native Americans was perfect material for English writers looking for a way to promote the superiority of their own empire against the Spanish “black legend,” tales of Spanish atrocities in the New World. Some geographers mentioned it only briefly, while others devoted pages to it.

Geographies also promoted national identity by offering recitations of the heroic exploits of English discoverers. The earliest English books that discussed the Americas, by Hakluyt, were not geographies per se but collections of traveler’s and similar accounts and so highlighted the actions of men like Sebastian Cabot, Sir Francis Drake, and John Smith. Later, authors of descriptive geographies, who were interested in an organized listing of the world’s countries, still sometimes retained a section explaining the important voyages of discovery undertaken on behalf of England or by Englishmen.

In the preface to his *Cosmographie* Peter Heylen explained that “as an English-man I have been mindfull upon all occasions to commit to memory the noble action of my Countrey; exploited both by Sea and Land.” Though he acknowledged the “Historie and Chorographie of the World” as his “principall business,” Heylen noted that he “apprehended every modest

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72 Bohun, *A geographical dictionary*.
occasion, of recording the heroick Acts of my native Soil, filing on the Registers of perpetuall Fame the Gallantrie and brave Atchievements of the People of England.”

Connecting his endeavor even more clearly to empire, colonial enthusiast George Gardyner wrote, “as I am an English man, so I desire that name and people may grow great and famous and extend their authority and name beyond either Roman, Grecian, Assyrian, or Persian Nation. And if from this discourse they may draw any thing that may prove for their Honour or Profit, I have my aim.”

Geographies worked to promote empire by confronting the issue of colonialism, a precedent set by earlier writers. We often assume that European powers took over land in the Americas without a second thought, based on their assumption that their culture was superior. Intriguingly, however, authors of these works very often did provide a justification for their country’s colonization of the New World. Many English believed that Native Americans did not properly use their land, and therefore did not possess it. In fact, in Thomas More’s popular 1516 work The Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia, the Utopians themselves engaged in colonization and considered it a just cause for war to take over the land of a people who did not properly occupy and cultivate it. Even before the English had colonies in the New World, intellectuals were offering justification for them.

This tradition of rationalizing colonialism and explaining the rights of a European power to be in the New World continued throughout the seventeenth century in geographic works. Looking at them, we can see definite attempts to use them to assert English rights to New World lands. Many of them open with a discussion of this very subject. Samuel Clarke, in A Geographickall Description of the Whole World, claims that England’s King Henry VII agreed to fund Columbus’ voyage, but that Columbus did not hear about the offer in time and so he appealed to the Spanish crown. By mentioning this, Clarke was setting English claims alongside or even above those of the Spanish. He also intended it as an explanation for England’s long delay in colonization. George Abbott, in A Description of the Whole World, opened his section on the Americas on a similar note. He considered several theories about the English and

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74 Heylen, Cosmographie, “To the Reader.”
75 George Gardyner, A description of the new world (London, 1651).
77 Samuel Clarke, A Geographickall Description of the Whole World, (London, 1662).
the Americas, including that King Arthur had ruled over the Western Hemisphere, or that Native Americans spoke a language similar to Welsh. While Abbott did not write that these stories were false, he rejected them as the basis for England’s empire in favor of more straightforward reasons based on exploration and plantings in the seventeenth century. By dismissing tenuous theories, Abbott sought to strengthen the underpinnings of the English empire and forcefully declared its right to exist.\footnote{George Abbot, \textit{A Briefe Description of the Whole World} (London, 1599).}

While many geographies opened with justifications for colonization writ large, asserting England’s rightful possession of New World extended to individual colonies as well. Individual colonies were often given very different treatments in geography books. A comparison of the representations of Virginia, the first colony settled by the English; the New England colonies, which by the mid-century had the largest English population in America; Jamaica, which the English took from the Spanish in 1655; and New York, formerly New Netherland and taken from the Dutch in 1664, highlight the ways in which English geographers used a variety of tactics to assert possession over English colonies.

The discovery of the New World challenged certain religious beliefs, raised the prospect of trans-Atlantic territorial expansion, and brought new trade goods into English homes. Through their efforts to bridge the Atlantic over the course of the seventeenth century, the writers of geographies were key players in connecting people in England to a place they had not known existed until 1492. Exploits that occurred far from home turned sailors into English heroes, while descriptions of the colonies, over time, came to be less exotic. England was clearly connected to its colonies, especially financially, but establishing such a relationship in the minds of the English at home was less straightforward. A closer look at the way four English colonies in the Americas were portrayed over the course of the seventeenth century reveals that geographers did not simply assert the Englishness of these places, and they were not represented uniformly. Instead, the history, location, settlers, profitability, and other aspects of a colony factored into the way it was portrayed by these writers. All of the colonies would eventually be styled English, but each had its own path, laid out in the geography books that captivated so many readers and were, for most of them, their only way to experience the New World.

English special geographies promoted English interests in the New World by providing an ideological basis for English colonization. When it came to providing specific information
about individual colonies, even ones claimed by England, special geographies often failed to deliver. Authors of these large-scale works seem to have been more concerned with advancing English claims in general, not promoting any one colony specifically. Readers who wanted specific information about New World locations until around 1670 would likely have turned to smaller works on just one colony. Just why geographers would have neglected to write more about these colonies is not entirely clear. One reason may have been that the type of information regarded as important was not really applicable to locations in the Americas. Societies in the Americas often lacked the complex political or religious machinations of those in Europe, nor were their histories documented. Geographers, as part of practicing their science, typically reported the same information about each country, so when they were unable to report the “right” things about the country, they may well have gone mute. Geographers were also writing about places that were still little known and in the case of some colonies, they might have had sparse information.

A final possibility was that these huge volumes were just too difficult to update very often. Reprinting hundreds or even thousands of unchanged pages for the sake of updating a few sections was unfeasible, not to mention that people who owned an earlier edition might not have wanted to replace a mostly up-to-date work. While some geographies were indeed reprinted, we have seen that they often promised updates that were not really there. In the midst of this dilemma, a new type of geography emerged that focused exclusively on the Americas or on just the English possessions. These works were much smaller than special geographies and yet they devoted several pages to each colony. These works were the first to mention some colonies at all and the first to devote much attention to other colonies. An examination of four colonies in depth shows the different ways each was represented in special geographies, traveler’s accounts and related works, and shorter geographies. Despite the varying amount of attention given to each colony initially, all received their fullest assessment in the New World geographies produced at the end of the century.

**Jamaica**

Jamaica provided an interesting strand for geography readers to follow. It figured prominently in some early geographies and when the English captured it mid-century, the conquest and English prospects in their new colony were widely reported in geographic works. By the time writers started focusing on just the Americas in geographies, they found more still to
say about Jamaica. Writers assessing Jamaica before the takeover already found the island noteworthy, though without the benefit of an English seizure, descriptions were less exciting. Heylen’s *Cosmographie*, drier than most, discussed at length the complex governmental system established by the Spanish, how certain positions were chosen and which were the most favorable, the chain of command, and other minutiae in his “brief” description, but little else. George Gardyner’s description of “Jamico Island” was a bit more colorful, informing his readers of an island that was subject to “Turnados and Huricanos,” and lacking gold or copper mines. It was, however, a place where the resident lived in a “plentifull manner” and the island must have seemed so to readers who learned that the island had a governor, abbot, monastery and cloister. Gardyner did not mention that the island was held by the Spanish, though perhaps he assumed his readers knew that.

When the English took Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655, geographic works were quick to relay the news. Jamaica, a former Spanish colony, suited the needs of geographers who sought to highlight both English triumphs and Spanish cruelty in the New World and thus it featured prominently in special geographies in the second half of the century. Clarke, in one of the first works published after the takeover, wrote that the English had taken the colony the year before. Most geographers elaborated on Spanish inhumanity to the native peoples of the Americas in general and Jamaica in particular, thus painting the English claim to Jamaica as more legitimate. Clarke’s work included a section titled “A Narrative of some barbarous cruelties of the Spaniards on the Indians of America,” using “their own Authors” as his source. In it, he described how the Spanish came to the Indian “lambs” as “cruel and hungry Tygers, Bears and Lions, intending nothing… but blood and slaughter.” After the conquest of Jamaica, geographers were quick to begin connecting it to the English empire. Jamaica had been taken from the Spanish, a definite enemy; furthermore, Jamaica had clear potential to turn a profit. Writing about the Jamaican conquest, geographers had a clear success to celebrate in their writings.

One work on Jamaica proved to be extremely influential. In 1661, Edmund Hickeringill, who served as a captain in Jamaica, wrote *Jamaica Viewed*. The work, which was dedicated to Charles II, was not a special geography, since it was only about Jamaica, but it did follow a

79 Heylen, *Cosmographie*, 453.
80 Gardyner, *A Description of the New World*, 66.
81 Clarke, *Geographicall Description*, 110.
82 *Ibid.*, 186
format similar to such works and likely served as a source for later writers. The text was also updated and republished for at least another forty years. Hickeringill provided a very detailed account of the island and took particular care to highlight goods Jamaica produced that could not be found in any other English colony, like the cacao bean, used to make “the famed Chocoletta, whose virtues are are hiperboliz’d upon every post in London: though we must confesse it of excellent nourishment.” Unlike Gardyner, Hickeringill believed it “more then probable” that gold and silver mines would discovered, though advised it could not happen until more English lived there. In that vein, Hickeringill throughout the work mentioned that the island had fallen into disrepair since the Spanish left, but was optimistic that English settlement could easily turn the situation on the island around.

*Jamaica Viewed* came at an important juncture in the history of the island. Charles II had promised to return the island to the Spanish in exchange for their assistance in his restoration to the throne. Such help was not needed, but Charles considered returning it nonetheless. When he read *Jamaica Viewed* and similar reports of the island’s present value and future potential, he chose to keep it. Unlike the other colonies discussed here, Jamaica remained in English hands for three more centuries. For his efforts, Hickeringill was awarded the post of secretary of state for Jamaica, a post worth the considerable sum of £1,000 a year. *Jamaica Viewed* demonstrates that geographies and related works did much more than educate ordinary readers about English colonies. Indeed, these books sometimes helped shape English history.

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Figure 4: A map of the "Caribee Islands," from R.B., *The English Empire in America*, 1685. While many geographies included maps, they were of widely varying quality.

Geographic works focused only on the Americas, usually written at least fifteen years later, still took the opportunity Jamaica afforded to flaunt English superiority to Spain. In *The English Empire in America* (1685), the author includes a poem on the conquest of Jamaica and contrasts Spanish and English actions in the New World:

For divers Ages had the Pride of Spain/Made the Sun Shine on half the World in vain…
Of Nature’s Bounty men forbore to tast/ And the best Portion of the Earth lay wast…
When Brittain looking with a just disdain/ Upon this gilded Majesty of Spain…
Our Nations solid virtue did oppose/ To the rich Troublers of the Worlds repose…
Others may use the Ocean as their Road/ Only the English make it their aboad.\(^\text{84}\)

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\(^{84}\) R.B., *The English Empire*, 206.
In this poem, the author first established the cruelty of Spain, contrasting the Spanish with the English, who were appalled at their actions. Not only were the Spanish presented as barbarous but also indolent, seeking only to exploit the riches of the new world, while the industrious English wanted to properly colonize it. Because of this, the English were justified in taking Jamaica. The poem closes by flaunting the military prowess of the English, especially at sea.

Yet, the section about Jamaica as a whole is more even-handed. The author explains the conquest in great detail, as an unprovoked attack and the plan of Oliver Cromwell who “usurpt the Government” of England. He writes that many who went on the conquest were lured with a promise of great riches, only to die en masse once they arrived. The depiction of Jamaica here is as a lukewarm conquest that the English were able to turn to an advantage: “though the success of the English at the beginning of the Spanish War was but in-different, yet it afterward proved Fortunate enough.” Given the attention lavished on Spanish atrocities in general and the conquest of Jamaica specifically, it would seem that by the time geographies focusing on the Americas were popular, there would be little left to say. As these examples, prove, writing several years after the conquest allowed writers to view Jamaica as more than just a military conquest, but as an English colony. Once Jamaica was firmly English, geographers could paint a picture of a colony that was more complex than the initial reports out of Jamaica.

New York

After the capture of New York in 1664, geographies, which usually had large sections devoted to the Americas, might have served as the perfect tool of empire, there, too. Through them, writers could have defended English claims, informed readers about the native peoples, natural environment, and settlements, and generally raised awareness of this new part of the Stuart domains. Yet, far from presenting a unified English front, geographies varied widely in what they said about New York. Many of the most popular works failed to mention the colony at all. Instead of demonstrating that geographies did not serve as a tool of empire, the New York example simply shows that geographers chose to ignore places that did not neatly fit into their conception of the English empire. The irregular description, and even omission, of New York demonstrates that exclusion, too, was a component of the promotion of empire.

85 Ibid., 203.
The representation of New York in geographic works reflects its indeterminate colonial status. The conquest of New Netherland was the first of many incidents that led to an uncertain image of the colony. An early attempt to take the colony in 1654 was aborted when war with the Dutch came to an end.\(^6\) The English announced plans to invade in 1661, but they were ambivalent about the conquest and did not make a move until three years later, when they combined the invasion with an attempt to reorganize New England colonies. The Dutch, entirely unsupported by the Dutch West India Company, decided not to resist and so the conquest itself was largely not dramatic. The conquest of Jamaica, by contrast, was costly and drawn out, and therefore more visible to English at home. It is likely that in England, little was known about the relatively easy seizure of New Netherland. The Spanish were enemies, renowned for their alleged cruelty in the new world. The Dutch were the sometime allies of the English with no particular infamy to live down. While New York was strategically important to the English, in that it filled in the map of English holdings from Maine to the Carolinas, the conquest did not easily fit in with other tales of the overseas heroics of the English, a staple of many geographies.\(^7\)

Although one might initially think that geographers would want to take the opportunity to flaunt English superiority in New World colonization, an examination of this period of New York’s history instead shows divisions that culminated in the temporary loss of the colony. While the English conquest of Jamaica lent itself to poetic renderings, that of New Netherland did not. It was only after the English regained control of New York and began to rule it more forcefully that special geographers began to regularly add New York to their rendering of the English empire. An examination of geographic writings up to this point, then, serves as a parallel to the troubled history of New Netherland and New York.

English geographies printed while the Dutch had control of New Netherland complicate the picture of its representation. Even while they struggled over North America, the Dutch and English remained allied elsewhere, working together in the Caribbean to plunder and in South America to frustrate the efforts of the Iberian powers.\(^8\) English geographies written before the 1650s did not always mention New Netherland, but many that did presented it in a positive light,

\(^{8}\) Schmidt, “Mapping an Empire,” 449.
particularly if it suited the motivation of the author. William Castell, a minister, wrote *A Short Discoverie of the Coasts and Continents of America* in 1644. Directed to Parliament, Castell’s work intended to “sheweth… the great and generall neglect of (the) Kingdome, in not propagating the glorious Gospell in America.”89 Like most other geographies, Castell proceeded colony by colony, explaining the climate, native peoples, colonization efforts and other attributes of each. The key difference in *A Short Discoverie* was Castell’s attention to efforts taken to proselytize the Indians. Castell’s section on New Netherland mentioned that Henry Hudson, who was English, discovered it. Unlike later accounts, which asserted English ownership, Castell admitted that Hudson was rightfully employed by the Low Countries. Castell wrote favorably about New Netherland, a colony of fellow Protestants. In the final analysis, he asserted that the adjacent colony differed little from those in New England except that “the land in generall is richer, the fields more fragrant with flowers, the timber longer… the woods fuller of Bevors, and the waters of Salmon and Sturgeon.”90

Peter Heylen’s *Cosmographie*, printed in 1652, was one of the earliest works that mentioned that, rather than sailing for the Dutch, Hudson gave them information about his discoveries afterwards in exchange for money.91 The question of ownership of New Netherland surfaced in the years before the English takeover; English treatments of the question centered upon Henry Hudson. The Dutch claimed that Hudson had sailed for them, just as Christopher Columbus, a Genoese, had sailed for the Spanish and John Cabot, a Venetian, had sailed for England. The English, however, asserted that Hudson was a subject of the English crown and had no right to sail for another country. Heylen maintained that the English were the rightful owners, but since they did not quickly colonize the area, it was “open to the next pretender,” by which he meant the Dutch.92 In order to maintain their unlawful colonization, Heylen wrote, the Dutch armed the Indians for the purpose of fighting the English. Castell wrote of Fort Orange positively, while Heylen saw it as a threat. Heylen ended with something of call to action: “I fear that little will be acted, or to little purpose, till it be made a Work of more publick intereste.”93

Thus the complicated relationship that the Dutch had with the English was reflected in the way English wrote about claims to New Netherland. George Downing, who served as envoy

91 Heylen, *Cosmographie*.
to the Dutch government in Europe, published an account of an address he gave at The Hague in 1672 in which he defended English claims to New York by saying not that the Dutch had possessed it illegally, but that they had never actually had it all:

And as to the business of New-Netherland (so called) this is very far from being a surprize, or anything of that nature, it being notoriously known, that That spot of Land lyes within the limits, and is part of the possession of His Subjects of New England, (as appears most evidently by their Charter) and that those few Dutch that have lived there, have lived there meerly upon connivence and sufferance, and not as having any right thereunto.\(^{94}\)

In this view, the government established in New Netherland, the immigrants who moved there, the trade relations undertaken with Indians, the forts constructed—all had been part of an elaborate fiction that the English had permitted, so long as the Dutch had continued to “demean themselves peaceably and quietly.”

The first works that did mention New York came from people who had been to the colony. These accounts were not a part of descriptions of the empire or the Americas more generally. Daniel Denton, an English colonist and land speculator, wrote *A Brief Description of New-York, Formerly Called New-Netherlands* in 1670.\(^{95}\) Although he published in London, the author’s position as a colonist lent him a special authority, even if financial interests led him to paint a positive picture. Denton’s work was one of the first to describe New York in much detail. Many later accounts borrowed some of their information, especially that on Indians, from Denton. This common practice of lifting unattributed text from other authors ensured that Denton’s text was influential beyond its own the readership.

Denton spent several pages on the customs of the Indians of New York. Throughout, he walked a fine line between portraying fascinating, savage “others” and unthreatening, tractable ones. While they worshiped some type of devil in strange ceremonies, they also believed in a supreme being and had concepts analogous to heaven and hell. Under the Dutch, Denton wrote, settlers “were almost always in danger” from the Indians. Indeed, Dutch rule was marked by several disastrous wars with the Indians. Only six years later, though, Denton wrote that, “if you chance to meet with an Indian Town, they shall give you the best entertainment they have.”\(^{96}\)

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\(^{94}\) Sir George Downing, *A Discourse Written by Sir George Downing, the King of Great Britain’s Envoyée Extraordinary to the States of the United Provinces, &c.* (London, 1664), 16.


\(^{96}\) Ibid., 19.
Denton’s view, the English leadership had ensured better relations with the Indians, though if he believed this was true or was just trying to encourage migration is impossible to tell.

Most accounts of New York described the climate favorably. Denton’s New York was a place “where many people in twenty years’ time never know what sickness is,” and “the Countrey itself sends forth such a fragrant smell that it may be perceived at Sea.” A surprising counter to the muteness of earlier accounts concerning New York, Denton’s offered unabashed praise and issued a call to colonize. He wrote that if he had, “err’d it is principally in not giving it its due commendation.” He suggested to his readers who might have been ready to emigrate that they join in groups large enough to found a town and make the crossing together.

Although New York was, by 1670, starting to be described in print, it was yet to be integrated into larger descriptions of the colonies, the empire, or the world. This move came a bit later, in a work published under the name of John Speed, whose books had been describing Norumbega for several decades with no mention of New Netherland or New York. This new, better-revised work demonstrated the increased importance of New York and other colonies. His atlas *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* was also a popular book that appeared in multiple editions. Though “empire” appears in the title, Speed was only concerned with the British Isles—which makes sense, since he died before there was much of an empire anywhere else. In 1676, however, someone had the idea to combine parts of this work with sections of the *Prospect* in *An Epitome of Mr. John Speed’s Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain And of His Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World*. This was important, as it marks the moment when the British Empire became global, at least in the minds of Speed’s writers and readers. The American colonies moved from the periphery to an expanded center.

In this completely updated edition of Speed’s *Prospect* (1676), a section titled, “The Description of New-Neatherlands, now called New-York” appeared for the first time. In it, the anonymous author responsible for the revisions described how the Dutch claimed New Netherland, though it was rightfully part of Virginia. According to this and other accounts, the Dutch at some point agreed to leave New Netherland. After civil war broke out in England in 1642, however, they knew the English would be too preoccupied to make them leave. Taking

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97 Ibid., 19.  
98 Ibid., 17.  
99 John Speed, *An Epitome of Mr. John Speed’s Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain And of His Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (London, 1676). Oddly enough, though, the section on Norumbega was still there, too in another part of the work.
advantage of this situation, they stayed; this betrayal occurred because, in the words of the author, “the custom of this people is [to] never let go any opportunity that serves their turn, by right or wrong.”100 The author went on to describe the natives, trade, flora, and fauna of New York, mentioning that the only town of note, New Amsterdam, was, “now wholly changed,” into New York, implying something much deeper than a renaming. The section ended by noting that the colonists of New York “live in very happy plenty and quiet, and very good amity and correspondence with the Indians.”101

New York, largely ignored in English geographic works written in the decade after the 1664 conquest, had become fit for inclusion in the empire. In 1673, the Dutch recaptured the colony in a bloodless takeover reminiscent of the first. This loss was humiliating to the English. When they regained control of New York in 1674, the Duke of York wanted to control the colony more forcefully, and so he worked to avoid the divisions that marked the first decade of English rule.

Later works continued in this tradition, increasingly promoting New York as an important part of the English Empire. An excellent example of this is The English Empire in America (1685).102 Of all the geographical works detailed, this one was most concerned with asserting England’s claims in the Americas, as the title attests. The book, whose author appeared simply as “R.B.,” opened with an account of the discovery of America and particularly the role of English explorers. Henry Hudson’s voyage of discovery received three full pages, although the author did not mention that he was sailing for the Netherlands. Rather, later in the text, under the description of New York itself, R. B. said that Hudson sold the land to the Dutch without the authority of the King of England in 1608 and that the Dutch began settling New Netherland in 1614. The book gave no more information about what went on in New Netherland until 1664, when “300 Redcoats … turned out their governor with a silver leg and all the rest but those who acknowledged subjection to the King of England.”103 Unsurprisingly, the English loss and recovery of New York was omitted.

100 Ibid., 228.
101 Ibid., 230.
102 R.B., The English Empire.
103 Ibid., 93. The governor was Peter Stuyvesant, who had a silver-tipped peg leg.
The author went on to praise New York, “well seated both for trade, security, and pleasure.” He detailed the type of trade conducted there and crops grown, explained the government structure, estimated the number of houses in New York City at 500 and described the rivers and boundaries. The description of New York’s economic prospects was followed with several pages about the native peoples of New York, some, though not all, of which appeared to be taken from Denton. If Denton was the source, R.B. adopted a more subdued tone. He wrote that the Indians were “not unserviceable to the English, being strangely decreased since the English first settled there, for not long ago there were six Towns full of them which are now reduced to two Villages, the rest being cut off by Wars among themselves, or some raging mortal diseases.” This information provided an interesting contrast to other accounts and may even shed insight into the lives of natives during the period of the takeover. While in accounts such as Denton’s, the Indians suddenly became friendly simply because the English take control, R.B. hinted at other causes: the natives faced increased mortality, perhaps owing to an influx of settlers.

The neglect of New York altogether in certain books and the marginalization of it in others seems remiss, but, as we have seen, there were compelling political and economic causes that led to New York being overlooked at best, purposely ignored at worst. New York, while it was described as well situated for trade, was negligible in terms of profitability in the period immediately following the takeover. The Dutch had long ignored New Netherland in favor of the quicker profits that could be made in their southern colonies.

Another major reason for a lack of information about New York was its not yet fully established English identity. From its inception, the colony had been extraordinarily diverse, attracting immigrants from various parts of Europe. The English not only had to try and assimilate the Dutch, but various other groups as well. New England, founded by Reformed Protestants purported to be religious radicals, posed enough of a challenge for Restoration-era writers who attempted to pen its history. In order to assert the Englishness of the English empire, then, it might have been easier to call little attention to New York until more English were settled there. The lack of migration into early English New York may also have posed a practical problem: if few English were going there, then geographers, many of whom did not travel and

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104 Ibid., 93.
105 Ibid., 94.
instead relied on the knowledge of those who did, had fewer sources. A dearth of migration and a lack of information may have indeed been mutually supporting.

The English were late-comers in the Americas, but there were instances where they made up for lost time by seizing the colonies of other imperial power. While this would seem to offer a chance to celebrate, the different representations of Jamaica and New York demonstrate that geographers and other writers did not necessarily see it that way. While there were clear-cut reasons to tout victory in Jamaica, New York at first posed more of a challenge. Once New York was really won and under control, geographers, and particularly those who focused only on the New World, were happy to incorporate it into their visions of empire, as they had done with Jamaica years before.

Virginia

In contrast to Jamaica and New York, Virginia was a relatively secure English possession for most of the seventeenth century. Virginia was the first English New World colony that most readers encountered, England’s only possession in the Americas until 1620, and because of this it received more mention in books than any other colony. Unlike the one-sided acclaim Jamaica received, Virginia was portrayed alternately as a paradisiacal Eden and a merciless death trap in a number of books written about the colony. Special geographies, meanwhile, always included Virginia but did not enter into the debate. Geographies focused on the New World, published after Virginia was relatively stable, had the benefit of hindsight. These works often went into some detail about the difficulties early Virginia settlers faced, but also wrote of how the colony had improved. The bad press on Virginia seems surprising, since we imagine geographers would have wanted to put the best face on the colony. Representations of Virginia reveal that instead of just passively asserting English control, geographers, in situations in which imperial possession was clear, were perhaps more willing to weigh in on aspects of the colonial situation.

Though Hakluyt dreamed of a North American English settlement in the 1580s, it would be another thirty years before it was realized. The English crown was too poor to take on colonization itself so, as the French and Spanish had done before, they enlisted private investors in a joint stock company to take on the financial risk of establishing the colony in return for the profits they hoped to find. The most active investors were gentlemen from southwestern England, such as Sir Walter Ralegh and Sir Francis Drake. Known as the “West Country Men”, they enlisted the services of the two Richard Hakluys to promote the colony. In 1585, the first
group of English settlers landed and founded the ill-fated Roanoke Colony. Geographically, Roanoke was situated poorly on an island with shoals and sands that inhibited ships’ landing or loading goods and the soil was bad. The first colonists abandoned Roanoke, though not before angering the local Algonquian Indians, from whom they expected to receive all their food. A second group of colonists famously disappeared. In 1607, the newly formed Virginia Company tried again to start a colony, this time at the much better situated Jamestown, on the Chesapeake Bay. This attempt ultimately worked, but the colony faced staggering mortality rates during its formative years.

The Virginia project, with its dashed hopes, produced two competing sets of reports out of the colony: one from a group of people who wanted to alert others of what they saw as the dangers and poor prospects of the colony, another from those who still had high hopes for Virginia and thought it could be profitable. Ralph Lane, who was a part of the first settlement, initially wrote enthusiastic letters home to Sir Francis Walsingham and the Hakluyts about the “goodliest and most pleasing territorie of the world”, but his later “Discourse on the First Colony” was less optimistic, detailing the hunger and conflict the colonists encountered in their first year. Thomas Hariot, a scientist who also went to Virginia with Lane, addressed *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (1588) to the “Adventurers, Favourers, and Wellwillers” of the colony. He wanted to counteract the “slanderous and shamefull speeches bruited abroad” about the colony by others who had been there in order to reassure those who, if not for the bad reports, “otherwise would have also favored & adventured in the action, to the honor and benefite of our nation.” In 1608, John Smith’s *True Relation*, the first full-length book about Virginia, was published, detailing the first year of the Jamestown settlement. Like Hariot before, Smith wanted to dispel the bad press the colony received, yet he, too, had to admit the troubles that plagued the venture. Virginia, then, was given extensive treatment, negative and positive, in short, non-geographic books written solely about the colony.

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106 From 1580 to 1620, “Virginia” referred to the Atlantic coast from Florida to Acadia. Roanoke is in present-day North Carolina, which was part of Virginia until 1663, when a charter signed by King Charles II created “Carolina.” Virginia here is discussed the way that contemporaries would have known it.


Special geographies that discussed Virginia were more tempered in their appraisal than books by colonists themselves, particularly early on. Abbot’s first edition of *A Briefe Description* (1599), written before Jamestown was colonized, reported that the English had gone to Virginia twice and left.110 In *Microcosmus* (1621), Peter Heylen wrote that “the English have diverse times gon thither to inhabit some not liking the country returned homewards, others abiding there still, and at this time are in number about 3 or 400 men weomen and children.”111 In this way, Heylen alluded to the problems of the colony without going into too much detail and assured readers that the English had a physical presence there nonetheless. Similarly, the Virginia section of the 1635 edition of *A Briefe Description* is mostly about the history of the several plantations. The authors wrote about their failure without going into any specifics about disappearances or fights with Native Americans. The lackluster but reassuring assessment of the current settlements informed readers that “in the yeere of our Lord, 1606 the English planted themselves in Virginia under the degrees 37, 38, 39 where they doe to this day continue… reasonably secured against any power that may come against them by Sea.”112 This lukewarm description would not likely have persuaded anyone to emigrate, but did let readers know about the growing English colonies.

The government itself may have actually discouraged overly optimistic appraisals of Virginia. After the 1622 massacre, when a third of Virginian colonists were killed by Indians and the colony was taken into royal hands, John Harvey, commissioner to the Privy Council, suggested to them that they block publication of texts that spoke only of Virginia’s material wealth and great prospects, since too many new settlers might overburden the colony.113 In this instance, promoting English interests in the colony actually meant keeping people away, at least for a time. Whether geographers were tempering enthusiasm because of this, or if it was based more on a balanced reading of the varied accounts is not clear. In any case, even geographies that had a lot to say about Virginia avoided heavy praise or criticism.

Debate about Virginia persisted as the colony grew. Virginia, more than other colonies, relied heavily on indentured servants. In one book about the colony, the author heavily criticizes the English, whom he contrasts with the Spanish, for making “slaves” out of their own people and writes that indentured servants do not usually live out their term. Other writers again came to

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110 Abbot, *A Briefe Description*, 1599, 300.
the defense of Virginia. In *Leah and Rachell, or the two fruitful sisters, Virginia and Mary-land* (1656), John Hammond writes that although “it is the glory of every Nation… to encourage their own forraign attempts… we Englishmen do not onley faile in this, but vilifie, scandalize and cry such parts of the unknown world, as have been found out, settled and made flourishing, by the charge, hazard and diligence of (our) own bretheren.” Getting more to the point, he said that the country was reputed to be “an unhealthy place, a nest of Rogues, whores, desolute and rooking persons; a place of intolerable labour, bad usage and hard Diet, etc.” In defense of Virginia, Hammond acknowledges that in the early years, the colony had a lot of prisoners and other undesirables, was poorly supplied, and that the Indians were troublesome. Years later, however, he reports that the land is more wholesome, that servants regularly come to own land, and that the people are more pious. In reality, Virginia was more stable by 1665, although Hammond’s picture was still overly optimistic.

Around this time, New World geographies began offering their assessments of the colony and unlike their counterparts who wrote special geographies, these authors were less hesitant to weigh in on Virginia. George Gardyner, author of *A Description of the New World* (1651) found not only the high death rate in Virginia appalling, but also its mental effects. “The air is exceeding unwholesome,” he wrote, such that “one of three scarcely liveth the first year… though formerly [the Virginians] retort, the mortality hath stretcht the taking away of eleven of twelve.” Gardyner concluded that the mortality hardened their hearts and that the colonists were “the farthest from conscience and morall honesty, of any such number together in the world.” William Castell was more positive in his *Short Discoverie of the Coasts and Continent of America* (1644). In his lengthy section on Virginia, he downplayed the hardships of the early years and focused instead on the variety and abundance of food. Of the natives, Castell mentioned that the “Chespeacke are Giants” while the “Wickocomacks are Dwarves” but that in any case the English “command the Natives as they plase.” A later treatment of Virginia, in R.B.’s *The English Empire in America* (1685) was more interested in fantastic stories than in offering an appraisal of the colony. *The English Empire* contains several well-informed descriptions of other colonies, with information like major exports and their yearly value, important towns and geographic features, and history. The section on Virginia was eight pages,

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115 Ibid., 3.
116 Gardyner, *A description of the New World*. 
seven of which were stories about the Native peoples with references to cannibalism, blood-sucking devils, harems, and jewelry made of live snakes. Why the author chose to focus on these unbelievable reports out of Virginia is unknown, but the fact that an author had enough source material available to construct such an image is a testament to the amount and variety of things that had been written about Virginia in the previous century.

Geographic representations of Virginia show that in the absence of imperial rivalry, authors might openly debate the merit of a colony or even the way it was being run. These rapprochements, then, also opened the door for other writers to defend the colony. Virginia received more attention than any other colony in all kinds of geographies and traveler’s accounts but also of a much wider variety. The example of Virginia also brings to light the way genre influenced writing. Short books about Virginia were polarized, often written to justify the author’s action in the colony. Special geographies, however, were written with a much more detached perspective. These authors were likely motivated by a desire to put a positive spin on England’s overseas involvements, but they were not willing to completely overlook evidence to the contrary. Writers of geographies focusing on the Americas only were not as conservative as their counterparts who wrote about the whole world nor as partisan as authors of shorter books. These works, while diverse in their estimations, were more likely to take into account the variety of sources on Virginia, whether good, bad, or simply bizarre.

**New England**

In the earliest geographies of the whole world, Virginia and New England were together under one heading. Later geographers, however, would portray the two colonies quite differently. Though they had very different histories, types of settlers, climate, and religious inclinations, both areas were well established and firmly in the hands of the English for most of the seventeenth century. Representations of these thoroughly English colonies differed from one another, but a similar lesson can be drawn in both cases. Like Virginia, New England also received praise and criticism, though authors were equally likely to ignore the colonies as take either side. Confusion in the representation of New England started early. Even when colonies there were granted their own charters, the region was still described as just northern Virginia, even into the second half of the century. Furthermore, in all of the works surveyed, New England is treated as one colony and none of the geographers mentioned its component parts.
This indifference to New England by writers seems puzzling considering its many assets. In New England, the climate was more temperate than in Virginia, and people were generally healthier than their counterparts were in England. New England’s colonists were largely of the middling sort, so most of them were able to pay their way across the Atlantic. Consequently, the region did not have large numbers of indentured servants, white unpaid laborers who were linked to all sorts of vices in Virginia and the Caribbean. Its colonists were more likely to be family units, as opposed to the single men that made up most of the white population in other English Atlantic colonies. New England attracted large numbers of settlers during the mid-seventeenth century, in sharp contrast to nearby colonies of other European powers like New France and New Netherland. New England was, in many ways, an ideal place, one the English might have very well wanted to tout as a New World success. Instead, like Virginia, geographers debated about New England, though they were just as likely to resort to brevity when discussing the colony.

Samuel Clarke, in his 1657 work *A Geographical Description Of All the Countries In the Known World*, writes little about New England, saying that it is “planted with many English Towns, especially New-Boston, an haven Town, and a place of good trading.” As a point of comparison, he writes much more about the island of Nevis, including an anecdote of a voyage led by Captain David Middleton that landed on the island in 1604, and information on a hot bath there. Even the islands of England’s colonial rivals received a lot of coverage and favorable reviews. Hispaniola, for example, enjoyed “a perpetual spring”, exceeded Cuba in its gold, sugar and soil, and the people there purportedly collected fireflies to read by at night. Interestingly, in his praise of Hispaniola, Clarke admitted that the English themselves tried to take it, “but through miscarriages they lost their opportunity… which made them go to Jamica.”

George Meriton’s work *A geographical description of the world* (1671) discusses America at great length. While this might seem to indicate a wealth of information about the New World, it should not be assumed that length is indicative of quality. For example, Meriton writes that America was named after its discoverer, Amerigo Vespucci, while books written decades earlier acknowledge that it was Columbus who discovered America. Meriton writes favorably about New England, claiming it may prove to be “the greatest, best, and happiest

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118 Ibid., 183.
Plantation of all this western Continent.\textsuperscript{119} He focuses on the success of New England without going into much detail, with the description running only two (albeit long) sentences. By comparison, the description of a fellow “marginal” colony, New York, is about a page long, while Carolina, a colony that was only established a few years before, has a longer section still.

Even more intriguing are the descriptions of non-English colonies, particularly those in the Caribbean. Like other writers, Meriton seems preoccupied with the area. Most of the Caribbean Islands have their own entry and Meriton provides many statistics for even the smaller ones. In his description of “Nievis or Mevis” (Nevis), we learn concrete facts about the island that are missing from descriptions of New England, like that the island is “18 miles in circuit” is home to “3 or 4 Thousand, who Live well,” and has three churches and, again, a hot spring. Meriton also mentions the type of crops grown on the island. Similarly, other Caribbean islands have comparable information. Meriton’s oversight was commonplace—little coverage of New England and an abundance of information on other colonies, including seemingly marginal ones. While New England again seems to be slighted, the amount of information on the Caribbean could simply reflect the preoccupation writers had with the valuable colonies in areas near strong imperial rivals and the need to clearly defend English claims. Although Meriton’s opinion of New England is very positive, he nonetheless glosses over any detail of the area to focus on two newer colonies—places that he perhaps thought needed the attention in the way that New England, with tens of thousands of colonists, did not. Geographers felt that New England, the namesake colony, was clearly English.

Other writers did not ignore New England but were critical of its colonists, as was the case with Virginia. Geographer Peter Heylen was a high-church Anglican whose patron was William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Heylen therefore was highly critical of the dissenting and separatist New England colonists, writing in his Cosmographie how the settlers of the Plymouth colony there had fled to Holland first.\textsuperscript{120} Edmund Bohun’s A Geographical Dictionary (1688), written after the colonies were consolidated into the Dominion of New England, wrote that New England “would never submit to any Governor sent from England, but lived like a Free State… till they submitted… and in 1686 accepted Sir Edward Andrews

\textsuperscript{119} Meriton, Geographical Dictionary, 297.
\textsuperscript{120} Armstrong, Writing North America, 44. Heylen, Cosmographie, 4:117.
[Edmund Andros] as Governour for King James II.”  

Significantly, later editions of Bohun’s work retained the above reference to the Dominion of New England long after that political imperial unit’s 1688 demise and King James II’s overthrow, even though other portions of the same section were updated.  

William Castell’s 1644 geography of the New World, one of the earliest of such books to appear, had more information than many special geographies, but was still brief. After discussing the exploration of the area and the improbability of converting the natives of the area, Castell wrote that he “might adde many other generall and particular observations concerning New England, but it would not agree,” with his plan “not to write all of any place, but somewhat of every place.” Still, Castell’s depiction of New England was half the length of those of Virginia or Florida.  

*The English Empire in America*, written over forty years later, was both more informative and even-handed than its predecessors. In his twenty-six-page appraisal, the author mentioned that some of the New Englanders had indeed moved first to the Netherlands, but instead of seeing them as disloyal in some way, he depicts their moving to an English colony as a way of providing their children with a better upbringing than they could get in a “Foreign Nation.” As with Virginia, the author tells several outlandish stories about encounters with Indians, but he also lists the important geographic features of the area, mentions the names of all of the towns and colleges, and tells readers about the crops grown there. He also explains the governmental structure in some detail. Although this work cannot be fairly compared with much earlier ones, it is still much more informative than special geographies published around the same time. In the case of colonies like Jamaica or Virginia, geographic works focusing on just the Americas provide a more nuanced view, but with respect to New England, they are among the few geographies that discuss in detail at all.  

New England and Virginia were long upheld by scholars as archetypical America colonies. Part of understanding colonial American history is acknowledging that the places that loom so large to us were not necessarily as important to the English. There is, however, something to be said for the relative security of Virginia and New England as colonial

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122 Ibid.
123 Castell, 21.
possessions in the seventeenth century, a security that ironically encouraged responses such as neglect and criticism. A comparison with less secure colonies shows an utter reluctance to criticize them in the same way.

Taken as a group, the examples of these four colonies also show the changing ways each was represented throughout the seventeenth century. While they demonstrate that there was no one way for a geographer to depict an English colony, they nonetheless exhibit geographers’ interest in projecting a good image of English colonies abroad. Special geographers writing about the whole world wrote shorter, more conservative evaluations of these places. In some cases, brevity was necessary due to space, but the evidence seems to point more to other reasons. A scholarly reluctance to circulate unverified stories, an interest in more “traditional” facts about a place, as well as a hesitation to prematurely laud or vilify a colony all kept New World descriptions in special geographies short. Readers who wanted more details were often advised by these authors to read traveler’s accounts from the Americas and they likely did so. Around mid-century, other geographers started offering works about the New World. These books can generally be characterized as avoiding both the terseness of special geographies and the eccentricities of traveler’s accounts. It was largely through these works that English readers came to a fuller understanding of their country’s involvement in the New World.

Conclusion

In Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, Patricia Seed outlines the various ways each European imperial power worked to claim and keep territory in the Americas, and positions the English as a people who maintained their colonies through settlement and its visible markers, such as fences. There is certainly no question that the English immigrated to the Americas in numbers far greater than their colonial counterparts during the seventeenth century, and this no doubt helped them to protect their colonies. Understanding why the English came to the Americas in such great numbers requires a complex analysis, going far beyond the simple sense that the English believed their small country to be overpopulated in the early 17th century. Ultimately the English simply provided more ways for people to immigrate than other European colonial powers. A more intriguing question, then, is

why were the English, government and people alike, so much more receptive to the idea of sending their countrymen to the Americas?

The geography book, a uniquely English endeavor, written in English, by and for English readers, provides at least part of an answer to the question. As has been shown, the English wrote about the New World much more often than other Europeans and in a way that was fairly accessible. Far from being an academic pursuit enjoyed by the upper classes, geographies became a vehicle for various types of people to learn about the world beyond the British Isles. Humorous stories of foreigners and fantastic descriptions of strange animals were interwoven with history and politics to create a genre that was both educational and highly entertaining. As greater numbers of English crossed the Atlantic for good, those who remained in England grew more interested in news from the American colonies.

Surprisingly, however, the greatest contribution of geographies was not educating the English about the Americas or even about the rest of the world. Rather, geographies, above these aims, sought to educate the English about themselves and their home and to facilitate discussion about what it meant to be English. Whether they posed their countrymen against familiar Europeans or New World savages, geography writers defined Englishness against others. Importantly, the geography was an exercise in articulating Englishness that came to popularity during a period when that notion was ever changing. As England grew into an empire over the course of the seventeenth century, geographers eventually projected their visions of Englishness across the Atlantic. Indeed, geographers were the ones who first imagined, long before Virginia was settled, that New World colonization was the path to bringing England greater glory. The geography helped facilitate such fame by making the Americas more tangible to the English reading public.

**Afterword**

Just as Edmund Bohun had predicted in 1688, geography continued to develop, so that by the mid-eighteenth century, the types of geographical works being sold were very different from the works of Bohun and his contemporaries. Geography was alive and well but descriptions of the English colonies, along with the rest of North America, were now much more detailed and depictions of a colony were based as much on mathematical measurements as on descriptions of character—a trend that would continue. Some scholars date the advent of modern geography to 1769, when James Cook entered the Pacific. The naturalists and illustrators aboard Cook’s ship
took the scientific methods developed in the Enlightenment, such as description, classification, and comparison, and applied them to the study of geography. Enlightenment thinking also led to maps being produced in ways that seemed more factual, as mapmakers removed sea monsters and other decorative artwork. While scholars have contested both of these claims, geography did undergo a dramatic change in this period. Meanwhile, the United States of America strategically employed geography to promote a sense of citizenship. Ironically, as geography entered this new phase of its existence, geography books written for adults declined precipitously. How, then, did these new developments influence geography and why did such a popular subject fall so out of favor?

At the end of the Revolutionary War, the United States of America stood, for the first time, as a recognized geographical entity. Such geographic cohesion did not, however, mean that a national “American” character had developed from the collection of states that had banded together to fight for independence from Great Britain. Historians of the early republic have long debated how the identity of these people, who were born British subjects and one day found themselves called “Americans,” developed. The rise of a unique American identity was fostered through a variety of means, but one avenue in which scholars have identified a concerted effort to assert a sense of nationhood to the residents of the new United States was geographic writings. America was a nation destined to be explained in terms of its geographic circumstances. Unlike their European counterparts, Americans had a physical frontier. While a map of France or England was relatively straightforward, a map of the United States raised questions about what lay to the west. The American people themselves were defined by geography in a very different way than European nations. Early America was culturally diverse (by standards of that time if not our own) and so its people had no long-shared history or traditions on which they could base their identity. Americans were simply people living in a geographic unit called the United States.

The early United States’ turn to geography may have also been precipitated by its colonial history. In 1690, British Parliament revoked many existing land charters in British North America in order to consolidate imperial land claims. Because previous claims in the colonies were made null, the land had to be surveyed. Huge numbers of people who were not professional surveyors began to measure and describe the land. Martin Brückner argues that the

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mass surveys of the late sixteenth through the mid-seventeenth century made surveying an ordinary act and that this incorporation of geography into everyday discourse influenced the writing culture of colonial America, and allusions to surveys and related references began appearing in poetry and prose, while books on surveying and geodesy (the science which deals with the representation and measurement of the earth) became popular offerings.\textsuperscript{127}

Once the United States won its independence, readers sought out geographic knowledge about their new nation. Whereas before they might have been content with descriptions of their home colony or of the British Empire, they now wanted to know about their new country. This desire for an American version of geography was encouraged by the prominent men, which touted the need for geographic education among the new citizenry. “Every child in America,” wrote Noah Webster, “should be acquainted with his own country,” while men like Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Benjamin Rush advocated for geography in schools.\textsuperscript{128}

Although Americans were eager to establish their own brand of geography, they lacked the means to reproduce the English printing system. In the colonial period, many works that were sold in the North American colonies were reprints of books from England. After the Revolution, geographies printed in England were, not surprisingly, deficient when it came to the new United States. In the 1788 edition of the very popular \textit{Guthrie’s Geography}, originally written by Scotsman William Guthrie, the former colonies appear as disjointed entities on a map of North America. Canada is enlarged and the name “United States” is nowhere to be found.\textsuperscript{129}

The first task of those who wanted to assert an American vision of geography was to alter these texts. Since no copyright laws existed at this time, it was not uncommon for a publisher to make additions and alterations to books they received. Similarly, when authors of popular works died, others often carried on their text, adding revisions but retaining the well-known author’s name. Matthew Carey, an Irish publisher living in Philadelphia who was fervently anti-British, published \textit{Guthrie’s Geography} in America in 1794. He did not, however, publish it as it was; rather, he added a section on the United States along with maps of the country and the individual states. Carey also took the opportunity to add in lines like “England swarms with beggars” in that


country’s description. For publishers who either did not have the ability to produce a whole new text, or who wanted to offer a popular title like Guthrie’s Geography to an American audience, altering British texts was an option. In spite of the lack of a full-fledged publishing industry, there were writers early on who crafted their own works. These offerings were the only the first few of the huge number of geography books that soon flooded the United States.

English books, meanwhile, continued to represent their former colonies in the Americas, as well as the ones they retained. John Seally’s A Complete Geographicall Dictionary (1787) represents what might be a typical British response. Not hostile, but decidedly terse in tone, Seally wrote that the United States was composed of colonies that had opposed the British and that, after the war, the British had let them go, but only by proscribing their boundaries. Seally then describes at great length the boundaries as they “are and shall be.” Doing so, he claimed, would prevent any future hostilities between the two nations. While Seally recognized that the colonies had won the war, he saw a benefit to England nonetheless in that they had supposedly limited the extents of the United States, presumably securing Britain’s other North American possessions. Seally’s position seems like what one might expect from British writers, but, surprisingly, it was in the minority.

Few special geographies from this period were written from such an overtly English perspective as A new royal authentic and complete system of universal geography. The work, authored by three men—Thomas Bankes, Edward Warren Blake, and Alexander Cook—opens by letting readers know that the work is “published by the royal license and authority of his Brittanic majesty, King George III” and promises to tell them of the brave and daring explorations of people like their countryman, the naval explorer James Cook. The authors also promise, however, that “In our Historical Accounts of the particular Circumstances which have occasioned the various Revolutions that have taken place in different States and Kingdoms, we shall preserve a strict Impartiality.”

The book then discusses the possessions of the various colonial powers on the opening page of the section on America, first mentioning how unimportant the Dutch and French colonies were. The writers next describe how Great Britain amassed so much property in the colonies that

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130 Short, 100.
131 John Seally, A complete geographical dictionary; or, a universal gazetteer, 2 vols. (London, 1787).
it extents were never known. This comment in and of itself is intriguing as it demonstrates how colonial powers claimed to extend into areas they had never been. “But alas!” the work continued, “these flattering prospects have been annihilated by a most unhappy contest between the mother country and the colonies” which ended in the creation of “The Thirteen United States of America.” The chapter on North America begins with a description of Canada, which the authors note received new settlers following the Revolution.

Overall, the tone of the work is subdued. The book opens as an extraordinarily pro-British work, yet does not disparage the United States, which still had cultural and other ties with Britain. The many pages spent describing the United States are written in a fairly objective tone. A later section in the book gives a lengthy account of the “civil war” between the colonies and Britain, in which France is cast as more of a villain than the rebellious colonies. It stands in contrast to works from the United States, which tout certain positive qualities as peculiar to Americans: “The virtues that shine in human nature…are the growth of no particular country” and hopes that in the future people from both nations will “read with concern the phrenzy of their fathers” as they cultivate “such friendly connections as may render both a great and happy people.”

_A New and Concise System of Geography_ (1788), written by James Tytler, a Scotsman, says in the preface that the work will provide brief histories of the European states, “more particularly of those states where the events have been most interesting,” as it is important for readers “to know the various revolutions which have taken place in the political affairs of mankind.” The work contains a section on the American Revolution, in which Tytler gives an even-handed account of the conflict and cites economics as the cause. Leaders in Britain made poor decisions about how to tax the Americans, who were not as rich as the British supposed, while the Americans, who had a legitimate complaint, were too easily swept up into rebellion.

Interestingly, although Tytler writes fifty pages on the Revolution, he does not include a description of the United States in his work. Instead, he has each state listed separately (as they would have been when they were colonies of Britain), and although he mentions they are part of the United States, the country as a whole has no entry. This is unusual because other countries have their own description even when regions within them are described. The lack of an entry on

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133 _Ibid._, 575.
134 James Tytler, _A New and Concise System of Geography_ (Edinburgh, 1788).
the “United States” might be a colonial remnant, when each colony would have had its own entry, or it could just be a reflection of the fact that the country still lacked a strong federal government.

Although the United States and other new nations of former colonies would employ geography to define what they were, the geography books that had been so popular a few decades earlier soon fell out of favor. The reasons why are not altogether clear, though a few possibilities seem likely. One reason was that geography books were less exciting once all of the strange creatures and people that early explorers had found were named, studied, and become familiar. The fascinating stories that drew in some readers were largely absent from eighteenth-century geography books. A related reason for the decline in geography books might have been the relative completeness of a given geography book compared to those of the early modern period. In the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, geography books, particularly those that discussed the Americas at any length, needed to be updated at least every few years if they were to reflect the most accurate information about the known limits, ownership, and habitants of a place. To be sure, exploration was still taking place throughout the entire eighteenth century, particularly of interior North America, but the rate of new discoveries slowed somewhat and they certainly did not match the thrill of finding completely undiscovered continents, after Australia was discovered in the seventeenth century. 

Lastly, geography bibliographer O.F.G. Sitwell sees in geography’s popularity the key to its demise. Starting in the eighteenth century, geography was seen as so crucial a subject that schoolchildren were compelled to learn it. In the United States, geographical catechisms were used to quiz children in the following manner:

Q. What is the situation and extent of North America?
A. It is situated between 8 and 80 degrees of North latitude, and between 54 and 131 degrees of west longitude. It is about 5,000 miles long, from north to south, and… 3,700 miles broad, from east to west.

Children as young as six or seven were expected to memorize the scores of answers in such books. While children were taught increasingly difficult geographical facts, in England, geography dropped off the university curriculum in the 1780s, after which point only a few books of geography were written for adults over the next one hundred years. The United States followed a similar trajectory, though a couple generations behind. In Sitwell’s estimation, it was

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the compulsory elementary geographical education itself that made the subject of no interest to adults who had seemingly already “learned” geography.

While the above examples from the United States and Britain concerning the American Revolution seem to point to a mature geography that would have well-served the reading public, they are in fact the last gasp of the kind of geographical writing in English that started with men like Hakluyt, Speed and Heylen. It may have been this very maturity that made geography no longer useful. If, as has been suggested here, geography’s aim was first to promote a sense of national identity and later to assert possession over colonial holdings, then at some point the work of geography was done. The British knew who they were and as a full-fledged imperial power, they perhaps no longer needed to be reassured of their possessions in the same way by the early nineteenth century. The example of America, which defined itself along geographical lines and then relegated the subject to children after a couple decades, seems to prove this point.

Today, the type of geographical information that used to be contained in special geographies is still out there. The listing of countries was subsumed into Encyclopedias, mixed in with descriptions of nearly everything and taken out of the context of a geography. The internet also provides an array of information about the entire world with standard listing for all countries—something our seventeenth century geographers pioneered.

The shift in geographic thinking that occurred in Europe after the discovery of the New World was about more than adding new continents to the map. It led to a revolution in thinking about what the world was, how it might be represented visually, and how it could be described textually. It was not that Europeans in the fifteenth century did not care what the world looked like, but that their conception of what “the world” was entirely different from our own. English colonization in the Americas happened at approximately the same time that English geographers started writing accounts of the world. This was not mere coincidence but part of a long process whereby the English came to define who they were as a people and to think about how colonization could benefit the nation. The grand geographical works of the early modern period soon became outmoded, but while they flourished, they did much to shape thinking about England’s place in the world.
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