

**NARRATING THE GEOGRAPHY OF AUTOMOBILITY:
AMERICAN ROAD STORY 1893-1921**

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the cultural history of American automobility as revealed in narrative back to its inception in order to shed light on the construction of America's automobile geography. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's idea that the geographies we live in are manufactured by cultural products and social practices, my research examines multiple genres of narrative to argue that narratives representing road travel established new relationships to national space and new geographies so that the civil and industrial infrastructures that make automobility possible could be built.

Transforming cultural and social relationships to national space is no small task. In order to rebuild their social environments, Americans had to, among other things, reinterpret the constitution, form new government bodies, construct a whole new infrastructure of auto roads, develop new industries that would redefine the economic profile of the country, work to purchase motor vehicles, build facilities in service of motorists, and drive auto-roads in ever increasing numbers. All of this depends upon the production of narrative rhetoric that formulates new possibilities of relating to and experiencing America's physical space. Thus, building on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope of the open road, and defining narrative broadly, I analyze poetry, novels, travel memoir, prescriptive travel writing, and promotional literature to show how narratives about road travel propelled sweeping changes in the production of national space in the early century.

Chapter One traces the beginning of automobility in America to the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and analyzes geographic narratives in architect Louis Sullivan's

Transportation Building, Colonel Albert Pope's rhetoric of the Good Roads Movement, and Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" of American institutions.

Chapter Two demonstrates the spectrum of nineteenth-century conceptions of geography reflected in Walt Whitman's romantic worldview and outlines the points on which Whitman became a touchstone for the national geographic concepts of later American road writers.

Chapter Three analyzes numerous promotional texts that depict road travel, including press coverage of the first transcontinental motor trip in 1903 and the 1919 Military Convoy over the Lincoln Highway, as well as writing by Henry Joy, President of the Lincoln Highway Association, Henry Ford, and naturalist John Burroughs to demonstrate how promotional literature popularized automobility for a reluctant, reactionary nation.

Chapter Four examines prescriptive travel books by Effie Gladding Price, Emily Post, and A. L. Westgard, revealing the fantasies and desires with which these texts imbue automobility such that it can be represented as more rewarding than alternative modes of travel.

Chapter Five investigates Theodore Dreiser's modernist efforts to depict the novel form of travel in intellectually original and formally innovative ways in his travel memoir *A Hoosier Holiday*. This chapter exposes the book's embedding of Dreiser's complex and original assessment of American political and ideological movements within a very personal geographic narrative.

Finally, Chapter Six analyzes how three of Sinclair Lewis's early novels, *Flight of the Hawk*, *The Innocents*, and *Free Air*, reconsider the scope of American geography and dramatize reasons for supporting the construction of an automobile infrastructure at the moment when the nation was debating revisions to the power balance between federal and state authority over road construction.

For all their support, both instrumental and moral,
I dedicate this dissertation to my family,
especially my mother, my father, and my wife.

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INTRODUCTION

READING THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF AUTOMOBILITY

In 1904 the United States Federal Office of Road Inquiry conducted the first comprehensive census and assessment of the national highway infrastructure in nearly a century.¹ According to the report, of the more than two million miles of road in the country, ninety-three percent were nothing more than graded dirt tracks. The remaining seven percent of “improved” road were surfaced with macadam, simple gravel, sand, shells, or plank. Only 141 total miles were surfaced with something more substantial than macadam: 123 miles with brick and 18 miles with bituminous macadam. In short, the vast majority of roads in the country were, as John Rae puts it, “uncomfortably dusty in good weather and usually impassable in bad” (32-3).

A century later, the United States boasts more paved miles of road than any other country in the world. According to 2005 statistics,² the United States has 3,927,800 total miles of roads, 2,597,365 of which, a full two thirds, are paved, and 46,233 miles of which are expressways. By comparison, Russia, with nearly twice the land area of the United States, has only 333,855 miles of roads, 225,019 of which are paved. That is more

¹ The previous survey of travel infrastructure had been conducted by Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury in the Jefferson administration. His *Report on Roads and Canals* was published in 1808. See John Stilgoe (109).

² CIA World Fact Book online: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> (June, 2006).

than eleven times as many miles of road in the U.S. Similarly, Brazil and China, each only slightly smaller than the U.S. in area have a combined total of 2,168,679 miles of road, a little more than half the total miles of road in the U.S., and the U.S. has better than eight times as many miles of paved roads as China and Brazil.

These statistics indicate that, unlike anywhere else, in a single century the United States radically transformed its relationship to national space. The process of building, rebuilding, and maintaining multiple comprehensive national infrastructural networks in the twentieth century reflects revolutions in culture, social behavior, politics, and economics in the United States. This remarkable transformation from an almost total paucity of viable roads to a superabundance of pavement in a single century can be seen as nothing less than a socio-cultural revolution and represents one of the principal constitutive factors of modernization and the evolution of the culture of modernism and subsequently postmodernism in America.

This set of facts and the significant socio-cultural transformation they reflect provokes a number of questions which, to borrow Raymond Williams's terminology, involve emergent, dominant, and residual socio-cultural forms (41). Why had the United States not built anything resembling a road network infrastructure prior to the beginning of the twentieth century when benchmark empires like France and England had? Then, once the U.S. began to build roads, why did it build them so prolifically, particularly given the numerous challenges of terrain, logistics, politics, and economics? More to the point, on what grounds did a nation that had not made road construction a priority during its first century decide that only a superabundance of highways would suffice in its second? How did the U.S move from a transportation economy dominated by the

privately operated and maintained railroad to one dominated by free, public
automobility? Moreover, how did national political (and ideological) forms and
discourses need to change in order for the nation to get behind such massive public works
projects? How did the cultural climate need to change in a participatory democratic-
republic like America in order for an ascendant political order to mount a policy of total
socio-cultural transformation represented by the construction of millions of miles of
roads? Indeed, given Alan Sinfield's observation that literary texts address controversial
aspects of ideological, social, and political formation,³ how were the narratives that frame
and orient individual relationships to physical space and national society revised in order
to allow for the construction of such an awesome infrastructure? In short, how did
America narrate the reordering of national geography represented in the rise of
automobility?

There are two common misrepresentations of the driving forces of this
transformation. One standard historical narrative identifies mobility as essential to the
American character and characterizes the automobile as the apotheosis, so to speak, of
this fundamental American trait. As Gertrude Stein would have it:

³ Sinfield argues in *Cultural Meritism, Othello, and the Politics of Plausibility* that reading literature historically reveals ideological fault lines within "narratives of plausibility," exposing preoccupations with class, gender, race, and sexuality. He writes "Those faultline stories are the ones that require the most assiduous and continuous reworking; they address the awkward, unresolved issues, the ones which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute. . . . The task for political criticism, then, is to observe how stories negotiate the faultlines that distress the prevailing conditions of plausibility" (818). Sinfield uses the terminology of plausibility to theorize how stories lead to social action, and his case for historicism can be extended beyond the highly charged conflicts of identity politics to other more seemingly benign political formations like transportation infrastructure, business practices and commercial relationships, agricultural economy, fashion and the like; indeed, identity politics are exacerbated by such apparently banal questions such that the risk of fetishizing demographics is overlooking the mechanisms by which discrimination and exploitation become banal subjects within complex structures of domination, oppression, and exclusion within social practices. Similarly, in *Theory and the Premodern Text*, Paul Strohm argues that before medieval England could begin to burn heretics, narratives that presented the torture of them was necessary so that the idea could be considered before it was executed in reality.

I am always trying to tell this thing that a space of time is a natural thing for an American to always have inside them as something inside which they are continuously moving. Think of anything, of cowboys, of movies, of detective stories, of anybody who goes anywhere or stays at home and is an American and you will realize that it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled always filled with moving, a space of time that is always filled with moving. (“Making of Making of Americans” 286)

Likewise, Val Hart argues in his book, *The Story of American Roads*, that all the various forms of road and highway in America “spring. . . from the pathways of our national being” (17), as though there were a fundamental relationship between the land itself, a will to mobility, and highway construction. Likewise, George Pierson argues that America is singular due to “the M-Factor: the factor of movement, migration, mobility” (278). Similarly, Phil Patton, in *Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway*, remarks that all American roads represent “a literally concrete expression of the central American drives.” That is, “change is [the nation’s] most unchanging premise, movement is its most firmly fixed pattern, impermanence its most permanent condition, and the receding horizon its most steadfast goal. . . the mute perspectives and pavements of the highway objectify elements of the American mind” (12). Also, according to Drake Hokanson, automobility is “another outlet for wanderlust, another way to span the continent, to bind the East and West” (31). All these histories imply that roads are an outward expression of an essential American psychic desire; the road is the manifestation of latent desires for such things as travel, adventure, escape, nature, and/or freedom. However, such narratives presume an essentialized, homogenous American character which is anything but representative, and they reify the construction of the largest road infrastructure and public works project in human history as though it were the most natural thing in the world. The danger of this thinking is that it elides the difficult

political, economic, and ideological conflicts out of which the American highway infrastructure was actually manufactured.⁴ Such a view presupposes an American highway system as a historical inevitability and thus foreshortens the need for any complex understanding of the history of such a transformation and its numerous social and environmental impacts.

Another common explanation of America's prodigious construction of roads in the twentieth century is that its occurrence is flatly instrumental. This is simply technological determinism. Referencing the evolution of automobility in the late teens and twenties, Drake Hokanson maintains, "On the now paved highway were cars that had reached a high level of utility, and beside the highway, road-side America was rising. Americans had found a new mode of travel and were now busy creating a landscape to support it" (116). Individual actors are relegated to the background of this narrative; progress builds itself. Similarly, characterizing the twentieth century as an era of industrial progress, William Kaszynski asserts that "the internal combustion engine on wheels has made the greatest impact, transforming the earth's landscape and starting new industries" (24). Implicitly the engine itself, the technology, is the agent of history. Chester Leibs states, "cars began streaming from the nation's auto factories, and the demand for places to drive them soared. Before long hundreds of new highways laced the continent, and countless older roads were widened and paved" (3). Again, the machine itself, because of its all too obvious benefits to mankind and the market, reoriented the course of American history with hardly a trace of human involvement. This sort of

⁴ Such thinking elides also the fact that private automobility was heavily subsidized by the federal government at the expense of other modes of transport like trolley, streetcar, and train systems. See Stephen Goddard, James Flink, and James Howard Kunstler.

instrumental reasoning, while casting automobility as a teleological inevitability, fails to account for the slow acceptance of and even reactionary resistance to the technology in the early years of its introduction in the U.S. Representing technologies determining the course of history overlooks the socio-cultural production of human relationships to technologies.⁵

Because they are based on limiting assumptions, both of these approaches to narrating the history of automobility fail to develop any sense of the specific circumstances of the production and implementation of the new technology by human agents operating within the contingencies of a socio-cultural order at a particular moment. In fact, new automobilists at the turn of the century (and the bicyclists who preceded them) faced a real problem in the lack of roads on which to drive. Building roads, contrary to the implications of these reductively instrumental and unreservedly exceptionalist histories, was extremely difficult business and even more difficult politics in a country unprepared—culturally, politically, economically—for so large an undertaking. In order to build roads individual states and the country as a whole had to invent new engineering technologies that could accommodate cars and trucks to America's numerous difficult terrains. Also the nation had to revise its political relationships between townships, cities, states, and the federal government. Indeed, Good Roads enthusiasts encountered resistance at all levels of government to alteration of such

⁵ See David Nye, *Narratives and Spaces: technology and the construction of American culture*. Nye argues, "Too often writers minimize the complexity of technological change" by presuming hegemonic control of politics and industry or "by assuming that machines inexorably shape historical events." He asserts, "machines are human-directed agents of cultural change. Human beings invent, market, and use technologies to create new sensibilities, and consumers in turn make demands on them." He theorizes, "technologies are contested terrains" within fields of cultural conversation: "Technologies are part of a dialogue between human beings about their differing perceptions. This dialogue takes the form of narratives, different stories we tell each other to make sense of the transformations that accompany the adoption of new machines" (2-3).

an obviously important element of political power, and the national road network envisioned by the most progressive proponents of road construction necessitated a reinterpretation of the constitution. In short, the American populace had to be convinced in spite of intense skepticism and serious reservations that the enormous investment necessary to make automobility viable was not only worthwhile but possible. Narratives were the driving force in the actualization of this transformation.

Essentialist and instrumental histories overlook the relevance of narrative, literary and otherwise, for working out the difficulties of the radical socio-cultural transformation represented in building automobility's enormous infrastructure. Stories were elemental to the rise of automobility because stories provided a lens through which the expense of the investment in automobility could be justified and even made desirable in the popular imagination. As such, the narratives of automobility work out for the larger population the significance, success, and benefits of automobility in different, often parallel, and occasionally competing terms. The nation needed to recreate, re-narrate in other words, its relationship to national space in order to pave the way culturally for the investment in the infrastructure. Transforming the social and political makeup of the country in order to build an infrastructure of automobility marks, then, a turning point in national geography. The geography of automobility replaces the geography of the carriage and the railroad as the dominant organizer of national space in the popular imaginary. In the literature of the road the dominant system of geographic meanings and values of the nation are reoriented, and a whole new set of cultural and social practices are conceived and practiced. Revising relationships to national space, road narratives interpellate readers and travelers into recognizable and constrained social roles and cast physical space as accessible,

navigable, consumable, and socially meaningful. That is, these new narrative geographies produce an imaginary landscape of the new social space of automobility by establishing the imaginary conditions necessary to relate to national space in particular ways that encourage individuals to purchase motorcars, travel, and invest in road infrastructure projects. This dissertation analyzes road narratives for the ideas that produced America's automobile geography.

This project is positioned at the intersection of cultural history and literary criticism. Starting with Whitman's nineteenth-century geography, this dissertation tracks multiple modes of broadly defined road narrative from the beginning of the American automobile revolution in 1893 and follows it through to 1921 when the U.S. Congress passed and President Woodrow Wilson signed the Federal Aid Road Act, appropriating for the first time in U.S. history significant federal monies for the construction of a national highway network. My broad definition of road narrative includes the implied narratives of advertising, promotional and prescriptive travel literature, journalism, poetry, fiction, and memoir that depict road journeys. Following Kenneth Burke, Wayne C. Booth, and James Phelan, I take all narratives to be rhetorical, constructing arguments through both the framing of perspective and the encoding of ideologies regarding human relationships to the world. By the term automobility I mean to reference, following John Burnham, John Rae, and James Flink, all the combined aspects and impacts of the motor vehicle—roads and highways, the roadside service infrastructure, industry, politics, socio-cultural formations like narratives and travel rituals, as well as emotional and ideological investments within these material conditions. The term geography here means cultural products which construct and represent conceptual relationships to the conditions

of the material world. In formulating this definition I reference the term's etymological origins in the Greek—world (*geo*) and writing (*graphos*)—meaning a method of representing conceptualizations of human relationships to and the experience of the material world. As the conceptualization the human relationships to the material world, geographies are not stable but always subject to revision and reiteration; they are defined in large part by tensions between competing sensibilities.⁶ In particular, I want to emphasize that geographic conceptions are embedded in narratives and acquire through narrative their persuasive power. Thus, moving across disciplinary boundaries and genre forms, this project effectively maps the rhetoric and ideologies embedded in the narratives by which the people of the United States in the early twentieth century redefined their relationship to national space and brought automobile modernity into being.

In Chapter One I trace the beginning of automobility in America to the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, and illustrate late-nineteenth-century geographic thinking in architect Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building, Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis of American Institutions, and the activism of Colonel Albert Pope who was a leader of the Good Roads Movement. Chapter Two exposes the spectrum of nineteenth-century geographic conceptions fostered by Walt Whitman's romantic worldview, which would become a touchstone for later producers of automobile

⁶ This point is well summarized by Howard Stein in *Developmental Time, Cultural Space: Studies in Psychogeography*: "The identity for every human group is bound up with how it imagines, symbolizes, constructs, and maintains its boundaries. For cultural content does not exist apart from, and without constant reference to, the shape, size, extent, and security of its boundaries. Group boundaries, whether 'natural' (rivers, mountain ranges) or 'man-made' (railroad tracks, clothing styles) are at once arbitrary and absolute; no room is left for ambiguity" (57).

geography. Chapter Three examines how promotional literature by Henry Joy, Henry Ford, and others popularized narratives of national automobility for a reluctant, reactionary populace. The fourth chapter shows how prescriptive travel books by Effie Gladding Price, Emily Post, and A. L. Westgard imbue automobility with fantasies of personal development and access to an American exotic, instigate motor travel through appeals to patriotic citizenship, and translate nineteenth-century codes of landscape appreciation to a twentieth-century context, all while documenting the plausibility of cross country motoring despite its very real hazards. Chapter Five analyzes Theodore Dreiser's modernist efforts to depict motor travel in intellectually original and formally innovative ways while conceiving a complex and original assessment of American political and ideological movements at a key point in the geographic transformation in which he was self-consciously participating. Finally, Chapter Six argues that early novels by Sinclair Lewis—*Trail of the Hawk*, *The Innocents*, and the motor romance *Free Air*—translate popular adventure and romance genres to a modern context while arguing for reconsideration of the terms by which Americans imagine national geography.

Critical Geographic History

Despite all the paeans of American automobility, it is essential to recognize that for all of its benefits automobility carries with it very real consequences. As James Howard Kunstler points out in his book, *The Geography of Nowhere*, the contemporary landscape is dominated by the automobile. That is, America's contemporary built

environment privileges not human social interaction, but the convenience of autonomous driving.⁷ This is a condition that Lewis Mumford foresaw when the Federal Interstate highway Act was passed in 1957, writing, “the current American way of life is founded not just on motor transportation but on the religion of the motorcar, and the sacrifices that people are willing to make for this religion stand outside the realm of rational criticism. . . [America’s] highway program will, eventually, wipe out the very area of freedom that the private motorcar promised to retain” (244-5). Similarly, in *The Insolent Chariots* (1958) John Keats laments, “this civilization is exclusively designed to meet the demands of our automobiles,” which leads to wholly standardized, abstract, and inhuman environments. Likewise, in his exceptional history of the struggle between rail and automobile interests, Stephen Goddard identifies the unforeseen consequences of allowing highway investment to become “no longer a means to a better life but rather an end in itself.” As an end in itself, automobility accounts for many unforeseen costs and consequences like rampant pollution leading to global climate change and contaminated watersheds, a foreign policy disastrously committed to sustaining the flow of foreign oil, inefficient and environmentally destructive land use, urban sprawl, disposal of millions of junked cars, damage to public health, lost time to traffic, auto injury and property loss, courts dedicated to personal injury and property loss, and endless auto insurance premiums. While overly strident criticism of automobility will only fail to acknowledge its all too obvious benefits to society and to individuals, it is reasonable to question

⁷ Building public spaces for automobility rather than communal sociability, Kunstler reckons, amounts to a sacrifice of what he calls a sense of place: “The idea that people and things exist in some sort of continuity, that we belong to the world physically and chronologically, and that we know where we are” (118). Kunstler takes his idea of the sense of place from the landscape studies tradition which I will discuss in the following section.

whether automobility is worth sustaining in its current form given a thoroughgoing evaluation of its consequences. While it's fruitless to imagine some alternative, preferred course of history, an examination of the narratives and events by which our system of automobility arrived at the state it did can establish a ground upon which the reconsideration of current trends and narratives is possible. This calls for a critical understanding of the geographic history of automobility.⁸

Contemporary critical geographic historicism is indebted to Henri Lefebvre's theorization of the social production of space. Working in the wake of the social upheavals of 1968, and within the current of competing discourses of the New Left, Lefebvre observed in humanistic and philosophical discourse a growing interest in and concern for ideas of space. Yet he also perceived that the tendencies in the new discourses of space were toward presumption of linguistic transparency, faulty realism, and the suppression of analysis of everyday lived space in favor of the intellectual space of theory. In *The Production of Space* he argues that these new discourses of spatiality tend ultimately toward the ascendancy of what he loosely terms "abstract space and dominated spaces."⁹ Abstract, dominated space represents, for Lefebvre, the newest form of capitalism: it erases difference, suppresses older social forms of spatial relations, and manifests itself in the destruction of nature (50). Lefebvre maintains that this abstract

⁸ Theory and models of critical geographic history are represented in the work of Frederic Jameson, Edward Soja, and David Harvey, as well as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, all of whose spatial work is indebted to Henri Lefebvre. The point that these writers are all keen to advance is that social forms that directly influence the contemporary day-to-day lifeworld are neither natural nor inevitable as they sometimes appear or are presumed to be. Rather, significant determinate factors of social forms, like roads and automobility for instance, emerge from traditions, commitments, desires, and concerns established within the multiple generational relationships to space. So an understanding of historical, geographical, and material conditions that define modern life enables an engaged and rational relationship to culture, society, politics and, I would add, the planet.

⁹ Lefebvre's conception of abstract space parallels the dominant geographic logic of postmodernity as defined by Jameson, Soja, and Harvey, though Lefebvre does not use this term.

space, when fetishized as transparent or reified as absolute leads to certain dangers. For instance, Lefebvre warns, “Fetishized abstract space. . . gives rise to two practical abstractions: ‘users’ who cannot recognize themselves within it, and a thought which cannot conceive of adopting a critical stance towards it” (93). Likewise, dominated spaces are the geographies of state control, which are “space transformed—and mediated—by technology, by practice” (164). Lefebvre’s emblem of dominated space is the space of the super-highway, which “brutalizes the countryside and the land, slicing through space like a great knife,” rigorously determining social action.¹⁰ Lefebvre worries that if conceptualizations of space continue toward abstraction, then dominated space will become utterly dominant, precluding resistance by subcultural or countercultural groups, and social relations will drift ever toward totalization and absolutism. Lefebvre warns, “The ‘dominance’ whose acme is fast approaching has very deep roots in history and in the historical sphere, for its origins coincide with those of political power itself” (164). Thus, Lefebvre demands an understanding of the history of space in order to combat the disenfranchising and alienating tendencies of what he calls neo-capitalism.

“(Social) space is a (social) product,” Lefebvre maintains (26). Grounding Lefebvre’s thesis is the idea that space amounts to a unity of separately apprehended, but irrevocably conjoined “fields”—the physical, the mental, and the social.¹¹ Space is the ground in which all human activities operate, but Lefebvre stresses that it is not an

¹⁰ Lefebvre implies that airports, military bases, docks, and even in certain cases shopping malls and public parks when technological commitments define them are dominated spaces; yet, the highest form of dominated space is the landscape of the superhighway.

¹¹ Lefebvre compares these socio-spatial fields to analogous to molecular, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces in physics. These fields are unique and therefore require different methodological apparatus to elucidate, but are nevertheless integrally united.

absolute and empty void to be filled and catalogued; rather, space is produced by and within societies. In Lefebvre's words, "(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products; rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder" (73). That is, every society, modern neocapitalism in particular, produces its own social space through *social practice*, *representations of space*, and *representational space*. Lefebvre defines social practice as the quotidian functions of day to day life, the locations of rituals and performances, the points of contact between different social groups, and the routes of communication throughout the social organization of space. Representations of space amount to conceptualized space of the dominant order of any society, which in the modern context means the space of technocrats, social engineers, scientific planners, and the like. Finally, by representational spaces he means "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols; it is the space of the arts, space passively experienced and described, overlaying concrete space and appropriating its symbols and signs" (39).¹² Thus, Lefebvre calls for a history of the (social) production of (social) spaces, the point of which is the creation of a critical distance from the hegemony of the modern world.

Lefebvre insists the negative conditions of late-twentieth-century life demand critical geographic history. What this dissertation proposes, following Lefebvre, is a critical historical analysis of a particular form of geography, namely the early twentieth

¹² In this project, I combine Lefebvre's representations of space and representational space under the single word geography. In so doing, I mean to emphasize that the conceptions of space that guide behavior are built into ideological formations about space. The ideologies that make for road building are inseparable from the ideologies of narratives concerning individual automobility. While there is good reason to distinguish between these terms, when analyzing the production of America's automobile geography so many echoes exist between representational space and representations of space that this distinction loses some of its explanatory force.

century road story. The multiple national road networks that now connect and interlace the population of the United States are one of the principal determinant, not determining, conditions of twenty-first century existence, affecting economics, politics, habitation, labor patterns, cultural dissemination, social distinction (a la Bourdieu), and in many ways how we see and experience not just the country but also, indeed, ourselves. A better understanding of the development of this socio-cultural infrastructure, the ongoing production of this space, as both a discourse and a constructed environment, is essential for engaged citizenship and individual self understanding. A critical geographic history of the American road system gestures toward an ethics of critical engagement with the factors that shape our world and to which we conform by choice, by habit, or by compulsion. Tracing the roots of this produced spatial infrastructure back to its beginnings provides a fuller comprehension of the numerous micropolitical decisions and their impacts which, in the aggregate, led to the implementation of a national network of highways where none had existed. The production of social space does not take place in some removed center of authoritarian power but rather, as Lefebvre and others maintain, within the mundane practices of the quotidian. It is produced in the repetition of daily social routines and represented in the iterative discursive practices of geography.

Practical engaged politics demands some form of address to produced geography, and in the American context of the twenty-first century, with our “bridges to nowhere” and “addiction to oil,” no engagement with the production and reproduction of the social order is possible without confronting the ongoing (re)production of automobility. Bearing witness to such a process of socio-cultural transformation and ordering, a transformation that so directly impacts our lives a century later, prepares us to comprehend the spatial,

social, and cultural forms of the world we have inherited and, crucially, to recognize similar movements in our own time so that we might conscientiously evaluate decisions both great and small—consumer decisions, voting decisions, personal political decisions, linguistic choices, pedagogical practices—that impact not only our own lives but also the lives of future inhabitants of our world.¹³ Thus, the implications of this analysis should resonate with economic, ethnic, racial, gender, and identity politics on points of geographic exclusion, segregation, and access, and it should inform debates regarding the ecology of the planet we occupy.

Landscape Hermeneutics: Relating to the Ground of Experience

Critical geographic historicism, as an approach to reading literary and cultural texts, analyzes the production of conceptualizations of spatial relationships in literature, political discourse, and maps, to name only a few examples. Located at the point of contact between cultural history, literary criticism, and human geography, this method of reading literature and culture can be extended to the reading of physical spaces of social involvement and interaction as well. Through culture, societies interact with physical space in three ways which are revealed in geographic analysis. At the most basic level geographic texts reflect subjective experiences of material space. Conversely,

¹³ While this project follows in the methods outlined by eminent Marxian thinkers, I would distance the agenda of this project from a Marxist politics of revolution. Rather than perpetuate the cipher of class antagonisms (which is most certainly not to say that such conflicts do not exist) in the name of some fantasy of utopian social revolution, I prefer using critical analyses of the productive forces that both enable and constrain the conditions of existence to empower individual citizens within the parameters of the existing social-political order so we may all take ownership of the consequences of our mundane actions and, further, make reasoned and responsible choices with regards to such actions.

geographies define human relationships to physical space and so influence alterations to physical space. That is, geographic texts are invested with commitments to develop and sustain modes of behavior that define the locations people inhabit: cities are built, farm land developed, and roads constructed because cultural narratives establish and sustain precedents for such geographic activities. Geographic texts also mediate the experience of physical space, conditioning individual subjects to respond to physical space in certain ways. Therefore, analysis of the production of space is an effort to research and theorize the reciprocal relationship between physical environments, human behavior, and culture as a process that produces socially constructed spaces. In short, geographic analysis calls for a hermeneutics of produced spaces which entails, in the broadest sense, a method of interpreting the interactive and recursive relationships between human societies, cultural production, and the environment. So, theorizing the interpretation of the material environment by producers of geography is integral to critical analysis of the production of automobility.

With his journal, *Landscape*, John Brinkerhoff Jackson initiated a tradition of landscape studies which provides a starting point for thinking about the interpretation of the physical environment not simply as a given, but as something of a created artifact which inflects the generations of human history that have “written” their cultures palimpsestically on the surface of the land.¹⁴ After the Second World War, Jackson began to outline a field of inquiry into the relationships between cultures and environments. The total inflected record of human habituation on the material environment, Jackson termed

¹⁴ Jackson followed the work of French cultural geographers, Pierre Defontaines, Vidal de la Blache, and Abler Demangeon, avoiding both the descriptive methods of contemporary decorative arts and architectural historians, and the blatant determinism of Friedrich Ratzel and Ellen Churchill Semple.

landscape.¹⁵ He considered landscape an entirely constructed phenomenon with real consequences for the environment, nonhuman life, and humanity. As Jackson explains in an editorial from *Landscape*:

The relation. . . between man and his environment is in some respects similar to that existing between the artist-craftsman and the material which he has chosen as his medium. This may be a relationship admitting of an infinite number of variations: the attitude of the carver in wood, who considers the texture of and grain of his medium part of the completed beauty, is different from that of the modeler in clay who creates something almost entirely new; and different from that of a sculptor who uses stone. In like manner one group of men will set about creating their habitat by radically transforming the natural environment, while another will modify it scarcely at all, and a third will seek to perfect the already existing features. The human landscapes of Midwestern America, of the Pueblo Indians, and of Japan are illustrations of these three attitudes. But there are countless others, and one of the tasks of human geography is the locating and defining of the areas in which such distinct attitudes toward the environment prevail. (334)

For Jackson landscape is a broader concept than the word's Germanic and Anglo etymological roots imply. While traditions of landscape viewing, painting, and shaping are certainly part of what Jackson is concerned to interpret and explain, he extends his notion of landscape past the picturesque tradition of aesthetic appreciation to affirm that:

we will eventually formulate a new definition of *landscape*: a composition of man-made or man modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence; and if *background* seems inappropriately modest we should remember that in our modern use of the word it means that which underscores not only our identity and presence, but also our history. (Jackson's emphasis 8)

¹⁵ While respecting Jackson's choice of terminology, I want to distinguish between my own use of the term landscape and his. Whereas Jackson and many of his followers use the term to signify human-built physical spaces as in, for example, the products of landscape architecture and landscape construction, I think of landscape in a parallel way to geography, as a discourse that represents human relationships to physical space. Clearly built environments can be thought of sign systems, and a not very liberal reading of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* lends itself to the interpretation of built environments as texts. Nevertheless, for clarity's sake it is worthwhile to distinguish between geography and/or landscape as discourse and the material world which these particular textual modes reflect.

Jackson's interests are deliberately not limited to the impact of formal, official, or instrumental structures of dominant classes on landscapes. For instance, Jackson is only marginally interested in the Romantic tradition of landscape appreciation traceable to the late eighteenth century, because this is an idea of landscape belonging to an elite class and not necessarily applicable to all of England. Jackson is more concerned with what he terms "the vernacular landscape," by which he means the improvisational efforts of communities close to the land and far removed from the "polite" and "timeless" constructions of elite artists, writers, thinkers, architects, and engineers. Jackson's focus, in other words, is a historically inflected understanding of the total relationship, both dominant and popular, of societies in terrains. In short, the concern of landscape studies, as he would have it, is to interpret what altered environments reveal about the worldview of the people who have altered and lived in them.¹⁶

In general, followers of Jackson have engaged the complex problem of theorizing the interpretation of "ordinary landscapes." James Duncan and Trevor Barnes provide a salient analysis of "landscape" interpretation in the introduction to their anthology of

¹⁶ Following Jackson a whole generation of American geographers and cultural critics began to explore the relationship of human societies to their "landscapes," covering a range of approaches from geographical phenomenology to human ecology, human geography, and literature. Yi Fu Tuan has developed a philosophical approach describing individual experiences and assessments of places, noting in particular the experience of what he calls *topophilia*—the feeling or affection an individual develops for a particular location. Similarly, Edward Relph has written about what he terms the "sense of place," describing how places are interpreted, understood, and negotiated. Karl Raitz and Peirce Lewis have endeavored to articulate a cultural history of the American landscape aligned with Jackson's ideas and methods. Carl Sauer worked to develop a discipline of human geography and ecology. Richard T. T. Forman has also worked on uncovering the relationships between ecology and human culture. Sharon Zukin, Jennifer Wolch and Michael Dear, and Dolores Hayden have studied the inscriptions of power and politics in the landscape. Kent Ryden has investigated folk and literary narratives, which he defines as *chorography*, or place-writing, for an understanding of "the invisible landscape," the stories about landscape that are invisible to the eye of visitors, but rooted deep in folk culture. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri have analyzed the production of landscapes in theater. This list of writers, thinkers, and theorists only sketches in the most cursory way the broad and growing field of landscape studies in America. The remarkable contribution of Cultural Geographers is almost completely overlooked in this truncated list.

essays, *Writing Worlds: Discourse text and metaphor in the representation of landscape*.¹⁷ They argue:

The social-life-as-text metaphor is easily applicable to landscape because it too is a social and cultural production. Thus a landscape possesses a similar objective fixity to that of a written text. It also becomes detached from the intentions of its original authors, and in terms of social and psychological impact and material consequences the various readings of landscapes matter more than any authorial intentions. In addition, the landscape has an importance beyond the initial situation for which it was constructed, addressing a potentially wide range of readers. (6).

This way of thinking empties the landscape of any absolute significance or structural knowability and sees the physical environment as a polysemious signifier within fields of socio-cultural production. It unfetters landscape interpretation from such problematic anchors as human nature, timeless significance, or universal rationality. Unlike earlier models of interpreting built spaces and geographies, Duncan and Barnes do not presume a perfectly stable, consistently coherent, structural or instrumental ground for interpretation of the production of space which is not always already an interpretation and or representation. They acknowledge that interpretations of places mediate and are inflected in all behavior, including textual behavior. Thus, the landscape as a produced space is an effect of repeated, continually mediated performance within material and linguistic social environments. Seeing the produced landscape as prone to the same instabilities as other cultural products, Duncan and Barnes argue “text is. . . an appropriate trope to use in analyzing landscapes because it conveys the inherent instability of meaning, fragmentation or absence of integrity, lack of authorial control, polyvocality and irresolvable social contradictions that often characterize them.”

¹⁷ Comparable work to that of Duncan and Barnes has been offered by Derek Gregory and David Ley. Sharon Zukin demonstrates a highly theoretically nuanced method of landscape analysis in *Landscapes of Power*.

Moreover, “it is not just accounts of the world that are intertextual; the world itself is intertextual. Places are intertextual sites because various texts and discursive practices based on previous texts are deeply inscribed in their landscapes and institutions” (7-8). Thus, all spaces and the stories of spaces contain the residues of the spatial and narrative manifestations they endeavor to exclude. In opening built environments to such analysis, Duncan and Barnes have introduced to the field of landscape interpretation and human geography exactly the crises of signification and representation faced by literary critics and broached precisely the questions which demand critical analysis of social geographic historicism.¹⁸

Considering the production of geography and the construction of spaces it becomes necessary to recognize the literary, rhetorical, artistic, and political components of the rise of automobility, which advanced by fits and starts and molded the material ground in which American culture and society are spatially arranged. Reading the space of the road as a text we can see that it has been produced by the uneven dissemination of ideas, technologies, and infrastructure, and it has been defined by regional variations of infrastructure, services, and consumption. Its justifying narratives vary from place to place, moment to moment, and text to text, in spite of mutual inflections and dominant trends. Recognition of the variable composition of automobile space, both “real” and

¹⁸ According to Duncan and Barnes there is no perceivable, isolatable boundary between the landscape as a ground or background of experience and behavior and representations of built environments. They see both the world and the writing of it as existing in one plane—geography. Thus, Duncan and Barnes’ perspective establishes geography as wholly contingent and indeterminate, implying that geographical ideas like the idea of a landscape (or the landscape) are the surface effects of social operations such as ritual, repetition, and iterative differentiation. In short, social behavior (including representation) conditions the landscape and the landscape conditions behavior—*geography is produced*. Like subjectivity, geography is a byproduct of social discursive engagements, and though contemporary theory has thoroughly explored the ramifications of the decentered subject, histories and criticism of a decentered landscape as ground and factor in influencing the definition of the subject remain open.

“written,” prepares us to interpret it as the product of a set of narratives which recursively define a particular and very real set of relations to the environment.

Production of Space and Discursive Form in Road Narrative

The short history of American road narratives, literary and popular, can be read as participating the production of a certain perspective on the world, a certain geography. Precisely this approach to genre is implied in Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the chronotope which provides a paradigm for reading spatial form in narrative as it relates to folkways, modes of production, and cultural forms. The introductory paragraph of Bakhtin’s essay, “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” outlines the interrelationship between historical experience and forms of literary/artistic representation:

The process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature has a complicated and erratic history, as does the articulation of actual historical persons in such a time and space. Isolated aspects of time and space, however—those available in a given historical stage of human development—have been assimilated, and corresponding generic techniques have been devised for reflecting and artistically processing such appropriated aspects of reality. (84)¹⁹

Given these relations, Bakhtin defines the chronotope. “The intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships,” he explains, “artistically represented in literature” is the chronotope, or literally “time space” of the novel (84). The chronotope, in other words, is the presence of time in space and space in time in literature. The particular

¹⁹ Like Bakhtin, Raymond Williams has outlined historical material relationships between political economic formations and literary representations in *Country and the City* (1973).

development and representation of a chronotope gives a narrative its unique, identifiable qualities and characteristics. Bakhtin states, “It is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions” (85). It is chronotope that distinguishes epic from idyll or pastoral from romance, for instance, because chronotope as narrative time-space orders a narrative, defining its perspective. As Bakhtin explains, chronotopes “are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place of the novel where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative” (250). Bakhtin’s analysis of the chronotope can be applied in the analysis of geographies because relationships to “time space” are grounded in the culture of social groups.

Although the chronotope at its most basic, the chronotope of a narrative, establishes particularities of the representation of time-space, it is ultimately a complex and multivalent phenomenon. For example, Bakhtin identifies a number of distinct and influential modes of chronotope—adventure time in classical narratives, the Rabelaisian chronotope, and the idyllic chronotope—and he shows the influence of these different modes on later narratives. So although authors emphasize certain elements, settings, symbols, and time scales to register the folkways of a given place and era, they also incorporate traces of other influential modes of chronotope. Ultimately chronotopes, like language itself, are dialogic, containing multiple registers mutually informing and influencing one another within the represented world of the text (252). Thus, according to Bakhtin, because the world of the text is drawn from actual lived experience, readers/writers who may be temporally and spatially isolated from one another “participate equally in the creation of the represented world of the text.” Clarifying the

interrelationship between real experience and shared textual experience, Bakhtin maintains, “Out of the actual chronotopes of our world. . . emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work” (Bakhtin’s emphasis 253). That is, reading, writing, and living, all historically grounded, transhistorically inform the construction of textual worlds as cultural products. In this formulation of the chronotope Bakhtin parallels critical geographic history and landscape interpretation. I would extend Bakhtin’s definition to argue that ideas of the world sustained within the social imaginary as geography influences the imaginary relationships to real spaces and in turn individual and social action. Though chronotope and geography are not the same thing, they have key points of contact, and thus chronotope can be said to play a decisive role in the production of space because chronotope is geographic.

Bakhtin provides a basic formula which defines the chronotope of the open road which, identifying four basic characteristics of the narrative time/space of the open road, provides a framework for analyzing road narratives of all types. According to Bakhtin, the principal feature of the open road chronotope is the encounter. The road, Bakhtin argues, collapses social boundaries more rigorously maintained in town environments, thereby making the interaction of people from all spectrums of the social order possible. Characters on the road encounter all different types, so the road becomes a place for the intersection of not only spatial and temporal points, but also of the social aggregate. The mechanism that determines these encounters, and thus the form of the road chronotope, is chance. In Bakhtin’s words, “the road is especially (but not exclusively) appropriate for portraying events governed by chance” (244). Yet, according to Bakhtin, these chance encounters are also familiar within the spectrum of the social order. The chronotope of

the road takes place in recognizable country: “the road is always one that passes through *familiar territory*, and not through some exotic, *alien world*” (Bakhtin’s emphasis 245).

These basic characteristics make the chronotope of the road transferable to other narrative modes. This is possible because of the fundamental formal relationship between space and time particular to the road chronotope. Bakhtin explains:

The chronotope of the road is both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course: ‘the course of a life,’ ‘to set out on a new course,’ ‘the course of history’ and so on; varied and multi-leveled are the ways in which road is turned into a metaphor, but its fundamental pivot is the flow of time. (243-4)

The metaphorical comparison between life, history, and/or narrative plots and a winding road, according to Bakhtin, is a convenient outgrowth of the formal nature of road narratives having a point of departure, a direction, and a destination. Based on these features, Bakhtin notes that forms of nonfiction like journalism and memoir have the potential to develop similar chronotopes. Yet it is also possible, given a specific context like early American automobility, to identify the same points in other forms of writing that reflect road travel like poetry, prescriptive travel writing, and promotional texts.

Bakhtin suggests that varying historical contexts will manifest different chronotopic tones, elements, and formal features. Indeed, the space of the road reflects an aggregate of experiences, both real and literary, which taken together make up the chronotope. The American road chronotope defines itself through emphasis on a number of specific characteristics like, for instance, registering road conditions, commenting on

ephemera such as advertising and directional signage, shop talk,²⁰ and idealizations of the American West. The early American road chronotope sustains the uniquely American mythos of the voyage of discovery, Manifest Destiny, pioneerism, and the ideology of reaching a promised land. It celebrates grandiose physical environments and regional variations as having sublime influence on individuals. In these narratives the road is cast as a democratic space where persons of other classes and kinds pass, and so it is also seen as a space that nurtures democratic ideals. The road is presented as having the power to positively impact individuals by providing escape from modern social pressures like convention or the ills of the city. Finally the road-life metaphor, which Bakhtin identifies, is cast as a metaphor for the life of the nation itself with and through which the traveler is identified. These features taken together make up the characteristic elements of the chronotope of early American road narrative and reflect the emergent sense of the automobile relationship to national space.

The viability of this geography in the face of reactionary resistance was based on the incorporation of residual and familiar geographic tropes. Following Bakhtin, it's clear that road narratives are intertextual and polyvocal, meaning that numerous texts and cultural practices are inflected through them. Thus, early American road stories cannot be thought of as entirely new, because they draw on earlier geographic narratives. They adapt residual geographic representation to changes in the socio-cultural environment—new roads, new spaces and places, a variety of new traveling experiences. Indeed, the twentieth-century American road narrative is an inheritor of all the Western geographic, travel, quest, and adventure genres, including traditions of discrimination and

²⁰ In 1934 linguist Levette Jay Davidson identified new additions to American English “developed in connection with transportation by automobiles” (110).

domination.²¹ Certain elements of automobile geography draw on previous discursive forms and cultural practices but are modified to represent emergent social and cultural conditions. For example, in the novel *Professor How Could You* (1922) Harry Leon Wilson's professor exclaims, "straight into the west our dusty gray road led us. And assuredly beyond, though yet invisible, were those Rocky Mountains whose noble crags had so long beckoned me on" (318). This passage echoes Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, where Twain rides atop a stagecoach headed west through the plains, anticipating for days on end the Rockies, which seem always just beyond the horizon. Moreover, Wilson's professor is an unlikely and quixotic version of the pioneer American setting out for the frontier as emblematically captured in Horace Greeley's directive, "Go West young man, and grow up with the country." Wilson's passage invokes automobility as the extension of the ideology Manifest Destiny inasmuch as with a little dumb luck and an automobile even a staid professor can find his way into the freewheeling adventure which putatively characterized the American West. Likewise, Vachel Lindsay updates inherited romanticism to modern experience:

I am a tramp by the long trail's border,
Given to squalor, rags and disorder.
I nap and yawn and look,
Write fool-thoughts in my grubby book,
Recite to children, explore at my ease,
Work when I work, beg when I please. . .

But I would not walk all alone till I die
Without some life-drunk horns going by.
Up roun' this apple-earth they come

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt in "Invisible bullets" and *Marvelous Possessions*, Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, Derek Gregory in *Postmodern Geographies*, and Alan Trachtenberg in *The Incorporation of America* all point up the discrimination and injustices of Western travel texts dating back to the Renaissance. Kathleen Franz in *Tinkering* and Kris Lackey in *Road Frames* have cogently outlined the racial and class segregation and discrimination particular to automobility.

Blasting the whispers of the morning dumb:—
Cars in a plain realistic row.
And fair dreams fade
When the raw horns blow. (14-15)

Situated as he is on the periphery, literally on the roadside, of socio-spatial change, Lindsay struggles to apply ideas and forms inherited from Whitman to this modern context where the dust and barking horns of automobiles disrupt his attempting romantic contact with nature. As a disciple of Whitman, Lindsay wishes to celebrate the technologies of modernization as the symbol and structure of human spiritual transcendence, like in “Passage to India;” however, in this poem that very technology disrupts his efforts. The ambivalence that is the result indicates the incommensurability of earlier geographic formulations for the emergent experience of automobility. Both of these examples indicate the reformulation of familiar and recognizable geographic models to accommodate changes in social space, and as such Wilson and Lindsay’s efforts reflect the potency of automobile revisions of popular nineteenth-century American geography.

In spite of the fact that road narrative as a form of geography must be read as polyvocal, unstable, and historically contingent, certain outlines and patterns are nevertheless discernable based on both travel writing traditions and the historical conditions in which the narratives were produced. In the most general terms, there are two basic road story structures: narratives that have a destination and narratives that do not but which cast travel as continuous. The pilgrimage and the quest narrative fall into the first category, where the traveler-protagonist is driven by his or her need to arrive at a particular location, and the bulk of the story draws on the encounters and adventures that

crop up along the way to complicate the narrative baseline of leaving point A and arriving at point B. For example, one variation of the quest narrative which deeply influenced the narrative of automobility is the pioneer's story or migration tale, where the narrative direction proceeds toward an unknown but idealized destination. This formal model develops in relation to the specific historical context of nineteenth-century America, and it informs road narratives of the twentieth century, investing them with ideological connotations familiar and comforting to popular audiences. In the second general category, wanderer, vagabond, and hobo tales are characteristic. These are stories wherein the central character is driven from place to place by desire or circumstance and are typically peripatetic. These road narratives are particularly fertile ground for variations on the picaresque, where reportage on circumstances and regional character types discovered along the way takes precedence over completing the journey, making the emphasis of these narratives the journey itself and not arrival at any destination.²² Also, as often as not, road stories self consciously participate in a classical tradition of traveler tales like *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, *Don Quixote*, *Don Juan*, the *Canterbury Tales* and, closer to home, *Huckleberry Finn*.²³

²² Rowland Sherrill has comprehensively analyzed versions of American picaresque road stories in the later portion of the century in *Road-Book America*. Sherrill's late century picaresque is an outgrowth of early tramp narratives from Josiah Flynt, Jack London, Harry Kemp, Upton Sinclair. See also John Seelye "The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque"

²³ As much as this self awareness provides road trippers in the early century with inspiration, following the lead of great explorers as it were, by the latter part of the century the tradition is seen as wholly mediating the travel experience such that despite ideologies of the free and open road, travelers find there can be no truly liberating road experience, and that the road always betrays the freedom it promises and in actuality comprises a powerful form of formal and ideological constraint.

The Rhetoric of Social Transformation and Unforeseen Outcomes

In the middle of the 1880s when bicycle organizations began to mobilize a movement to build a system of roads on which to ride, they encountered deeply entrenched resistance to the idea that the national infrastructure needed alteration. A decade and a half later, early motorist clubs encountered the same resistance, the same reactionary arguments. So what was it; what were the arguments that the nation made to itself to justify the enormous expenditure of road infrastructures upon which to ride bicycles and drive automobiles? And more importantly, how were these arguments encoded in narrative? What stories did the nation tell itself about itself in order to convince itself to build a national infrastructure of automobility?²⁴ How exactly did America reformulate its relationship to national space?

Answering these questions is an exercise in critical geographic history and landscape studies following Henri Lefebvre and John Brinkerhoff Jackson respectively. Lefebvre's notion of socially produced space aligns with Jackson's idea of the landscape, and both theorists base their analysis of the human relationship to environments on researching the cultural products and social practices which contribute to the production

²⁴ Drawing on Clifford Geertz, I define culture as the stories a social group tells itself about itself. Thus, the United States justified the construction of its highway networks by changing the stories and geographies about those networks.

of spaces. Analysis of the cultural narratives which produced the space of automobility is such a project. The narratives that contributed to the conceptualization of automobility in the early twentieth century are not conveniently limited to one genre or one discourse. Road narratives take many forms. From the rhetoric of politicians arguing for roads legislation to poetry to advertising imagery, narratives from different discourses mutually influence one another and in the aggregate produce the plausibility of the construction of new spaces. Full understanding of the literature of automobility and automobility itself depends upon analysis of the shared forms and themes of road narratives from different discursive registers. Thus, Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope usefully elucidates exchanges of formal and thematic trends in American road narrative, because analysis of the chronotope of the American road reveals the conceptualizations and ideologies which produce both American road geography and material space.

In the process of making an American highway network plausible, a whole host of narrative arguments were manufactured, refined, and marshaled in different contexts, and these narratives with their geographic elements redefined the national relationship to space. For example, America was shamed for the state of its roads in comparison with European models, particularly the French.²⁵ The commercially minded argued that unimproved roads constituted a "mud tax" and a drain on the economy. The National Grange argued both that roads would increase agricultural profits and farms values and that roads were one way to combat rail road trusts; the latter appeal catapulted good roads

²⁵ In 1906 Winthrop Scarritt published a travel book recounting a summer spent traveling easily by motorcar thru France, noting in particular the quality of French roads. Likewise, though with less deliberate propaganda, in 1908 Edith Wharton published *A Motor Flight through France*, a travel book that casually enjoyed the ease of traveling by car in the French countryside. Emily Post's evaluation of American road travel presumes her audience's familiarity with motor touring in Europe.

onto Populist political platforms. Some mounted cases that roads opened access to better schools and churches as well as to “God’s open spaces” and sites of domestic natural splendor. The military-minded argued for the need of roads for national defense. Patriotic groups argued that to “See America First” made better citizens who knew more about and therefore loved more deeply their native land.²⁶ Automobile owning urban elites argued that driving over rutted and dusty roads was a recreational pleasure that could be made more pleasurable with a better road surface. Finally, generally speaking road travelers whatever their modes of travel or destinations are represented as discovering “America.” That is, the practice of taking road trips and telling road stories establishes and sustains relationships between individuals, the larger society, and national space.

So when the time came to actually build roads and motorcars, an established set of goals for the construction of a social space of automobility was already being put into place. Roads were to provide freedom, a route of escape from convention and conformity. They were meant to open access to others, to markets, and to the great places of the American continent. Roads were intended for pleasure, for the pleasure of speed, for the pleasure of access to nature. The profit motive and economic expedience were never far from the minds of the boosters and planners of the national highways. The roads were thought to be the harbingers of social progress, pushing back the shadows the ignorance nurtured in isolation by uniting the remote parts of the country with each other and with enlightened urban centers. Roads were to make the nation safer, more easily defensible. They were meant to bind the varying regions of the nation together in an inspired unity, a great road system representing the greatness of American civilization.

²⁶ Marguerite Shaffer provides an excellent history of the movement in *See American First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*.

A short list of the specific impetuses and outcomes for road travel in America were developed with the rise of automobility. Road travel supposedly broadened an individual's horizons. It provided opportunities for adventure and quixotic romance. Road stories represented encounters with local color, fetishizing the signs of regional otherness. Likewise, coming into contact with "the real" as in "real southern hospitality," "real cowboys," "real Indians," or "real nature" and the like was represented as a goal of hitting the road. A greater sense of freedom often drove such narratives. As often, simply the pride of saying they did it was represented as justifying journeys. Similarly, the fulfillment of some sense of obligation to the ritual of road travel itself motivated road narratives. Many road travelers went to merely to go *somewhere else*, to vacation, to escape, or to visit a particular destination if only briefly. There was often also cited, simply, the pleasure of mobility, the bucolic peace of a rural landscape, the thrill of the open road, the excitement of speed. Also, finally, for dominant white society the road provided the opportunity to take scopophillic pleasure in social, class, regional, and racial difference.²⁷

These desires and drives make up the matrix of themes with which American road literature deals and the grounds on which the space of automobility has been continually

²⁷ In fact, a significant aspect of the construction of automobile geography involves the deliberate exclusion of certain groups from access to the road experience. While it is true that the construction of roads early on led to a liberating experience for many white women, notably Harriet White Fisher (*A Woman's World Tour in a Motor*), Kathryn Hulme (*How's the Road*), and Alice Huyler Ramsey (*Veil, Duster, and Tire Iron*). It must also be recalled that tramps and nonwhites were systematically denied access to particular elements of the road service infrastructure, making long distance travel a dangerous enterprise for many. Likewise, Migrants like Steinbeck's Joad family are deliberately discriminated against on the road. In *Countering the Counterculture*, Manuel Luiz Martinez writes, "The migrant writer's challenge to other writers who have pictured only open sky and uninhabited land, and for whom progress is a noun, is to redraw the map of the American landscape. The migrant cartography represents the myriad pitfalls, impassable borders, and ideological spaces in which progress is always a verb, 'to progress,' to move on but never to arrive. Their narrative thus stresses directly and indirectly the imperative of arrival, of finding place in what we might begin to think of as América rather than America" (286).

(re)produced. Defining America in the twentieth century, the road trip has been made into one of those iconic rituals of the American experience, and instantiations of the road trip, either in narrative or practice, aspire to mimic some quality or essence of the experience of the road, an essence sustained in stories. However, much though our celebratory histories would like to imply that this state of affairs is somehow completely natural, the fact is that this geography is a construct of narrative, ideology, and practice. The above mentioned themes and elisions make up the ground on which and by which this constructed environment has been produced. As critical geographic historians like Lefebvre and Jackson maintain, reading geographic cultural history in this way situates us to critically evaluate the outcomes of this produced environment. As we wrestle today with global warming, surging energy demand, urban sprawl, impossible traffic, and numerous forms of pollution, the question we must confront is, given automobility's cultural fetishes, whether it's not time to think more seriously about the geographies and social spaces we are producing today with our narratives and day to day choices.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROAD FROM THE COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION: NARRATING A TURNING POINT IN AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY

The World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 marked many firsts. Visitors to Chicago sent the first picture postcards home from the World's Fair. They admired the moving sidewalk that for ten cents carried them to and from the end of a pier jutting into Lake Michigan. It was the first time many tasted Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer (the blue ribbon was won at the fair), and the first time many tried Cracker Jack, Cream of Wheat, Shredded Wheat, Aunt Jemima Syrup, Juicy Fruit gum, carbonated soda, and hamburger sandwiches. Visitors saw belly dancing for the first time. Commensurate with the fair, the Columbus Day holiday was established, as was the Pledge of Allegiance. They saw the moving pictures of Edison's Kinetoscope and heard music carried by cable from New York. Dvorak composed his *New World Symphony* in honor of the fair, which was counterpointed by marching bands belting out new compositions by John Philip Sousa. Meanwhile Scott Joplin, working at the fair, was developing the staccato syncopations of his innovative ragtime. The event inspired travel-guide writer Karl Baedeker to publish the first Baedeker's guide to the United States (Rose, Julie 2007; Mintner 24; Larson 247-8). The buildings of the White City, as the fair came to be known, symbolized a powerful mythology of American unity and exceptionalism, and

within the buildings visitors were shown technological wonders which were implicitly the inevitable result of American entrepreneurial capitalism. The nearby Midway Plaisance provided diversionary entertainment for the millions of visitors to escape to if the programmatic ideologies of progress and citizenship became tiresome. Together the first Midway Plaisance with the first Ferris Wheel represented a new form of American entertainment that presaged both the traveling carnival and Amusement parks like Coney Island, Disneyland, and the like. The fair marked, as Peter Ling has pointed out, precursors to many social and cultural formations of the twentieth century “in which corporate power wielded authority and expertise in the work place while providing the compensations of mass consumption” (97).²⁸

Among these, another first of the exposition made the event a flashpoint for the technology that, combined with the cultural narratives and entertainments represented and sustained by the fair, would transform American culture and lifeways and set the pace for modernism. The millions of visitors who found themselves astonished by the White City were also astonished by displays like Harold Sturgis’s battery powered horseless carriage which carted visitors around (Wells 51). The fair included automobile exhibits in Louis Sullivan’s Transportation Building, The Electricity Building, and the Midway. This context of programmatic ideology and mass entertainment presented the automobile, a device which many were seeing for the first time, as both a symbol of progress and the prototype of a consumer product that promised pleasant diversion.

²⁸ Similarly, Diane Dillon reveals the ways in which the the maps of the exposition conceal the relationships between consumption and production upon which the event was founded within a whole culture of illusions.

Crucially, two men who already sensed the potential of the automobile came to the fair to have a look at the horseless carriages there on display.

Charles and Frank Duryea met in Chicago in the fall of 1893. Together, they visited the World's Columbian Exposition with the express purpose of inspecting the Daimler internal combustion vehicle, which they had been reading about in *Scientific American* since 1891. Both mechanics, the brothers had been working on building a motorcar of their own since Charles had read about Carl Benz's experiments with internal combustion in Germany. By September of 1892, the two brothers were assembling their engine, but in the middle of development Charles moved to Peoria, Illinois to pursue a favorable opportunity to develop his "Sylph" bicycle project. Frank would have to finish the work on his own. Before Charles left, they tested their engine for the first time. It failed, and Charles left for the West. On his own, Frank engineered a new engine and began to build a transmission. On September 20, 1893, the Duryea's horseless carriage was hitched to a horse and led out to a friend's barn on the outskirts of Springfield, Massachusetts, where they stored it overnight. The next day Frank staged the first successful trial of an American built motorcar, and even though the little engine produced good power there were clearly flaws with the transmission. Frank voiced his disappointments in a letter to his brother, and the two agreed to meet in Chicago at the Exposition to have a good look at Gottlieb Daimler's three automobiles on display there in Louis Sullivan's Transportation Building (Scharchburg 57-8). Upon his return to Springfield, Frank rebuilt his transmission, and the new transmission was far more successful. Two years later, the Duryea brothers would return to Chicago, this time with their own "Motocycle," as they called it, to compete against two electric driven autos

(one of which was Harold Sturgis's electric wagon), and three Benz internal combustion models in the Chicago *Times Herald* Thanksgiving Day race, the first auto race in America. The Duryea Motorcycle that won the race was the first domestic manufactured automobile to be sold in America. By the turn of the century the Duryea brothers were in a headlong race with competing engineers and manufacturers to shape the motorcar as a consumer product.²⁹

Thus, the fair serves as a convenient marker for a turning point in American culture by reflecting the preoccupations held by the nation in the years leading up to it and by precipitating cultural forms that would come to dominate American society in the twentieth century. As Robert Muccigrosso puts it, nothing “captured the public imagination in 1893 like the Chicago World’s Fair” (3). The prevalence of the fair is recorded in literature. Hamlin Garland fictionalized the impact of the fair on the older generation of Western Americans in his novel *Son of the Middle Border*, and Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbit* would escape to his book of pictures from the fair when the stress of modernity was troubling. Principal among the changes presaged by the exposition is, as the story of the Duryea brothers indicates, the coming of automobility. Aside from the automobile, many of the elements that would define the culture of the American road like postcards, the kitsch entertainments of the Midway, and the mass produced foods can be traced back to the Columbian Exposition. Though the millions of visitors to the fair had no clear idea what the event augured, some sensed that significant changes were in the air. The work of figures like architect Louis Henri Sullivan, bicycle manufacturer Colonel

²⁹ The Duryea brothers had a falling out which disabled their business and set them working for others, but in the early years of automobility they were at the cutting edge of the new technology. See Richard Scharchburg *Carriages Without Horses* and J. Frank Duryea *Data Relative to the Development of America's First Gasoline Automobile*.

Albert Augustus Pope, and historian Frederick Jackson Turner reveal the popular sense of American geography and America's place in the world at the time, and their work registers an awareness that the nation was at a turning point to new geographic orders. This chapter analyzes the work of these three figures to expose the geographic thinking of the day and to begin to trace the narratives which would mold America's automobile environments.

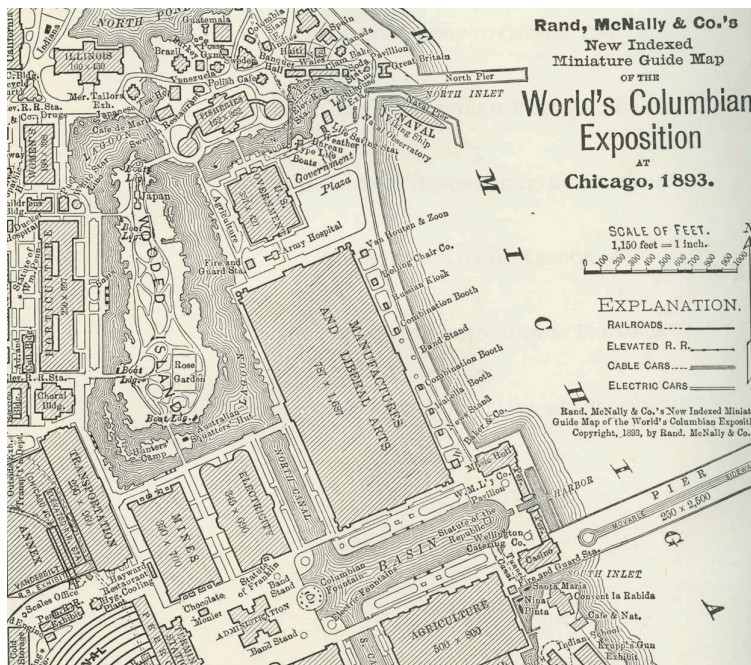


Figure 1.1: Map of the exposition. The Transportation Building is located in the bottom right corner of the map. The golden doorway is aligned not with the walkway running along the Electricity and Mines Buildings, rather it overlooks the lagoon (Applebaum frontpiece).

Louis Sullivan's Harmonious idea of Transportation

Circling the lagoon and strolling east from the Manufactures and Liberal Arts exhibition building, visitors to the World's Columbia Exposition were stunned by Louis Henri Sullivan's Transportation Building as it emerged from behind the trees on Frederick Law Olmsted's Wooded Island situated in the lagoon (Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.7). Located to the north and east of the Court of Honor, the architectural centerpiece of the fair, and west of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts building, by far the largest structure on the campus, Sullivan's Transportation Building was the only major building in the Exposition not painted gleaming white. It was also the only major building that did not conform to the officially prescribed neoclassical architectural style. Facing the



Figure 1.2: This view of the Transportation Building is taken from the Olmsted's Wooded Isle (Applebaum 53).

lagoon, the Transportation Building featured romanesque design principles with arched doorways supporting a raised cornice, and it blended Eastern and Western decorative motifs in both representational and nonrepresentational murals and bas-reliefs spanning

the enormous gilded doorway which was the focal point of the structure. Consisting of five recessed arches, the famous Golden Doorway, as it came to be known, was the most prominent feature of the edifice and, as some argued, the most striking architectural feature of the exposition (Figure 1.3).³⁰ Each arch was decorated with a unique arabesque motif symbolically representing transportation and mobility by combining and overlaying dynamic, decorative features indicative of motion. The designs in the arches blended classical influences like ivy and acanthus leaves with nonrepresentational figures resembling coiled springs and interlacing gears in an expression of Art Nouveau

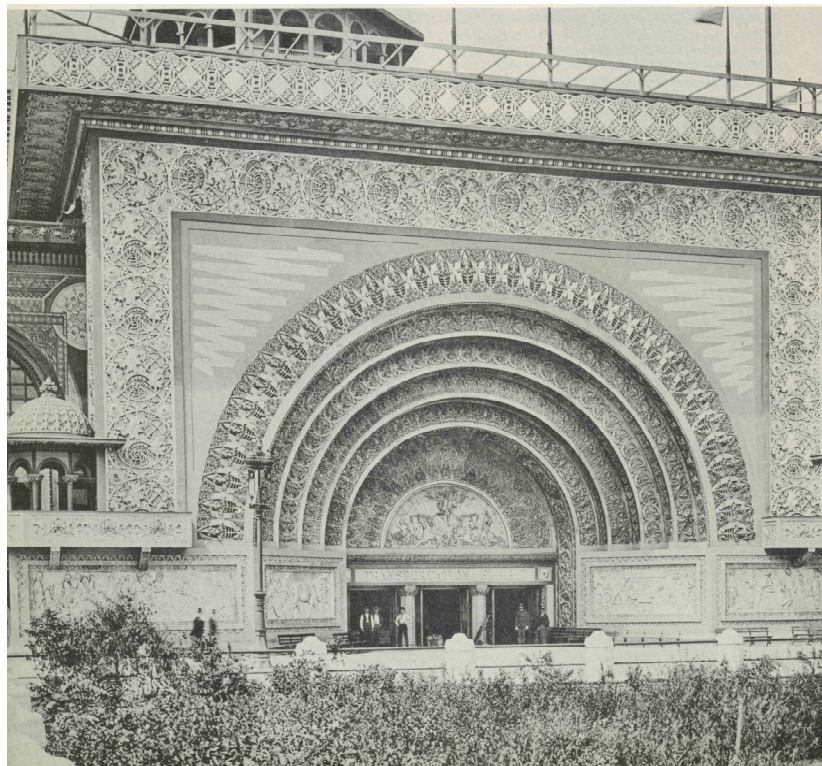


Figure 1.3: Sullivan's famed Golden Doorway. Note the implied motion in the circulating patterns of the arches of the entryway and the frieze (Applebaum 54).

³⁰ Erik Larson writes, "That one great entrance eventually became the talk of the fair" (115). Robert Twombly corroborates, noting, "the most often asked question at the fair, according to several reports, was, 'Have you seen the Golden Doorway?'" (269).

styling. Directly above the actual entryway, in the lowest, most recessed architrave was a bas-relief of an angel symbolizing the *idea* of transportation soaring above four charging stallions. This angel was repeated as a stylized motif painted on every pier. The angels were holding banners inscribed with the names of transportation technology pioneers.³¹ Flouting the prescribed white neoclassicism of the rest of the fair's architecture, Sullivan's entire building was painted in a palette consisting of more than thirty colors on a backdrop of crimson. Even though, like most of the buildings of the exposition, it was basically a large warehouse with an elaborately cosmetic entryway, of all the buildings in the campus, the Transportation Building was the most unique and therefore attracted much attention, not all of it favorable. Within the context of the exposition, Sullivan's Transportation Building incorporated a geographic vision rooted in the times into the building's symbolism, and it moreover gestured toward a technologically and spiritually progressive future based on the new geographic relationships which he presumed would be the result of new technologies of transportation.³²

The larger significance of the Fair's bleached neoclassicism, and Sullivan's rejection of it, was not lost on certain visitors. Larzer Ziff describes the White City's reception by American visitors, who "proudly felt that their culture had come of age. They were showing the world that they shared the timeless aesthetic dream in spite of the

³¹ Robert Twombly and Narciso Menocal record a contemporary description of the Transportation Building: "Above the pier of every other opening is a large figure, 14 ft. high, of a woman holding a screen in front between her hands, with the name of some famous inventor in regard to transportation. The idea of Mr. Sullivan is these stiff and almost archaic figures was to get the idea of motion expressed without movement of the body, and for this reason the figures, which are similar, have large outspread wings of white colour, which detaches them somewhat from the main color scheme" (120).

³² Sullivan biographer Robert Twombly remarks that Sullivan intended his work "to convey messages about life in his times, about democracy, business, selected institutions, human relations, nature and the physical world, but above all the process of creation" (vii). He also notes Sullivan's idealization of the West (46, 77).

raw youth and bustle of their civilization” (120). Even Henry Adams, Ziff notes, was impressed by the White City: “He sat in the Court of Honor to ponder with a willed optimism the miracle of continuity which allowed a flexible metropolis like Chicago to overleap the centuries and root its future. . . in ancient Greece, to settle its contradictions in the measured rhythms of classical unity” (20).³³ Whereas American visitors reveled in the classical aesthetics of the White City that bespoke national unity and continuity with the history of civilization, foreign visitors were less impressed and favored Sullivan’s offering. Narciso Menocal observes, “Bannister Fletcher, the eminent British architectural historian, described it as ‘fresh as the first rose of summer to the jaded European’” (42). One French critic described the classical white sterility of the main buildings as a curious mingling of *carton pate* imitations of Greek, Latin, and Italian Renaissance aesthetics. For this critic, however, Sullivan’s building stood out:

a fantastic construction attracted us; its walls covered with vermillion appeared to the eye as a bloody spot upon the field of snow. It was an architecture of a primary character, of studied roughness; a cyclopean and barbarous conception, but certainly not a common one. One could see in it a seeking after the strange and enormous, a dream of new forms which would harmonize with the tumultuous and brutal genius of the human collectivity acting in Chicago, that monstrous city, forced as a precocious vegetation upon the marshes of Lake Michigan. (qtd in Ziff 21)

Evidently, untouched by anxieties over America’s place in the world, the French critic sensed Sullivan’s intentions. Indeed, the Union Centrale des Arts Decoratifs in Paris awarded Sullivan a medal for the Transportation Building design in 1894.

³³ Cecilia Tichi, in *Shifting Gears*, notes that Henry Adam’s enjoyment of the fair was practically predetermined because his friend Auguste St. Gaudens was the sculptural director of the event. She also connects the fair’s symbolism to the new mechanistic cultural aesthetics which were at the time redefining the national relationship to nature (141-3).

The Transportation Building's opposition to the general ethos and aesthetic of the Columbian Exposition reveals much of what the fair in general meant to the United States at the time. The idea of holding a world's exposition to commemorate Columbus's discovery of the Americas had been proposed as early as the mid 1880s, but the idea had received little attention. Early on St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago, New York, and Mexico City were among the proposed locations. It wasn't until news of the success of the 1889 Paris World's Fair began to circulate that the idea really took hold of the American imagination. Sectional rivalries began to develop around the question as to the best city to host a hypothetical Columbian Exposition. The most acerbic confrontation developed between New York and Chicago, and as the pitch of the competition between these two cities increased, other cities fell out of the running. The antagonism between Chicago and New York rehearsed a pattern of East/West rivalry with deep historical roots still palpable in the daily affairs of the country at the time, notably in the burgeoning Populist political movement. Finally in 1890, Congress settled the regional dispute that had emerged by passing legislation announcing the intent to host a world's fair in Chicago with the dual purpose of commemorating the fourth centenary of the discovery of America and to mark the progress of civilization since the discovery. The unstated yet commonly understood purpose was to draw international attention to American contributions to world progress. For a growing nation keen on announcing its increasing importance on the world stage, hosting a world's fair carried significant implications and opportunities.

The official program fomented anxiety about the exposition initially. The French had just hosted a very successful fair. Skeptics doubted anyone would want to come to

another so soon after the Parisian celebration, particularly because the Eiffel Tower, the tallest structure in the world at the time, symbolized progress so exceptionally. Could the U.S. and Chicago possibly match it? Would the world, meaning European powers in the American imagination, even care to entertain the idea of visiting a Columbian exposition in a recently rebuilt Western American city populated largely by immigrants? In an age when history, nationalism, and progress were so tightly intertwined, Americans harbored a deep concern that America and Chicago, each with relatively shallow histories, remained inferior to European civilization and culture.³⁴

In addition to the U.S.'s sense of inferiority as a young immigrants' country, the selection of Chicago for the fair caused much concern. It was seen as both a good and a bad choice in that Chicago represented the Midwest and, therefore, the core of the country. Whereas Eastern cities, New York in particular, kept their attention deliberately turned toward Europe, Chicago represented the putatively real America west of the Appalachian Mountains and, although this belief is what favored Chicago in the Congressional selection process, many doubted whether Chicago could achieve a sufficiently respectable international event. Detractors suggested that this young Midwestern town could do no better than to host a large country fair. Although the largest port, rail hub, lumber producer, and meatpacking center in the world, few Europeans had even heard of the city on Lake Michigan that had sprung so recently out of the western prairies. Yet, despite the risks of failure and embarrassment, the Columbian Exposition was seen as an opportunity for the United States, as the perceived leader of the Americas, to demonstrate its proper place on the world stage, and it was seen as an opportunity for

³⁴ According to Robert Muccigrosso, "While many boasted loudly of American superiority, they remained sorely sensitive to reproofs from Europeans and, for that matter, from European-oriented Easterners" (65).

Chicago to demonstrate itself as a uniquely American, but also a world class city (Reid 49-52). The cohesive vision developed and instituted by the planners, the all white neoclassical main exhibit buildings intentionally suggested that America had claimed a place in the tradition of Western civilization. The White City also deliberately intimated a sense of national unity. In a country still wrestling with the legacies of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, these symbolic performances of unity carried no small importance.³⁵

In the middle of it all sat Louis Sullivan's gilded, polychromatic Transportation Building, neither white, nor neoclassical, and housing a collection of mobile machines representing progress and humankind's conquest of nature, space, and time. Sullivan, as secretary to the planning committee, had persuaded the exposition's board that Transportation should have a privileged location separate from Machines and Liberal Arts where it had been subcategorized initially. Then he lobbied to have design of the building assigned to his own firm. Sullivan's idea for the building was to deliberately and explicitly represent transportation as a prime factor in the march of civilization.³⁶

Inscribed on the Transportation Building was the motto, "Of all inventions—the alphabet and the printing press alone excepted—those inventions which abridge distance have

³⁵ It must also be noted that the Fair's organizers deliberately excluded women, blacks, and native peoples. See Robert Muccigrosso (132-153). David Mintner puts it, The Court of Honor was "where 'Greek' temples spoke of the past to the ages, without challenging the Exposition's aggressive nationalism, or its emphatic exclusion of the poor, or its emphatic control of native Americans, Women, and black Americans" (26). According to Robert Rydell in "A Cultural Frankenstein," the exposition "Deeply inscribed with prevailing beliefs about race and gender, the exposition posited a common culture for some Americans at the expense of others" (169).

³⁶ Original drawings of the building had two entry ways, and it was at Daniel Burnham's suggestion that Sullivan use only one. The design of the Golden Door is wholly Sullivan's conception, but Burnham's influence can't be overlooked. See Robert Twombly's *Louis Sullivan* (262).

done the most for civilization” (Figure 1.4).³⁷ Sullivan aimed for a style that captured his *idea* of transportation. In his letter to D. H. Burnham, the director of planning for the exposition, he explained his sense of style as “first a *harmonious system of thinking*, second, an equally *harmonious manner of expressing the thought*” (Sullivan’s emphasis).³⁸ That is, the look of a building should reflect a philosophy of life and art, and Sullivan had a specific “harmonious system of thinking” in mind.

Sullivan borrows his aesthetic ideals from his favorite poet, Walt Whitman. In his essay, “The Artistic Uses of the Imagination,” Sullivan argues that the architect must cultivate imagination over reason to turn craft into true art, and he cites Whitman’s “There Was a Child Went Forth” to illustrate this romantic principle (66-7).³⁹ According to Lauren Weingarden, Sullivan’s idea of transportation, the idea that organized his vision for the edifice, is drawn from transcendentalist thinking of the nineteenth century in general, but Walt Whitman’s poem “Passage to India” in particular.⁴⁰ In Weingarden’s view, Sullivan aimed to depict with the edifice a harmony between primitive human spirituality and the technological progress of the modern age. These ideas are developed in Whitman’s poem where the Americas serve as a vital link between the world of the past, Europe, and world of the future, the Far-East. The central symbols of “Passage to

³⁷ Inscription quoted in Neil Harris, *Grand Illusions*. The Golden Arch symbolized, according to Harris, the naïve idealizations of the Gilded Age out of which it came (117).

³⁸ Passage quoted in Appendix B to Weingarden (221). According to Narciso Menocal, Sullivan saw “the chief function of architecture would be to express philosophical concepts related only to what he considered to be the highest truths of nature” (16).

³⁹ It bears mention that Whitman’s “There Was a Child Went Forth” establishes his notion that the poet is the product of his geographic experience (chapter 2), and Sullivan repeats the idea in his essay.

⁴⁰ It must be noted that Whitman did not invent the Passage to India ideology, but rather adopted the ideas of Thomas Hart Benton who argued on the Senate floor in 1848 “An American road to India through the heart of our country will revive upon its line all the wonders of which we have read—and eclipse them. The western wilderness, from the pacific to the Mississippi, will start to life under its torch.” See Henry Nash Smith *Virgin Land* (19-30, 44-8).

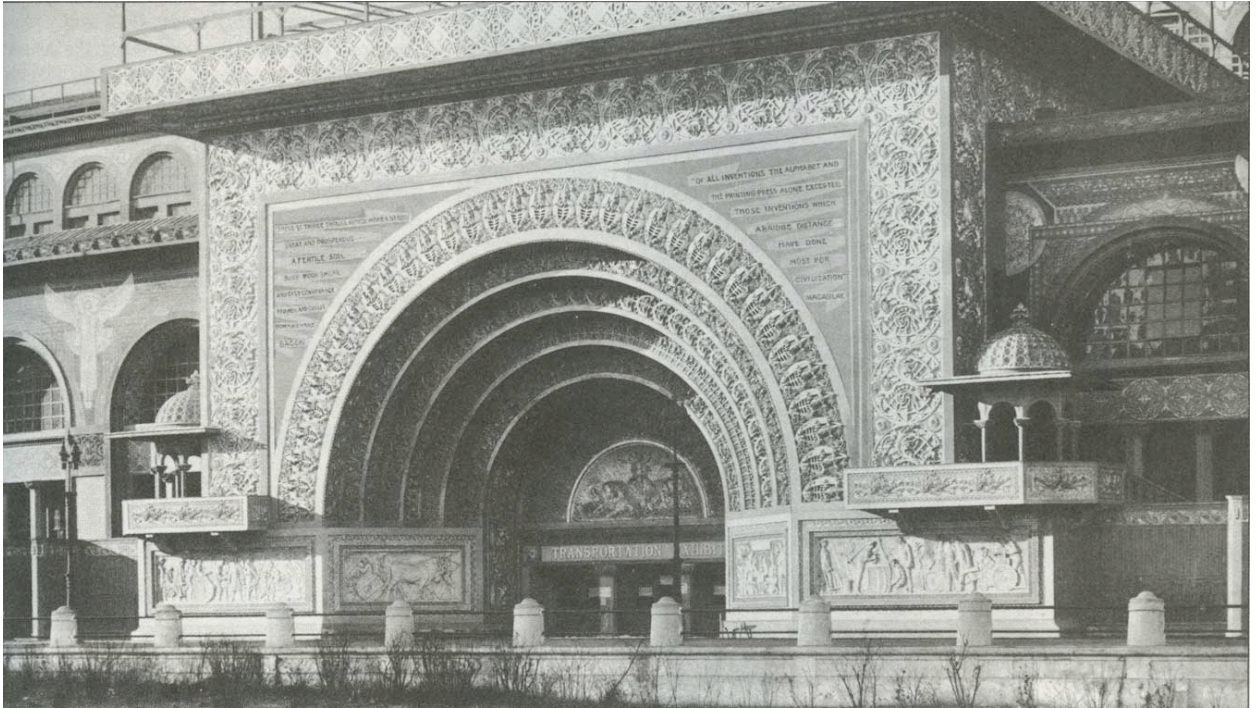


Figure 1.4: The angel as symbol of transportation and the bas-reliefs depicting stages of transportation and civilization's march are visible in this picture as well as Sullivan's motto (Bolotin and Laing 57).

India" are major transportation and communication breakthroughs of the later nineteenth century, the transcontinental railroad, the Atlantic and Pacific cables, and the Suez Canal. These events provide Whitman an occasion to celebrate the present as the link between the past and the future and America as the link between Europe and the East. He writes:

The Earth to be spann'd, connected by network,
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
 The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,
 The lands to be welded together. . .
 . . . not for trade or transportation only,
 But in God's name, and for thy sake O soul. (412)⁴¹

The East for Whitman is a multivalent concept. It represents the distant, primitive past out of which Europe, civilization, and modernization developed, but it also represents the

⁴¹ All citations of Whitman's poetry are taken from *Leaves of Grass* Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett editors, 1973.

spiritual future of mankind where technology and spiritualism will blend harmoniously. Inter-marriage and global geographic access are the keys to this teleology. Similarly, the bas-reliefs of Sullivan's building represent an evolution of transportation history from primitive modes of travel through to the mechanization of transport (See Figures 1.4 and 1.8). Depicting a common human past and implying a common human future based on modes of travel, the bas-reliefs to the left of the door depict primitive modes of travel and those to the right modern steam engineering.

In addition, as Sullivan outlined in his description of the building submitted to Rand McNally's *A Week at the Fair*,⁴² the choice of polychrome color was meant give the building the appearance of a landscape painting. The idea that the building should look like a landscape painting suggests three readings. First, that the building is a landscape containing all the modes of transportation including machines is reminiscent, as Lauren Weingarden notes, of Leo Marx's scholarship on the nineteenth century's fascination with the incursion of mechanical progress into the Edenic wilderness of the American continent. Inasmuch as nineteenth-century American writers and artists were concerned to find and represent a balance between industrialization and nature, Sullivan's comparison of his building to a landscape painting which would literally contain all modes of transportation can be read as an architectural representation of the machine literally placed inside the figurative garden. Similarly, Whitman's poem deliberately endeavors to attune mechanized industry and spirituality. In "Passage to India," he writes, "I hear the locomotives rushing and roaring, and the shrill steam whistle, / I hear the

⁴² Another interesting presaging of automobility is Rand McNally's investment and promotional efforts in the Fair. The publishers of the first American road map (1924) would come to sell complementary ideas of American escape and access via the road.

echoes reverberate through the grandest scenery in the world” (413). The poem catalogues the grandiose scenery newly accessible by transcontinental railroad. The machine exposes the continent, creating a new geography, and the geography defines the machine. Whitman writes, “Bridging the three or four thousand miles of land travel, / Tying the Eastern to the Western sea, / The road between Europe and Asia” (414). The figurative embodiment of the machine in the garden of America complimented Sullivan’s “harmonious expression of the thought.”

In addition to the Transportation Building representing a harmonious relationship between industry and nature, situating Golden Doorway in the focal center of the building which Sullivan meant to look like a landscape painting would make the implied picture a sunset. This reading is particularly strong when the recessed arches of the enormous gilded portal are reflected in the lagoon (Figure 1.5). The metaphorical linking of a setting sun and the idea of transportation, which is represented as a winged figure at the



Figure 1.5: Golden Doorway reflected in the lagoon with the trees of the wooded isle in the foreground. Photo by C. D. Arnold, *Official Views of the Fair* (Weingarden 216).

center of the sun, suggests that the direction of human progress, particularly regarding transportation, is Westward. The turning earth and cycle of progress narrative that drives this metaphor parallels Whitman's idea that America is the bridge between East and West, past and future. Thus, the Golden Doorway could be taken as a symbol for the West, which Columbus had discovered and opened, and which the Exposition itself aimed to represent. Yet, the setting sun could also be taken as a symbol of Sullivan and Whitman's shared notion that the American West was the backbone of American identity (Chapter 2). Moreover, the implied placement of the future of transportation in the West suggests that even though the major advances in transportation technology all came into the West from the old world, from the East, they found and would continue to find their culminating achievement in the American West. Reid Badger aptly describes Sullivan's Golden Door symbolism: "Throughout the country's history, physical mobility—movement—had been associated with popular liberty and freedom and thus the "golden" promise of the New World itself" (117).⁴³

Significantly, Whitman's poem also includes a reference to Christopher Columbus, a point that would not have been lost on Sullivan who had written a personal letter of praise to the poet.⁴⁴ Whitman writes, "(Ah Genoese thy dream! thy dream! / Centuries after thou art laid in thy grave, / The shore thou foundest verifies thy dream" (414). For Whitman, the technological advances that allow humankind to overcome

⁴³ Badger in the same passage links the Golden Door to Gilded Era Populist politics of resistance by associating the gold of the doorway to the despised business practices of railroad trusts. Obviously the appeal of the motorcar on the free and open road would follow similar lines once the technology and infrastructure caught up with the narrative.

⁴⁴ Sullivan biographer Robert Twombly reports that Sullivan wrote a letter and poetic essay to Whitman which the poet cherished. In the letter, Sullivan identifies with Whitman's struggle to achieve "a virile and indigenous art" (214-5).

difficulties and social divisions born of geographic distance are the culmination of Columbus's dream. In Whitman's teleology, the land which Columbus discovered, the New World, completed and justified his dream of a connected world; effectively, the New World built Columbus's passage to India. For Sullivan, this was a perfectly appropriate "system of thinking" for both the Columbian Exposition as a celebration of Columbus's discovery of the Americas and also for his building which would represent the *idea* of transportation as the motive force of progress and the driving factor in the development of uniquely American cultural forms in the land of the setting sun.

After the fair was over Sullivan complained about the planning committee's slavish piety for classical forms of architecture, though he voiced no reservations during the planning. Apparently he thought that the Exposition should have been forward looking and original and that the future lie in the American West, as his landscape of the setting sun imagery suggests. This is the sentiment that the French critic detected in the building's roughness and barbarism—a "dream of new forms." According to Robert Muccigrosso, the neoclassicism of much of the architecture "was an academic, fundamentally anti-modernist style which looked backward at a time when much of the United States was hurtling forward" (63). Obviously Sullivan was developing in architecture the vision of his favorite poet, and the frustration with slavish conformity to European models that Sullivan Expressed in his *Autobiography of An Idea* is consonant with Whitman's notion of creating a distinctly American poetry and art. His groundbreaking innovations in functional architecture and his contributions to the Chicago sky line, like Whitman's rude American prosody, embody the forward looking culmination of new, wholly modern modes of existence that were for him the result of

building in and for a New Western World. In 1893 Sullivan still saw his and the country's future as bright because progressive and original.⁴⁵ This geographic narrative would be inflected in many early road narratives.

Pope's Gospel of Good Roads

Like the Duryeas, Colonel Albert Augustus Pope attended the Columbian Exposition, and he too was deeply interested in the contents of Sullivan's Transportation Building. Like Charles and Frank Duryea, Pope inspected the automobiles. It was no coincidence that Pope would visit the World's Fair with an eye to new industries. Pope had started a bicycle company after seeing the high-wheeled ordinary bicycle at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. Calling his company Columbia, he in time developed a business strategy that combined ownership of primary patents, vertical integration of his facilities so that he manufactured all the components of his bicycles in house, and aggressive public relations and distribution networks. Pope became the biggest bicycle manufacturer in the country, and Columbia Bicycles became a household name. Perhaps more importantly, Pope's activities with regard to the Columbian Exposition reveal contemporary constructions of geography, and his work before and after crucially impacted the course of American automobility's development. Pope's business model,

⁴⁵ By the end of his life his own failure would poison his sense of America's new architectures and geographies, impelling him to opine that American architecture had died during the fair because of slavish prostration to the virus of foreign aesthetics. In *Autobiography of an Idea* he wrote, "The damage wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century. . . It has penetrated deep into the constitution of the American mind, effecting there lesions of significant dementia" (324-5).

his advertising, his work in the Good Roads Movement, and his early investments in the automobile industry all made lasting impressions on the construction of the geography of automobility.

Pope's bicycle company had a seminal influence on twentieth century business and industry models that is largely overlooked. The vertical integration of Pope's manufacturing was a model for successful industrialization. Ransom Olds and Henry Ford both started their careers with vertical manufacture models and it was not until Pope's Hartford factory was eclipsed in that regard by Henry Ford's Highland Park plant that manufacturing models began to change. Also, endeavoring to create a healthy, happy environment for his workers who would then purchase the product they manufactured, Pope paid well and invested in parks and housing in Hartford near his plants, a move that paralleled but never went as far as George Pullman and prefigured Ford's paternalistic relationship with his employees. In addition, Pope's experience with control of bicycle patents taught him early their usefulness, and when the bicycle market started to flag in the 1890s Pope anticipated the change and bought out the Selden patent for a self propelled, internal combustion vehicle, a move which precipitated the formation of the Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers who Ford would later have to fight in the courts for the privilege of selling his Model T. Finally, Pope set the precedent for dealerships by establishing a network of associate dealers for his bicycles around the country (Goddard 66-88).

Beyond his significant contributions to the models of industrial capitalism, decades before the automotive industry, Pope recognized the commercial benefit in selling not only a product but a lifestyle. Defining the cycling life would lead Pope into

political action which would reorient American geography. By 1880, only four years after first seeing a velocipede, Pope was the premier manufacturer of the device in America. According to Phillip Mason Parker, the popularity of bicycling was spreading despite initial predictions that it was a fad of the wealthy which would soon pass (a claim that would later be leveled against the motorcar). Besides the fad for exercise, the attraction of the bicycle in the 1880s was that it allowed individuals access to more places and more things; the problem was that there was nowhere to go, or rather few places that could be easily reached because few roads were in a condition suitable for bicycling. As more and more bicycles appeared on the roads, reactionary resistance to the device as a plaything of the leisure class spread. The bicycle angered and frightened many, sentiments especially strong among farmers. It startled horses, frightened children, was attacked by dogs, and was unwieldy in urban traffic. Local governments started to ban bicycles in city streets and parks. In response, small local clubs cropped up among enthusiasts to promote the new sport, and though these groups endeavored to resist anti-cycling laws they were unsuccessful and so the New York Bicycle Club called for the creation of a national cyclists' organization (37). On May 6, 1880, with the bicycle craze on the upswing prompting a parade of more than a hundred cyclists at the Decoration Day ceremonies in Newport, Rhode Island, Pope seized the momentum to inaugurate the formation of the League of American Wheelmen (Goddard 76).

Forming clubs of one sort or another was all the rage in the late century. Organizations like Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, and Moose were cropping up around the country, and Pope exploited the fashion for forming clubs to advance cycling. Under Pope's guidance, the League of American Wheelmen was a club devoted to promoting

bicycling and protecting the activity from restrictive legislation, but it also took on many of the activities of comparable community service and recreational organizations like promoting races, hosting tours, and developing a literature designed to instruct cyclists on road etiquette and political concerns. The Wheelmen had mottoes, songs, and their own style of dress, all contributing to the development of a positive image for the sport and generating a whole cycling lifestyle that reified popular assumptions of the time. The Wheelmen distributed maps and endorsed hotels and taverns along preferred routes.⁴⁶ Additionally, in early efforts to overcome the difficulties of bad roads, local clubs would hang signs indicating whether or not a road was passable. Pope supplied the signs and left space for local distributor of Columbia products to advertise. In this way the Wheelmen would be the first to agitate for freedom on the open road and suitable maintenance those roads so as to create leisure destinations for touring. Pope integrally directed their efforts (Goddard 74).

The main reason for the formation of The League of American Wheelmen was to combat ordinances outlawing bicycles on public roads and in public parks, and Pope took a central role in this crusade. Pope spent thousands of dollars of his own money helping local chapters of the Wheelmen combat prohibitive legislation, setting a precedent among League practices. The national organization would assist anyone challenging discriminatory laws against cycling. In one famous case, three men staged a protest ride through New York's Central Park. They were arrested, tried, and convicted. The case was fought all the way through the courts. Pope, who was behind the whole affair, and the Wheelmen lost that particular case, but galvanized and undaunted they took their

⁴⁶ The LAW is a significant precursor to the Automobile Association of America.

campaign to Albany, and in 1887 the New York legislature passed a law opening public streets and highways to bicycle traffic (Goddard 75). By the 1890s with the introduction of the smaller, affordable, less intimidating and, thus, vastly more popular safety bicycle with pneumatic tires, road restrictions were less of a problem, but bad roads still limited cycling's range. The Wheelmen's lobbying experience translated well for the group's next big concern, road conditions. Even though lobbying for appropriations to build suitable roads was a far cry from lobbying for laws that enforced the belief that all vehicles had the right of equal access to public roads, the Wheelmen, with Pope at the helm, took on the problem and in so doing started no small revolution.

When it came to agitating for good roads, the Wheelmen found themselves facing prejudices and entrenched assumptions that were not easily overcome. Eighty years earlier, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Gallatin had made the construction of a network of national highways a part of their political agenda in an effort to unify the rapidly expanding country. They were at least partially successful, winning appropriations from Congress for the construction of a National Road that would run from Baltimore through the Cumberland Gap to cross the Ohio River at Wheeling, and from there across Ohio. However, a series of vetoes on road projects from Presidents James Madison, James Monroe, and then Andrew Jackson, all made on constitutional and budgetary grounds, would shift the emphasis on road construction and maintenance from the federal government to State authority (Raitz 50). At the same time, land grants made to railroad companies subsidized the privatization of national transportation. As a result, although some States took an active role in road construction, most left it to counties to control. As

emphasis shifted to the railroads for the majority of internal transportation, the nation's roads generally fell into disrepair. Philip Parker Mason describes the situation:

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the roads of the country were unbelievably poor. This situation was largely due to certain outmoded characteristics of American highway policy; namely a decentralized system of road management, an almost universal dependence upon untrained personnel in the construction and maintenance of roads, and the widespread use of statute labor in the payment of road taxes (23).

In short, the cornerstone of national road production was left to local overseers whose only job it was to inspect and repair damage to existing roads. Property owners living in the district were obligated to pay a road tax which they could avoid by working on the roads instead. The day that all the able bodied men came out to work on the roads in the district became a significant element of the social structure in rural communities. The roads they worked on were roads that they used, roads that ran from their farms to the market and/or the railroad in town. They would rake off the worst ruts in the dirt road, and spend most of the day leaning on shovels.⁴⁷ So when the Wheelmen began to lobby for good roads they were met with significant resistance from rural areas where people neither wanted to relinquish any power to the state or federal government, nor pay more taxes, nor give up an important community-building event. In addition, rural areas saw this system of road construction and maintenance as unbroken and not in need of fixing for the sake of over-privileged, intrusive bicyclists whose ostentatious contraptions frightened draft animals anyway.

⁴⁷ James Rood Doolittle (1916) describes this statute method of road maintenance as woefully inadequate (267). See also John Rae's *The Road and the Car in American Life*; he points out that the introduction of the bicycle played an instrumental role in introducing to many who never had occasion to experience them the poor condition of American roads (26-8).

The Wheelmen started agitating for good roads in 1888 when they formed a national committee for the improvement of highways. Pope, however, took an early interest in bringing about the construction of suitable roads nationwide. In 1884, *Outing Magazine*, which Pope owned and used as a vehicle to define the cycling lifestyle and influence public opinion, published an article by Lewis Bates on building good roads (Mason 70). Pope recommended a comprehensive national aid program for roads. He funded a chair in road engineering at MIT. At his own expense, he paved roads in Boston as an object lesson in the possibility and benefit of good roads. He published numerous articles on the subject in *Wheelman* and *Good Roads*, as well as other national media sources. He encouraged journalists like Sam McClure to make cycling and related concerns, like free and open highways and good roads, constant fodder for the reading public. He lectured around the country. Aiming his program at future generations, he enlisted teachers into the Good Roads Movement by offering a Columbia bicycle to teachers who found a documented error in a textbook. In the conclusion of the pamphlet announcing the textbook errors contest, Pope argued, “The greatest error of all those discovered in school books was the omission to teach the great need and importance of the construction and Maintenance of good roads throughout the country” (23). All in all, using the League as a vehicle, Pope became the most prominent and vocal proponent of good roads in the country before the turn of the century.

By the time of the announcement of the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1890, the Good Roads Movement was gaining ground due to the combination of a successful national education campaign, the introduction of the “safety” bicycle, which increased League membership, and affiliation with the ideals of the emerging the Populist and

Progressive movements. For instance, the Wheelmen had witnessed intractable resistance to good roads agitation in rural areas and quickly shifted their approach to focus on farmers, arguing that the farmer was “stuck in the mud.” They also allied themselves with the railroads, who saw good roads as a way to get more produce to arterial railways. Good Roads agitators cited data from economists suggesting that farmers in the aggregate spent hundreds of millions of dollars more than was necessary in transporting their goods to market because of bad roads. Calling such expenditures a “mud tax,” they argued that this unnecessary expense ultimately restrained the whole economy. In addition, they pointed out that the dreariness of rural life could be overcome with the construction of good roads that would make schools, church, and cultural activities in towns more accessible. They argued that better roads would make for better schools and churches because with increased access these institutions could consolidate, and thereby serve larger populations more efficiently. Even though in state and local governments League agitation was often met with disdain, requests still came in from all over the country for information and speakers. By the close of the 1880s the time was right to gather the energies of the burgeoning movement.

Propounding his philosophy that investment in roads meant a boon for transportation manufacturers, in 1889 Pope began to argue for Federal Aid to good roads at a meeting of the National Carriage Builders Association at which he was an invited speaker. By early 1892, with League encouragement, Roy Stone, a civil engineer from New York, drafted a bill outlining a federal road commission designed to research national road problems. One of the provisions of the bill stated that the commission would meet in Chicago at the Columbian Exposition to announce its findings. Pope

intended to make this event into a spectacle. While Stone worked up his bill, Pope began agitating for a comprehensive road exhibit that would gather together in one building at the Columbian Exposition exhibits describing and lauding the importance of good roads. Stone's bill, because it stipulated simply research and education, and neither increased taxes nor conferred undo powers to the Federal government, was met with broad support in Congress, and eventually passed the Senate. Forward momentum stopped there, however. The road commission bill would have passed the House, where a unanimous vote was required on legislation involving the Columbian Exposition, except that it was stalled by the rules committee of the House which refused to bring the legislation to the floor before adjourning for recess. By the time Congress reconvened, it would not be too late to pull off their program for the Exposition, but time would be short.

Pope and Stone refused to back down; rather, they redoubled their efforts and took their message to the people in an effort to win popular support for the bill. They formed the National League of Good Roads (NLGR). To capitalize on the media presence at the dedication of the main buildings of the Columbian Exposition in October, they scheduled the new organization's first meeting at the Fair within a week of the ceremony. Thousands attended, and the delegates created an organizational structure that would encourage grass roots development within the League. In addition they planned for nationwide information gathering and educational activities. The final item of business called for a convention in Washington D.C. in January, 1893, to coincide with the next Congressional session so attendees could visit their congressmen to deliver the "good roads gospel." This date also coincided with the Meeting of the National Board of Trade, a coincidence which the leadership of the NLGR exploited. Pope funded the whole

meeting, and went on to publish at his own expense the open letter he had written to the American people with excerpts from the letters of respondents including the organizers of the Exposition, President Harrison, important cabinet members, Congressmen from both houses, Supreme Court Justices, captains of industry, presidents of universities, and over a thousand journalists' reports all written in support of good roads for the nation.

Ultimately Pope and the NLGR wanted to take advantage of the World's Fair to put together a comprehensive road exhibit and so spread the word about the absolute necessity of a national system of good roads. In the end they would get both more and less than they had hoped.

In the open letter to Congress, Pope outlines his primary complaint with the exposition's road exhibits as they were planned. He complains that one could not get a full picture of the science and economy of roads and road building at the fair without significant preparation and work. In this open letter to Allan Durborow, Chairman of the Congressional Columbian Exposition Committee, entitled "Memorial to Congress," Pope argues that if the exposition did not include roads as a factor in the progress of civilization, the provisions of the act announcing the fair would comply in neither letter nor spirit to the stipulation that the exposition would exhibit "the progress of civilization in the New World" (4). In the letter, Pope explicitly argues for an educational exhibit of roads in America which would serve as an object lesson in road construction. The need of this, he reasons, is that the difference between civilization and barbarism can be measured by the condition of a society's roads—the more civilized the people, the better the roads. To a congressman and nation already harboring acute anxiety over America's subordinate status compared to Europe, Pope ironically implies that because America

does not have a comprehensive and effective system of roads it must be less than civilized. His subtext is sharply critical of the progress of civilization with regards to roads in America.

One of the principal lines of argument levied by the Good Roads Movement shamed America for the state of its roads in comparison with those of Europe, particularly France. For instance, just after Congress failed to appropriate the necessary funds for a road exhibit at the Exposition, *Century Illustrated Monthly* ran an editorial, "Road Building Exhibit at Chicago," which cites evidence showing that the state of American roads is at least a hundred years behind France. The article suggests, "It is not improbable that the people of the United States, now slowly awakening to the fact that they are more than a hundred years behind other civilized countries in the science of road building, may date the general beginning of their determination to catch up with the rest of the world in this matter from the World's Fair of 1893" (150). This writer, likely one of Pope's stable of journalists, deftly shames America for being so far behind, shames Congress for not passing the commission bill, and at the same time takes the organization of a comprehensive exhibit at the fair for granted as any enlightened, intelligent citizen ought.

Citing good roads as the measure of civilization is just the point Pope emphasizes in his letter to Durborow, but Pope goes on in his letter to appeal to the notion that they cannot pass up the opportunity of the exposition to teach American citizens the importance of good roads. What's more, he appeals to the nation's sense of exceptionalism. He pleads that America as a world leader has an obligation to all the less civilized countries of the world, particularly those of the Americas, who need to see what

good roads could do for their own countries. He then predicts “the hastening of a more glorious day wherein there shall be a higher civilization and a wider Christianity, brought about by good roads extending wherever man has made his home” (4). He concludes with an appeal to this session of Congress’s legacy in that bright future as the instigators of progress here and around the world. The future begins, in other words, with the World’s Columbian Exposition, and the future will come with the construction of good national roads. Thus, Pope effectively tries to impel the action of Congress and the organizers of the Exposition by situating the necessity of an exhibit between the shared sense of being less civilized than European countries yet desirous of assuming a leadership role in the world. He challenges their national leadership by suggesting that they owe it to their country to instruct the mass of American citizens who do not yet understand that importance of good roads; yet, he appeals to their sense of self importance by implying that they will be the heroes of the future because they served an integral function in making the Columbian Exposition the event that cleared the ground for the good roads of the future.

Although he dropped out of high school in order to fight in the Civil War, Pope was a shrewd intellect, and he sharply tailored his rhetoric to the many different audiences he addressed. In an article he wrote for *Forum Magazine* during the height of the 1892 congressional debates surrounding Stone’s commission bill, Pope takes a less enthusiastic, less idealistic approach than in his letter to Durborow. Aiming his arguments at the sensibilities of the practical, business minded readers of *Forum Magazine* who subscribe to the up-by-the-bootstraps success story of American commerce, Pope appeals “to the sordid, solid, immediate returns of money values, and rest[s] the matter there”

(116). In spite of the pejorative tone, Pope, a prominent and well respected businessman, explains to his readers that when wealthy men buy property they quickly build roads because it pays to do so. By the same reasoning, “It would pay the poor men equally well in proportion, and if enough of them would co-operate they would have enough money”

(116). Having thus earned his audience’s attention, Pope cites several examples of communities and townships that have collectively invested in good roads and thereby reaped the benefits of increased commercial activity and increased property values. Then he goes on to narrate a geographic history that reveals the basis of his argument:

The first roads were built by the owners of the land through which they passed, from the necessity of their own immediate use. Then towns came to take the expense, because it was necessary to distribute the cost and the care of maintenance of roads over more people and more territory. Then counties assumed the expense and care of certain roads of more difficult and extensive construction. State interposition in the construction is almost as old as the English settlements of this country. As long ago as 1639 it was found necessary for the General Court of Massachusetts by statute to compel the towns to complete and keep in continuous construction and repair the through roads, bridges, and ferries from Newbury to Hingham. The national road from Delaware to Ohio, whose promotion was begun by General Washington, is another instance. The freeing of toll-bridges and turnpikes in most of the States and the construction of bridges in the place of ferries, are further illustrations of this principle. (116)

So stating, Pope makes the point that the history of American progress is the history of the centralization of road policy. Then he explains, “Not only does every man and every family have this interest in the road immediately adjacent to his home, the need of it for going to and from his source of supply and his market for his products, his school, his church, his post-office, his town hall; but he has a like interest in all the roads of his state, and in the roads of all states” (117). On this warrant, Pope asserts that enlightened self interest will lead a thinking man, a practical, business-minded thinking man, to conclude that because all are complicitly interested in roads the State is justified in requiring of all

citizens that which is necessary for the construction and maintenance of them. He hinges his argument on the language of market economics, the language of supply and demand. Claiming that no one will get rich off anyone else if good roads are built but that everyone will get richer in proportion to the initial State investment, Pope deploys the language of economic success to unseat the intransigent ideologies which the good roads movement had been confronting. Inasmuch as the fair was in no small measure dedicated to marking progress and directing the course of the future, Pope's emphasis here is telling. The title of this essay, "An Industrial Revolution By Good Roads," implicitly links ideas of progress, modernization and, given the language of his essay, wealth, all of which were ideas fundamental to the ethos of the exposition.

Pope's rhetoric is representative of much of the rhetoric of the early Good Roads Movement. In his memoir of the early years of automobility, Bellamy Partridge confirms that with such rhetoric, Pope was a leading force in the movement that changed the geography of the country (182). Other principal figures of the Good Roads Movement, Roy Stone, Isaac Potter, the title of whose essay, "Gospel of Good Roads," became the motto for road propaganda, Sam McClure, the editor of *McClure's Magazine*, and Otto Dorner who wrote the influential "Must the Farmer Pay for Good Roads," were all indebted to Pope for outlining the arguments that would drive the movement, and for designing the program that would keep the necessity of good roads in the forefront of the American popular discourse well into the twentieth century.

Despite all their efforts, Pope and Stone and the League didn't get a roads commission at the exposition, but what they got was better than they could have hoped. At the fair, Pope's centrally located comprehensive roads exhibit with demonstrations of

roads under construction and giant topographical maps showing roads spreading like network across the country proved impossible. Dr. S. H. Peabody, the Chief of the Department of Liberal Arts Buildings, although sympathetic to Pope's appeals, stated, "I am of the opinion that the extensive material exhibit which you propose is not practicable within the conditions that exist in Jackson Park" (Pope "Memorial" 10). There were, however, several road exhibits around the fair's campus in Agriculture, Mines and Mining, Machinery, Manufactures and Liberal Arts, as well as in Sullivan's Transportation Building, and Pope's ideas were taken into consideration during the final planning stages. Even though they did not get exactly what they wanted, they were still able to exploit the event to direct a significant amount of attention to what they termed the national roads crisis.

As for the road commission, without the auspices of the convention at the World's Fair, the commission's purpose would have been pretty narrow—simply research without a well publicized reporting event. By mid-January of 1893, when the NLGR held their second national convention in Washington D. C., it was getting late to plan the full event that Stone and Pope had imagined, and there was still doubt, if not outright rejection, among certain congressmen as to the desirability and constitutionality of federal involvement in road affairs anyway. However, the convention did have an impact in Congress. In February, the House Committee on Agriculture dropped the World's Fair proposal, but provided for the creation of a Federal Office of Road Inquiry. The Agriculture Department's bill was passed in early March, establishing under the authority of the department a National Bureau of Public Roads with a \$10,000 appropriation. Roy Stone was appointed director of the department, whose very limited work involved the

research and dissemination of information regarding the planning, construction, and maintenance of public roads. In an effort to avoid constitutionality issues, the office was directed to in no way to do anything more than serve in an advisory capacity to State road departments. Initially the NLGR was upset, and tried unsuccessfully to reintroduce their original legislation for the roads commission convening at the World's Fair. The effort was quickly dismissed in Congress. In the end however, the Bureau of Public Roads became an important instrument of the Good Roads Movement, ultimately legitimating the early work of the League of American Wheelmen (Mason 146-9) and paving the way for broader federal road legislation to come.

Yet, Pope's involvement in setting the stage for the automobility revolution did not stop with the first significant Federal road legislation to be passed since the Jackson administration. In the years after 1893, due to market saturation and the economic depression which coincided with the exposition, bicycles weren't selling as well as they had in previous years. Pope turned his attentions in new directions. Just as he had done in 1876, he embraced a technology he had seen at the fair, and put capital behind it. After the World's Fair, he began looking into self propelled vehicles. Pope visited the Duryea brothers after they rose to national prominence by winning the Chicago Thanksgiving Day race and offered to produce their gasoline powered engines. Pope and the Duryeas were unable to come to an agreement.⁴⁸ After this, Pope engaged Hiram Percy Maxim to design and build the Columbia Motorcar. Maxim's earlier work had been in internal combustion, which he preferred, but Pope believed that electricity was the real future of automobility. Whereas internal combustion and steam driven engines were considered

⁴⁸ Pope offered five dollar royalties per car; the Duryeas demanded fifty.

noisy and volatile, for many including Pope and, notably, Thomas Edison, electric cars offered ease of use and uncomplicated, non-threatening comfort. Pope only tolerated Maxim's experiments with internal combustion engines because electric models like the Mark III Stanhope were forthcoming, feeding the wealthy, leisure class market of conspicuous consumption that Pope believed to be the only market for such a product. By the end of the Century, Pope had come to a business deal with William Collins Whitney who had an idea to outfit the entire New York City taxi fleet with electric cabs and from there expand nationally. During negotiations for their merger, the subject of existing patents came up. The Pope Company had previously determined that the Selden patent was not a threat to their business, but during the merger the new company made a deal with Selden for a controlling interest in the patent anyway. Stephen Goddard suggests that in an era when multiple technologies were competing to determine the course of the future automobile market, any control would be advantageous as Pope was well aware given his success was based on control of bicycle patents. The Selden patent could be used to control the production of internal combustion automobiles, thus limiting competition and lending advantage to electric models. Despite the success of the Stanley brother's steamer auto, the two strongest rivals for the market were gasoline and electric. With Edison in the latter camp, and electric cars being safer, cleaner, and quieter, it's easy to see why Pope and Whitney were so confident of their eventual success. In a move that would define the automobile industry for years, Pope and Whitney's Electric Vehicle Company sued the Winton Motor Car Company for patent infringement. Winton lost, but rather than appeal the decision, Winton joined forces with Packard and Olds. They approached Pope to make a deal. They came to a mutually beneficial agreement, forming

the Association of Licensed Automobile Manufactures (ALAM), members of which would pay royalties to Pope and Whitney's Electric Vehicle Company. A portion of the royalties was earmarked to control market competition, thus making it extremely difficult for upstart companies, like Ford, generate enough capital to at one time manufacture, fight a patent case, and earn market share (Goddard 143-163; Brinkley 90-7 and 141-4).

However, despite Maxim's ingenious designs, despite the Electric Vehicle Company's central charging stations in urban centers, despite possession of the Selden patent, despite Pope's aggressive style of public relations and advertising, and despite comprehensive vision, planning, and the strong capital base of the company, the direction of American automobility finally went with internal combustion over electric. Electricity might have worked in the densely populated cities of the East, but in the broad expanses of the Midwest, where farmers were already familiar with combustion technology used in agricultural equipment, electric technology simply could not and would not take hold. Henry Ford understood the Midwest, and geared his models toward farmers and the "great multitude," as he called the middle classes. When the ALAM denied Ford's application he took them to court. The Electric Vehicle Company was already in decline. Pope had sold his interests to Whitney, and his relatives were running what was left of the bicycle company. Pope had turned his attentions to spreading the "gospel of good roads." By 1907 what was left of the bicycle interests and the Electric Vehicle Company had to be sold off to cover debts. After an initial loss in his battle against the Selden patent, announced just weeks after the Colonel's death in 1909, Ford would appeal the decision and finally win in 1911. Appropriate for the Progressive era, as well as Henry Ford's Western, populist mentality, the Selden patent and the ALAM, which was nothing

more than a skill put in place to control competition, were broken, and Pope, whose work had cleared the ground for the automobility revolution, was eclipsed in the national memory by other industrial visionaries. However, as an 1898 editorial in *Outlook* put it, it was for his “ardent support of the movement for road improvement that Albert Pope received the title, “The Father of Good Roads” (qtd in Mason 195).⁴⁹ Yet for all his obscurity from the historical record, Pope’s work before and after the Columbian Exposition represented late-nineteenth-century geographic thinking and dramatically impacted the production of American automobility.

Frederick Jackson Turner and his New Frontier Thesis

Another key participant in the 1893 Columbian Exposition was the young historian Frederick Jackson Turner. At the time, Turner’s paper, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” was received with indifference by the convention of historians gathered to mark the fourth centenary of Columbus’s voyage. His was the last presentation late into the evening of July 12. Most of the gathered historians had spent the day touring the White City, and ironically many had accepted Buffalo Bill Cody’s invitation to his Wild West Show.⁵⁰ It had been a long day, and they were tired. Turner was asked not a single question from the exhausted, bored audience. However, Turner’s

⁴⁹ James Rood Doolittle confirms Pope’s impact, writing in *The Romance of the Automobile Industry* (1916) “Col. Albert A Pope was one of the pioneers of the modern good roads movement. . . It was under the influence of Pope and other leading minds of the bicycle business that the first boom in road-making that had been experienced in this country, finally took form in the middle 80’s” (264).

⁵⁰ Richard White compares the myths of the West promulgated by Turner and Cody in his article “When Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill Cody both played Chicago in 1893.” John Faragher documents Turner’s humble start (2).

thesis would later come to be embraced as one of the most influential concepts of American history, one that would stoke the geographic imagination and lend a narrative and a certain ideological legitimacy to the embrace of automobility in the twentieth century.

Turner's basic thesis is that the unique character of American customs, social institutions, economics, and politics are explained by the fact of the frontier, which is defined as an abundance of free land to which people can escape if conditions where they were living were to become intolerable. Turner's argument for the essential importance of the American frontier draws on the 1890 census director's statement that there was no longer enough unsettled land in the continent to identify a frontier line in future census reports. For Turner this statement is tremendously significant, because without an unsettled frontier West there would no longer be an escape route for the dissatisfied and disaffected, and America's social and cultural institutions must necessarily and inevitably transform as a result.

Identifying European sources of American institutions was the predominant method of contemporary American historians, but Turner was keen to locate native factors to explain America's development. For Turner, the fundamental factor behind the unique character of American institutions is geography.⁵¹ As he succinctly puts it, "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development" (199). Fundamentally, Turner maintains that America contained at once multiple progressive stages of the evolution of civilization;

⁵¹ In this line of argument Turner parallels the deterministic geographic thinking of his day represented in Friedrich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, and Ellen Churchill Semple, *American History and Its Geographic Conditions*.

everything from primitive societies to the most complex and industrially urban society coexisted in one complex, composite society. He states, “The peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life” (199). Turner argues that the specific originality of American institutions, particularly democracy, is based on geographic determination within America’s unique natural environment.

Europe, he reasons, could not possibly be the true primary source of American institutions because engagement with the frontier had systematically stripped settlers of the trappings of civilization, forcing them to grow up with the land. Turner describes a process of engagement with the frontier during which primitive forms of hunting, warfare, construction, and agriculture demanded by isolated confrontation with wild nature would strip the frontiersman or pioneer settler of European clothing, methods, and ideas. Turner writes, “Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs. . . The fact is, that here is a new product that is American” (201). Thus in Turner’s model escape from the pressures of civilization lends itself to the development of self reliance and individualism, the outcomes of which with regards to social and political institutions are composite nationality, industrial independence, and ultimately democracy.

Even though Turner’s ideas about the significance of the frontier for American institutions met with antipathy from his audience at the Exposition, his thesis was too

finely attuned to the concerns of the time to remain obscure.⁵² As Turner biographer Allan Bogue observes, “Turner set his themes within a framework of contemporary social thought” (92). Populist sentiment was gaining strength as Western states began to believe they could pressure perceived Eastern interests, particularly the trusts, which were at that time consolidating power. Turner’s thesis supports the idea that the frontier West speaks back to the powerful business and political interests of the East, thus providing a foundation for 1890s progressivism, the same ideas that Pope and the NLGR would exploit in the name of good roads. Turner also addresses the anxieties of proving American worth in the face of much older European institutions, sensibilities which had guided the planning of the Columbian Exposition, by keying into popular notions of Manifest Destiny like Thomas Hart Benton’s expansionist rhetoric, Horace Greeley’s famous dictum, “Go west young man and grow up with the country,” and Walt Whitman’s notion of the Western character (covered in chapter 2). These were the same arguments that made Chicago the choice for the World’s Fair over New York. Yet Turner also speaks to the economic anxieties following the Stock market collapse and subsequent depression that hit the country during the Exposition by implying, according to John Faragher, that the economic downturn was the result of the turn to new economic modes attributable to the close of the frontier (3). In short, Turner reads the historical evidence of American westward colonial expansion, but confronts the concerns of his moment.

America was at a turning point, a fact for which Turner found proof in the 1890 census report. Cutting his nostalgia for the closed frontier with exceptionalist optimism,

⁵² It should also be noted that Turner worked very hard at self promotion.

Turner suggests that the era of exploration and expansion had come to a close, and now the strength of America's institutions would really be put to the test as the country moved into a new era with a new sense of geography.⁵³ That which had defined America, in Turner's reading, from the time of Columbus up to his own was now gone. As Turner puts it, "Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them" (227). America, Turner maintains, faces a new relationship to the land and that new relationship, like the old one, would have a determining influence upon the institutions that the U.S. would in time exhibit. Turner states, "And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (227).⁵⁴

Turner sees his country as looking into a new frontier, a new *kind* of frontier, in other words, and although his statements are carefully guarded, occasionally in his flights

⁵³ John Faragher summarizes Turner's argument, "Just as the frontier had been essential to Americans' becoming who we were as a people, so it would require 'new frontiers' to insure our continued development" (3). In *Recalling The Wild*, Mary Lawlor reads Turner's frontier thesis alongside the constructed photography of Native Americans by Edward S. Curtis to outline their shared nostalgia for a disappearing landscape. In his *Cultural History of the American Novel*, David Mintner observes that Turner "believed that his nation stood at a critical juncture and concluded that it needed its hard frontier virtues to meet new challenges" (28). Robert Muccigrosso has it that Turner and his "mixture of industrialism and technology" mirrored a more widespread anxiety and nostalgia for a vanishing America" (126). As automotive historian Peter Ling explains, "the frontier which had permitted America's progress hitherto, was now closed, and some substitute had to be speedily devised" (112). Alan Trachtenberg links Turner's thesis and the expansionist policy it tacitly supports to the burgeoning of corporate business and citizenship models of the Gilded Age.

⁵⁴ Turner's thesis was roundly criticized in his own day, and yet it still found traction with the popular imagination. Theodore Roosevelt credited Turner with having "put into shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around rather loosely" (qtd in White 204). Modern critics have challenged Turner's thesis on the grounds that that not everyone could afford escape to the frontier, the frontier experience of America was hardly unique, he neglected French and Spanish settlement, many settlers indeed carried democratic institutions with them, and the frontier was still very open in 1893. See *Trails: Toward a New Western History*.

of rhetoric he reveals glimpses of his sense of the formative factors for contemporary American institutions. In Turner's view, physical and cultural geography would continue to play a significant part in determining the form of American institutions, and he feels that the indomitable spirit that led to geographic expansion would not evaporate, but would take a new form based on the new relationship to national space implied in the closed frontier. Taking geographic determinism for granted, he states:

The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there. . . each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons have accompanied the frontier" (227).

That is, because of the intellectual traits that have accrued in the American mindset as a result of the frontier experience, now that the frontier is filled, and as the country turns in on itself spatially, Americans will now see the expanse of this new geographic frontier not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to redefine itself in new ways. In so doing, as Turner sees it, America's new pioneers will outstretch stodgy, contained, stultified Europe. Yet, in Turner's view, America will not stop at besting European civilization; rather, it will push back and thereby redefine world institutions. So just as the Western States had influenced the Eastern, the United States will exert influence on Europe. Finally, Turner goes on to compare the significance of the frontier for America to the significance of the Mediterranean for the ancient Greeks, thus implying that America will be the revolutionary civilization of the future as the Greeks were the revolutionary civilization of the ancient world. With this he echoes both Walt Whitman's "Passage to

India,” and Henry Adams’ sentiment that the buildings of the White City overleap time to connect American unity and progress to the cycles of history.

These are the grounds on which Turner’s thesis would acquire so much significance for the generations that would build America’s road systems. Although some road systems were fairly well established, if not always well maintained, in the East, the West lacked them utterly. Populations had cropped up where federally supported railroads had laid out commercial town centers in areas where farming was particularly good. Other than the railroads, what roads there were that connected these isolated outposts of civilization were practically impassable for most of the year. According to Turner, now that the West is populated, now that the frontier is effectively filled, it is time to begin the work building roads to tie it together within itself and to the East. Based on his geographic narrative of history, Turner intimates that road building would define generations to come:

Indian trade pioneered the way for civilization. The buffalo trail became the Indian trail, and this became the trader’s “trade;” the trails widened into roads, and roads into turnpikes, and these in turn were transformed into railroads. The same origin can be shown from the railroads of the South, the far West, and the Dominion of Canada. The trading posts reached by these trails were on the sites of Indian villages which had been placed in positions suggested by nature; and these trading posts, situated so as to command the water systems of the country, have grown into such cities as Albany, Pittsburg, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Council Bluffs, and Kansas City. Thus civilization in America has followed the arteries made by geology, pouring an ever richer tide through them, until at last the slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines; the wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization, growing ever more numerous. (210)⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Turner, like Whitman and Sullivan, was deeply influenced by the mythology of Western expansion promulgated by Thomas Hart Benton. In fact his doctoral dissertation is indebted to Benton’s stages of transportation development. See Allan Bogue, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Strange Roads Going Down*.

What Turner is after here is a historical model that reveals the mechanism of the inevitable progress of civilization. Turner presumes that the central feature of America's new frontier will necessarily be geographic and that America's future will be drawn from the complex interaction of lines of communication and commerce. The trails of aboriginal travel will grow into the wide and elaborate networks of modern roads, and as this process unfolds governance will continue to consolidate and centralize. Superficial state and regional differences born of the life in remote locations will be mollified by ease of travel and exposure to regional differences, differences both of land and culture: "Mobility of population is death to localism, and the western frontier worked irresistibly in unsettling population" (210). In Turner's narrative, with each successive advance into the frontier there developed a new primitiveness, and the character of the nation would continue to evolve as it had, based on of the interaction of citizens with the nation's physical space. Thus mobility, the movement through geographies of populations, is the determining factor of history and the institutions that historians study. The frontier is then, Turner implies, an accident of history, and now filled American geography and American mobility will take on a whole new set of measures and meanings. The new arrangements of communication and commerce will be addressed according to the unique character that the frontier has bred in Americans and their institutions. Mobility itself, Turner suggests, with geography and custom will be at the core of America's ascendant civilization, and the bonds of political exchange will be cemented on it. Moreover, the composite character of the country will in time be subtly homogenized as the central government gains influence over the resistant West because of expanding lines of mobility. Turner implies that pathways of mobility and political federalization are almost

inevitable in the aftermath of the closing of the frontier and will be the distinguishing characteristic of the century to come. This thinking would gain traction and become one of the most common narratives associated with American automobility.

In the words of David Mintner, “It was stunningly appropriate that [Turner] should deliver his first great address when and where he did” (31). Turner had spent the day of July 12 polishing up his essay before delivering it at the conference, but it is unknown whether or not during his stay he visited Sullivan’s Transportation building, whether he saw the Daimler or Sturgis autos, or what he thought about the Good Roads Movement, the NLGR, or the formation of the Federal Bureau of Public Roads. It is nevertheless clear that he was indeed strongly influenced by the narratives defining American culture in his day. Although he could not predict the specific impact of automotive technology, what he does outline is the fact that American geography at the end of the nineteenth century was changing, and because of this American institutions would change. Thus, he maintains that forms of mobility in the landscape would come to characterize new institutions. This thesis reflects attitudes of the historical moment resonant throughout the fair, but more importantly Turner’s thesis provides a geographic framework for later producers of American automobility.

Dreaming the Columbian Road

Visitors to the Columbian Exposition could view the wonders of modern industrial machines housed in the main buildings, then ogle representations of primitive

and exotic difference, and then wander the Midway Plaisance to sample exciting novelties and consumer goods. They could see a world class art exhibit and then purchase cheap souvenirs to mark their visit. Through its many spectacles the fair produced a carnival and vacation atmosphere, a place outside the real world where dreams seemed possible. Such cultural contradictions characterize the exposition and, appropriately, America's geographic culture in the Gilded Era. In this context, it is telling that both Turner's and Pope's succinct recitals of history are the history of traveled roads, and that read side by side they arrive at the conclusion that federal involvement in the methods of transportation through American space are practically inevitable on the one hand and good sense on the other. It's additionally telling that the same belief in mobility operative in Turner's thesis also defines the themes of Sullivan's Transportation Building, both echoing Whitman. As a historian Turner could not state so much, but it's reasonable to suppose that with his emphasis on mobility he would not be surprised by the cultural revolution that would make automobility to the twentieth century what, to him, the frontier was for the previous four centuries—a release valve for the frustrations brought on by civilization. Indeed, the interrelationship of industrial production and consumer pleasure that the Columbian Exposition defined would underlie the embrace of automobility as a driving cultural force in coming years. Crucially, the narratives of history, modernity and progress, and exceptionalism contained in the work of Sullivan, Pope, and Turner at the time of the Columbian Exposition represent a paradigmatic touchstone for geographies of America in the coming century.

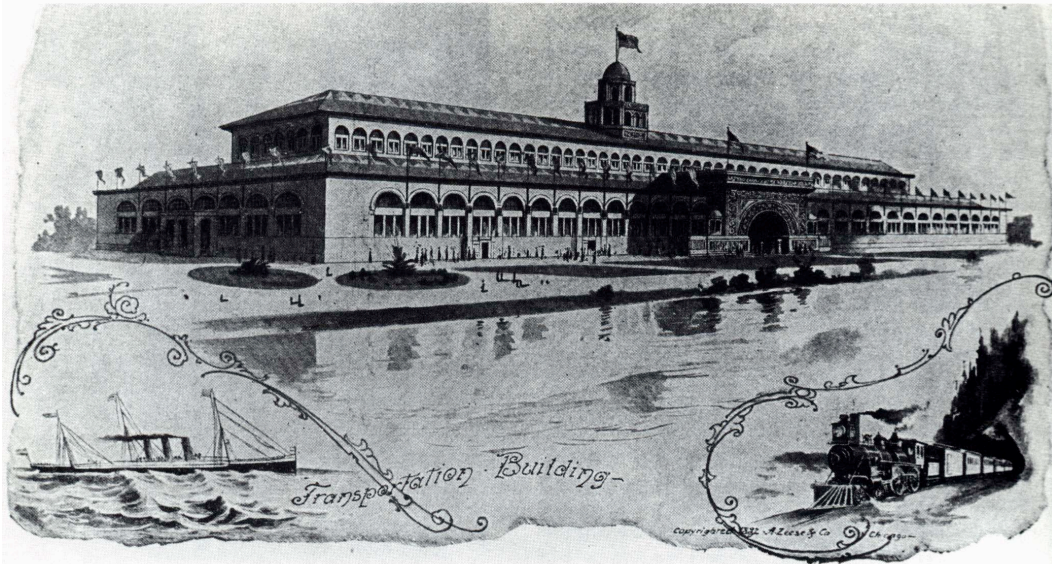


Figure 1.6: Rendering of the Transportation Building from the Wooded Isle included in Rand McNally's *A Week at the Fair* (cited in Weingarden 216).

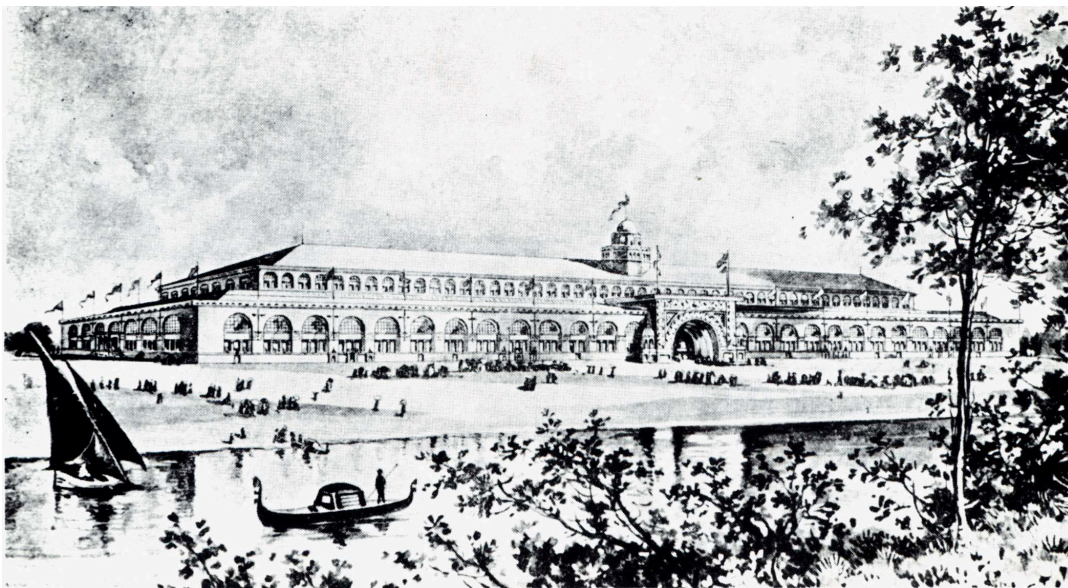


Figure 1.7: Rendering of Transportation Building in *History of the World's Fair 1893* (Weingarden 213).

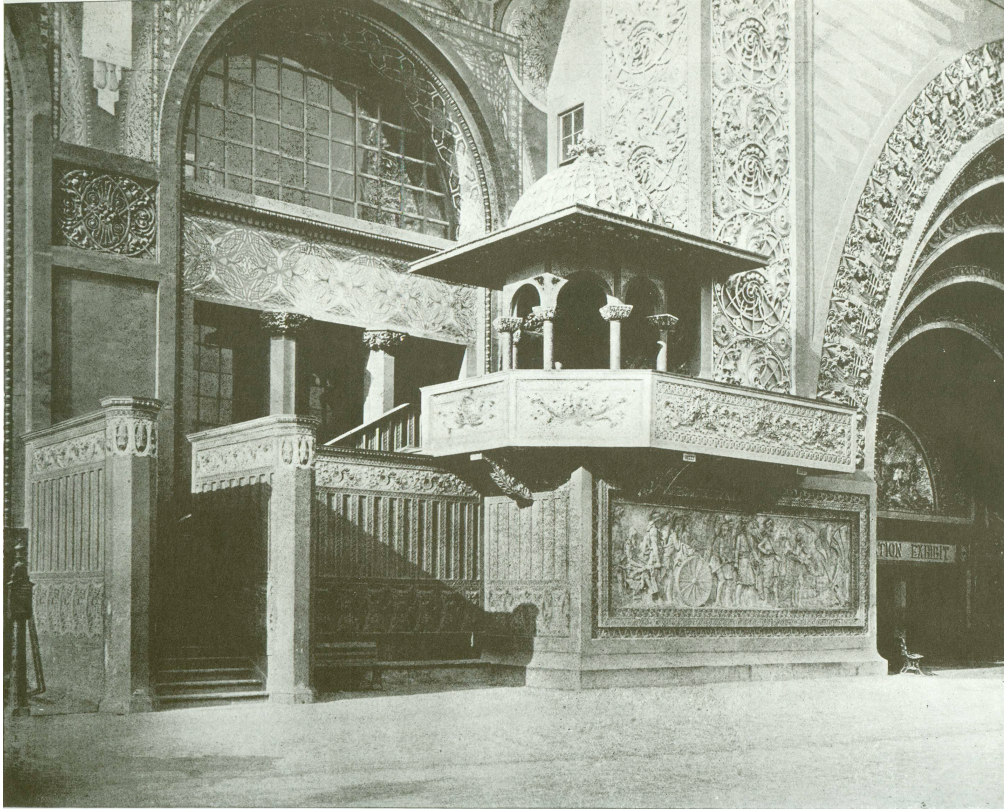


Figure 1.8: Close up of the Golden Door's ornament showing the façades combination of classical and modern decorative styles. Also visible is one panel of the bas-relief depicting the stages of transportation history. Picture taken from J. W. Buel, *The Magic City* (New York: Arno, 1894).

CHAPTER 2

WALT WHITMAN'S ROADS: THE GEOGRAPHY OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA IN FREE VERSE

In the years leading up to the Columbian Exposition, many thought Whitman should have been involved in the Expo in some way. The magazine, *Illustrated American*, thought Whitman would make an appropriate symbol for the fair, publishing in 1891 an anonymous editorial responding to the planners of the exposition's request of a commemorative from British Poet Laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson. The editorial questioned the choice of Tennyson to represent the exposition, arguing that Tennyson, though a great poet indeed, had not written anything of value in a number of years. A better choice the writer insists would be an American:

But best of all would be an American poet. The children of the New World, which Columbus revealed to the Old, are best fitted to celebrate the glories of the new dispensation. . . . Walt Whitman would be the best choice. He is an American, a democrat in the largest and best sense of the word, a son of the soil. He could give us a splendid chant, full of virility and breadth and wisdom. But we have not yet reached the ideal stage where we can appreciate him at his true worth. (qtd in Traubel 8: 126)

Later the same year, George Horton of the Chicago Herald requested in a letter that Whitman write an exclusive poem for his paper to commemorate the exposition. Horton indicates that he had approached several other prominent poets, but flatteringly adds that any list of contemporary poets would be incomplete without him. Further, appealing to

Whitman's taste for self promotion, Horton promises, "The West is anxious to hear from you on the subject, and the Herald reaches the West very widely" (qtd in Traubel 8: 446). Closer to home, Horace Traubel, historian of Whitman's final years and tireless promoter of the man and his poetry, had tried numerous times to get Whitman to write something for the fair. Yet Whitman complained time and again that he was unable to write any more poems. It did not matter to him how many requests he received (Traubel 9: 126). Notwithstanding his reluctance or inability to write, for many Whitman would have been the perfect literary representative for the ideals of the Columbian Exposition.⁵⁶

It was impossible for Whitman to play anything more than a symbolic role for the exposition, however; he had died on March 26th 1892 while Pope and Stone were lobbying their road commission legislation through Congress, while Frank Duryea was laboring over the mechanics of his "motocycle's" transmission, while Turner was working out his frontier theory of American history, and while Louis Sullivan was overseeing the construction of his Transportation Building. Yet, the symbolic role Whitman would have embodied elucidates a set of shared sensibilities about America at the time of the event. For those who saw the obvious connection, Whitman represented America's significance, its geography, and the direction in which the country was tending in the Gilded Era. Notwithstanding the qualities of Whitman's verse that so many found vulgar and perverse, Whitman's ethos is rooted so fully in the national values of the time that, while the country marshaled the resources to represent itself to the world, meaning

⁵⁶ Traubel also records in *With Walt Whitman in Camden* 8 that on September 11, 1891 that Whitman said to him, "I have had fully half a dozen applications for poems lately—poems for public occasions—to none of which I have replied" (499). More pertinently, Traubel reports on November 11, 1891 of a San Francisco paper "warmly advocating W. as poet for the Columbian Exposition" (*With Walt Whitman in Camden* 9, 138).

European capitals, Whitman's verse advances a narrative for the mood of the day. So, although Whitman was not actually at the fair, it was nevertheless an ideal vehicle for a number of Whitman's preoccupations like American originality, Columbianism and the spirits of discovery and pioneerism, technological progress, democracy, and the importance of roads for binding the corners of the nation together.

Inasmuch as Whitman would become something of a spiritual forebear for tramps and travelers who would take to the open road throughout the twentieth century, his ideological proximity to the values expressed during the Columbian Exposition is not insignificant when that event is read as a flashpoint for the beginning of the era of automobility. Indeed, for as much as the exposition marks a turning point in geographic values and opens the way for automobile modernism, Whitman's poetry produces a set of geographic ideas that represented contemporary thinking and would help to drive the changes in thinking about national space during the production of the automobile geography and infrastructure. Whitman's poems register the values of nineteenth-century American geographies, but they also develop chronotopic metaphors of the American road in both essentialized and heraldic enough terms that his verse would become a touchstone for future road travelers long after the Columbian Exposition, its novelties, its themes, and its ideas were largely forgotten. This chapter will outline the synchronous geographic ideas between Whitman's last poem, "A Thought of Columbus" and those of the Columbian Exposition, examine Whitman's representation of contemporary geographies, and then analyze the structure and symbolism of the American road chronotope Whitman constructs throughout *Leaves of Grass*, illustrating the particulars of this form with a reading of "Song of the Open Road."

Opening the New Way: A Song of Columbus

Even though he said he was too infirm to put together anything directly for the fair, at least something officially dedicated to the spirit of the fair, on March 16, 1892, ten days before he was to die, Whitman handed his old confidant, Horace Traubel, a manuscript of two sheets upon which were pasted old envelopes and paper scraps containing the lines of the last poem he would write, “A Thought of Columbus.” This poem may have been Whitman’s response to Gregory Horton of the Chicago Tribune’s requests, or it may be the result of his exposure to the popular discourse surrounding the quatracentenary of Columbus’s voyage, something Whitman would have been open to because he deeply admired Columbus. Either way, the poem speaks to Whitman’s thoughts about Columbus and America in the four hundred years since the explorer had sailed and captures the spirit of the fair and the changes the country was facing at the time. “A Thought of Columbus” is a paeon to the inspiration that impelled Columbus’s attempt to sail west to arrive in the Orient as well as the historical result of that act—a modernizing America stepping into a leadership role in the world. These were the principal ideologies of the Columbian Exposition.

“A Thought of Columbus,” like so many of Whitman’s poems, wields associative language and broad, expansive scope to layer history, geography, the cosmos, and Whitman’s own brand of mysticism within an accessible extended metaphor. At its most basic, the poem is an effort to demonstrate the significance of Columbus to America four hundred years after his first voyage. In order to do this, Whitman imagines the beginning of time. “Mystery of mysteries,” the poem begins, “the crude and hurried ceaseless flame,

spontaneous, bearing on itself. / The bubble and the huge round, concrete orb! A breath of Deity, as thence the bulging universe unfolding” (581). By opening with the birth of the cosmos, Whitman is constructing an enlarged scope of time and space, one that vastly exceeds the Earth itself, much less human history, to portray the significance of Columbus and America.

Having established a cosmological backdrop, Whitman moves in on his subject: “Thousands and thousands of miles hence, and now four centuries back, / A mortal impulse thrilling its brain cell, / Reck’d or unreck’d, the birth can no longer be postponed” (582). From a cosmic vantage point Whitman, as his ambiguous title suggests, zooms in on the thought, the moment of inspiration, the flash of genius which compelled Columbus to set out west in search of a trade route with the East, casting that moment of inspiration in terms that make that one flickering instant a supremely important turning point in cosmic cycles. Whitman proposes that Columbus’s moment of inspiration was fateful and latently carried the overthrow of the old order. “Only a silent thought,” he suggests with understatement, “yet toppling down more than walls of brass or stone” (582). Then from his cosmic perspective, Whitman jumps from Columbus for whom “A thought! a definite thought works out in shape” (582) to his own historical moment and his reflection on the significance of Columbus’s thought:

Four hundred years roll on.
The rapid cumulus—trade, navigation, war, peace, democracy roll on; —the old
camps of ages pitch’d in newer, larger areas,
The tangl’d, long-deferr’d eclairsissement of human life and hopes boldly begins
untying,
As here, to-day up-grows the Western World. (582)

Whitman pins on this first, inspired thought of Columbus the transcending of older eras of civilization by all that has developed in the New World, his America. Out of that one thought has accumulated through the years a new, expansive geography in which old societies and ideas find room to expand and new life in a new form. With this geographic transposition, all that was latent in European culture, all that was waiting to unfold, rolls boldly forth, and history is explained. With this, he chants, is born the eidolon of the future, with this the “Western World.” For Whitman, thinking of Columbus and seeing time and space merged, reveals how the impulses of biology, brave individuality, the cycles of history, and the exigencies of physical space cooperate to manifest the cosmic spirit of progress embodied in Whitman’s America. This poem is a recasting of the idea of a dreaming Columbus and the concomitant history of New World progress that Whitman had already developed in “Passage to India.” The rapid accumulation of associations registers metonymically the four centuries of the building of America, which positions the poem within the reflections on development since Columbus that the exposition was supposed to encourage.

The cosmic perspective that Whitman takes is significant in this context of historical reflection. Whitman tacitly establishes a connection between himself and Columbus based on the notion that history, progress, and evolution are together like a road on which the world is traveling toward ever higher realms of perfection. Thus he opens the poem with the beginning of time, and concludes with “the modern world” (582). Yet, Whitman complicates his road of progress, road of life metaphor by folding into it his idea of the democratic spirit. In his formulation, all life, including Columbus, Whitman himself, and the everyperson on the street all tread the same path toward

spiritual and material perfection, and through innumerable but very real moments of contact Whitman reaches back along the road of history to Columbus himself. Whitman is figuratively casting this poem as an encounter on the road. Within his encounter trope, Whitman addresses Columbus directly:

If still thou hearest, hear me,
Voicing as now—lands, races, arts, bravas to thee,
O'er the long backward path to thee—one vast consensus, north, south, east, west,
Soul plaudits! acclamation! reverent echoes!
One manifold, huge memory to thee! oceans and lands! (582)

The tone of the address bears echoes of the trope of direct addresses that Whitman so often makes to his readers, particularly those who he imagines will read his poems generations after him. For instance, in “Poets to Come,”⁵⁷ Whitman speaks to those who in the future will justify his work, and in “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” he states, “I am with you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence” (160). Indeed, Whitman sees himself as linking Columbus and the future. Like Columbus with his thought, Whitman implicitly proposes that his prosodic project anticipates the manifestation of latent eidolons which would make, as he puts it in “One’s Self I Sing,” “The Modern Man” (1). Registering the social upheaval of his day and compounding the ambiguities of his poem, Whitman delivers “The modern world to thee and thought of thee” (582). Evidently, identifying with Columbus as he nears death, Whitman hopes that someone will someday sing of him in a similar way, as a pioneer of the modern spirit on the road of history who listened to his own flickering inspiration and bore witness to the exigencies latent in his historical moment.

⁵⁷ Whitman, Walt. “Poets to Come” *Leaves of Grass*. eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett. New York: Norton, 1973 (14).

The sentiment delivered in “A Thought of Columbus,” would have been perfectly appropriate for the World’s Columbian Exposition. The poem celebrates America’s discovery and products since 1492. It speaks to the westering of civilization and the culmination of progress. It praises the broad continent that supposedly makes such political innovations as democracy and technological inventions like the engine possible. It speaks to the development of new customs and social forms appropriate to America and to the freedom from as well as the perfection of older European models. It advances ideas of American exceptionalism. In Columbus, Whitman was able to find a symbol of all that he had endeavored to represent in a long and difficult iconoclastic career.

Whitman had been disappointed in 1876 because he had wanted to be recognized as the poet of democracy at the American Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. He was then overlooked because of reactionary responses to his coarseness and vulgarity. He had been invited in 1871 to deliver an address at the Exhibition of the American Institution, for which he wrote “Song of the Exposition,” a poem which would have suited the spirit of the Columbian Exposition. “Song of the Exposition” anticipates the spiritual embrace of progress which Whitman would perfect in “Passage to India.” “A Thought of Columbus” references the technological, economic, and geographic transcendentalism of both of these poems, but what would make it an appropriate poem for the Columbian Exposition is its emphasis on the idea of inspired creativity as the hallmark of America, the West in particular, and modernism. Pope and Turner both would have agreed with and celebrated the framing of history as dependent upon economics, physical space, and technology. Sullivan, who saw himself as an architect for the great democratic averages deeply appreciated the idea that new ideas and new forms develop within democratic

exchange. Inventors like the Duryea brothers might have been flattered by Whitman's celebration of the feats of engineers. Yet, Whitman was too infirm, too anticipatory of death to engage in the self promotion which he had performed throughout his career, self promotion which would have been necessary to be embraced as the poetic representative of the exposition. However, by 1891 he must have been warmed by the idea, even though he explicitly said it was stupid (Traubel 8, 499), that some, even a small group, were lobbying to have him named the official poet of the fair which would represent American and world progress since Columbus.

A Backward Glance on the Geography of Whitman's Century

Whitman was six years old when the Erie Canal opened and the merging of the western with the eastern waters allowed the economy of New York to explode. As Whitman came of age, the grid plan of Manhattan that had been adopted in 1811, an imitation of Philadelphia's grid and the township surveys of western territories authorized by congress in 1785, was leveling the island's natural undulations. As a young man he wandered the docks that lined the banks of Manhattan and Long Island, shuffling goods for shipping back and forth between the newly opened West and European markets. Steamboats chugged up and down the Potomac, the Mississippi, the Ohio, and the Missouri. While Whitman entered adulthood, railroads and steam engines began to connect the country's major cities, and by the time he was in his prime transcontinental railroads were connecting the East and West coasts of the continent, spreading a vast

network over the country. And as the West was opened and bound to the East, North and South were torn apart, only to be reunited in the uneasy embrace of Reconstruction. As for the roads, throughout Whitman's life, the few existing, long-distance roads were clogged with the wagons of pioneers heading into the seemingly interminable West, while the rest of the nation's roads largely served provincial interests as farm to market roads. All roads were poorly maintained and unconnected turnpikes, or narrow local footpaths. Such was the socio-spatial context in which Whitman wrote, and it is reflected in his geography which he imbues with the ideals of personal freedom, individual expression, amative humanity, historical progress, uniquely American aesthetics, and above all democracy.

For Whitman, like Frederick Jackson Turner, the key to understanding America and its institutions rests in understanding the land and the peoples' relationship to national space. Whitman termed this relationship the "Western character." He maintains in "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" that his *Leaves* were from the beginning an attempt encourage the Western character and that they should be read as a reflection of America and its people. Thus, the *Leaves* can be read as geography. He explains, "I have wish'd to put the complete Union of the States in my songs without any preference or partiality whatever. Henceforth, if they do live and are read, it must be just as much South as North—just as much along the Pacific as Atlantic—in the valley of the Mississippi, in Canada, up in Maine, down in Texas, and on the Shores of Puget Sound" (572). He saw the insertion of the country into his poems as actively promoting a new kind of verse supported by America's new ways of living in the New World. He explains that with *Leaves of Grass* he meant "to exploit that Personality, *identified with place and*

date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book” (my emphasis 563). For an explanation of the impact of this personality of place, we might turn to an article he wrote for the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* in 1846: “Democracy may expect, (and such expecting will be realized,) great things from the West! The hardy denizens of those regions, where common wants and the cheapness of the land level conventionalism, (that poison to Democratic vitality,) begin at the roots of things—at first principles—and scorn the doctrines founded on mere precedent and imitation” (Uncollected Prose of Walt Whitman vol. 1, hereafter UP 1, 151). This sentiment is echoed in a stanza from the poem “Pioneers! O pioneers”: “Minstrels latent on the prairies! . . . / soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us” (232).⁵⁸

Exploration of the personality of place and the American character pervades Whitman’s writing. In his poems and prose he scours the nation recording the landforms and the character of his America. For example, Whitman writes in “Rise O Days from your Fathomless Deeps” of long roaming “the woods of the north, long I watch’d Niagara pouring, / I travel’d the prairies over. . . I cross’d the Nevadas, I cross’d the plateaus” (291). In “On Journeys through the States,” he sings, “We dwell a while in every city and

⁵⁸ Several critics have identified Whitman’s concern for physical space. John Roche asserts that Whitman “provided the American people with their first articulate mental map” (16). Eldrid Harington writes that Whitman “looked into the material identity of the nation for parallels with the style of his poetry,” citing Platte Canyon which Whitman saw as “rugged as his verse, creating an identity between his poetry and the physical characteristics of the land” (132). Christine Gerhardt observes that Whitman’s Southern landscapes are rooted in national politics and the emerging environmentalist movement. David Reynolds notes that as a young man Whitman was “located between rapidly urbanizing Manhattan to the west, and rural Long Island to the east. Brooklyn for Whitman was a middle ground between the two, with access to both” (17), and he references Whitman’s early dream of becoming a “wanderer-speaker” who would always “hold the ear of the people” through constant travel (32). Jerome Loving has remarked that “The first *Leaves* come largely from the blue collar Ryerson Street neighborhoods of mechanics and Brooklyn shipyard workers on the eastern edge of expanding Brooklyn” (100). Walter Grunsweig states that Song of Myself’s geographical catalogues “were supremely equipped to address the world in its entirety” (152).

town, / We pass through Kanada, the North-east, the vast valley of the Mississippi, and the Southern States, / We confer on equal terms with each of the States” (10). In “To Rich Givers” Whitman expresses gratitude for charitable souls by whose generosity he may take “A traveler’s lodging and breakfast as I journey through the States” so he can bestow upon his fellow citizens “the entrance to all the gifts of the universe” with his poems (273). The opening stanza of “Starting from Paumanok reads:

After roaming many lands, love of populous pavements,
Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
Or a soldier carrying my knapsack and gun, or a miner in California,
Or rude in my home in Dakota’s woods. . .
Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in deep recesses,
Far from the clank of crowds. . .
Aware of the fresh free river the flowing Missouri, aware of mighty Niagara,
Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hirsute and the strong headed
bull. . .
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for the New World. (15-16)

Thus, with his “Chants of the long running Mississippi” and “Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota,” it is through travel that the spirit, the regions of the nation are witnessed, recorded, and shared. “I will acknowledge the contemporary lands,” he claims, “I will trail the whole geography of the globe and salute courteously every city large and small” (19). In the Preface to the 1853 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman states, “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem” (711), and in “Song of Myself” he gestures “to the landscape of continents and the public road” (83).

During his life, Whitman lived in rural Long Island, Brooklyn, Manhattan, New Orleans, Washington D.C., and Camden, New Jersey. He visited Chicago, Boston, St.

Louis, Denver, and Ontario.⁵⁹ For his day he got around a good deal, and his travels appear in his work. Indeed, he aimed to capture something concrete about the regions of his nation. For example, his idea of the best art was that it was inspired by and depicted concrete reality. When he crossed the Alleghenies he saw “first rate scenes for the American painter,” not the artist satisfied to imitate pleasing scenery, but rather for the visionary who “seizes original and really picturesque occasions. . . for his pieces” (qtd in Loving 136). That is, the best art derives from studying real landforms. In the “Preface” he put it this way, “to speak in literature. . . of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art” (719).

Whitman’s concern for knowing the physical environments of America was not lost on his disciples. For instance, when James William Wallace, an English enthusiast of Whitman, visited America to become better acquainted with the poet and his book, Whitman was keen to impress upon him the material conditions of America out of which *Leaves of Grass* had sprung. In a conversation with Traubel in late 1891, Whitman impressed upon his friend the idea that *Leaves of Grass* was only spiritual, philosophical, and theoretical secondarily but primarily was material:

[The Leaves] must be, can only be, understood as the states must be, can only be, understood—with the traces of their material origin clinging everywhere on them. They emerge out of, with, the material—tally all the great shows of our civilization—stand for them—yet for these—not only as they exist, in pride of material splendor—but in their heroic entanglements. (61)

Wallace was receptive to Whitman’s guidance in pursuing the material world that had contributed to the evolution of the Leaves. The next day, Whitman explained to Traubel:

⁵⁹ Jerome Loving’s comprehensive biography details Whitman’s lifelong travels.

One of Wallace's dead-sets is to go down to Timber Creek. I encourage it—yes, have told him he ought to go. I find he is much disposed to see the *concrete* of 'Leaves of Grass'—I mean its *geographical concrete*. I told him today how to go—gave him some points (for which he questioned me) He is not satisfied to go there for an hour or two: he says he wants to absorb its air, as much as may be—to come into touch—that is, remembrance. And so he plans to spend a couple days there, which I think well enough. . . I think he has the notion to walk—he may do it; the whole distance is not more than nine miles. And through a nice bit of country too. (my emphasis vol. 8, 65)

Like so many of his other disciples, Horace Traubel, John Bucke, William O'Connor, John Burroughs, and Arthur Symonds, Wallace was an avaricious student, and hung on the good, grey poet's words. He did everything and went everywhere Whitman told him in pursuit of the same understanding, the same mystical fire that drove the teacher. So Whitman sends him to Timber Creek where he had gone to come to terms with the Civil War to get a sense for the material conditions, the sense of place from which the *Leaves* are taken, and Wallace, taking the master's lead, rightly assumes that best way to actually do this is to walk.

Walking is central to Whitman's geography because, as the Wallace story indicates, walking for Whitman is the best way to come to know the real places of the nation. In his collection of Civil War poems, "Drum Taps," the poem, "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest," records something of the geographic experience of enlisted men marching through unfamiliar territory at night: "in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown, a route through a heavy wood with muffled steps in the darkness" (305). After a brief stop at a field hospital, the march continues, "Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on in the ranks, / The unknown road still marching" (306). In another poem from the same collection, Whitman recites "As toilsome I wander'd Virginia's woods, / to the music of rustling leaves kick'd by my feet" (307). In "Rise O Days,"

Whitman claims, “Long had I walk’d my cities, my country roads through farms, only half satisfied” (293). In the suite “By the Roadside,” while “skirting the river road, (my forenoon walk, my rest)” Whitman witnesses “the dalliance of the eagles” (273). In a similar mood after reading Hegel, he goes “Roaming in thought over the Universe” (274). In “Starting from Paumanok” he writes, “As I have walk’d in Alabama my morning walk / I have seen where the she-bird the mocking-bird sat on her nest in the briars hatching her brood” (22). In “Song of Myself” he proclaims, “I am afoot with my vision. . . along the ruts of the turnpike” (61).

This habit of walking for inspiration also informed Whitman’s geographic prose. Whitman reports in the *Daily Eagle* of a beautiful November day in 1846 during which the air “mellow as a full ripe peach” “forbade any return to indoor avocations.” So he wandered about Brooklyn marking the signs of growth and progress he saw there. Then he crossed on the ferry over to Manhattan, “lingered a while on the Battery,” reflected on the new Washington Park, and ended by wandering up Broadway to window shop and visit the Society Library (UP 1: 141-2). While in New Orleans in 1848, Whitman penned an article entitled “A Walk About Town By a Pedestrian” in which he reports getting up early, before dawn, and walking through the city. The report reads like a prosaic version of the sprawling catalogues Whitman would include in so much of his poetry: “Saw a poor longshoreman lying down on a bench. . . Saw a shipping master riding at full speed upon a small pony . . . There’s a big, red faced man walking hastily up the levee. . .

visited the markets and saw that every luxury given to sinful man by sea and land, from ship to small potato, were there to be purchased” (UP 1: 224).⁶⁰

Though Whitman reinforces walking as the primary mode of experiencing national space, this is not the only mode of experiencing the country he records in his work. In an article entitled “East Long Island” written in 1846, Whitman reports being able to have breakfast at home in Brooklyn in the morning, picnicking in Greenport at the far eastern end of Long Island, and supping the same evening back in Brooklyn. This novel experience is facilitated obviously by a newly opened railroad. Whitman would take the same trip and report on it in his Brooklyniana pieces published in the *Brooklyn Daily Standard* in 1862. In this piece, Whitman tours Long Island by rail, on foot, and finally on a sailboat. He writes of seeing Long Island by train, “Even rattling along after a steam-engine, people get a consciousness of the unrivaled beauties of Brooklyn’s situation” (UP 2: 307). In “To a Locomotive in Winter” Whitman apostrophizes the machine’s mechanical moving parts and glories in the machine as “Type of the modern—emblem of motion and power—pulse of the continent” (472). Quite literally the locomotive exposes the physical space of the continent and even serenades it: “Fierce-throated beauty! . . . / Thy trills of shrieks by roack and hills return’d, / Launch’d o’er the prairies wide, across the lakes, / To the free skies unpent and glad and strong” (472).

In a series of “Excerpts from a Traveler’s Notebook” published in the *Daily Crescent*, Whitman reports on his journey to New Orleans by train, stagecoach, and steamboat. He begins reporting a ride on “probably one of the most expensive railroads ever built,” “bounded on one side or the other by cliffs and steps of an Alp-like loftiness.

⁶⁰ Jerome Loving maintains that these journalistic essays were pivotal in honing Whitman’s prosody (60). Douglas Noverr confirms this view (36).

We seemed, for at least a hundred miles, to follow the course of an interminable brook” to Cumberland (UP 1: 182). The railroad, however, stopped at Cumberland, though he does note hearing talk of extending it to Wheeling. In Cumberland he sees the “immense Pennsylvania wagons,” “Hundreds and hundreds of these enormous vehicles, with their arched roofs of white canvas” led by their drivers, bringing goods to and from the frontiers (UP 1: 183). From Cumberland he rode with the “National Road and good Intent Stage Company” to Wheeling: “Up we toiled, and down we clattered, (for the first fifty miles it was nearly *all* up,) over these mighty warts on the great breast of nature” (UP 1: 185). Whitman was disappointed with a last stage of his journey. Riding a Steamboat to New Orleans was evidently a dreary experience, as he reports, “From Louisville down, one passes through a long stretch of monotonous country—not varied at all, sometimes for dozens of miles. The Ohio retains its distinctive character of mud till you get to the very end of it” (UP 1: 189). The highlight of the trip was coming into contact with the western character that would come to mean so much to him later in his poetry. He exclaims, “And here I may say, once for all, that, though expecting to find a shrewd population as I journeyed to the interior, and down through the great rivers, I was by no means prepared for the sterling vein of common sense that seemed to pervade them—even the roughest shod and roughest clad of all.” This sensibility he attributes to the fact that living in the West, as opposed to the East, “attention is more turned to the *realities* of life, and a habit formed of thinking for one’s self” (Whitman’s emphasis UP 1, 185).

Whitman had taken also something of the mania for instrumental and scientific relationships to physical space represented by the survey grids that were used to chart

national space and the work of rationalist geographer-explorers like Alexander von Humboldt and Lewis and Clark.⁶¹ In the poem celebrating America's botanical, biological, and cultural diversity, "Our Old Feuillage," Whitman writes, "The area of the eighty-third year of these States, the three and a half millions of square miles, / The eighteen thousand miles of sea-coast and bay-coast on the main, the thirty thousand miles of river navigation, / The seven millions of distinct families and the same number of dwellings. . . branching forth into numberless branches" (171). Here Whitman weds the ideology of Manifest Destiny with a distinctly rationalist approach to making physical space knowable. This outlook propels the conquering view of space and nature which would lead Whitman to cheer for "the falling trunk and limbs, the crash, the muffled shriek, the groan. . . from the redwood-tree" in "Song of the Redwood Tree" (209).⁶² This rationalist thinking also undergirds the progress of Manifest Destiny he lauds in "Song of the Exposition" and "Passage to India."

Traveling, meeting the people, and knowing the nation motivated Whitman's art. As Jerome Loving points out, Whitman's travel experiences "would help to release the vicarious traveler of *Leaves of Grass*" (140). With his mobile perspective, Whitman actively (re)produces the geographies of his day and invests them with the set of ideas which he believed represented what was best in the nation and would carry America onward on its path to perfection. As a journalist, Whitman understood the importance and necessity of representing the nation to itself, and in his conception of this responsibility,

⁶¹ Mary Louise Pratt provides an exceptional analysis of the rationalism of Humboldt and like explorers in her book *Imperial Eyes*.

⁶² M. Jemie Killingsworth persuasively critiques Whitman's affinity for the rhetoric of conquest and Manifest Destiny which saw the landscape only as a resource and native peoples only as an inconvenience: "The Voluptuous Earth and the Fall of the Redwood Tree" and *Walt Whitman and the Earth*.

for the poet as much as and more so than the journalist, direct observation of real environments was essential. As he put it in *Specimen Days*, the shorelines of his beloved Northeast are woven all through *Leaves of Grass*. Aesthetically, Whitman considered his *Leaves* a reflection of the real conditions of American physical space, and throughout the *Leaves*, Whitman develops a mobile structure which reflects and supports the geographic content of his poems. Indeed, his mobile structure is the keystone of Whitman's American chronotope.

Leaves of Grass—Sprouting all along the Roadside

During the late months of 1891, Whitman remained, for the most part, lucid and self aware. Even though he rarely went out, he kept up correspondence with friends and read the local papers and national publications daily. In 1891, while the Columbian Exposition was being planned, Whitman's energies were focused on seeing his last suite of poems, "Goodbye My Fancy," through the presses and putting the finishing touches on the final, death-bed edition of his *Leaves of Grass*, which would include his latest work. As noted above, he simply refused to write anything more than letters to friends. In late September of 1891 as they were working out the final arrangement of the final edition of *Leaves of Grass*, when Traubel asked him if he meant to write anymore he said, "No, the wheels have stopped. . . No I feel I have reached my finale. What more needs be said?" and then, "The free ways are closed" (557). That Whitman would describe his inability or unwillingness to write as a closed road is neither a simple coincidence nor a convenient

metaphor. At the time of this conversation, one of Whitman's primary concerns was the placement of "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" in the deathbed edition of *Leaves of Grass*. He was trying to decide whether it was more appropriate as an epilogue or, as his close friend and biographer Dr. Richard Bucke had recommended, as a preface. Indeed, he was unsure whether it was appropriate to the book at all and had considered leaving it out entirely. In the end, however, he made it an epilogue, something that would resonate with the ideas in "Goodbye My Fancy" by combining the road and farewell metaphors. Whitman clearly saw his career and his book as a journey, as a traveler's account of an observant life on the open road, and including "A Backward Glance," and "Goodbye My Fancy" at the end of the book integrally extended this metaphor.⁶³

An "Executor's Diary Note" by Traubel supports the reading that Whitman thought of all his work as part of a spiritual road journey.⁶⁴ Optimistically, Traubel asked the poet, "Though you have put the finishing touches on the *Leaves*, closed them with your Good-bye, you will go on living a year or two longer and writing more poems. The question is, what will you do with these poems when the time comes to fix their place in the volume." Whitman was not unprepared for this question and offered the title, "Old Age Echoes." Conscientiously, Traubel pressed him to suggest what to do with all the poems that had dropped from previous editions. He uses the very road metaphor that he had obviously inculcated from Whitman to ask, "You have dropt enough by the roadside as you went along. . . to make a volume" (575) Whitman's word on the subject was to

⁶³ "A Backward Glance" had been included in the 1889 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but the completion of "Good-bye My Fancy" in 1891, which was then included as a "Second Annex" to "Sands at Seventy," demanded for a final, full edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman explains this decision to Traubel, characterizing it as a cast of dice on August 18, 1891. *With Walt Whitman in Camden* 8 (422).

⁶⁴ The note is dated simply 1891 but apparently came after the deathbed edition was completed and "Good-bye My Fancy" and "A Backward Glance" were placed.

leave these decisions in Traubel's and Bucke's hands as his literary executors.⁶⁵ In any case, clearly Whitman had thought of his life's work as a road journey because the road metaphor pervades his poetry, his prose, and his conversations about his writing.⁶⁶

Taking a walk, literally and figuratively going out on the road, is one of the central structuring devices that pervade *Leaves of Grass*, which is why Whitman titles his epilogue, his final explanation, "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads." In it, he writes, "So I sit here gossiping in the early candle-light of old age—I and my book—casting backward glances over our travel'd road. After completing, as it were, the journey—a varied jaunt of years, with many halts and gaps of intervals" (562). *Leaves of Grass* is Whitman's offering of his time to the future, and the journey referenced in "A Backward Glance" echoes the historical progress as road and road as space of democratic encounter metaphors present in "A Thought of Columbus." The book, he explains, is experimental and a "*sortie*," a going out, as though by virtue of his own expeditions, he is handing to posterity a sort of map with these late musings as the key. Yet, the metaphor is only part of the explanation; the material landforms are also essential. The book must be understood through the material conditions that inspired it. The road for Whitman is as much a metaphor for his career as it is a method of composition and a reflection of real space. Literally he took to the road, in the transcendentalist tradition of Emerson and Thoreau; he took walks outside to generate the material that would make up his book. As

⁶⁵ "Old Age Echoes: *An Executor's Diary Note, 1891*" *Leaves of Grass*. Eds. Sculley Bradley and Harold Blodgett. New York: Norton, 1973. (575)

⁶⁶ Whitman used road metaphors constantly in his conversations with Traubel, even when he was confined to his room by illness. In April of 1891, when the visiting Longacker offered to help him to his chair, Whitman said, "No I can get along, it is a road I travel often—I know it well—and by navigating slowly, I come to port at last." It's also interesting that Whitman mixes his metaphors here. Often his references to roads include nautical terminology, both of which resonate with his affinity for Columbus.

such, it's no accident that road travel would become not simply a recurrent motif, which it indeed is, but it would be a structuring device for the whole.

Whitman biographer, Jerome Loving comments, "In Whitman there is only an 'open road,' where the scenes passed are more important than the destination" (207). Going out and taking to the road patterns many of his most important poems including, "On Journeys Through These States," "Starting from Paumanok," "Song of Myself," "Once I Passed Through a Populous City," "Calamus," "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and the collection "By The Road Side" which is a series of poems linked by the accident that they are subjects or events that might occur to the poet as he were walking along a road. Other walking-road structured poems are "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Whitman's elegy to President Lincoln, "By Blue Ontario's Shores," and "The Sleepers." Even his last suite, "Goodbye My Fancy," references the road leitmotif by implying that he is leaving on a journey which his readers cannot currently but will someday follow. He opens the preface to the suite with the question, "Had I not better withhold (in this old age and paralysis of me) such little tags and fringe-dots. . . as follow a long dusty journey" (537). These poems and suites all follow a going out, taking to the road pattern where the poet encounters others along the way and recognizes transcendental truths in the people and things he encounters. Crucially, while the formal pattern of going out and discovering the material realities of America's spaces and places is elemental to the poems in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman builds onto this sortie pattern metaphors of life, history, and democracy to create a chronotope that later writers easily borrow and expand upon. The most obvious and strongest of Whitman's road poems, the one that would be cited again and again by writers on the road in America after Whitman,

“Song of the Open Road,” captures Whitman’s materially inflected and metaphorical geography so fully that it can illustrate the road pattern of the rest of the book.

Singing the Open Road

“Song of the Open Road” begins, as do many of Whitman’s poems, with the most common of imagery. Just as “Song of Myself” begins with the poet leaning and loafing and looking at a spear of summer grass, or “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” begins with the poet calmly looking over the deck of the ferry into the water of the East River where he sees reflected his own face among the clouds, “Song of the Open Road” begins with the poet setting out, walking the road:

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose. (149)

Setting out on the open road, he has shed himself of everything that would weigh him down, everything that would slow his pace. He no longer begs for good fortune, no longer whimpers, no longer procrastinates; he is done with complaints, books, petty criticism. “Strong and content, I travel the open road” (149), he says, indicating his freedom from the drab, banal occupations of those not traveling as he is. All he asks is that the earth be where it is and as it is, and that the constellations remain where they are. All he carries are his “old delicious burdens” (149), which refer to the memories that have brought him to this road that he now travels so freely.

Establishing the context thus, he quickly proceeds, as he does so often in his poetry, to expand on what is directly before him and to develop the present experience into an extended, associative meditation. He states:

You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here. (149)

He sees that also present on the road are multitudes of the great average, which represent for him the democratic masses of America. Walking the road, Whitman compiles one of his famous catalogues, this one a catalogue of encounters, including among others a black man, a criminal, a drunk, a merchant, and an undertaker, and he concludes:

They pass, I also pass, anything passes, none can be interdicted,
None are but accepted, none but shall be dear to me. (150)

The public road becomes the ideal symbol for the companionable democracy which Whitman imagines as the foundation of all his abstract metaphysics. Yet this is only the beginning of his expansion. Whitman remarks on the air that gives him “breath to speak,” the light that shines everywhere, and the branching paths which are “latent with unseen existences” (150), and then his catalogue accumulates also curbstones in cities, wharves and their ships, row houses with their porches and windows. The list makes the road into both a unifying and revealing force:

You gray stones of interminable pavements! you trodden crossings!
From all that has touch'd you I believe you have imparted to yourselves, and now
would impart secretly to me,
From the living and the dead you have peopled your impassive surfaces, and the
spirits thereof would be evident and amicable with me. (140)

Whitman sees the road as written upon over and over again by the passing feet of tremendous populations. In its wear, he can see, as it were, the construction of civilization. By revealing to its poet all the unseen, the road has become the method by which he may come to know the country and the world because the road connects all. Even though not all of America is literally on the road with the poet, all of America is on

the road as in along the road. The road is that which we all share, and by virtue of that sharing he is able to inclusively elaborate upon the whole because he is the poet of the open road. Yet, he goes further. The road takes to itself all that comes into contact with it which, because the road is interminable, because it does not end, because it is the basis of civilization, and because the road has carried the dead as well as the living, means that all history has become available to the walker open to what the road will reveal. This notion is then implied in the opening line of the next section in the poem as the poet walking the road encompasses the whole earth into his experience. “The earth expanding right hand and left hand” (150), he exclaims, and so doing accepts everything within the visible horizon as fine and good. He accepts the road, and the road does not make demands of him, rather it patiently invites him to follow. Here the poem begins a turn away from simple apostrophe, the poet addressing the silent road which he also describes, and begins to show that the road speaks through the poet. The material road becomes the metaphorical platform for transcendence as the road begins to speak the poet as much as the poet speaks the road.

“O Public Road,” Whitman sings, “You express me better than I can express myself, / You shall be more to me than my poem” (151), and with these words, Whitman steps out of his poem in a sense, and the road itself takes over. Whitman identifies so closely with the road that he becomes a conduit through which the road can speak, just as the road is the conduit by which he comes to be able to speak. In this, Whitman reinvents the classical tradition of invoking the muse, a practice which he often performs according to different innovative procedures in his verse. He balks at his own poetic abilities and thus defers to the road as though it were the muse, as though the road were the spirit of

the song. The road, both a real material place and a symbol, says better what the poet would mean to say, and thus the road shall be more than the poem; indeed, the road will be the poem and the poem a road:

The earth expanding right hand and left hand,
The picture alive, every part in its best light,
The music falling in where it is wanted, and stopping where it is not wanted,
The cheerful voice of the public road, the gay fresh sentiment of the road. (151)

Whitman's persona fades until the poet's voice is indistinguishable from the voice of the open road or, the song of the open road. The poet becomes possessed of an ebullient happiness. As he identifies with the road, the poet is utterly liberated, and the whole world bears itself up to him:

Going where I list, my own master total and absolute. . .
I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness. (151)

Thus, just as the road invited him, he will invite those he meets into this expansiveness and goodness. Speaking to and for the road, he exclaims, "I will recruit for myself and you as I go. . . / Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me, / Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me" (151). Like the road, the poet has taken on not the spirit and language of interdiction and control, but the spirit of kindness, generosity, familiarity, and invitation.

Yet the spirituality does not operate idealistically and transcendently only; Whitman's transcendentalism is not outside and behind the conditions of the real world. In fact, there is a political foundation in the idea that he will accept everyone he encounters on the road. Whitman is echoing the Jeffersonian political rhetoric of

neighborliness, which would ideally serve as the basic institutional mechanism of democratic polity.⁶⁷ Whitman combines in the symbol of the road both his transcendentalist beliefs borrowed from the influence of Emerson and his very personal involvement in national politics as a former editor of Democratic newspapers in New York, Brooklyn, and New Orleans. His metaphysics are firmly grounded in material history and politics.

Based on intersection of the material, the political, and the spiritual on the road, Whitman proposes a course for the future. Because of the free and open road, and with the free and open road as its symbol, the great Western character that Whitman refers to in “A Backward Glance,” will build a great republic and redirect the course of civilization. Fairly gorged on romantic and liberal idealism, the poet of the open road bursts forth:

Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear it would not amaze me,
Now if a thousand beautiful forms of women appear'd it would not astonish me.
Now I see the secret of making the best persons,
It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth. (152)

The open road and the open geography to which it leads have the potential to reeducate populations and make for a wiser nation of better, more beautiful citizens. The road opens out into nature, the transcendentalist's key point of true contact with the world, and so becomes the gateway to a more pure education, a more pure morality, a more pure wisdom, and a stronger republic. On the open road, Whitman will test philosophies and religions, which though they may prove well in lecture halls, will fail when compared to “the spacious clouds and along the landscape and flowing currents” (152). Those

⁶⁷ The idea of democratic neighborliness served as ideological justification for Jefferson and Albert Galatin's arguments for internal improvements, particularly roads. Whitman, the good democrat, is clearly echoing such a vision of democracy.

beautiful men and women, educated in the open air, and the citizens of the great future republic, will be nourished by everything they experience, will determine new codes of human ethics based on adhesiveness and, significantly for Whitman's symbolism, they will recognize each other by a telling look about the eyes as they pass. On this point Whitman gestures toward the significance of the traveler's encounter, the same trope which defines "A Thought of Columbus" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

What will tell on these new and mobile citizens will be the "efflux of the soul," which for Whitman fundamentally means questioning with an emphasis squarely placed on the root word, quest. A soul nourished by Nature, freely wandering the open road, asks original questions, asks about the physical and spiritual nature of human desire and adhesiveness, asks of the human desire for community. The question is a feeling that draws the soul out of itself and into company with others. The soul's efflux is happiness, and it animates "the fluid and attaching character" the natural attraction between men and women, "it heaves the shuddering longing ache of contact" (154). And thus swollen with this desire for amative contact among men and women, the poet of the road makes a rallying call: "Allons! whoever you are come travel with me / traveling with me you find what never tires" (154). By this point in the poem, the poet's voice has totally dissolved. It is indistinguishable from the voice of the road, or the voices of the New World's citizens, or the voice of eyes making silent, but revealing contact along the road. The road's song has overwhelmed the poet, and the material road and the people met there in divine political and amative congress have allowed him to transcend himself.

The road thus creates political transformation. It leads in the direction of that which is latent in Columbus' discovery of America, in the spaces and places of the

continent, in the democratic experiment of America, in the great average populations, in the science and commerce of America. The road shows the way to the new prosody that would free citizens of the old-world moralities. The road points toward the ascendant teleology of the New World. The road, like the earth, is rude, rough, and incomprehensible at first, but will be shown to be beautiful. The road invites its citizens ever forward, overcoming the inducements of stasis and comfort. The road calls forth the best, cleanest, most honest, and does not “convince by arguments, similies, rhymes,” or any of the traditional academic rhetoric, but rather “We convince by our presence” (155), and by arguments which can be read about the eyes of the traveler. The road is honest, and does “not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer[s] rough new prizes, / These are days that must happen to you” (155). The traveler will never be rich, and never remain stuck in one place, tied down by love or property. A journeyer’s compensation is the companionship of great and free people, they achieve access “to that which is endless and beginningless” (156). The road allows travelers to possess more love and more property than conventional, enfeebling relationships where people hide themselves from each other and guard their petty ownership of things. Those who follow will come “to know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls” (157).

The poet has added to the realm of free individuals traveling the basic mechanism of all his metaphysics. He sings:

All parts away for the progress of souls. . .
Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand roads of the
universe, all other progress is the needed emblem and sustenance.
Forever alive, forever forward. . .
They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go, But I know
that they go toward the best—toward something great. (157)

The revelation of the song of the open road, with its indications of civilization and history, with the democratic polity that it nurtures, and with its invitation to a geography of purifying nature, is an invitation into the teleological culmination of history. Those who hear the call and follow will be great leaders in the progress to the coming age of enlightenment, honesty, and beauty. And yet, inevitable though progress may be, the traveler should be under no illusions that it will be easy. The poem references here an anticipation of revolutionary struggle. “Allons! through struggles and wars!” the poet exclaims, “The goal that was named cannot be countermanded” (158). He does not precisely indicate the actual goal, “I know not where they go” (157), rather he knows only the spirit of the progressive revolution which has its emblem and sustenance, both material and metaphysical, in the revolutionary polity of the road. He exclaims:

Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.
(158)

The battle Whitman describes in these lines is spiritual, but has material causes and consequences. Whitman’s revolution will be a revolution of the road.

The poem ends with the gradual dissipation of the stridency that characterizes the middle sections, but never loses the identification between the poet and the open road who, together, invite the reader to leave off study and writing, to put down the workshop’s tools, to walk away from the teachers and preachers, to disregard the lawyers and judges, all of whom represent the illness that the open road, with its iconoclastic and

revolutionary music, will overturn. These types represent the buried essences of festering social and psychological illness:

Behold through you as bad as the rest,
Through the laughter, dancing, dining, supping, of people,
Inside of the dresses and ornaments, inside of those wash'd and trimm'd faces,
Behold a secret silent loathing and despair. (157)

By contrast, the road is free, open, natural, and it beckons “with love more precious than money,” with honest human companionship before customs and laws: “Allons! the road is before us! It is safe—I have tried it—my own feet have tried it well—be not detain'd!” (158).

With such attention to the road as a symbol, it's no wonder that Whitman would become for so many something of a forebear of the spirit of freedom and experiential observation for generations of poets and writers who would set out on the open road. Ruth Bohan has observed that “Song of the Open Road” was a favorite poem among modernist writers who cited Whitman as an influence (6). Whitman seems somehow prescient, even when he modestly rejects the notion that his name or his book will survive the century, anticipating that generations after him would accept his invitation to explore America, the New World, along the routes of the open road. Within the context of Whitman's geographic-historical moment, and reading “Song of the Open Road” as emblematic of *Leaves of Grass*'s road structure, it's clear that Whitman's road chronotope represents the real conditions of his day and simultaneously establishes the precedent metaphor which would be translated and modernized by his followers with the rise of automobility.

Whitman's Chronotope in the Age of Automobility

Whitman's road was not the road of automobility. Whitman walked dirt tracks. He rode railroads. He rode in horse drawn carriages. He traveled in paddlewheels. He depicted in his writing the conditions of nineteenth-century geography. The road for Whitman was a different experience than it would be for those who would follow him in the development of new geographic narratives based on automobility. Yet the significance of the automobile road, Whitman defined for later generations in "Song of the Open Road" and *Leaves of Grass*. Some, like Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, Muriel Rukeyser, Hart Crane, Pablo Neruda, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Least Heat-Moon would directly emulate Whitman's forms and themes, using his free verse certainly but also capitalizing on the *sortie* and the encounter as structuring devices. More, like Hamlin Garland, John Burroughs, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, John Dos Passos, Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck would follow Whitman's ideological rather than his prosodic revolution by depicting real environments and concern for nature and the democratic spirit. Further, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and so many more would cite Whitman as an inspiration even if they would ultimately reject both his formal innovations and his naive idealism. William Trachtenberg describes Whitman's influence on the generation of writers that followed him: "Whitman looms as the single most revered and honored and idolized figure from the recent past in the minds of artists dedicated to 'making it new' from the turn of the century through the 1920s" (195). In Whitman's road we can find the germ of the concerns for geography and experience that would guide later generations of road writers and modernists on whom

the task of exploring and defining the geography of automobility would fall. Even though Whitman's road was not the automobile road, just as Columbus's America could not anticipate Whitman's America, Whitman had tremendous influence over modern automobilists all the same, not only as the voice of freedom, individuality, originality, artistic genius, and free verse, but also in the mobile structure of his individual poems and *Leaves of Grass* as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

SELLING ACCESS TO AMERICA AND ITS GREAT OPEN SPACES: PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF AUTOMOBILITY

In 1903 Horatio Nelson Jackson, a retired doctor from Vermont visiting San Francisco, wagered fifty dollars he could drive a motorcar coast to coast. Automobile technology was still in early experimental stages, and the national infrastructure lacked gas stations, repair shops, maps and, not insignificantly, drivable roads.⁶⁸ Within days of making the wager, Jackson had bought a 1903 Winton, hired chauffeur Sewell Crocker to assist in the driving, and bundled the car, dubbed the *Vermont*, with enough gear to get him, he hoped, to New York City.⁶⁹ Thus equipped, Jackson and Crocker set out on their run at becoming the first motorists to drive coast to coast in the United States.

From the beginning, Jackson and Crocker's journey was plagued with difficulties. In an open car, they were forced to travel in all kinds of weather. They broke down repeatedly,⁷⁰ and when not broken down they were stuck in mud or hung up on some other obstacle. In places the trails were so bad they preferred to cut across open country. Because they lacked maps they spent much time and many miles lost. A telegraph to his

⁶⁸ As Pete Davies explains, few attempted distance travel "for the simple reason that for much of the way there wasn't a road, there wasn't a road map, and there weren't any road signs" (15).

⁶⁹ The 1903 Winton already had almost a thousand miles on it, and Jackson paid more than the list price for it because reliable autos like the Winton were scarce at the time.

⁷⁰ Of the sixty three days it took them to cross, nineteen were spent waiting for auto parts.

wife summarized the early going of their trip: “Rain, washout, bum roads and luck, broken spring. Crawl to Rawlins, [Wyoming]” (qtd in Duncan 78). In a retrospective of his trip, Jackson recalled that “the roads were a compound of ruts, bumps, and thank-you-marms, raising dust clouds that literally enveloped us in choking invisibility” (11). The difficulties that Jackson and Crocker faced on their groundbreaking journey reveal the condition of, or rather the absence of a road and roadside service infrastructure at the turn of the century.

Often in the West the *Vermont* was the first motorcar to pass through towns, and crowds, alerted to the approaching phenomenon by telegraph, gathered to gawk. The further east they traveled, though automobiles and infrastructure were increasingly commonplace, the crowds continued to gather. The crowds continued to come out in the Midwest and the East not because they wanted to catch a glimpse of the new machine, but because Jackson and Crocker might be making history. They came not to see their first car but to see the first car to be driven coast to coast. By the time Jackson was halfway through Nebraska, he was mobbed by curious crowds and by reporters anxious to promote automobility with the scoop on the first transcontinental motorist (Figure 3.1). As they neared New York City, cheering crowds lined the streets of Hudson and Poughkeepsie. Announcements of Jackson’s arrival in New York drew a stream of onlookers to see the mud splattered, flag draped *Vermont* (Figure 3.2). These well wishers cheered for Jackson as a hero seeing through a momentous accomplishment, but they also cheered for the assurance that cross continental drives were possible. News of Jackson’s approach attracted enthusiasts and advocates to spontaneous popular demonstrations promoting automobility and good roads.



Figure 3.1: Jackson in the Vermont surrounded by a crowd. This picture was published in “Ocean to Ocean in a Winton,” *Auto Era*, July-August 1903. It implicitly promotes the popularity of Jackson’s accomplishment.

Jackson was not the only person to drive coast to coast in 1903. Marius Krarup and Tom Fetch, hired drivers for Packard, and Lester Whitman and Eugene Hammond for Oldsmobile also made it across. As news of the multiple trips spread, daily updates in the national press of the teams’ relative progress cast the three coincidental expeditions as a race.⁷¹ Coverage of the three attempts became a media phenomenon, which the auto companies exploited. Yet, Jackson’s endeavor was independent which, as the Winton Motor executives quickly realized, was worth more promotionally than any devised

⁷¹ Duncan’s history describes the newspaper progress reports as characterizing the relative progress of the different groups as a race, which is in some ways hyperbole given Jackson’s lead on the other expeditions. *New York Times* July 13, “Long Automobile Journey” picks up Jackson’s progress in Omaha (1). *New York Times* July 24, “Across the Continent in an Automobile” announces Jackson’s arrival in Syracuse. *New York Times* July 27, “From Sea to Sea in Auto” registers Jackson’s arrival in New York. *Chicago Tribune* July 27, “From Sea to Sea” reports Jackson’s arrival in New York. *New York Times* August 16, “Over Continent in Auto” records Krarup and Fetch’s arrival in Ohio. *New York Times* August 22, “Completion of Transcontinental Tour in a Twelve Horsepower Car” reports on Krarup and Fetch’s arrival in New York; this article implies that Jackson’s trip may be a hoax. *New York Times* Sept 22, “Long Automobile Trip” announces Hammond and Whitman’s arrival in Boston.

spectacle.⁷² Advertisements announcing Jackson's "Triumph" emphasized the fact that Jackson's *Vermont* was a stock vehicle, and that the trip was undertaken for "recreation and pleasure."⁷³ An advertisement made to look like an article published in the *New York Times*, August 2, 1903, shows a picture of Jackson and Crocker in the Vermont among rugged terrain and emphasizes that Jackson refused factory assistance. The banner reads, "From the Golden Gate to Hell Gate" (15). The Omaha Morning World notes, "Dr. Jackson is not in the automobile business, nor in the advertising business, but is making the trip across country for his own pleasure, and to prove to a party of friends that the trip can be made" (qtd in Duncan 101). Jackson later recalled, "Newspaper reports of our progress were gaining front pages in the nation's press as our goal appeared in sight" (50). Jackson quoted one commentator's remark in *Automobile Topics* that, "There is a touch of realism. . . which no press agent could compete against" (50). Thus free of commercial taint, the newspaper coverage invested Jackson's accomplishment with broader significance because Jackson was in a way competing as an independent against interested auto manufacturers while at the same time ushering in a new era of American geographic experience. The "touch of realism" references literary tastes and progressivism of the day by casting Jackson as a model of the average person, with whom citizens could identify, who was taking on industrial goliaths. Without intending to,

⁷² The Winton Company in fact did offer to underwrite Jackson's expenses once they became aware of his attempt. Jackson considered the offer, but in the end declined. He probably didn't want to share in the limelight even if it cost him in expenses and responsibility.

⁷³ See Jackson's letter to Winton Motor Carriage Co. published with Jackson's photographs from the trip in the company's house organ *The Auto Era*, July-August 1903. The citation is from an advertisement printed in Duncan (125).

Jackson found his way to the center of promoting automobility and made it more successful at a decisive moment.⁷⁴

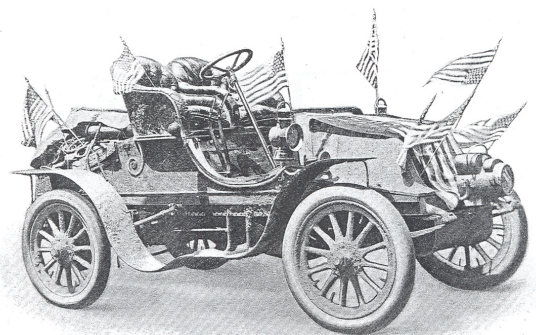
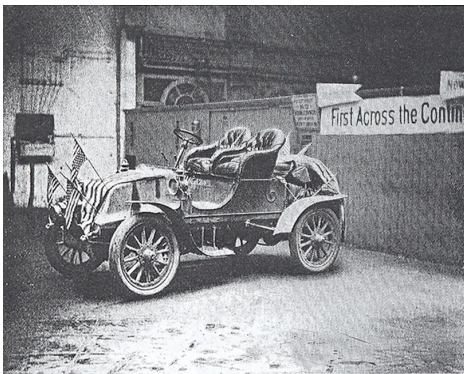


Figure 3.2: Two images of the Vermont at the end of the road, both taken from promotional material. Both are taken from “From Ocean to Ocean in a Winton” *Auto Era*, 1903.

Sixteen years later, a very different transcontinental trip would set out from Washington D. C. headed for San Francisco along the Lincoln Highway on another defining coast to coast auto journey. With the United States military returning victoriously from the First World War, the Government sent a convoy of automobiles, trucks, and various other equipment across country. The officially stated purpose of the mission was to test automotive equipment, to examine road conditions for purposes of military preparedness, recruitment, and finally to explicitly promote the Townsend Federal Aid Roads bill. Unofficially, the convoy served as a sort of cross country parade,

⁷⁴ The rhetoric of automobile promoters was highly invested in the idea of the freedom. As opposed to rail travel, in a motorcar one could choose the route and departure and arrival times. He also stood in some ways as independent from institutional and corporate support, a free man pursuing freedom. Jackson’s independence made him a modern model of the mythopoetics of the freedom and the pioneering spirit which, borrowing the idealism the frontier, surrounded early automobility. However, Jackson also stands as a representative of the motoring class of 1903. Costing Jackson in excess of eight thousand dollars, only a wealthy man would have been able to make such a trip. Not only was the automobile prohibitively expensive, few would have been able to fund the time, materials, and repairs necessary to make it.

showing off the new, motorized military and celebrating victory in Europe.⁷⁵ Despite competition from other named routes, successful promotional work had made the Lincoln Highway a symbol of good roads progress since it was first proposed in 1912.⁷⁶ With military preparedness and good roads progress associated with industrial production, the Lincoln Highway, with its celebrated namesake and red, white, and blue road markers, was the obvious choice for a military parade and good roads propaganda exercise.

Though much had changed since Jackson made the trip in 1903, the soldiers of this cross country mission would face the same problems that Jackson had faced—mud and mechanical failures. In sixteen years almost no real progress had been made toward the production of a national road infrastructure that could support automobility. Thus, like Jackson the army was met by crowds and journalists at every town. The cheering crowds along the convoy's route feted the soldiers with lemonade, cigarettes, dinners, and dancing, but more importantly every stop was an occasion for good roads speeches.

⁷⁵ Progress of the convoy was followed closely in all the towns along the proposed route, and the convoy was greeted in each town with well wishers, celebrants, and good roads advocates such that it literally became a parade for the Main Streets that lined the Lincoln Highway. See Peter Harstad and Diane Fox and Pete Davies for records of the local festivities.

⁷⁶ Though there were other possible named routes, most notably the National Old Trails Highway which was supported by the Daughters of the American Revolution, with so many industrialists with influence in Washington as members of the Lincoln Highway Association the selection of that route is obviously an invested decision. As Harstad points out, "The list of officers and donors reads like a Who's Who of the automobile and cement industries" (70). Henry Joy, president of the Packard Motor Company and President of the Lincoln Highway Association, had argued vociferously in the press in favor of both military preparedness and good roads as mutually benefiting ideas, with the Lincoln Highway as the quintessential symbol of both goals. Under Joy's influence Packard became a leading manufacturer of military equipment. Joy had actually retired from Packard once war was declared in order to serve in Europe, but had established military production prior to America's entry into the war. Other members of the Lincoln Highway association had military ties as well. Austin Bement, the Association's Secretary, wrote articles in favor of roads investment, particularly the Lincoln Highway, as essential for the National Defense (Bement, Austin F. "The Economic and Strategic Value of the Lincoln Highway as Considered from the Standpoint of National Defense." *The Scientific Monthly*. 2: 4 April 1916, 373-380). In addition, Roy Chapin, president of Hudson and Director of the Association, along with the Association's most successful promotions man, Henry Ostermann, had helped to coordinate highly acclaimed cross country (Detroit to Atlantic Coast shipping centers) deliveries of military equipment. Ostermann served as guide and representative of the LHA for the 1919 convoy, leading it in a white (with blue and red markings) Packard twin six.

In his reminiscence of the trip, Dwight Eisenhower reports that “the speeches went on and on” (166). This is hardly surprising given the direct involvement of the Lincoln Highway Association. Every good roads committee and automotive interest in every town along the route made it their project to promote the motor train’s passing in order to garner support for good roads policy.

Implicitly the convoy’s purpose was to promote a narrative of automobility to the public. As Colonel McClure, commanding officer of the mission put it, “The convoy. . . is doing more for good roads than anything else in the history of the country. You will see more good roads in the process of construction after this trip than you ever had any idea of” (qtd in Davies 102). This is because the convoy embodied the geographic narrative of the good roads movement that had been so successfully sustained by the Lincoln Highway Association and other groups during the war years when investment in national roads would have been impossible. Thus, Colonel McClure’s remark that the unparalleled scenic beauty repaid the numerous hardships faced in crossing the continent repeats a trope of the good roads and See America First campaigns that had been united during the war. Likewise, upon the company’s arrival in San Francisco, John Willys, President of Willys Overland and a director of the Lincoln Highway Association, makes a correlation between early pioneers who struggled across the continent in wagons and the soldiers who had just completed their own mechanized trek. Paralleling Frederick Jackson Turner, he argues, the pioneers “stand in reverend tradition, makers of California and American history. So in this journey across plain, desert, and mountain trail, you, too, have blazed new trails—the trails of Commerce, Highways, Mechanical Achievement, and the Protection of the Flag” (qtd in Davies 204).

Indeed, without the convoy automobility in America may have been stalled in the years after the war. In his memoirs former president Eisenhower would recall the significance of that journey for bringing to the consciousness of the nation the importance of good roads. He states, “In part prodded by the enthusiasts for a transcontinental highway and in part moved, as I have said, to search out the military capabilities of the automobile and truck, the War Department committed itself to the venture of a coast-to-coast convoy that was, under the circumstances of the time, a genuine adventure” (387). The trip resonates in Eisenhower’s remembrance as adventure, as inevitable culmination of the march of historical progress, and as fateful turning point in the history of the nation. Actually the Townsend Act, the proposal put forth by Senator Charles E. Townsend of, notably, Michigan, was unacceptable for most of Congress because it failed to adequately allow for state’s rights in the development, construction, and maintenance of highways for a national network. Constitutionality aside, when the depression of nineteen-twenty and twenty-one hit, it would have been hard to justify expenditure on what would have been perceived as simply touring roads, particularly in Southern and Western states. Given that it was not until the constitutional issues were fully deliberated that the Townsend Act would be passed two years later, it’s not unreasonable to imagine it taking far longer for such legislation to be worked out without the promotional work of the military convoy demonstrating the popularity of the project.

So for the cheering crowds along the way the passing soldiers of the convoy symbolized progress. Even though the convoy destroyed the roads and bridges it passed over, it did so in the name of progress. As Davies puts it, “they were destroying the road to save it” (123). Wrapped in the patriotism of victory, and making the standard allusions

to Westward expansion, imperialism, and exceptionalism, the convoy was celebrated for the same things that were celebrated when Horatio Nelson Jackson had passed along nearly the same route sixteen years earlier. These two events, Jackson's trip from West to East, and the military convoy's trip from East to West effectively bookend the Progressive Era of automobility and embody the concerns of the nation as it jilted, lurched, and steered down rough roads on its complicated route toward automotive modernization. For the idea that their Main Street was becoming connected to every other Main Street from Broadway to Michigan Avenue to Market Street, for modernity and progress, for freedom and democracy, for commerce and economy, for access to magnificent scenic beauty, for all this enthusiasts lined the road to cheer these representatives of automobility.

Given the enormous cost of constructing a national road infrastructure, the nation needed a story to justify the investment, and these two celebrated journeys bookending the era participated in promoting such a narrative. The biggest promoters of automobility, however, were the allied good roads and automotive industry interests. In 1915, Bachelor Bronson perceptively identified the importance of these groups' promotional work in producing a market for automobiles and, by extension, good roads. He writes, "By advertisements alluding to the great out-of-doors or the mystery of unseen places, by the romance of the race and endurance contests, they succeeded in creating a demand for motorcars" (320). Indeed, the influence of consumer advertising and promotions on the production of America's geography of automobility cannot be understated. This chapter will contextualize automobility in the first two decades of the twentieth century and then read the promotional work of Henry Joy's Lincoln Highway narratives of American

exceptionalism and Henry Ford's Model T narratives of access to peaceful open country as exemplary of the two branches of the vast promotional work geared to selling the American public on automobility.

Laying the Base: Automobility in the Progressive Era

The progressive era of automobility can be usefully summarized as a period of fits and starts punctuated by many firsts. Automobile technology and its popular acceptance advanced rapidly, but the construction of roads generally lagged. Despite the early good roads work of the League of American Wheelmen, and despite the spread of good roads ideology to other groups like the National Grange, Railroads, and motorists, by the time the automobile had become mechanically reliable the roads in most of the United States remained dismal.

In 1902, U.S. Representative Walter Brownlow introduced legislation that would eventually overturn better than two generations of Federal neglect of the nation's highways. Brownlow recognized the Constitutional nature of the vetos of Presidents Madison, Monroe, and Jackson and so he framed his rhetoric carefully. He argued that Congress had the constitutional obligation to "promote the general welfare" and to establish post roads. Brownlow observed, "it is a remarkable fact that [America] is behind all other civilized nations in reference to the improvement of its highways." He tailored his bill such that it allowed the general government to work with states to fund the improvement of post roads (355). It would be nine years before the country would be

ready for Federal assistance in the construction and maintenance of post roads (1911), fourteen years before the first Federal road assistance legislation (1916), and nearly two decades before the national government would get behind a full, national scale network of highways with the Townsend Act (1921); however, nine years after the formation of the Bureau of Public Roads (1893) Brownlow's arguments revised the terms of the debate around constitutional blocks to Federal involvement in road construction projects.

In the decade before Jackson made his cross country trip, the future applications of the new automobile technology were still to be determined. Internal combustion technology still competed with steam and electric for dominance of the road, not to mention the market. Even though the Duryea internal combustion carriage beat all comers in the Chicago Herald's Thanksgiving Day race in 1895, a race run on Long Island in 1900 pit five gasoline powered autos against three steam carriages and one electric vehicle. The fifty mile course was won by the electric powered entry in just over 2 hours. Only one racer, a steam car, failed to complete the course, losing a tire on a turn ("Fifty Miles in 2:03:30 by Electric Car," *Scientific American* 28 April 1900). In 1910 two electric cars were set on a one thousand mile promotional tour through New England (mapped by A. L. Westgard) to prove the reliability of electrics (*New York Times*, 19 Sept 1910, 9). A 1914 *New York Times* article, entitled "May Give Benefits of Electric Trucks," favors electrics in a comparison of the relative advantages of internal combustion and battery power sources (X11). Moreover, Thomas Edison believed electric cars were the future, and the nation's largest manufacturer of automobiles in the early years of the century, Albert Pope, produced primarily electric automobiles (Chapter 1). In international land speed trials, electric cars dominated the field until 1902 when a

French steamer claimed the prize. William Vanderbilt would then claim the prize for internal combustion in November of that same year. Internal combustion engines, including Ford's Arrow, would dominate the field from then on, even outperforming the Stanley Brother's 127 mph steamer.

Following the League of American Wheelmen, early organizations of automobile owners began to form to promote races and tours, offer maintenance advice, define the motoring lifestyle, and promote automobile interests in general. The Automobile Club of America (ACA) had formed as a private interest group which was centered in major metropolitan areas and catered to the concerns of wealthy motorists to the exclusion of what few middle class auto owners there were early on. With the introduction of more affordable motors, the Automobile Association of America (AAA) formed in 1902.⁷⁷ Both organizations rallied for good roads and automobile interests around the country by keeping public offices for the distribution of tourist materials like Blue Books and maps, organizing motoring events like races and endurance runs, offering advice to motorists, lobbying for good roads and fair use road laws, and instructing motorists on proper motoring behavior.

With regards to roads, although some states were doing pioneering work in road engineering, most of the nation either could not organize or could not fund significant road construction or repair projects. A 1900 report on the progress of the Bureau of Public Roads explains that after seven years of research since the founding of the office,

⁷⁷ *Chicago Tribune* article of Jan 10, 1902, "Automobile Clubs Fall Out" reports a split of ACA and Chicago Automobile Club over racing rules. The ACA demanded proprietary control over motor sport rules, and the more modest regional club refused to concede. *New York Times* article of March 5th 1902 announces the formation of "National Automobile Club" out of 8 prominent regional automobile clubs (6). Also see Bellamy Partridge *Fill 'er Up* for a history of the AAA.

the Bureau “considers that for local needs as well as for our material developments and prosperity, a well regulated system of public roads through the whole country is day by day becoming more necessary” (*Scientific American*, April 14 1900). Brownlow introduced his post road legislation to Congress, but as with all new ideas this was received with much rhetoric and even more political trepidation. Even if most Americans could agree that good roads were useful, the application of a good roads policy was troublingly elusive (Rae 1971, 35). Whereas urban motorists appealed to the federal government for long distance arterial routes, the railroads, the national grange, and rural voters largely favored locally built and maintained farm to market roads. The rural system would effectively serve the local interests, but proponents of a fully developed national road network would describe this as merely a patchwork road policy. From the rural user’s perspective, there was no use in a road that ran only from city to city if all the other roads were impassable. Such a road would amount to nothing more than a “peacock alley” (Goddard 16). In the urban road user’s eyes, the question was what good was a road that only led to the country surrounding a particular city if it went nowhere else. Thus, when the first road census was taken in 1904, of the two million plus miles of highway in the United States, only about seven percent could be classified as improved, and even that was a subjective and unstable evaluation (Rae 1971, 33).

By the early twenties the nation would finally unite around a comprehensive federal road policy; yet, before embracing automobility on a mass scale, before making the crucial investments in road infrastructure, before Henry Ford’s vision of a car for every family could become a real possibility, the nation needed to make sense of and identify with the new technology and the new social formations that would arise along

with it. Some repudiated the automobile and the push for good roads. For instance, the article “Report on One Hundred Twenty-eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church” denounced the evil affects of automobiles and declared that the automobile was “carrying away from the church the magnificent army of Christ” (360). Rejecting good roads rhetoric in “The Passing of the Friendly Road,” Prescott Frost rebutted those good roads enthusiasts who would pave all roads and eliminate the narrow, friendly roads good for walking with one’s family. He suggests, “‘Motor flights’ between ‘points of interest’ is all we have for our macadam” (70). Likewise reactionary to automobiles in 1915, in “Eight Days in a Barley Motor,” Granville Trace recounts a horse and buggy camping trip, “proving that you can have a lot of fun even with an old fashioned horse” (348).

Yet steeped in the ideology of progress and the spirit of adventure, automobility enthusiasts drowned out the reluctant and reactionary voices. For instance, after Jackson’s trip more and more intrepid adventurers would make distance trips and find their way into the national spotlight for having done so. Motorists would be cast as romantic characters in the pages of *Collier’s* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. For example, *Collier’s* published William Allen Wolf’s romance, “The Clutch of Circumstance,” in which young Montague-and-Capulet type lovers meet along the roadside and quickly fall in love despite the pressures of their feuding parents. Another *Collier’s* publication by Wilbur Hall, “A Benefactor-Net,” briskly narrates the story of “A Class A driver, a beautiful girl, a night race across the desert to save the potash claims” (29). The *Saturday Evening Post* serialized Sinclair Lewis’s motor-romance, *Free Air* (Chapter 6).

Beyond the strident justifications for automobility in the press, the automobilists' cause was further advanced by a series of breakthroughs and landmarks representing tremendous unpublicized labor in machine shops, board rooms, legislative committee chambers, and elsewhere. The first automobile show would be held in New York's Madison Square Garden in 1900, establishing a tradition that would become commonplace in cities around the country. The first motor vehicle registration would be exacted in New York State in 1901.⁷⁸ By 1920 several States would begin to produce new tax structures to subsidize the construction of roads by the road users (Burnham 436). Automobiles would be successfully deployed for rescue efforts during a natural disaster in the San Francisco earthquake in 1907. The first family would drive across country in 1908. In 1909 Alice Huyler Ramsey would be the first woman to drive across the country unassisted.⁷⁹ The first named coast to coast highway, the National Old Trails Highway, was proposed by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1911, and named routes like the Lincoln Highway, the Dixie Highway, the Daniel Boone Trail, and the Sunset Highway followed. This series of firsts registers larger changes taking place in the cultural mindset as the nation began to narrate stories of itself defined by automobility.

The ongoing educational work of the Bureau of Public Roads was seized upon and aggrandized and distributed by various vehicles within the Good Roads Movement and was having a cumulative impact such that the cause of good roads slowly became a

⁷⁸ Levying a registration fee represented an early user fee, with revenues channeled toward highway construction. States began to enforce registration fees on out of state automobilists until a compromise could be worked out on the federal level by which states would recognize the registration of other states (Flink 1975, 26).

⁷⁹ Huyler was independent except for two aunts and a young cousin and financial support provided by the Maxwell-Briscoe Auto Company promoting automobility to women. Many women motorists followed Ramsey—Blanche Stuart Scott and Gertrude Lyman Phillips in 1910, and Harriet White Fisher who was completing a round the world auto trip also in 1910, and Kathryn Hulme in 1923.

keystone of national political discourse. The major political party platforms all equivocally called for good roads in their 1908 and 1912 platforms (Bromley 235). Good roads policy remained a part of political planks thereafter. The exigency that drove the political rhetoric was a general acknowledgement that rural post roads were safe politically. Urban motorists with their eye on national roads supported this course as at least a step in the right direction. Rural voters got behind it because they were embracing rural free delivery because mail order commerce was being implemented and postmen would not deliver to addresses on impassable roads, creating a strident demand for road work in rural districts. Because federal investment in matters of the national post were well established constitutionally, as Senator Brownlow had demonstrated, this was safe, popular policy.

Also, narratives of the democratization of transportation accompanied technological advances for the automobile. Although in the early years of the century some makes of cars were aimed at middle and lower class markets like the Oldsmobile, Buick, Briscoe, Willys, and Ford's Model N, it wasn't until Ford began slashing the price of his Model T while also increasing the wages of his workers and beating the Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers (ALAM), to much Populist and Progressive anti-trust approval, that the automobile was no longer thought of as an expensive toy for the wealthy but as the working family's friend. The introduction of the electric starter, which made operating internal combustion motors easier further popularized the technology, particularly among women. As the technology became increasingly reliable, the automobile was imbued, through promotional writing, with multiple popular notions like economy, efficiency and speed, freedom, and individualism.

It was touted as a remedy for social problems like rural isolation and urban crowding.⁸⁰ More and more, Americans made personal sacrifices in order to own an automobile, reflecting a change in consumer attitudes that eventually made the auto industry one of the cornerstones of the American economy as the second decade of the century progressed (Rae 1970, 87-104). In the words of Progressive Party activist William Allen White, “The Automobile Age had arrived. . . A kind of democracy was coming into the world and not through the ballot box, not by marching cohorts in the streets carrying banners, not even out of Congress nor its laws. The thing which was changing our world was the democratization of transportation” (qtd in Bromley 358). Parroting Henry Ford in his 1916 article, “Democratizing the Motor Car,” Albert Clough writes, “The process of democratization of the automobile bids fair to continue until a car is owned by every family in the land” (180).

With more motor cars, automobile travel increased and accounts of cross country travel found their way into the pages of popular magazines and newspapers. As S. D. Waldron hyperbolically put it in 1909, “An epidemic of touring is over the land” (S4). In 1909 a *New York Times* article, entitled “Perils of Pathfinding in West,” depicts the difficulties faced by pathfinding missions for the Glidden Tour, the New York to Seattle Race, and the Flag to Flag run from Denver to Mexico City. In the fall of 1910, the *New York Times* publicized a transcontinental tour to be executed by A. L. Westgard for the purposes of compiling accurate data regarding road conditions and all other details

⁸⁰ *Collier's* automotive number, January 8, 1916, published articles representing automobility as the solution to many practical problems faced by Americans every day: Judson Welliver in “The Automobile in our County” (70) details the benefits to a rural county of the automobile in social contacts, churches, schools, keeping youth close to home; Theodore Von Keller in “Suburban Change and the Automobile” lists the reasons for suburbanites to purchase an automobile (60); Ray Giles in “1916—The Great Year to Buy and Automobile” lists all the reasons owning an automobile can benefit the average family (58).

necessary for the comfort and success of a pleasure transcontinental motor tour” (“Transcontinental Tour Starts from Here Tomorrow,” 6). In December of 1914, the *New York Times* reported in “Lincoln Highway Covered in One Day” that the entire 3,400 mile route of the Lincoln Highway had been inspected by 200 official observers in a single day (5). Starting in 1904, the Annual Glidden Tour led private owners annually on an auto tour of some section of the country and earned detailed coverage in the presses because auto manufacturers brought journalists along with them. For instance, in July, 1913, a *New York Times* article reported on the start of the Glidden Tour from St. Paul, Minnesota to Glacier National Park emphasizing the point that during the tour a newspaper would be printed daily from the route (“The Glidden Motor Tour Starts Today,” 15). *Outing* magazine, in 1915, published a photo essay by C. J. Belden entitled “Motoring Among the Mountains” which depicts the pleasures of motor camping. A brief text accounts for the difficulties of such an endeavor, but Belden assures, “All these troubles are minor affairs compared with the exhilaration of touring among the peaks and over the passes” (358). Another *Outing* offering was “Gypsying on a Motorcycle,” in which Hamilton Laing notes that his attraction to the idea of motorcycling from New York to Winnipeg was inspired by “those ever misleading stories of it all” (204), but Laing explains that all difficulties are outweighed because “all through it I gathered experiences—new ones” (205). In 1909 a race from New York to Seattle was publicly kicked off by President Taft turning a switch in the White House, and the event was covered in the press start to finish. As named routes began to spring up, press coverage promoted points of interests along them. The popularity of motoring was further incited by the publication of encouraging prescriptive travel writing like that of A. L. Westgard,

Emily Post, and Effie Gladding Price (Chapter 4), but while Westgard, Price, and Post represent book length encouragements to travel, popular publications promoted such trips as well. For instance, the *Independent* published an article encouraging motorists to drive to California for the 1915 Pan American Exposition. The article maintains “‘See America First’ has always been good advice,” but “this summer. . . owing to certain difficulties in the way of seeing Europe we shall have to take this advice. . . Why not go to California by automobile.” “Certainly,” the article presumes, “there’s no pleasanter way imaginable to see the United States. . . than from the upholstered cushions of a noiselessly gliding touring car” (“Unites States Over” 392).⁸¹

The aggregate of all this cultural work contributed to the passage in 1916 of the first significant step toward Federal support of a national highway network in more than 100 years.⁸² The Federal Road Act of 1916 spent \$75 million over a period of five years to improve rural post roads. The money would be distributed under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and spent through state highway departments on a matching basis. Though this legislation marks a significant turning point in the return to federal involvement in the development of interconnected national highway networks, the fact is that a \$75 million appropriation would have been woefully inadequate to address the road construction needs of a country the size of the United States. Even given the state of advanced road development in some states like California, Michigan, New York,

⁸¹ Gregory Clark has identified relationships between travel writing written by Americans for Americans and production of modern national identity in “Road Guides and Traveler’s Tales on the Lincoln Highway.”

⁸² The Jefferson Administration represents the last time the Federal Government worked for highway development. Although the popular American System of Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun included development in commercial transport infrastructure, including roads as essential along with railroads, and river, canal, and sea ports, their ideas failed to garner broad support due to resistance from state’s rights and free market advocates.

Maryland, New Jersey, and Ohio by 1916, the appropriation would not have been sufficient to address the obstacles faced in the rural Southeast, or the transcontinental West where populations were still thin, state revenues small, and the conditions of construction tremendous. In addition, because the bill was passed only shortly before the United States entered the World War raging in Europe, the execution of the legislation was stalled initially as the country's attention turned more deliberately to issues overseas. Regardless, the Federal Aid Road Act represented a victory for the good roads movement and automobility, representing popular recognition of the fact that if all the country was to have a useful national highway network the federal government would have to be involved.⁸³ Such was the socio-spatial context in which Henry Joy with the Lincoln Highway and Henry Ford with the Model T promoted automobility and so reoriented the nation's relationship to national space.

Joy of the Lincoln Highway

Before the government would get involved in road construction, private enterprise would endeavor to bring about the construction of interstate highways, and Henry Bourne Joy was at the helm of by far the most successful of such projects—the Lincoln Highway. In his *Romance of the Automobile Industry* (1916), James Rood Doolittle described Joy as “one of the most aggressive men in the industry” (274), and one of the ways Joy's aggression manifested itself was in the organization and promotion of the Lincoln

⁸³ For more on the development of national highway legislation in the progressive era see Rae 1975, 33-39.

Highway. Joy himself described the Association's campaign, "Beyond question we did bring about what is known as the Good Roads Movement in America. We knew that a real road across the country would have to come; our problem was to get steam behind the idea" (qtd in *Lincoln Highway* 57). Getting steam behind the idea is precisely what Joy did, but the idea for a coast to coast highway actually belongs to Carl Graham Fisher who invented the Prest-O-Lite compressed carbide gas headlamp for automobiles and was one of the originators of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Fisher decided that because the politicians were recalcitrant even though everyone in the country more or less agreed on the need of good roads, the time had come to stop agitating and for private industry to start building. Estimating that ten million dollars would finish the job, his idea was to build a coast to coast, gravel highway with subscriptions from companies and private citizens interested in good roads. In his own words, "A road across the United States; Let's build it before we're too old to use it" (qtd in *Lincoln Highway* 2). He argued:

the highways of America are built chiefly of politics, whereas the proper material is crushed rock or concrete. We believe a magnificent highway of this kind, in actual existence, will stimulate as nothing else the building of enduring highways everywhere that will not only be a credit to the American people but that will also mean much to American agriculture and American commerce. (qtd in *Lincoln Highway* 15)

When Fisher presented the idea to Joy, he did so in similarly strident terms. "Joy," he said, "the way things are going in this country, we will get an American highway system about the year 2000" (qtd in Davies 24). So he suggested a deadline. He proposed that the project be completed in time for the Pan American Exposition to be held in San Francisco

in the summer of 1915 so that people could drive to the exposition and really see their country.

Fisher's idea quickly won commitments from Frank Sieberling at Goodyear, Roy Chapin at Hudson, and Colonel S. D. Waldon, General Manager at Packard, and the AAA composed a set of resolutions in support of the idea. However, when Henry Joy with his organizational acumen and connections in Detroit and Washington stepped forward, the movement spontaneously gathering around Fisher's idea really took shape and direction.⁸⁴ Fisher asked for a meeting of Detroit auto and finance elites chosen by Joy, and at the meeting The Lincoln Highway Association (LHA) was incorporated with Joy at the helm. Joy immediately demanded an accounting of commitments made and, perhaps more importantly, he lobbied to change the name of the project from The Coast to Coast Rock Highway to the Lincoln Memorial Highway.⁸⁵ When it came time to decide on a route, Joy insisted that the route take the most direct route from New York to San Francisco, even if doing so meant bypassing major cities.⁸⁶

The Association needed to gain extra support. While touring in the West with an Indiana motorist club,⁸⁷ Fisher got the Association an invitation to present their proposed

⁸⁴ Though Fisher was a charismatic idea man and head of a successful company, his plan needed support at the highest levels. Joy's father had known Lincoln, he had married into the Detroit social elite, and he was head of the largest and certainly one of the most highly respected auto manufacturing companies in the country.

⁸⁵ Permission had to be gotten from the Lincoln Memorial Road Association, a group that advocated a memorial road to Lincoln running from Washington to Gettysburg rather than a building. After Congress voted on a building, they agreed to relinquish the name to Joy and Fisher's group.

⁸⁶ This direct route marks a contrast with previous plans like that of the ACA and Col. Albert Pope which would zigzag between New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, and Ogden, Utah on its way to San Francisco. Reported in "Plans for National Highway," *Chicago Tribune* 13 April 1900 (1). Joy's plan was met with resistance from many quarters, especially in cities and towns passed by.

⁸⁷ While the Lincoln Highway Association was incorporating, Carl Fisher was actually on the road. With an Indianapolis auto club, some of whom had made commitments to the Lincoln Highway, Fisher participated in a tour of the West that many presumed was a scouting trip for the Lincoln Highway because of Fisher's participation. This was not the case. In fact, while Fisher was touring Joy was studying maps and

route at the national conference of governors in 1913. With this impetus they quickly put together a proclamation that would officially bring the Lincoln Highway to the attention of the nation. Along with the proposal made to the governors, and a publicized proclamation of the route, both composed principally by Joy, the LHA distributed maps of the route. According to Joy, “the magazines and newspapers ate [the proclamation] up” (qtd in *The Lincoln Highway* 65). Joy insisted that all Packard dealerships decorate their showrooms with flags, pennants, maps of the route, and portraits of Lincoln. The reception of the proclamation of the Lincoln Highway was electric. Private subscriptions poured in. Then, to keep the idea of the Lincoln Way before the eyes of the public, the LHA devised a nationwide celebration to dedicate the memorial highway. They asked the governors along the proposed route to announce a legal holiday and encourage participation in civic celebrations. They touched clergy to mention the Lincoln Way in their sermons the following Sunday, a request that prompted moving appeals from the pulpit. They developed local grass roots Lincoln Highway consuls, particularly in towns along the route, to encourage participation and establish local support for their projects. Finally, they began to channel donations from concrete manufacturers into “seedling miles,” which were sections of paved road meant to be an object lesson to road users in what was possible all along the route with proper investment.⁸⁸ Obviously the national attitude was ripe for such a project, what with so many named trail organizations created contemporaneously, but credit for the success of the Lincoln Highway in the popular

establishing the route. Interestingly though, in 1915 when Theodore Dreiser drove from New York to Indiana with Franklin Booth, Booth’s chauffeur, Speed, tells Dreiser about this trip. Speed had thought this was the scouting trip for the LHA.

⁸⁸ For more on promotional work of the Lincoln Highway Association, see *The Lincoln Highway*. (56-71 and 91-108)

imagination is due in large part to the organizational efforts and instrumental influence of Joy.⁸⁹

Joy understood how to work with the press to keep the name Lincoln Way before the eyes of the public. He understood that with the right promotional associations the Lincoln Highway could become a symbol that would inspire automobility. Even though the road was never completed, Joy's promotions treated this symbolic road as a reality, and the public got behind the Lincoln Highway both as a reality and a symbol. Once the people got behind it, the rest, so his reasoning went, would fall into place. As historian of the Lincoln Highway, Drake Hokanson puts it, "This was clearly Joy's highway" (14), and Joy himself published many articles enumerating the benefits of investment and participation in the Lincoln Way movement.⁹⁰ Joy's writing consistently responds to the issues and concerns of the American people in a way that either associates the Lincoln Highway positively with ideals of American patriotism or offers the highway as a nostrum for ills faced by the society. He deploys the language of boosterism at the universal need of good roads, roads as an essential element of progress and empire, the importance of roads for national defense, the usefulness of roads to unify the diverse regions of the country, the unrealized potential of the automobile due to bad roads, economic concerns, and the developing American pride in America's wonderland of natural scenery. Basically, in Joy's writing we find a barometer of many of the ideas circulating in the popular discourse, and we get these ideas hung with banners of

⁸⁹ The Lincoln Highway was mapped and even marked, but it was never actually constructed all along its route. One of the LHA's more impressive accomplishments was the creation of a grass roots network that marked and maintained the road. Nevertheless, in sparsely populated regions little could possibly have been accomplished. During the war, even well maintained portions of the road fell into disrepair because of the poor materials used.

⁹⁰ Like Pope, what Joy didn't write himself, he influenced in the work of others, namely Austin Bement, Arthur Pardington, and Harry Osterman, and S. D. Waldon.

American exceptionalism and tailored to promote Lincoln Way and the ultimate goal of the Good Roads Movement, a national highway network.

All of the above associations are present in the first national article Joy published after the announcement of the highway. In “The Lincoln Way From Sea to Sea,” published in the *Independent*, Joy outlines the significance of the road in an obvious educational effort. He starts with a very brief world history of roads, going all the way back to the book of Genesis and, deploying a common good roads trope, proceeds to associate road quality with the march of civilization. He explains, “Our ancestors in the Old World took the example of the difficulties of Adam and built better highways to ease life’s burdens. The old Romans excelled in their day and with their arms carried their roads and their civilization to the north of Europe. ‘Nothing retards civilization like inaccessibility.’” Referencing Jefferson and Gallatin’s efforts, he goes on to demonstrate that this was the idea that led to early national efforts to build main highways in the U.S. Road construction, he explains, was justifiably superceded by the more efficient railroad for a period, but “the railroad has about reached its limit.” “We find ourselves,” he asserts, “on the eve of another awakening” of good roads interest in the United States, and he claims that this is a renaissance of American road building. This renaissance is coming about because despite the national growth in population and progress, and even though every person in the country has a road to his door, “We cannot go where we would. Our roads prevent it.” He binds together the related themes of the universality of purpose, in that roads have always served the good, with the universality of need, in that

all America needs and would use good roads. To this warrant he adds the precept that roads are essential to progress, and American progress will stall on bad roads.⁹¹

Having established the necessity of good roads, Joy proffers the Lincoln Highway. He assures, “There is a remedy. I think we have it in the Lincoln Highway. . . It is a road with a purpose behind it, for the Lincoln Highway will be a model thoroughfare.” Mimicking Jefferson, Joy claims the road will promote sociability and neighborliness. He suggests, it will “knit thirteen states in a bond as firm as concrete and as lasting,” connoting the thirteen original colonies but literally referencing the thirteen states through which the Lincoln Way passed. Moreover, he describes the future road as easy to drive because it avoids difficult terrain and the traffic snarls of cities; yet, he promises it will pass close enough to major cities that it will be easily accessible to sixty percent of the population. Lincoln Way, he says, will also touch numerous points of national historic and scenic interest so that the route will cause Americans to “learn more about the United States than a dozen books can ever tell.” He is keen to show that these are not empty promises by detailing the growing endowment behind the program. Finally, he concludes by invoking the spirit of the road’s namesake and tying the principle themes of his argument together in one final statement of everything this road will mean to this “national awakening for good roads.” He states:

We have taken the name of Abraham Lincoln because Lincoln was the emancipator of the nation and his name will help emancipate us today from bondage to bad roads. As a memorial it will be a nationwide remembrance of him.

⁹¹ His next move is to establish the necessity of good roads for the national defense. Once the war in Europe would begin, this would be a common point among good roads advocates, but Joy is ahead of the game here, claiming that dependency solely on railroads “In war [material and troop] traffic would be paralyzed.”

It will last for all time as does the Appian Way, a tribute to a great and good man, leading us forward into the future.⁹²

Such rhetoric is exemplary of the many arguments made by Joy and others promoting roads.

Joy recycled many basic arguments in the several articles he wrote for the national press on the Lincoln Highway. Yet in each article he emphasized a different perspective. For instance, in “Transcontinental Trails: Their Development and What they Mean to This Country,” published on two months after “The Lincoln Way from Sea to Sea,” Joy amplifies all the basic points he had made in the previous argument—universal good, progress, defense, unity, potential of the automobile, and Lincoln Highway as nostrum; yet, he stresses two new ideas in this article. First he explicitly analyzes the centrality of the Lincoln Highway to the See America First campaign, which increasingly entered popular discourse as political friction in Europe intensified. See America First, Joy claims, “is a slogan that has grown tremendously.” However, Joy doesn’t simply extol the virtues of the slogan and offer the Lincoln Highway as the opportunity to see America, rather he notes the usefulness patriotically and economically of the idea, but then he poignantly regrets America’s failure to realize such an ideal. In other words, he updates Albert Pope’s shaming trope to a new historical context, noting that though many Americans go west to see the scenic wonders that rival Europe, “hordes of rich Americans, increasing yearly in numbers, still go.” This is because “America to-day

⁹² See Joy, “The Lincoln Way From Sea to Sea” in *Independent* 18 December 1913. Joy deserves criticism for exploiting the name of Lincoln in the name of emancipation when the Lincoln Highway and every other principal route of communication in the country actively discriminated against African Americans. For more on this history, see Malaika Adero’s excellent anthology *Up South: Stories, Studies and Letters of This Century’s Black Migrations*. Also of interest is Sikivu Hutchinson’s essay, “Lincoln Highway” in *Performing Hybridity*, analyzing the exclusion of African Americans from popular locations, the Lincoln Highway in particular.

offers almost insurmountable obstacles to following [the See America First] precept.”

This problem is due not just to roads but to essential roadside services perfected in European countries: “They will continue to go abroad, and small blame to them, as long as existent conditions prevail. Why? Places of Interest. Good Roads. Excellent taverns and restaurants” (167). This, for Joy, is not merely patriotism, but a matter of national economics, because American dollars spent overseas could be better invested domestically.

The second point Joy emphasizes in “Transcontinental Trails” is economic. He compares the investment in the Panama Canal to that of the Lincoln Highway, arriving at the conclusion, “These roads would pay yearly dividends far greater than any we may ever expect from Panama.” The increase of farm values and decrease of freight costs is a formula that means more net profits for all. Calculating national produce, wastage, and the cost of tonnage miles, Joy asserts, “The saving in one year would be sufficient to build three or four great national highways” (170). He implies that with each highway hauling costs will continue to decrease, leading to significant national economic development. Add to this the cheapness and efficiency of autos over horses and the savings accrued by investing in well built roads needing little maintenance rather than poor roads needing constant costly maintenance and the point is clear. Joy drives the message home stating, “In constructing highways one of the cardinal points is that they should be built and paid for by the present generation and not by future generations” (172). With this, Joy combines the patriotism of “seeing America” with the wisdom of prudent investment and infuses both with the ethics of investing in future generations, all of which can be brought about through investment in the Lincoln Highway.

In “The Lincoln Highway,” published in August, 1914, Joy makes many of the usual arguments but really stresses the idea that for all the different road congresses, local good roads committees, and different named trail organizations, the Good Roads Movement was stalled because of disunity and sectarian rivalry among the various groups of the movement. The Lincoln Highway, he asserts, stands out because it has done more to advance the movement than anything else in the recent history, and it represents a solution to the problem of disorganization. This is because the Lincoln Highway is “a definite accomplishment, it provides a real tangible goal toward which to work, it crystallizes the scattered effort, it focuses attention, and provides a method of cooperation” while it simultaneously is “a wonderful and fitting monument, to stand for all time as a memorial to the best and most beloved man in the history of our country.” Implicitly, though all good roads efforts are good, everybody should get behind the Lincoln Highway because it is the best and most effective, and unity in the one project will make all the other projects come about faster.

In January of 1915 Joy published an article tailored toward automobile interests, which he highlights the usefulness of the automobile as the “greatest revolution of all time in industrial transportation” and as the culmination of the dreams of generations. However, just as with the steam locomotive, which is only useful on rails, without roads, the car is practically useless. He complains, “what the motor vehicle may mean to the people of the United States—this country of great distances—is today unrealized,” because “Is it not true that we have the dreams of a hundred centuries realized in the modern motor vehicle? And is it not also true that our roads—the nation over—are impossible and impassable and inappropriate to the era?” Presuming the inevitability of a

national network, he asks why prolong expenditure when roads will only become more expensive, and “Is not the social value of a nation valuable beyond measure?” Returning to the shame trope, he complains, as long as action is not taken what happens to America “while the good roads of every other civilized country give their people so great an advantage over us?” (21).

All of these articles, along with all the other LHA efforts at keeping the good roads movement before the national attention (the press releases, the maps, the local consuls, the celebrations, the speeches and sermons, the renaming of local streets Lincoln Way, campaigns to mark the route between towns, and the seedling miles) did have an impact, though not the one that Fisher and Joy had anticipated. The original goal of the LHA was, as Fisher put it, “a coast-to-coast rock highway” in time for the Pan American Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. The obstacles to this project were insurmountable given its sheer size. However, there was a marked increase in tourist traffic that summer, which is attributable to people driving the Lincoln Highway to the fair who were inspired to do so by the association’s promotional work.⁹³ Henry Joy was one of the thousands who drove the Lincoln Highway to San Francisco. When he arrived at the exposition, his

⁹³ For instance, *Travel* published a three part article in February, March, and April issue written by Newton A. Fuessle depicting a drive from New York to San Francisco via the famous highway. Among his colorful descriptions of local color and scenic interest which are laced with “See America First” idealism, Fuessle emphasizes the fact that “any competent motorist may now undertake” a coast to coast trip via Lincoln Way, and he repeats the prediction that thousands will drive to San Francisco later that year. Emily Post was only one of the people inspired by the proposition. Marguerite Shaffer includes an analysis of Fuessle’s article in her excellent history of American tourism, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity 18880-1940*. Also see “The National Old Trails Road: Part 2 See America First in 1915” by Richard F. Weingroff available through the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/not2.htm>

Packard was put on display in the Transportation Building covered in several states' mud. The narrative promoted by this display is obvious.⁹⁴

Joy wrote up an article on the occasion of his trip as an opportunity to advance another perspective on the significance of the Lincoln Highway. When he had made the trip two years earlier, just before announcing the route of the highway, he was but one of roughly fifty tourists to make the trip. In 1915, he exclaims, "I was but one out of 5,000." The interval is central to his narrative rhetoric. "To have driven the road then, and to drive it again now," he reasons, "is a lesson in what Americans can accomplish on an undertaking so enormous that in the aggregate it is actually beyond comprehension" (12). He optimistically notes new construction at intervals along the highway but regrets this work is only just beginning. There are sections of the road that are in near perfect condition, he observes, and the states of the West, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada, are passable in good weather, but those same states are completely impossible to drive if it rains. The improvements made impress him, but he is keen to stress just how far the road and the nation need to come. Again citing revenues lost to European tourism, Joy derides "See America First" admonitions. He declares it a "clever phrase" that has no more actual meaning to the ordinary tourist than "'See the Moon First' or 'See South Africa First,'" because for the tourist, See America First is a line "to be uttered sarcastically as his car sinks from under him in some rainswept bog" (13). Still, the progress made in just two short years is heartening to Joy. He believes a national highway network can be accomplished, but he is now acutely aware of "the necessity of national cooperation." He anxiously asserts that for the traveler prepared to rough it, "the diversity

⁹⁴ Other promotional exhibits present were a miniature road building exhibit that Pope would have deeply appreciated, and a small Ford assembly line that put out real Model Ts at the rate of twelve a day.

and beauty of the scenery,” which he remarks it would take a Ruskin or a Whistler to depict, “makes up for all the discomforts.” He proclaims, “I have driven a great deal in many parts of the globe, and have seen most of the famous beauty spots of both the old and the new world, but I have yet to experience a sight more inspiring than this trip over the Lincoln Highway.” Concluding with allusions to romantic fiction, Joy suggests that it is worth the cooperative work and investment that would transform a trip “which would make the writer of the modern thriller blush with shame for his lack of imagination,” a trip which sheds doubt upon the idea “that romance and adventure are things of a dead past,” into a real possibility for all Americans. “‘Seeing America’ in a motor car ten, or even five, years from now will not be an exploit for the adventurous, but an everyday trip of interest and enjoyment to millions” (13).

In later articles Joy’s perspective changes. Early on he argued for the construction of the Lincoln Highway as a real possibility, and this basic notion never fully evaporated from his writing, but in time his arguments began to shift from building the Lincoln Highway to turning Lincoln Way into an identifiable symbol of the good roads movement. In other words, the association’s efforts shifted under Joy’s direction from being a construction project to an educational campaign. Hokanson describes the shift in attitude, “Joy proposed to publicly abandon the goal of building a gravel road at association expense . . . and instead to concentrate on assisting the country in building its own road” (18). Their work did make a real difference, developing and sustaining narratives that defined the significance of an automobile geography and influencing the

passage of the 1916 Federal Aid Roads bill. Thus, Joy and the Lincoln Highway laid the ground work, figuratively at least, for the military convoy and Townsend Act campaign.⁹⁵

God's Open Spaces in a Rattling Good Car: Henry Ford and John Burroughs

When Carl Graham Fisher tracked down Henry Ford at the Michigan state fair to make his Coast to Coast rock Highway proposal, so the story goes, the two men leaned on livestock pens talking over the plan. At first, Ford was receptive to Fisher's ideas and, according to legend, he even made a verbal commitment. However, when Fisher arrived at Ford's office the next day to seal the deal, he was informed by Ford's secretary that Ford had changed his mind (*The Lincoln Highway* 16). Ford's lieutenant, James Couzens, explained in a letter that Ford was reluctant to participate in a project like the Lincoln Highway, because if industry built roads for the people and the nation, they would never build for themselves (Hokanson 8). Despite Ford's resistance to the program of the Lincoln Highway, which the founders of the Lincoln Highway knew would weaken their movement, his work was nevertheless one of the primary contributing factors to the automobility transformation taking place during the Progressive Era. If on the one hand, the movement for the construction of lasting good roads nationally was a renaissance of Jeffersonian idealism, the other half of Progressive Era automobility was undoubtedly the

⁹⁵ During the war, Joy left his posts at Packard and the LHA to serve in Europe. Yet he continued publishing, writing in 1917 not about his beloved highway, but asserting that sectarian political divisiveness was stalling progress, and that "a broad comprehensive National plan. . . is the only thing that will ever secure for the United States an efficient National road system of connecting highways." Joy, Henry B. "The Traveler and the Automobile" *Outlook* 25 April 1917.

revolution in automotive technology, and Ford was at the nexus of forces that would make the new automotive technology available to the mass of people in ways that early producers hadn't dreamed. Thus, Ford was central to the automotive revolution in the United States but, like Pope, his contribution was not limited to the industrial; indeed, it extends to the cultural. James Rood Doolittle described Ford's impact in 1916, "Henry Ford and the Ford car are the best advertisements the automobile industry has enjoyed" (72). Doolittle perceptively sensed that as a person, a machine, and a company Ford embodied a set of narratives which successfully promoted automobility. With his folksy populism and unique perspective on labor, industry, and success, Ford managed to help define for a generation a new relationship to national space in spite of his troubling acts and attitudes like the Peace Ship debacle, his relentless production demands, and his ugly anti-Semitism. The commercial success of the Model T, because it flooded the market with millions of units, accelerated the production of the infrastructural support of automobility like roadside service stations, autoparks, camping and roadside hotel (eventually motel) facilities, and road construction. Yet it is the embrace of Ford's narratives of freedom and access to clean pastoral places associated with the Ford brand that allowed the nation to imagine and so build new geographic lifeways based on individual mobility.

The engine of Ford's activities was an idea, an idea symbolized in the Model T. In a 1906 letter to the editors of *The Automobile*, Ford set forth his plan to produce an automobile that was affordable for the average wage earner, easy to operate, easy to repair with basic tools, but tough enough to travel America's bad roads. Such a vehicle, Ford believed, would liberate the average person by creating leisure time from drudgery

and allowing families to get out into wholesome environments. With the development of the famed, light but durable vanadium steel, the Model T was tough. The planetary transmission on the T's four cylinder, twenty horsepower motor made it powerful enough to easily manage normal driving conditions, including steep grades and muddy roads. The three point suspension allowed to T to bend and twist over rutted roads. The T was easy to repair with basic tools—a set of wrenches, a screwdriver, pliers, and, so the joke would go, a bottle of aspirin in every tool box. The T was also famously versatile, serving more utilitarian functions than just mobility. Once the car was designed, the key to affordability was enormous mass production, and despite the deceptive sticker price, which excluded all but the basic frame and engine, the public would buy as many cars as Ford could produce, tacitly accepting the brand's ideologies of personal liberty and wholesome recreation.

The cultural impact of the Ford Model T and Fordism in general was profound. The car was dubbed the Tin Lizzie, the Flivver, the little Henry, the road louse, and the road cootie. Songs were written in Tin Pan Alley in celebration of the tough little car—"The Little Ford Rambled Right Along" and "The Ford March and Two Step." Jokes were made about its lightness. It was compared to a swarm of bugs because of its popularity, and to a cockroach because of its shape. Parodies of biblical psalms were composed to disparage the qualities of the car. To commemorate the ten millionth Model T, Frederick Converse wrote a symphony entitled *Flivver Ten Million*, which included among its instrumentation a honking horn (Stern 158). The Ford plant built by Albert Kahn at Highland Park earned comparison to England's Crystal Palace. Artists made pilgrimages to see the Detroit factories that Fernand Leger considered more impressive

than the palaces of metropolitan Europe. Diego Rivera painted murals to industrialization represented by Fordism in the River Rouge factory. Charles Sheeler's famous photographs and paintings of the River Rouge plant inspired *Vanity Fair* to opine that the Model T plant was "the most significant public monument in America, throwing its shadows across the land probably more widely and more intimately than the United States Senate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, [and] the statue of Liberty. . . In a landscape where size, quantity and speed are the cardinal virtues, it is natural that the largest factory turning out the most cars in the least time should come to have the quality of America's Mecca toward which the pious journey for prayer" (qtd in Brinkley 291). Travel writer Beatrice Massey would assert class distinction by distinguishing between motor tourists and their distant cousins, the "Fordists" (49). Likewise, in *A Hoosier Holiday*, while commenting on the automobile revolution, Theodore Dreiser presumes essential differences between the Model T and every other make of car—"autos and Fords" (133).

Henry Ford maintained an image of himself that resonated with the ideology of his product. With his victory over the perceived corrupt and unfair business practices of the Association of Licensed Auto Manufacturers touted as a victory for Populist and Progressive common sense over Eastern financial interests, Henry Ford became ironically both an icon and a man of the people. With the five dollar day profit sharing program in 1914, the Fordson Tractor introduced as a peaceful contribution to the war effort in 1917, and the one ton truck also in 1917, Ford appealed to the primary concerns of his growing body of consumers on the most basic levels. Without trying, he earned votes in the presidential primary of 1916, which Ellis O. Jones, attempted to explain: "Henry Ford,

through a series of acts and utterances, has taken a powerful hold of the popular imagination” (242). Ford also later made a fair showing running for Senate at the behest of Woodrow Wilson. In all, he attributed his accomplishments to his ability to inspire exceptional work in others, on the one hand, and his unique view of the automobile and its place and uses in society on the other. His ability to inspire was, as he would have it, an outgrowth of his completely unique view of industry and manufacturing, which he set out to explain in *My Life and Work*.⁹⁶ Ford indicates that he saw the automobile differently than most from the very beginning. Where some saw luxury and privilege, he saw necessity and functionality. Where some saw terror and debasement, he saw personal independence. Where some saw only profit potential, he saw a tool for the enrichment of people’s lives. Where many saw manufacturing as a method by which to extract the most return from the least investment, he saw an opportunity to provide service to his fellow men and women. The Ford brand was an icon of the new, surely, but it was embraced because Ford and his product were recognizably traditional. Douglas Brinkley’s analysis of the Ford brand illustrates the public understanding of Ford’s thinking:

The public’s fascination with Henry Ford’s maverick role lay in part in his overt image as an iconoclastic, oddly nineteenth-century presence in the twentieth century’s most up to date business. It seemed that through modern industry Ford had reopened the American frontier. His company was more than a profit making enterprise; it was a pioneer’s domain, where old assumptions about business were cast out in favor of fresh notions. (180).

⁹⁶ Though Ford had the idea for a light, strong, affordable automobile, he wouldn’t have been able to bring it off without Harold Wills and a whole host of engineers and designers. Neither would he have been able to build the largest automobile manufacturing company without James Couzens. For the construction of his world famous Highland Park and River Rouge factories, he relied on the genius of Albert Kahn. Likewise, William Knudsen engineered the practical aspects of the production line that made Ford production so incredibly efficient. In a moment of private candor, Ford would admit, “I don’t do so much, I just go around lighting fires under other people.” See Brinkley (75, 134-161, 333).

This image, which Ford consciously worked to maintain, allowed the mass consumer to identify with his product in such a way that the automobile no longer seemed a device dangerous to family, livestock, and traditions, but a necessity for good living resulting, so the narrative went, in decreases of mundane labor and increases in opportunities to get out in the world.⁹⁷

The principles that Ford avers as driving his labors were, in his view, “absolutely universal and must lead to a better and wider life for all” (1922, 273). His creed, as he described it in *My Life and Work*, was simple. He neither feared the future nor overly venerated the past. He refused to worry about competition because as he saw it whoever can execute a task most efficiently ought to be the one performing that task for the good of all. He put service before profit, presuming that capability amounts to a responsibility to work for others. To him, profit was a side effect of good service. And finally, he saw manufacturing not as manipulating and exploiting the markets to increase profit, but as “buying fairly and. . . transforming those materials into a consumable product and giving it to the consumer” (1922, 19-20). With this creed driving his work and defining his brand, Ford avowed:

I will build a car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the family but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials, by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise. But it will be so low in price that no man making a good

⁹⁷ The reality behind Ford’s image is decidedly less appealing. Despite the whitewash he gives in *My Life and Work* Ford’s relentless pursuit of efficiency inordinately pressured industrial labor with impossible demands, and his workers chafed under the paternalism of his requirements for participation in the profit sharing program that resulted in the five dollar work day. While Ford would hire Arabs and African Americans in his factories at a time when other companies would not, he was truculently anti-Semitic, buying his own newspaper and filling its pages with tirades attacking Jews. Much of these issues were in the popular consciousness during the nineteen teens, and *My Life and Work* obviously responds to criticism of Ford and his principals and practices. However, the broader image of the man fits in with the “boy from the farm with an idea” success story that Ford favored of himself.

salary will be unable to own one—and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God’s great open spaces.⁹⁸

The Model T was the product, access to a better, more natural world was the story, the Ford Motor Company was the vehicle, and the American consumers bought it in unprecedented numbers.

Early on, Ford put himself along with his cars at the forefront of his marketing and spoke directly to the interests of his primary consumers. Like the Duryea Brothers, Ford understood from the beginning that racing brought attention to his products. He raced and beat Alexander Winton in 1901, scaring himself near to death. His famed 999 beat Winton again in 1902, but this time with a hired driver. Then in 1904, shunning the oval track but willing to take on a straightaway, Ford broke the land speed record on frozen Lake St. Clair. However, despite the attention he could attract building fast cars, Ford’s best, most successful marketing promoted cross country driving to the American consumer. Cross country motoring was rooted deep in the Ford worldview. Henry Ford believed that the chief benefit of automobility is that it broadens the possible experience of people, getting the family into “the blessing of hours of pleasure in God’s great open spaces” (73). This basic idea is implied in an early Ford advertisement (Figure 3.3). The print shows a family of four—mother, father, sister, brother—in a Ford Model T. The perspective of the illustration is over the fender (rather than over the shoulder), and shows the nose of the auto pointed toward a rolling, bucolic, pastoral scene. The text reads, “Ford Makes the World Your Playground.” The advertisement makes the selling point of the car the idea that with a Ford car the family can enjoy easy access to a broader

⁹⁸ Ford first outlined this vision in a letter to the editor of *The Automobile*, January 11, 1906. Evidently he liked it so much that he repeated it in his book, *My Life and Work* (73).

and cleaner world. The idea of play is crucial; the car provides an escape from tedium into the clean open spaces of the countryside. This belief and the promotional stunts that advanced it in the popular press accorded with American desires which kindled acceptance of automobility as a defining characteristic of modern life.



Figure 3.3: Ford Advertisement depicting access to "God's open spaces" in the Model T. Printed in Brinkley.

Using this basic narrative, Ford propagandized numerous cross country motoring events. In 1909, Ford combined racing with auto-touring in a promotional scheme by entering two cars in a race from New York to Seattle, itself a promotional stunt for the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition held that summer in Seattle. When announcing that Ford Motor Company would participate in the endurance race, Henry Ford included an invitation to any auto manufacturer to wager any sum against his Model T. Nobody took

Ford's bet. Of the six cars entered in the race, two were Fords. On the day of the start of the race, President Taft simultaneously started the race and officially opened the Exposition from Washington with a single stroke of a Western Union telegraph key. The race started quickly, but beyond St. Louis became a muddy, difficult ordeal; yet, the promotional work was effective because daily updates of the contestants' progress were published in the national press. A *New York Times* piece of June 13, 1909 reports, "Autos from New York Experiencing Heavy Going in Colorado" (S2). The Ford cars won first and third places, and the winning car was displayed as part of the Exposition. Additionally, Ford issued a booklet, "The Story of the Race," and sales were boosted on the wave of publicity the Model T had received. One Ford dealer described the public response to the event, "the unbelievable feat of a motor car attempting to cross the roadless plains and mountains to far-off Washington, somewhere in the uncivilized West, inspired newsmen to new heights with their stories of a coming new mode of transportation."⁹⁹ Other cross country promotions followed. *Ford Times* published many narratives of cross country motoring adventures like the 1910 travels of E. Roger Stearns through central California and the Harper family's pioneering motorized vacation of 1916 (Brinkley 125). Also in 1916, *Ford Times* published an essay on Edsel Ford's adventurous drive from Detroit to New York entitled "The Cruise of the Runabout." When the ten millionth Model T rolled off the line in 1924, it was sent coast to coast on the Lincoln Highway with a film crew to document the spectacle. When the Model A was released, another promotional road trip was staged and the account of the journey published in a pamphlet, "Across the Continent Twice in Three Weeks with a Model A

⁹⁹ Stern, Philip Van Doren. *Tin Lizzie*. (63-75) Also see Brinkley (116), for the salesman's quote.

Ford in Midwinter.” Ford Motorcars came factory equipped with little, but always mounted on their sturdy frames was the idea of distance travel and an accessible landscape.

Yet, perhaps the most successful auto trips, in terms of promoting the Ford name, were not exactly meant to be promotional trips at all, but vacations. Between 1915 and 1924, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, and John Burroughs set off on a series of getaway drives and camping trips that, covered in the press, became events of public curiosity and national significance as these leading industrialists were joined by cabinet members and presidents.¹⁰⁰ The spectacle, as they passed through cities of teeming mobs gathered to catch a glimpse of the architects of the modern era was enormous; yet, the vagabonds, as they named themselves, were also able to find some privacy and anonymity, collecting and publishing anecdotes of encounters in remote rural environs where locals were unfamiliar with them as modern luminaries.

Again putting himself front and center in his marketing, in *My Life and Work*,

Ford described the trips in characteristically terse language:

John Burroughs, Edison, and I with Harvey S. Firestone made several vagabond trips together. We went in motor caravans and slept under canvas. Once we gypsied through the Adirondacks and again through the Alleghanies, heading southward. The trips were good fun—except that they began to attract too much attention. (240)

Ford’s characteristic populist and masculine self-identifications are evident. He points up their not sleeping in fancy hotels. Demonstrating their commonness, he deploys the idiom

¹⁰⁰ *New York Times* 29 Aug 1916, “Edison of on Vacation. . . Ford and Burroughs Go Too” (5). *New York Times* 30 Aug 1916, “Burroughs Joins Edison Campers” (20). *Chicago Tribune* 28 Aug 1918, “Ford Says Did Not Know It Was Election Day” focuses on Ford’s Senate run, but reports that he was meeting with Edison and Burroughs for camping trip (1). *Washington Post* 28 Aug 1918, “Noted Party at Bristol” cites arrival of Ford, Edison, Burroughs, and Firestone in Bristol on route to Asheville (3).

of early motor tourism by referring to the crew as vagabonds and motor-gypsies. He also specifically locates their tours in familiar American vacation regions. This blend of romantic language, vagabondage and gypsy life, with familiar popular geography accords with Ford's narratives promoting the motorcar's function of bringing people into the open spaces. Earlier in *My Life and Work* he declares, "unless we know more about machines and their use, unless we better understand the mechanical portion of life, we cannot have time to enjoy the trees, and the birds, and the flowers, and the green fields" (1). Pursuing precisely this line of thinking in the vagabonds passage, Ford deliberately calls attention to his personal associations with Edison and Firestone, but he really advertises his relationship with the famous naturalist John Burroughs.¹⁰¹

John Burroughs, who had died in 1921, a year before the publication of Ford's memoir, cuts, for Ford, a significant figure for grounding and justifying the automobile as part and parcel with his idea of modern progress and wholesome recreation in natural places. Ford relates the story that it had become widely known that Burroughs detested industrialization, stating, "He criticized industrial progress and he declared that the automobile was going to kill the appreciation of nature" (237). Upon hearing of this, Ford sent to Burroughs a motor car that, as Ford explains, "completely changed his point of view" (237). According to Ford, Burroughs, "found that it helped him to see more, and from the time of getting it, he made nearly all of his bird-hunting expeditions behind the steering wheel. He learned that instead of having to confine himself to a few miles around Slabsides [Burroughs home], the whole countryside was open to him" (237-8). Thus, Ford assures that even the famous naturalist and friend of presidents like Teddy

¹⁰¹ See Norman Brauer *There to Breathe the Beauty* and Brinkley (124) for more on the vagabond trips.

Roosevelt and poets like Whitman could be enriched by the automobile (Figure 3.4). Then Ford's rhetoric turns elegiac, remembering fondly the philosopher-naturalist's finer attributes, particularly noting the accuracy of his vision. Ford lauds Burroughs' ability to change his mind late in life, an attribute connected to the man's ability to see the world accurately. Ford explains that "at one time in his life," Burroughs "had a grudge against all modern progress, especially where it was associated with the burning of coal and the noise of traffic" (239). Perceptively, Ford identifies the influence of Wordsworth and Thoreau. Yet, to Burroughs' credit, according to Ford, he was wise enough not to cling to



Figure 3.4: Burroughs exploring the countryside in the Model T Henry Ford gave him. outmoded literary ideas in the face of demonstrably beneficial progress. This is a turn of mind commensurate with Ford's own creed not to overly revere notions of the past. Ford maintains that Burroughs came to see that because not everyone in the world could make a living hunting bird's nests, and because there is no reason why humankind should continue to live in caves rather than sanitary modern dwellings, the world is made better by each individual following the channel of his or her own taste and abilities. Implicitly, because Burroughs was turned in the end to Ford's way of thinking about progress, he

transcended the backwards thinking of the likes of Wordsworth and Thoreau.

“Wordsworth disliked railways,” explains Ford, “and Thoreau said that he could see more of the country by walking,” but Burroughs, because he saw the error of this line of thought, came to embrace symbols of progress like the railroad and the automobile, and he thus came to see far more of the country than he could by walking (239). This supports the wisdom of Ford’s own position on progress, and illustrating this are the vagabonds’ auto camping trips. By associating himself with Edison, Firestone, and the exceptionally wise Burroughs, Ford supposedly proves the wisdom of his own visionary worldview. Thus the camping trips with this sage of the natural world are paraded out as justification of Ford’s own anxiously asserted association that a well heeled appreciation of nature is only more possible with the automobile.¹⁰²

Ford didn’t need to tell the story of the vagabond trips; aside from the press coverage which promoted the trips, Burroughs had already written of the excursion of 1918. In “A Strenuous Holiday,”¹⁰³ Burroughs conscientiously evaluates motoring as a new historical phenomenon within larger processes of nature and society while at the same time depicting the trip and the figures involved. He describes the democratic experience of meeting different types of Americans along the road. He highlights progress and develops ideas about modern economy; yet, he grounds his consideration of both on a solidly naturalist footing. Drawing figures of contrast—industry vs. nature, modernity vs. bygone, north vs. south—Burroughs recites and confirms Ford’s narratives

¹⁰² The Ford Motor Company would resurrect film footage taken on these vagabond trips to promote Sport Utility Vehicles in 2002.

¹⁰³ Clearly Burroughs is alluding to the strenuous life ideology of Roosevelt in his title, and associating automobile camping with this popular figure. Besides “A Strenuous Holiday,” *Under the Maples* also includes an essay recalling a automobile bird watching excursion which Burroughs enjoyed with Roosevelt entitled “With Roosevelt at Pine Knot.”

that put automobility at the vanguard of the benefits of progress to humanity by associating it with the appreciation of nature.

“A Strenuous Holiday” exposes the transformations in geography hinging on automobility. Contrasting his eighty plus years to the relative ages of his younger companions, Burroughs indicates that at his age the desire to see new scenes is weak, but he still hoped that the trip held “something new and interesting for me,” and then goes on to explain his pleasure at seeing military convoys headed east along the Lincoln Highway to fight the Kaiser, as they were “hurled along over the great highway.”¹⁰⁴ He also describes the “sense of easy victory” experienced in surmounting the mountain terrain in a powerful car (109-10). Thus he affirms the benefit of automobile technology for opening the landscape to easy exploration, which contrasts with traveling difficulties of earlier days. Characterizing the newness of automobility, Burroughs additionally explains that a trip into the South is like a trip into the past, and so records regional contrasts at length. For example, in one passage he tells of encountering a girl and then giving her a ride of a few miles. He contrasts her local sense that Elkins was ““ever and ever so many miles”” away with his own experience of the same region: “all the time among the mountains, with a succession of glorious views from the mountain-tops and along broad, fertile valleys” (115, 117). In these two passages Burroughs compares two senses of geography, a bygone sense and his own geography of automobility. The girl knows only a narrow corner of the world, whereas he, moving so quickly through the landscape,

¹⁰⁴ Burroughs registers in this passage the motor convoys organized by Roy Chapin that were a precursor to the 1919 cross-country motor convoy. Such associations between military mobilization and automobility were reflected in popular publications like *Collier's* 29 Dec 1917, which published as a cover story the article by Edward Mott Woolley entitled “Motordom Mobilized,” telling the history of martial applications of industrial production and concluding, “The mobilization of motordom is one of the biggest military and industrial stories of history” (7).

experiences a series of successive views and rapidly passed places. For him, in an open automobile, the geography unfolds quickly: “Now we were at Warm Springs, then at Hot Springs, then at White Sulphur, or at Sweet Water Springs” (118). This contrast characterizes automobility for Burroughs. In the North where roads and autos are common, there is a broader sense of the world, but the South reminded him of a narrower, more provincial range of existence remote from concerns of the outside world. This contrast repeats the Good Roads Movement notion that geographic isolation results from poor roads and that progress is dependent on roads and geographic accessibility.

Burroughs also describes automobility as opening access to nature, a narrative Ford obviously appreciated. Throughout his essay, Burroughs highlights the flora and fauna observed along the way, and his objective naturalist descriptions of wild flowers and birds justify the trip. “Wild nature,” Burroughs asserts, “is what the camper out wants. Pure elements—air, water, earth—these settle the question” (114). The question, in this case, has to do with the discomforts of auto camping in general. As he later anecdotally maintains, “It often seemed to me that we were a luxuriously equipped expedition going forth to seek discomfort, for discomfort in several forms—dust, rough roads, heat, cold, irregular hours, accidents—is pretty sure to come to those who go a-gypsying in the South” (121). The contrast of discomfort and luxury is what most impresses Burroughs about his experience with auto-camping. This is because “discomfort, after all, is what the camper out is seeking. We grow weary of our luxuries and conveniences. We react against our complex civilization, and long to get back for a time to first principles.” That is, discomfort keeps the camper, whose natural wisdom would become distorted with too much modern living, in contact with essential and

eternal truths. “We cheerfully endure,” he finishes, all manner of discomfiture “just to touch naked reality once more.” Naked reality is, of course, the reality that only nature can teach and modernization cannot distort so long as modern consumers are careful to stay in contact with the honest, first principles of nature. So according to this logic such contact with nature, made only more possible by the motorcar, creates a better, cleaner sort of progress and pleasure.

Indeed, Burroughs soberly evaluates industrialization’s benefits and risks. Opening the discussion of progress, Burroughs describes western Pennsylvania as “the storehouse of many of nature’s most useful gifts to man” (109-10). At the center of this region sits Pittsburgh, “a city that sits with its feet in. . . the lake of brimstone and fire, and its head in the sweet country air of the hilltops” (111). Such contrast characterizes, for Burroughs, the modern world. It is a polluted, infernal laboratory, but “out of such blackening and blasting fumes comes our civilization” (111). From the pits come both the destructive weapons of war, which in 1918 seems fitting to Burroughs, but much more is mined here, “much that suggests the pond-lily rising out of the black slime and muck of the lake bottoms” (111). Thus, Burroughs disavows his initial disgust by judiciously recalling that destruction and creation are integrally linked. This prompts him to anticipate a better future that will grow out of this brimstone age. He declares, “we live in an age of iron and have all we can do to keep the iron from entering our souls” (111). Yet, while we live in this age of iron, Burroughs insists, one needs to get out into wild nature and into contact with first principles and naked reality so as to avoid becoming infected by the products of the devil’s laboratory. This is crucial for him, because without knowing nature, one is liable to lose the broad outlook that recalls that flowers blossom

forth out of muck. The flower of progress, then, ultimately lies in the future, beyond but certainly based on the modern age of iron. He avers:

Our vast industries have their root in the geologic history of the globe as in no other past age. We delve for our power, and it is all barbarous and unhandsome. When the coal and oil are all gone and we come to the surface and above the surface for the white coal, for the smokeless oil, for the winds and the sunshine, how much more attractive life will be! Our very minds ought to be cleaner. We may never hitch our wagons to the stars, but we can hitch them to the mountain streams, and make the summer breezes lift our burdens. Then the silver age will displace the iron age. (111-2)

Burroughs' view of progress sees the modern advantages as mitigated by a nearly indescribable ugliness, but the repulsiveness of industrialization is seen as inevitable somehow and ultimately trained on a brighter way.

This is a view of progress that, by his own admission, Burroughs borrowed from his conversations around campfires with Ford and the others about hydroelectric and wind power and the benefits of such technology. Onto this understanding of the benefits of industry defined by, as he calls them, his "poet-industrialists," Burroughs grafted his own spiritual understanding of nature influenced by Whitman. Ford was right in his characterization of Burroughs's wariness toward industrialization; however, what Ford perhaps failed to recognize is the affinity for progress which Burroughs had inculcated from his friendship with Whitman. Burroughs's appreciation for poems like "Passage to India" and "Song of the Exposition" made him receptive to the idea that steam engines, telegraph wires, motors, and tires can be beneficial to humanity. Thus progress, which appears to him ugly in the present, tends toward a better future. Yet in the mean time, there is still the pleasure of access to nature to be enjoyed, and the dream of a bright, clean future embodied, for Burroughs, in Ford's vision which is always focused on "the

greatest good to the greatest number” and “aims to place his inventions within reach of the great mass of the people” (122). Thus Burroughs endorses Ford and the Model T as rough, even crude prototypes that augur an inevitably more attractive future for humankind, and this idea is in line with the transcendentalist and democratic ideas inherited from Whitman.

Despite the apparent contradictions of Ford and Burroughs’ world views, Burroughs’ grounding in the philosophy of Whitman made him an ideal supporter of Ford’s narrative that the principal function of the Ford brand was to make life easier and provide access to peaceful nature. For Ford the principal justification for industrialization was to make life easier for the mass of people, and easier in his narratives is explicitly associated with the creation of opportunities to get out into “God’s great open spaces” (73). Thus, Burroughs contributed the development and perpetuation of Ford’s narrative because he represents a link, through his friendships with Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, between industrial progress and the burgeoning natural conservation movements that had created Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Glacier National Parks. In addition, Burroughs support of Fordism grounds the Ford narrative in the evolutionary, transcendentalism through technology visions of Whitman. By naming Ford a “poet industrialist,” Burroughs credits him with advancing progress and creating access for the individual to natural settings. Inasmuch as Burroughs argues that progress will someday transform dirty industrialization into clean technology and that access to nature will teach the populace to appreciate such essences, he affirms Ford’s narrative of modernity.

As James Rood Doolittle put it, Ford’s story “may be truly called the ‘Romance of the Automobile Industry’” (76). Doolittle is casting romance here as the epic struggle

of a heroic visionary dragging civilization into the modern era. However, the irony is that Ford's promotions of automobility are based on nostalgic and romantic notions of America, machines, nature, and personal freedom. In representing this romance, Ford represents many automobile interests in the nation. Among the principal selling points of all makes of automobiles at the time is that the car allows its driver to get out into America's countrysides. For example, an Oldsmobile advertisement published in *Collier's*, November 20, 1915 (Figure 3.5) depicts a young couple on an autumn picnic. The frame of the drawing that places the couple on a country picnic is an etching depicting a picturesque, bucolic countryside. The text emphasizes the engineering qualities of the vehicle, while the two images show the machine's symbolic possibilities. Also a July 29, 1916 advertisement (Figure 6) shows a woman driving with reveling friends through a green mountain region (25). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Ford, the Model T, and the Ford Motor Company embodied modernist ideals of liberation through technology, and the Ford brand through its popularization of the narratives of progress, freedom, and access to clean, pastoral locales promoted and defined new cultural relationships to national space.

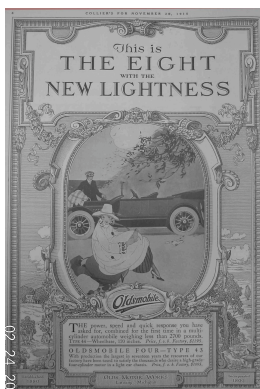


Figure 3.5: Oldsmobile Ad in *Collier's* Nov 20, 1915 (10). Figure 3.6: Briscoe Ad in *Colliers* July 29, 1916 (25).

Promoting Automobility Promoting Progress

The Progressive Era represents the period during which the automobility revolution took hold and Americans would struggle to understand, explain, and rationalize a new relationship to American space through automobility. This understanding would lead to new social formations and lifeways like the roadside diner, the motel, auto dating and courtship rituals, the family vacation and so forth, as well as new cultural forms like advertising rhetoric, the road map, new road and car songs, and new genres like American road literature. Through these cultural products the American public made sense of the possibilities of the new geographic experience represented in automobility. While numerous figures labored to formulate the narratives defining the new geography, the activities of Henry Joy and Henry Ford stand out for their clear embodiment of the era's geographic narratives and for their decisive early impact.

The Lincoln Highway, though never actually completed, remained in the public consciousness well into the mid twentieth century. Once Route 30 was built, during the twenties, it continued to be popularly known as Lincoln Way.¹⁰⁵ A radio program during the thirties entitled "The Lincoln Highway" dramatized events throughout America, putatively taking place at locations along the famous road, and popularized the lyric, "Hey there, neighbor, going my way, / East or west on the Lincoln Highway."¹⁰⁶ In his 1952 reminiscence of the early years of automobility, Bellamy Partridge would title his

¹⁰⁵ With the Townsend Act, the Bureau of Public Roads was now able to control national highway policy. The head of the department, T. H. MacDonald, elected to eliminate the named roads tradition in favor of the clearer, more efficient numbering system. MacDonald met with strident resistance to this plan, but bullied his plan through. Many held to the popular names anyway. See Tom Lewis's *Divided Highways* (18-19) also see Hokanson (108-9).

¹⁰⁶ Drake Hokanson publishes excerpts from the Lincoln Highway radio Show in his book, *The Lincoln Highway* (128-30).

chapter on his first cross continental excursion “The Lincoln Highway” even though, as he acknowledges, the road at the time of his drive was only a rumor. Referencing Whitman’s “Passage to India” in “A Vision Called Lincoln in India” (1927), Vachel Lindsay describes a conversation with an prophetic ancient mariner figure who links America’s East and West to the Far East on “New Highways going through!” Springfield, Illinois. Even though the Lincoln Highway does not run through Springfield, Lindsay implicitly associates Springfield with the Lincoln Highway through his rambling poetic figures. Similarly, a 1946 middle school textbook opens with a chapter on the globe, but the second chapter swoops down into the middle of Manhattan and then proceeds “Across the United States on the Lincoln Highway” (9), implying, like Lindsay, that the famous road is a platform first for America’s exploration of itself and then the larger world.

As for Ford, the brand’s impact is identifiable in the many reminiscences of the Model T, some fond and others sharply critical. Gertrude Stein would write about her beloved Model Ts in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Everybody’s Autobiography*. Stein’s partner, Alice Toklas, would also write favorably, if humorously, of her and Stein’s experiences with their two Model Ts in *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*. Sinclair Lewis’s eponymous *Babbitt* so internalized the relationship to the Ford car that while sleeping “he was pierced by the familiar and irritating rattle of someone cranking a Ford” and sympathetically “cranked with the unseen driver, with him waited through the taut hours for the roar of the starting engine, with him agonized as the roar ceased. . . Not until the rising voice of the motor told him that the Ford was moving was he released from the panting tension” (3). Despite the negative association here, the car is a distinct

positive when Babbitt imagines it as himself as a heroic figure and the machine as a means of romantic escape from the pressures of his life. In his modernist epic poem, “The Bridge,” Hart Crane attributes the leap of macadam “from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate” in part to the work of “Thomas a Ediford” and, not insignificantly, credits Whitman with defining America’s modern geographic vision. John Steinbeck recalled fondly his first car, a Model T of course: “I think I loved that car more than any I have ever had. It understood me. It had an intelligence not exactly malicious, but it did love a practical joke. . . I called it IT” (147). Steinbeck humorously narrates the difficulties in keeping IT running, contradicting Ford’s time to spend in open spaces narrative, but the symbolism of personal liberator remains in Steinbeck’s essay. E. B. White would eulogize the Model T, writing, “The last Model T was built in 1927, and the car is fading from what scholars call the American scene—which is an understatement, because to a few million people who grew up with it, the old Ford practically *was* the American scene” (White’s emphasis 9). Ironically criticizing Ford’s significance in his *U.S.A.* trilogy, John Dos Passos would assert, “Good Roads had followed the narrow ruts made in the mud by the Model T. The great automotive boom was on” (812). Likewise, Alfred Kreymborg, lampooning the language of newspaper headlines by turning it into verse, wrote “MORE FOLK OWN FORD CARS THAN FOLK WHO CAN’T” (16).¹⁰⁷ These writers, looking back, register the impact of the Ford brand and the narratives of personal liberation and escape associated with it.

¹⁰⁷ See The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook. Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. E. B. White “From Sea to Shining Sea” and “Farewell to the Model T.” The Dos Passos quote is taken from *The Big Money* (812). Kreymborg’s line is cited from “The Latest Headlines” in the *New Masses*, 1928 (16).

In short, the Lincoln Highway and the Ford brand so effectively promoted automobility that in the years after the famous highway and the cherished car were mothballed, they were held onto in the national memory as representative of those early years, and the ideas that this road and this car represented sustained in later cultural products. Personal mobility, the interlacing of all the places of the nation, progress, democracy, commerce and economy, access to picturesque nature, “Seeing America First,” these narratives remained in the cultural memory because the Lincoln Highway and the Model T remained. More importantly, however, Lincoln Way and Ford contributed to the Federal Road Acts of 1916 and 1921, and so in concrete ways accelerated the transformation of American geographic life, making the echoes of these cultural narratives of national geography possible.

CHAPTER 4

OPENING THE ROAD: GEOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY IN THE PRESCRIPTIVE ROAD TRAVEL BOOKS OF EFFIE GLADDING PRICE, EMILY POST, AND A. L. WESTGARD

Paralleling the promotional efforts of the Good Roads Movement and the automobile industry, a new form of prescriptive travel writing developed during the first decades of the twentieth century, which contributed to the production of the geography of automobility by representing distance motoring as entirely possible and thoroughly rewarding. Drawing on nineteenth-century travel writing models like Edith Wharton's *Motor Flight Through France*, Mark Twain's *Roughing It* and *Innocents Abroad*, and Henry James notable *The American Scene*, as well as Karl Baedeker's thorough guidebooks, this genre folded essential travel information in with narratives of real travel experience; they are part how-to guides and part documentaries which endeavor to show that the call of America's automobile road was stronger than any reason to stay home or travel by train.¹⁰⁸ Whereas promotional publications like those of the named trail

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Alan Melton observes in *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism* that "no other genre of American Literature enjoyed a greater popularity or a more enduring prominence in the nineteenth century than travel writing" (16), because writers and readers of the genre used it to learn about themselves and the successes and failures of societies (18). Similarly, in *Return Passages: Great American Travel Writing, 1780-1910*, Larzer Ziff observes, "the history of the genre of American travel writing is tied to the authorial search for completeness that the young nation could not furnish" (15). Playing into this trope, early automobile travel writing was no different, using exploration of national spaces as an occasion to parallel self discovery with a sense of national progress. Helen Carr notes in "Modernism and Travel" that Edith Wharton led a generation in realizing that with Baedeker authoritatively describing every famous church

associations and the automotive industry generally argued explicitly for investments in the development of automobility, prescriptive road writing put the propaganda in the back seat and stressed the immediate rewards (and the challenges) of distance motoring. Written for an audience considering or interested in distance motoring, these books combined dissertations on equipment, wardrobe, proper behavior, and what to expect along the route with travel journal narratives of modest literary ambition, emphasizing amusing anecdotes and impressions of places. These narratives reflect the real conditions of automobiling at the time, in particular the almost total absence of infrastructure for cars and tourists alike in many places. Because of their documentary quality, these books can be read as first-hand, amateur geographies of America which by implicitly promoting motoring in their literary depictions of the country actively redefined for their readership new possibilities of relating to the spaces and places of the nation. While demonstrating with documentary narrative and photography the geography of the continent opened by the automobile, this genre fleshed out a new chronotope of American geographic narrative, provided essential information for tourists, developed a civic ethos of the road, catalogued the rewards of cross country motoring, campaigned for the development of broader automobility infrastructures, played on fantasies of contact with diverse romanticized regional character types, and narrated appreciation of the national

and statue for the burgeoning mass tourism industry, travel writers needed to locate new approaches (79). In some ways, this is true of Price, Post, and Westgard as they seek out ways to make their texts interesting, but by and large these texts more reflect conventional nineteenth-century travel tropes. As for repeating nineteenth century trends, Sidonie Smith comments in *Moving Lives: Twentieth Century Women's Travel Writing* that the genre is fundamentally masculinist in outlook, and that women travel writers have struggled under this rubric as they became more mobile in the twentieth century. Certainly Price and Post, both escorted women travelers, fail to see their own rehearsing of dominant Western masculinist worldview as damaging, and so uncritically repeat many of the expected tropes of the established travel writing genre. One final note, though Wharton's *A Motor-Flight Through France* was published in 1908 it is written on the nineteenth-century guidebook model of travel writing, cataloging interesting sites of aesthetic and/or historic interest and descriptions of accommodations and cuisine.

picturesque. This chapter analyzes prescriptive road travel books by Effie Gladding Price, Emily Post, and Anthon L. Westgard as exemplary of the manner in which this mode of travel writing defined and encouraged the production of America's automobile geography.

Lincolnway through the Civil Garden: Effie Gladding Price Across the Continent

In *Across the Continent by the Lincoln Highway*, 1915, Effie Gladding Price recounts the drive taken with her husband in 1914 from San Francisco to New York City with extended tours of California and Virginia bookending the trip.¹⁰⁹ The book is structured as a catalogue of the day to day itinerary of the trip augmented with depictions of Price's impressions of cities, regional personality types, and the natural environment and agriculture. Her narrative plays up the history, patriotism, and democracy of transcontinental travel, while reclaiming and redefining glorified, nineteenth-century modes of travel by associating her and her husband's journey with those of idealized pioneers and gypsies. Directing her narrative at an audience considering transcontinental motoring, she spends much time describing the sights, facilities, and accommodations that travelers might expect to find. These details produce a chronotope of the tourist's experience of America. Crucially, she asserts that the unwritten rule of the road is that fellow travelers share information, and thus her book provides useful tips to tourists who might follow her. Her book is also an amateur geography of the nation in 1914, stressing

¹⁰⁹ This was the last leg of a three year round-the-world trip.

various aspects of American life along her favorite famous highway. This detailed and often prosaic geographic writing is supported by the notion that Americans need to know America and, implicitly, that such knowledge is best achieved by touring in an automobile. Thus, *Across the Continent* represents the nation as open for exploration by citizens in automobiles and works to define a new national geography by favoring concerns like knowledge of country, good citizenship, access to nature, appreciation of national picturesque, and automobility. By applying popular received narratives about the nation like the America as garden metaphor, access to the “real” America promulgated in popular Realist and Local Color fiction, the romantic notion of the road as a free and open democratic space for neighborly exchange, the road as space for adventure, and the patriotism of seeing the country, Price casts cross country motoring as familiar and worthwhile despite its challenges.

For Price the unwritten rule of the road is that fellow travelers must look out for one another and share information, and this corporate citizen idealism is the foundation of the book. She explains, the “unwritten rule of the open road. . . [is] that the traveler shall tell his fellow traveler of places at which to halt and places to avoid” (257). Illustrating the ethos by which fellow travelers watch out for one another, she relates an incident when she accidentally left her letter case behind, and after turning around to go back and try to find it, she and her husband were hailed by a passing motorist who had come upon the lost item and thought to follow along the same route in the hopes of returning it. In another illustration of this, the Price’s travel alongside a “commercial man” across the Great American Desert in order to meet any obstacles together, a plan that pays off for Mr. N when he ran into motor trouble and is assisted along by the Prices despite his

protestations that they should leave him. For Price these sorts of friendly encounters and mutual kindnesses make up the pleasure of motor travel and illustrate the ethos of mutual respect, civility, and support that travelers must share. She rejoices, “This is part of the charm of the open road, these salutations and this jolly passing exchange of sympathy, not between two ships that pass in the night, but between two parties who enjoy the air and the open, and who are one in gypsy spirit” (38).

Crucially, *Across the Continent* serves this ethos by being a travel manual. For this reason Price conscientiously records the quality of accommodations, cities, and road conditions throughout their trip so that other travelers may know what they should expect in making a similar journey. Aiming to be as useful as possible, she characterizes furnishings, décor, architecture, and cuisine at the hotels they visit. She writes, for instance, that The Mission Inn at Riverside, California is a particularly interesting combination of hotel, curio shop, cathedral, and place of recreation (77). Likewise, the cities they pass through along the way earn comment and act as punctuation for the quantity of physical space through which they pass in between. Sharing with her readers her impressions of the cities she sees provides insight for tourists and homebodies alike to know more of their country. As for road conditions, she grants that occasionally on their route they encountered impassible mud, but she assures her readers that they were never unable to find assistance. She warns about the dangers of chuckholes dug by prairie dogs, and deep runnels caused by watershed in the plains, and she records the changing character of the road all along the way, noting some bad spots where it got particularly muddy after a rain. Yet, she assures her readers that nowhere was the road utterly

impassable, and she hastens to affirm that the opportunity to witness America's diverse local cultures outweighs any difficulties.

Despite Price's optimism, not every aspect of their trip was easy, comfortable, or accommodating. In the generally unsettled places where hotels and inns were scarce, the Prices found that "ranch houses are very hospitable and are willing to take the place of a hotel so far as they are able" (84). Where facilities were nonexistent, she justifies acceptance of paucity of customary tourist accommodations as part of "seeing our country under all sorts of conditions" (168). She offers this point in rebuttal of the assumptions of some readers who would neglect to explore the nation on the grounds that provincial accommodations would be intolerable. This point supports her presumption that knowing the nation is of greater benefit to the individual than convenient comfort. Yet, idealism does not forgive, for her, either deliberately or negligently poor service from professional hotels, and although in general she withholds negative commentary on specific places, she instead suggests that hoteliers who do not provide good service will quickly lose business to proprietors who do because the rule of the road is that tourists share information.

As part of her reporting on the general infrastructure and accommodations of the road, along the way Price assiduously comments on signage and monuments of touristic interest (Figure 4.1). She laments, for instance, the "shabby, indifferent wooden signs" that mark state boundaries, looking as though they were thrown up overnight (157 and 183). Later, she celebrates and photographs a sign that marks the halfway point between New York and San Francisco, prompting the woman who lives in the farm house across the way to comment that every motorist stops at the sign. This sign is the sort that, she

predicts, the Lincoln Highway will in time bring along its length. Throughout, she exults at the sight of the red white and blue markings that indicate the route of the Lincoln Highway, “the old road with the new name which runs from ocean to ocean and which is destined to be one of the most famous highways of the world” (108). New signs augur,



Figure 4.6: Price's photograph of a representative Lincoln Highway sign (174).

in her eyes, prosperity for the merchants and proprietors all along the highway, and the rest of the country too for that matter. Yet Price further implies that signage will represent nationwide bonds of friendship and mutual concern. For example, along with the state boundary signs, Price opines, “some day the [Continental] Divide will be marked upon the Lincoln Highway by a monument, and the traveler will have a satisfactory outward expression of the thoughts that fill his heart” (177). In a further illustration, she remarks on a monument erected for General Braddock and a DAR commemoration of the Nemaquin Trail. According to Price, signs and monuments like these two express to travelers the community’s belief that important sites should be marked in order to provide a sense of camaraderie for visitors. Welcoming, expressive, and useful signage, though not common, should be, she believes, and where already present it makes the experience

all the more pleasant and instructive for the auto traveler. Implicitly, signage makes national space legible for the passing tourist; thus, for one to know her nation, Price indicates, the roads must be marked, and marking the roads has the added benefit of registering and contributing to national progress.

Additionally, Price is concerned to remark on her impressions of the natural environments, the flora, and the fauna she saw along the road. In these descriptions she represents the nation as a vast garden of varying environments where exploration has a distinctly positive impact on visitors.¹¹⁰ California in the spring is for her like a beautiful and bountiful garden, ideal for motoring. Yosemite inspires hiking, she suggests, and should be approached along the Wawona road to Inspiration Point in order to get the the most picturesque impressions (99-101). In Nevada, Price experiences the topographic representations on her map as a series of short mountain ranges constantly rising through barren passes to descend into low valleys, and driving it she came to “completely understand how the desert casts a spell over cattlemen and sheepmen so that they love it and its freedom and are continually drawn back to it” the way urbanites are drawn to the lights of the city (138). Ten miles beyond Medicine Bow, Wyoming, the terrain begins to change: “the grey and brown desert [turned] into fine rolling uplands dotted with new homes of homesteaders and green with the precious water of irrigation” (174). “We had left our beloved desert behind us and were in rolling grass and grain country,” she exclaims (181). Allowing a fellow traveler to characterize the experience of seeing

¹¹⁰ Leo Marx outlines the trope of locating industrial products and production in America’s natural settings in nineteenth-century art and literature in *The Machine in the Garden*. In *The Lay of the Land* Annette Kolodney identifies the association between garden imagery and idealizations of the feminine body in writing about landscape by men, arguing that such visions are linked to America’s pernicious relationships to national space. In *Virgin Land* Henry Nash Smith charts garden imagery in the mythologies of the American West.

America's natural environments, Price records the remark of one woman they had encountered along the road who says, "I felt as if everything bad in me was swept clear out of me when I first looked at this wonderful view" (182). Rehearsing picturesque and sublime landscape aesthetics of American romantics from Henry David Thoreau to the Hudson River school of landscape painters, William Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman, and John Burroughs, Price suggests that intimate contact with the majestic environments of the American continent has a transformative impact which rewards the occasional inconveniences and discomforts of cross country motoring.

As they travel and the climate and natural environments change, so does the flora, fauna, and agriculture, and Price diligently keeps a running tally of such observations for her readers. From the car she sees along the roadside the great sequoia of California, wild yucca, Matilija poppies, desert flowers, blue and white flowers of Colorado. In Virginia she notes, "we begin to see clumps of pine trees from time to time. The oak trees of the forest are very large, many of them of noble height. The juniper trees are in blossom, their blue green berries making them look as if they wore an exquisite blue-green veil. In Virginia, one is everywhere impressed by the richness and luxuriance of the foliage" (233). As for the fauna, in the Carmel Valley in California, "a bobcat came out from the forest and trotted calmly in front of us" (33). Occasionally escaping from their tires were the hundreds of prairie dogs. "Sometimes we saw a coyote, usually in the early morning or late afternoon," she reports. They see also "a herd of several hundred wild horses feeding on the great plain" (146). In the same way, noting the methods and manners of agriculture she visits the citrus tree orchards of California to see "a big packing house" where "dark eyed Sicilians, alert and prosperous, [were] sorting, cleaning, and packing

the lemons.” In Wyoming, Price learns of the conflicts that crop up between cattle and sheep ranchers over grazing lands, explaining, “Cattle will not feed. . . where sheep have fed, as the sheep tear up the earth and also graze very closely” (163). In the wheat fields of Nebraska, she comments, “we were seeing the bread of the nation.” In Pennsylvania, Price remarks that every year more and more forest is cleared for the planting of orchards because “The soil and the climate are most admirably adapted to the growing of fruit” (218). In Utah, Price lauds the opportunity that motoring provides to come into “contact with real ranch life.” This idea of contact with the real encompasses the orchards of the East and West coasts and indeed all of the nature, life, and industry in between, and the record of each facet contributes to the portrait of the nation as a great garden that Price develops. The opportunity to see America’s nature and agriculture rewards the tourist, she suggests, and acquiring first hand knowledge of this bountiful garden is shown to be pleasurable, edifying, and accessible by motorcar.

Making a careful record of the different people she meets, Price attributes the bounty and prosperity she observes to the people she encounters along the way. In Nevada, Price meets two women driving a Ford. “They looked like women of the plains, perfectly able to care for themselves and to meet emergencies,” she reports; “they had food supplies with them, and two dogs” (134). Later Price and her husband are helped out of a mud hole by a settler living in a tent with his wife and child while he busily clearing the land. He brags that within the year he would have the land cleared, a well dug, and if the county wouldn’t do it he would build a bridge over the stream that had caused the impassable mud hole (136-7). They encounter a covered wagon on their way to Boulder, and having had a breakdown Price is picked up and carried along by the family. Not

homesteaders, surprisingly, this is a family returning home from a holiday. The grandfather of the group imposes upon Price that he had participated in miners' strikes and had been incarcerated for doing so. His son exclaims, "We're poor but we're gentlemen still. We wouldn't be slaves to Rockefeller." Put that in your book, the grandfather goads. Price wonders parenthetically, "how did he know I was writing a book?" (187). Price rarely comments on these encounters, yet the mere reporting speaks volumes. The inclusion of these encounters in the narrative implies an ethos of greeting the people and character types of America on their own terms. There is a democratic spirit implied in Price's fair-minded, non-editorialized reportage on the people she meets along the road. Her record of these road encounters illustrates her romantic celebrations of all travelers and citizens and recalls Whitman's chronotope celebrating the democratic and unifying spirit of the open road.

At the end of the journey, Price concludes:

The Lincoln Highway is not as yet a road for those motorists who wish only luxurious hotels, frequent stops, and all the cushioned comfort of the much-traveled main roads of the favorite tourist parts of Europe. It is, however, perfectly practicable in its entire length of 3200 miles, and rich in interest and charm for those who care for what it has to give. (261)

What it has to give, obviously, are the very things Price records in her book, which then serves as both an inducement and a guide to what to look for and, significantly, how to interpret it. Her conclusion is that this form of touring is ideal for strenuous-living Americans, but perhaps not for the more effete. "We resolved at the outset," Price explains, "to take the days and the roads as they came; not looking for luxury and well satisfied with simplicity. It is surprising how one is fortified for the vicissitudes of the road by such a deliberate attitude of mind" (261). The advice suggests that the way to

properly set out to see and understand America is to take it as it comes. Such an attitude has its benefits, at least for Price's upper-class audience. The novelty of foregoing luxuries in favor of seeing first hand the farms and ranches of the nation, Price casts as pleasurable and diverting. This is real life, she suggests, and the motor trip provides access to it for those willing to accept it. Such a "deliberate attitude of mind" advances political acceptance of the national population as it really is. It overlooks the barriers that keep members of distinct classes separate and embraces the road as free and open to the entirety of the public, the effete as well as the common: "The friends of the Open Road are ours; the homesteader in his white canopied prairie schooner, the cattleman on his pony, the passing fellow motorist, the ranchman at his farmhouse door, the country inn-keeper hospitably speeding us on our way" (ix). Not only does this echo Whitman's "Song of the Open Road," building a chronotope of America as an experiential continent, it is the principle of seeing America first, and Price's book is timed perfectly for the movement.¹¹¹ Just as the automobile was becoming a reliable and effective means of travel, travel abroad was closed off contributing to a marked increase in transcontinental motor travel in the summer of 1915. Thus, Price's book, published in 1915, captures much of the motorist and See-America-First sentiment contributing to the early production of automobility.

¹¹¹ The See America First campaign has its roots in tourist advertising for vacations by rail to the West. However, with the escalation of the First World War in Europe, wealthy American tourists, like the Prices who normally would have traveled abroad, were compelled to find domestic travel entertainments. The spike in motor tourism in the summer of 1915 is also attributable to the promotional work of the Good Roads Movement, and in particular the Lincoln Highway, which was originally meant to lead tourists to the Pan Pacific Expo of 1915. Henry Joy had casually observed that there were more people traveling the Lincoln Highway in 1915 than there had been in 1913. Richard Weingroff provides a succinct history of this increase in motor tourist traffic: "The National Old Trails Road: See America First in 1915." Marguerite Shaffer lucidly articulates the national concerns and considerations behind seeing America first in her excellent history of the movement.

Looking back on her trip, she would write that America had seemed to be “tilled a garden, watered by the hoarded and guarded streams from the everlasting hills” (vii). She reflects, “we have a new conception of our great country; her vastness, her varied scenery, her prosperity, her happiness, her boundless resources, her immense possibilities, her kindness and hopefulness. We are bound to her by a thousand new ties of acquaintance, of association, and of pride” (ix). Price’s new conception, and the new sense of geography it represents, is fundamentally based on automobility. “The Lincoln Highway,” she asserts, “is already what it was intended to be, a golden road of pleasure and usefulness, fitly dedicated, and destined to inspire a great patriotism and to honor a great patriot” (ix). Neither Whitman nor Joy could have said it better.

Charting the Distance of Personal Comfort: Emily Post by Motorcar to the Golden Gate

In 1917, Emily Post would publish her record of the transcontinental trip she had undertaken in 1915 with her son at the wheel and her cousin buried under luggage in the tonneau—*By Motor to the Golden Gate*. Post and her companions, like so many in the summer of 1915, were headed for the Pan American Exposition in San Francisco. In the face of the prejudices of her sophisticated New York Society circle that such a trip was not only impossible for a woman like herself but would prove to be impossibly dreary and dull, Post was steadfast in her determination to attempt the journey. Reflecting the promotional work of automobility enthusiasts, she was, she says, inspired by “the

advertisements!” (2). Post had the additional motivation of having been contracted to write a travel essay for *Collier's* in which she was to determine how far west one could travel *comfortably*.¹¹² Thus, based on the assumptions of her social set Post's book answers whether cross country motor travel is possible and worthwhile for someone of her class and distinction. The specific tastes of her high class Eastern audience are inflected in Post's evaluations of accommodations, Western cities, and indeed everything she observes along the road, creating a chronotope of the tourist's experience that is deliberately centered on social-class consciousness. Reflecting popular mythologies, she narrates the pleasure she takes in seeing “real cowboys” and “real Indians” out West. Nevertheless, Post's travelogue very delicately and sophisticatedly dramatizes her recalibration of Eastern prejudices by narrating her embrace and celebration of authentic experience and contact with the larger nation. Post's book is neither as democratic as Price's, nor is it as adventurous as Westgard's, and while she pays lip service to the refined tastes and standards of the East, *By Motor to the Golden Gate* narrates Post's own mitigated but ultimately positive personal transformation which putatively results from driving through America.

Prior to setting out, Post is deliberately optimistic about the trip's prospects. In the face of the clerk at the auto club's dissuasions, Post maintains her determination to drive the continent. He tries to talk her into a nice, easy tour of New England, but she is resolute, saying, “But. . . San Francisco is where I am going.” He replies, “if you *must*

¹¹² According to Jane Lancaster, *Collier's* was “heavily dependent on automobile advertising” (3). As such, they published in January of 1915 a double issue devoted to the Automobile (Some of the articles cited as promotional material in Chapter 3 are taken from that issue). Post wrote three articles for *Collier's* entitled “By Motor to the Fair,” which appeared in the Sept 4, 11, and 18 issues. I focus on the book *By Motor to the Golden Gate* in this chapter because it emphasizes prescribing motor travel more than deliberately promoting it. The connections between promotional and prescriptive writing are, nevertheless, abundant.

cross the continent, there is the Lincoln Highway!” (Post’s emphasis 5). Later, while researching maps for a possible route, she runs into a friend with more cross-continent experience than herself. To Post’s queries for the best road to California, the sage older lady replies succinctly, “The Union Pacific.” When Post clarifies that she means motor road, the woman answers, “Motor road to California. . . There isn’t any.” Post persists, claiming she has read the accounts of hundreds who have made the trip, but her interlocutor insists that a woman like her couldn’t live through the ordeal. When Post suggests the Lincoln Highway, which is shown on maps to go straight across, the woman answers, “In an imaginary line like the equator! . . . maybe if they ever build macadam and put up good hotels—but even then it would be deadly dull” (6-8). Representing the opinion of her circle, Post reports that “the majority looked upon our undertaking with typical New York apathy: ‘Why do anything so dreary?’” (1). The book narrates the attempt to find and answer to this question.

Answering why drive the continent, *By Motor to the Golden Gate* is foremost a prescriptive guide, outlining what one ought to consider if making such a journey. The anecdotes of the book narrate descriptions of what to bring, what to wear, where to stay, and what to expect upon arrival in various places. For instance, Post repeatedly narrates the problems her group had with packing. When her group sets out, it is clear that neither they nor anyone of their acquaintance is much familiar with the necessities of such a trip. One friend gave them a silver, enamelware, and glass picnic set because she couldn’t bear the idea of her “starving in the desert” (12). Inexperienced and unsure Post and her companions pack everything, but as they travel and learn they adjust their equipment to meet only the specific needs of motoring. At the end of the book, Post provides a full

dissertation on useful fashion tips for distance motor tours, including pointers on lace veils, dusters, goggles, and dresses that pack well yet look fashionable at meals. Moreover, Post compels her son to write up a report on what the motorist should expect and prepare for in mechanical terms. They had taken a low slung European car, and thus he concludes that the best type of automobile is American made, so that parts can be had, and has a high clearance, so as not to hang up on the road. Finally, Post includes hand drawn maps with detailed mileage notes and a daily budget to assist readers in planning their own motor trips (Figure 4.2).¹¹³

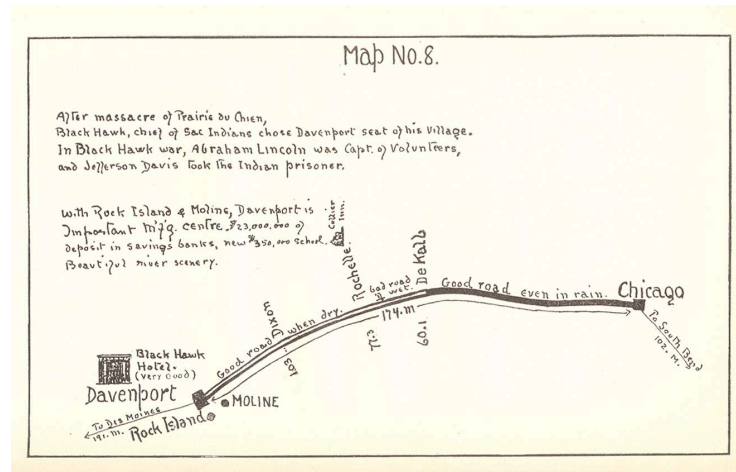


Figure 4.7: Post's drawing of the road from Chicago to Davenport. Note the clear demarcation of the Black Hawk Hotel.

So too, Post provides information for the refined tourist as to what to expect in terms of accommodations and urban points of interest. While apparently the legends in

¹¹³ A review in the *Independent*, June 5, 1916, states, “The journey as described consists mainly of runs from one hotel to the next, and the book has practical value in that it tells precisely what you are to expect in each place; adds daily expense records; maps each days run, for the Lincoln Highway is still “like the equator”; and sound advice as to the car to use and what to put in it. But one fancies that the folk who have done this trip less luxuriously, camping out most of the nights instead of one, made up in fun and interest what they lost in creature comforts” (398). This assessment of her book exposes Post’s finicky obsessions with decorum and taste that mark her book as addressed to her social class.

the East were that no tolerable hotel existed in the West, Post discovers, quite to the contrary, quality accommodations in Buffalo and Cleveland. At Chicago, she finds, “America’s most perfect hotel” (46). She is surprised to learn that the city and hotel of North Platte, Nebraska is, contrary to the fictions, not a roaring riotous frontier town, but “self respecting and above reproach” (109). Post was occasionally disappointed, and occasionally incommoded, but she found that on the heels of commercial travelers by and large the great West is catching up with Eastern ideals of service. She would have the food, especially in the more remote places, to have more variety and to be more delicate, but she concedes that they never went hungry. Finally, with generally acceptable standards of service and dining, Post assesses hotels based on the architecture and decorative style, the elements of which she evaluates for her readers discerningly (Figure 4.3). As for the urban scenery, Post offers observations and impressions of all their major stops. Cleveland “has wide, roomy streets with splendid lawns and trees and houses” (33). Chicago was like a person met once and briefly, but toward whom one feels a distinct liking and attraction (52). She concludes with disfavor that “every town through the Middle West seems to have a little grill of brick paved streets; a splendid post-office building of stone or brick or marble; a court-house, but of an older period generally; and one or two moving picture houses; two or three important-looking dry-goods stores, and some sort of hotel” (98). These impressions and observations serve the dual purpose of describing places for her Eastern audience, who may or may not follow her in her tour, and serving as part of a body of evidence answering why someone might want to drive across country, and in the process she defines a new, evolving sense of national space.

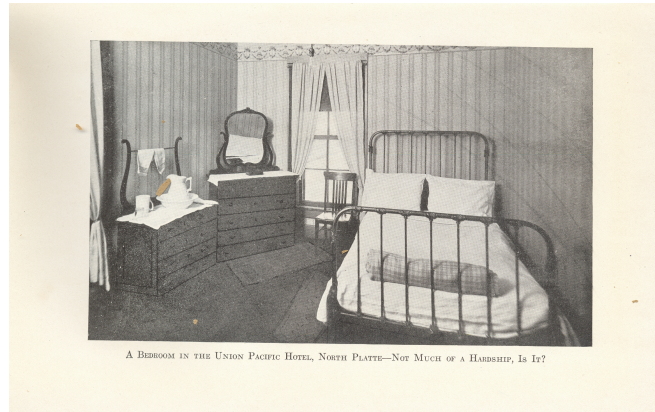


Figure 4.3: Images of the Mission Inn in Riverside California, which Price also enjoyed, and a room in the Union Hotel in North Platte. The photographs document for her readers the style and amenities of the various hotels.

Post, however, attempts to separate her book from the common round of promotional writing and tour guides with which she and her audience are obviously already familiar by insisting that “we were going solely for pleasure, which to us meant a certain degree of comfort, and not to advertise the endurance of a special make of tires. Nor had we any intention of trying to prove that motoring in America is delightful if we should find it was not. As for breaking records—that was the last thing we wanted to attempt” (2). Distinguishing her book on this basis serves a double purpose and creates a problem. She exposes here the critical formula that balances novel entertainments against ease of travel to determine both the worthiness of the trip and the singularity of her book. Yet, the risk is that if the trip is uninteresting she will hardly be able to write well about it.

A disappointing incident in a restaurant where the service, the décor, and the food were all atrocious highlights her narrativization of this formula. Post takes the dreadful restaurant experience philosophically. “It is just such experiences and disappointments,” she reflects, “that make the high spots of a whole motor trip when looking back upon it.” Identifying her philosophy of travel, she decides it is the troubles and misadventures of the road that make for the fondest memories. “In motoring, as in life,” she asserts “since trouble gives character, obstacles and misadventures are really necessary to give the *trip* character” (Post’s emphasis 44). Thus, though comfort is key for a person of distinction on holiday, she soberly indicates that it is not the only consideration. Certain novelties, even distasteful ones, should be accepted as part of the fun. Nevertheless, rolling into Chicago she worries to her cousin, “Suppose so little happens that there will be nothing to write about? No one wants descriptions of scenery or too many details of directions as to roads or hotels, and supposing that is all we know?” Celia suggests that she could make things up, but they quickly agree that this will not do because it would be unbelievable. Then Celia has an inspiration; she exclaims, “We could stop over in little places and pass those we mean to stop—and we can in many ways make ourselves uncomfortable, if you think it necessary for interesting material” (45). Post does not respond to this suggestion, but leaves it to hang as she describes the “beautiful, welcoming entrance to Chicago.” The obvious conclusion to be inferred is that if the trip has character, then her book on the trip will surely have character as well, and character is after all what makes a trip or a book memorable. Post has nothing to worry about of course, because there is plenty of discomfort and misadventure waiting west of Chicago, and this fact exposes the irony of the quip. This little dialogue is not an expression of worry but a self aware attempt at

suspense meant to pique her reader's wonder as to what adventures will give this trip character and/or how much character Post and her companions will be able to endure.

One of the things which would give Post's narrative character would be interesting characters. Post's contemporary, Hugo Taussig, complained in his privately printed *Retracing the Pioneers from West to East in An Automobile*, 1910, "The truth is, that crossing the American continent affords one but little variety of incidence." His complaint is that the characters one would hope to find on such a trip, 49ers and Indians for instance, have been entirely eliminated. The problem is that the people and places of the American continent are entirely dull because modernization has standardized everything. Post has similar laments. Worrying over the absence of the characters of literature of the American West, she queries, "Where oh where is the West that easterners dream of—the West of Bret Harte's stories, the west depicted in the moving pictures? Are the scenes no longer to be found except in the pages of a book or on a cinematographic screen? We have gone half the distance across the continent and all this while we might be anywhere at home" (99). Post, like Taussig, yearns for a more adventuresome experience that brings her face to face with an American exotic.¹¹⁴ Evidently one original desire in taking this trip was to confirm certain romantic preconceptions about the West. She wanted to go West to see real Cowboys, Indians, and Frontiersmen, versions of which had filled her leisure time literature and cinema. She doesn't want the Western imitations of the East; she wants to experience the "real West"

¹¹⁴ Reflecting on the rise of American consumerism paralleling the rise of mass tourism, Andrew Gross argues in "Theodore Dreiser and Emily Post: The Early Road Book as an Economic and Political Form" that early motorists "found themselves confronted by the standardized landscape their own mobility helped create. . . In this homogenized landscape, regional differences disappeared to be replaced by differences in product packaging and availability." Post is in these passages seeking a prepackaged and familiarly diverting exotic. She and Taussig both blithely overlook the discrimination and injustices of such thinking.

with which the East is familiar with from seeing Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show and reading Western novels like Owen Wister's *The Virginian*.¹¹⁵

However, Post is not disappointed in the end; she only sought her Western exotic too soon. Later she has the good fortune to see a family crossing the landscape in a prairie schooner: "exactly like a scene in the moving pictures, we passed three of the white topped wagons, their hoods rocking and gleaming in the sun" (136). A little further along they see real cowboys driving a herd, and once they make the Southwest she has numerous encounters with Native Americans of different tribes (Figure 4.4). In one occurrence, while analyzing the street theater put on for stopping rail tourists, Post

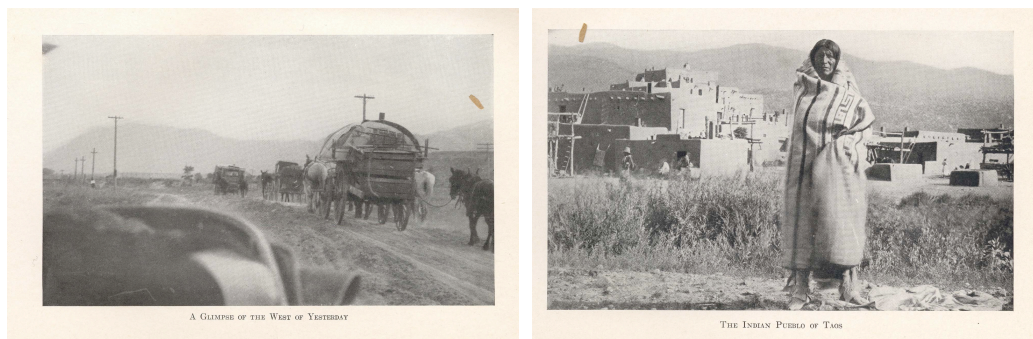


Figure 4.4: Post's photographs of a wagon train and a "real Indian," documenting the "real West."

reports that the "Old Squaws" line up to sell their goods, chanting "Tain cent!" at the tourists (161). She further describes some performances of native dances which, also put

¹¹⁵ Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West show was one of the most popular attractions at the Columbian Exposition, and represents a counterpoint to Frederick Jackson Turner and Louis Sullivan's idealization of the West with which the age of automobility was kicked off in 1893. Marguerite Shaffer argues in "The West Plays West': Western Tourism and the Landscape of Leisure" that with the rise of modern consumer culture "the mythic frontier provided the basis for a landscape of leisure that reshaped spaces and places throughout the American West both physically and symbolically" (376).

on for tourists, are “frankly a vaudeville performance of Indian dancing and singing” (162). Post is able to observe the theater of much of this because she is motoring and therefore able to witness the spectacles organized for the scheduled train tourists. Yet she is nevertheless unable to recognize that the preconceptions which shade her own judgments are also produced by glorified literature and blended with supposedly benign racism. Regardless of the mythologizing and the pernicious stereotyping, the opportunity to see her “real Pioneers,” “real Cowboys,” and “real Indians” justifies the drive as worthwhile for her, despite the measure of discomfort.

She applies her equation of comfort versus novelty to the natural scenery she sees as well. “Imagine,” she proposes rhetorically, “people living all their lives in Cairo never having seen the pyramids.” She continues, “Yet we, ourselves, to whom antiquities and wonders of far countries are perfectly familiar, did not even know that the wonders of our Southwest existed!” (155). With this Post advances a mitigated version of the See America First citizenship arguments. She does not outright claim that one is better off seeing America, but she allows this very implication in one illustrative narrative. She and her companion, Celia, meet a woman who was traveling entirely alone in the desert on a mule. The woman immediately pegs Post and Celia as Easterners, and then proceeds on a patriotic tirade against Americans who “go spend money in Europe and neglect their own country” (156). Knowing Europe intimately, Post is skeptical of the woman’s suggestion that the Southwest has got everything one would want of Europe. Post and Celia cannot, like this woman, sleep comfortably out of doors, she explains, so they take the woman’s diatribe as an ignorant effort to aggrandize America’s modest attributes. This exchange inadvertently spoils the experience of the Southwest for them by highlighting its lack of

amenities. Yet from the encounter they take away “an unforgettable picture of an enchanted land. . . vast, rugged, splendidly desolate, big in size, big in ideals, with a few threads of enchanting history” and romance which vie with the fictions of Kipling (160). Post opens this passage by criticizing herself and her peers for their ignorance of what the Southwest offers, but she leaves the encounter reminding herself that really the best way to experience even great things is comfortably (186). Her class grants her critical distance from vulgar patriotic jingoism, but it also limits the potential of broader experience. Moreover, her experiences are mediated by romanticized narratives of exotic peasant characters encountered in remote locations and exposure to picturesque and sublime scenery. Altogether, such scenery and such encounters begin to make the trip on the whole seem somewhat worthwhile, but the larger import of this anecdote is that Post implies that visiting the Southwest *will* be more worthwhile than the ignorant frontier woman can imagine once it is supported by tolerably good accommodations.

By the end of her narrative Post moves away from the firmly held Eastern idea of cross country travel’s dullness. She exclaims:

When we started, I had an idea that, keen though we were to undertake the journey, we would find it probably difficult, possibly tiring, and surely monotonous—to travel on and on over the same American road, through towns that must more or less be replicas, and hearing always the same language and seeing the same types of people doing much the same things. Everyone who had *never* taken the trip assured us that our impression in the end would be of an unending sameness. Sameness! Was there ever such variety? (238)

This realization reveals the distinctiveness Post sees in America itself, Eastern misconceptions of it, and the very limitations of her previously held prejudicial attitudes. Post is only able to arrive at this realization, however, because she was seeing America first hand by motor. In Rochelle, Illinois, for example, Post had nearly decided, due to

mud, to load the car up on the next train headed west and be done with the trip by auto. After indicating their intent, she was met with appalled expressions from the townspeople. Post concludes that the belief that a task ought to be seen through to the end made the idea that her and her companions would end their journey because of a little mud shocking. Embarrassed, they decide to try driving just a little further and so are able to extend their motor journey. “They have in some way imbued us with their spirit,” Post declares optimistically on her way out of town. The idea of American sameness, she recognizes, is a symptom of passively passing through the country in a train, and authentic exposure to the West inspires adventurousness.

Later, facing the notoriously difficult to navigate Raton Pass, Post boldly states:

these alarms no longer terrify! Are we, too, being imbued with the spirit of the West. Forgetting that our original intention was to motor only so far as we could travel comfortably, we can now think of nothing but that we have arrived merely at the gateway of the land of adventure, where cowboys, prairie schooners, and Indians may possibly still be found” (134).

In the Southwest this new spirit peaks when she and her companions meet a man called only Mr. X who knows the region well and softens their resistance to the idea of “roughing it.” They had planned to ship the car to California from Albuquerque, but Mr. X’s enthusiasm for the region piques Post and Celia’s interest, and Celia inquires where they would sleep if they went to see Chaco Canyon, Acoma Pueblo, the Painted Desert, and Enchanted Mesa. Mr. X states that with a fine night, he’d sleep out. Post quails at the idea of sleeping out in the wild with marauding Indians and snakes, but Mr. X gives her a look similar to the one her friends in Rochelle had: “You are not *afraid*, are you?” he asks, and that settles it. The can-do spirit captures Post and Celia once more, and they go on just when they had thought they would give up. They drive to the various

recommended places and end up camping out. Post relishes narrating the adventure, even waxing poetic about the views of the Painted Desert and the sublimity of sleeping under the stars. In the morning they motor the rest of the way to Winslow, where they finally did ship the car the rest of the way to Los Angeles. Experiences which were unimaginable at the outset now make up the character, the interesting material, the fondest memories of the trip, according to Post.

These experiences are significant, but Post does not claim a total transformation. In the final analysis, she decides that roughing it is nice enough for those who care to do it, but that as “an effete Easterner” she likes best to “see anything comfortably” (186). In light of this, she recounts several stories of Eastern women she has known who, upon exposure to the West became rugged, strong, and independent, and Westerners who transferred to the East longed to return home. Gravely struck by the immense and sublime beauty of the West, Post decides that Westerners are not different of character, as she had formerly thought, but merely different of environment (216). Exposure to this land has rubbed off on her, and she is partially changed by exposing herself to the country. She reflects:

I suppose the metamorphosis has come little by little all across our wide spirit-awakening country, but I feel as though I had acquired from the great open West more of a direct outlook, a simpler, less encumbered view of life. You can't come in contact with people anywhere, without unconsciously absorbing a few of their habits, a tinge of their point of view, and in even a short while you find you have sloughed off the skin of Eastern hidebound dependence upon ease and luxury, and that hitherto indispensable details dwindle—at least temporarily—to unimportance. (240)

Driving America she has changed in ways that her experience driving through Europe did not change her. Yet, qualifying this new outlook as merely temporary protects the sensibilities of her principal audience who obviously remain effete Easterners.

Nevertheless, Post's transformation, however mitigated, is the result of her new sense of geography which, she indicates, is only possible because of the automobile. For example, in Albuquerque, Post notices that arriving in a town by auto is like arriving behind the scenes of a theater, "The hotel people, curio-sellers, and Indians are the actors, the travelers on the incoming trains are the audience" (160). In traveling by auto, Post discerns that she is having a more authentic experience. She would neither have encountered the mule riding woman, her friends in Rochelle, Mr. X, nor the numerous cowboys, frontier families, and Indians had she been on a train. She would not have seen the deserts, the mountains, the prairies in the way she had. She would not have discovered that the high plains were not intolerably boring, but that speeding in an open car through "the interminable distance was in itself an unforgettably wonderful experience" (113). She would not have slept out of doors if she had gone by train. In short, she experiences so much in going by car that she rejoices:

We are seeing our own country for the first time! It is not alone that a train window give only one piece of a whirling view; but the tracks go through the ragged outskirts of the town, past the back doors and through the poorest land generally, while the roads become the best avenues of the cities, and go past the front entrances of farms. And such farms! We had expected the scenery to be uninteresting! No one with a spark of sentiment for his own country could remain indifferent. (23-4)

Thus, Post's answer to the question, why leave home to face potential difficulties, is that doing so broadens one's outlook and strengthens the spirit. Put more pointedly, Post implies that to stay home is to nurture ignorance and weakness. To Post, not

knowing about the differences and distinctions of the regional United States by passing through in a Pullman on the Union Pacific, reading during the day and sleeping at night, is as obtuse as living in Cairo and never seeing the Pyramids. However, this perspective puts Post in a delicate spot. She cannot insult her principal audience directly. It would be discourteous to charge the woman who described the Lincoln Highway as an imaginary line with ignorance; to do so she would risk being ostracized from her social circles. Ever polite, Post treads the difficult balance of maintaining familiar class loyalties while introducing new ideas born of her new geographic sensibilities to confront the prejudices of her circle. Thus she is at times ungentle in her reporting, while at other times she demurely recapitulates the expectations of a woman of her station. She buries the democratic argument that seeing America is good for a citizen under rhetoric that protects her status among her peers and also, significantly, protects her peers from exposure to ideas that would challenge hierarchical class distinctions. Post's chronotope of American motor tourism affirms that a cross country drive can be made with ease and with a measure of comfort, but she maintains in example after example that what ultimately matters is the quality of food, the gracefulness of service, the cut of fashion, and the intelligence of decorative appeal in architecture. Post is changed by her trip, but only somewhat, only bit by bit through long exposure, and only temporarily. As such, *By Motor to the Golden Gate* confirms for her readers the fact that the infrastructure supportive of mass automobility is most definitively not in place, yet the book reflects a fuller, less Eastern prejudiced construction of the national geography that affirms the ultimate benefit to the individual of automobile exploration in America.

The Authority to Open the Road: A. L. Westgard's Pathfinding Tales

Unlike Price and Post, who were tourists and wrote as such, A. L. Westgard was a professional motorist, and his prescriptive travel book reflects the difference. A civil engineer, Westgard made a living contracting to survey and open automobile routes between various places, and numerous accounts of his excursions and maps of his pathfinding missions were published in various popular newspaper and magazine outlets.¹¹⁶ Westgard had been employed to scout motor routes by several different groups, including the AAA and the Lincoln Highway Association and also served as a guide for different tour groups like the Touring Club of America and the Glidden Tours. Called at various times the Daniel Boone of the Gasoline Age, John the Baptist of Good Roads, America's most notorious tourist, "the man in the car," and simply Highwayman, Westgard was the premier *pathfinder* of the early automobile age.¹¹⁷ He made more than eighteen transcontinental trips and estimated himself that he had "traveled more different (note the different) miles on rubber tires than any man in the world" (82). He even had a

¹¹⁶ *New York Times*, Oct 30, 1910, "Finds Excellent Roads" reports Westgard's satisfaction with roads in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (C8). *New York Times*, June 9, 1912 "Transcontinental Trips" reports that Westgard intended to make three transcontinental journeys that year (X15). *Chicago Tribune*, Feb 2, 1913, "Westgard Big Pathfinder" reports on his 12,000 mile pathfinding survey of the West conducted for the government and claims, the "autoist [Westgard] has place with great names of history" (J4). *New York Times*, May 4, 1913, "To Map Two Trails Across the Continent" reports on the same excursion (X11). A June 6, 1920 advertisement in the *Washington Post* points up Westgard's choice of the Westcott Larger Six for his "National Park-to-Park Highway Trip." The ad names him "dean of pathfinders" (53).

¹¹⁷ Self-promotionally, Westgard repeats many of these titles in his *Tales of a Pathfinder*. In "Transcontinental Tour Starts from Here To-morrow" Westgard is called "the man in the car" (6).

mountain pass in California that he had scouted as a motor route named for him. In 1920, after years charting roads, Westgard published a record of his experiences finding auto routes entitled *Tales of a Pathfinder*. Because Westgard took numerous trips, his travel book condenses all his large experience into one book, and the result is not a conventional travel narrative that faithfully recounts the plot of a single trip with distance covered, things seen and discovered, and a statement of the individual's new outlook based on her or his travels. Rather, Westgard's book is exactly what it says it is—a collection of the tales of a pathfinder. It is a series of vignettes depicting the experiences of more than ten years work searching for the safest, most efficient, most beautiful auto routes of the era. As such, the road as life metaphor in Westgard's chronotope is fragmented and peripatetic, but vastly more expansive, resembling in some ways the observations by the roadside structure of portions of *Leaves of Grass*.

As a collection of motoring vignettes, *Tales of a Pathfinder* is formally unlike any of the other road books published contemporaneously, yet it advances many of the same ideas and concerns addressed in other road narratives.¹¹⁸ Like Joy, Westgard is concerned with good roads. Evidently influenced by Mark Twain, he has a story teller's taste for humor and romanticized masculine adventure. Like Price and Post, he is interested in encouraging and demonstrating how to travel by automobile in America. He comments on the sights and accommodations for motor tourists. A cast of idiosyncratic characters crowd his narratives. Yet, more so than any other road writer of the early days of

¹¹⁸ Despite genre, the closest structural comparison for *Tales of a Pathfinder* might be Sinclair Lewis's series of articles on motoring published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Though Lewis's experience is more limited than Westgard's, the structure is roughly the same, a collection of stories narrated about driving, brought together to make some point about the prospects of the activity. Given Lewis's contribution to writing on automobility, the shared influence and circle of the two writers is relevant in this context.

automobility, Westgard has intimate and detailed knowledge about America's physical environments. As such, his book provides a revealing perspective on the places being opened to the mass of people by automobility because Westgard was directly responsible for opening inaccessible locales. Although Westgard's book comes late in the early years of automobility, it exposes the many inspirations for and problems with building America's geography of automobility at the time. Westgard is acutely aware that the time had come to record for posterity the early history automobility, and he wanted to be sure his story was authoritatively documented. As he puts it, "The days of the pathfinder of motor-car routes are about over. . . the pathfinder's work of the past has been an important factor in the development of the good roads movement and consequently of the automobile and allied industries" (10). Thus, he plays up his breadth of knowledge in *Tales of a Pathfinder* in order to share his decidedly rich perspective on the pleasures and frustrations of automobiling with other motorists, to bring his unique authority to bear on the key issues of automobiling, as well as to deploy his experience in support of his political ideology which is based on the ascendancy of automobility.

True to the genre of prescriptive travel writing, Westgard carefully characterizes the troubles to be faced while motoring throughout the country. Most of these troubles, he demonstrates, are traceable to the lack of infrastructure. Having to dig the car out of sand holes and bogs is so commonplace an experience he hardly mentions it, but he does mention breaking out the picks and shovels to make it through Lemitar Canyon in New Mexico, where the walls of the canyon were so narrow they had to be cut back by hand so that the car could pass. As well, he recites a joke about a farmer's unruly cow which wouldn't need fences if the farmer would strap a Blue Book, notoriously misleading and

worthless travel guidebook of the time, to the animal's head so as to prevent her from finding her way anywhere at all. Additionally, he relates stories about various hotels he has experienced, including everything from the best hotels in the biggest cities, where in one case he was robbed then called a liar by the management, to humble structures in little shanty towns, where he slept comfortably on the floor beside kitchen equipment. While frankly pointing up the very real challenges of motoring, bad roads, no maps, poor accommodations, Westgard's stories aggrandize adventure and masculine resourcefulness and endeavor to establish his place in the history of America's roads while simultaneously demonstrating that motor travel is both manageable and rewarding.

Like Price and Post, among Westgard's favorite subjects upon which to base vignettes are interesting characters he has met during his travels. For example, he tells of a tramp who has wandered lost in the desert seeking the camp and mine of a fellow prospector for three days. When Westgard finds him, he is completely delirious, but they revive him with water and eventually crackers. Despite their efforts, the tramp will not agree to ride with them to the next town but insists that he will soon find his friend's camp. Reluctantly, Westgard leaves him in the desert, always wondering if he found what he was looking for, probably El Dorado, or if he died lost in some desert canyon (17-20). He tells also of a west Kansas farmer whose crops are so visibly suffering under heat, drought, and swarms of grasshoppers that Westgard feels compelled to offer his sympathy. The farmer would have nothing of it, however, insisting that he is the fortunate one because one good crop every five years in west Kansas is worth more than five mediocre crops back east (21-3). Motoring on, Westgard avows his amazement and inspiration over the man's optimism. In another instance, he encounters an ample-bodied,

woman drifter who travels in a sort of house on wheels in and alongside which she carries a cow, four horses, two hogs, two goats, four geese, three ducks, six chickens, six dogs of various breeds, a cat, a monkey, a parrot, and a young boy. Westgard describes the menagerie as “a veritable Noah’s Ark” of the plains and the woman as a shrewd native philosopher who lives boldly and by her wits, owing neither gratitude nor money to anyone (30-2). In addition to these characters, Westgard has had occasion in his travels to meet Clergy, anthropologists, numerous Governors who are all “Good Fellows” (63), gentlemen of the press, miners, Mexicans, cowboys, Indians, an alcoholic who nearly dies hiking through a desert canyon with Westgard but quickly revives when given whiskey, an old man trekking with a rickety wagon and a skeletal horse all the way from Texas to western Canada, and many others. In all of the individuals he meets, Westgard sees typified something of the American character, and his narratives about them illustrate the variability and vitality of the people. Implicitly, only with years of experience driving America could one meet so many compelling characters, yet the further intimation is that one would likely meet many unique individuals on any drive.

As with the people, Westgard comments on the wild life that populate and the dramatic natural landforms that make up the American continent. For instance, he explains that in the extensiveness of his travels he has “seen many different rattlesnakes of many different varieties.” He narrates meeting a rancher who raised bison which, because near extinction, were for a while in high demand among zoos. Westgard reports that the rancher had tried to sell the animals to the U.S. government, but when the sale

took an inordinately long time the animals were bought by Canada (101-2).¹¹⁹ He tells of seeing swarms of grasshoppers consuming crops and swarms of life-threatening mosquitoes descending on his outfit. In all, Westgard's numerous animal stories further convey the appeal of motoring in that in a car the opportunity to see wildlife of this sort is imminently possible.

As for the natural environments, he tells of his experiences everywhere from the "sandy wastes with black lava hills jutting out here and there" of western Utah (79) to the Badlands, "where nothing but sagebrush grows—and often not even that" (101). He points out that the Grand Canyon is the "most impressive natural scenery on the face of the globe" (174). He makes a point out of depicting the landscape of the Southwest with pueblos, prehistoric ruins, cliff dwellings, and numerous sights of "splendid picturequeness" (157). And, speaking of the pleasures of touring the new National Parks, for which he surveyed connecting roads, Westgard suggests that people should see "these magnificent wild regions [in order] to spread broadcast the glories of the mountains, forests, glaciers, peaks, canyons, lakes, streams, animal life, and many natural wonders" (128). Westgard's topographies and landscapes lack poetic artifice, and more often his focus is the difficulty of navigating the terrain in an automobile. Yet his bald imagery is infused with an energy and earnestness that conveys his sense of the thrill in strenuous, outdoor living that would make the sort of pioneer automobiling he is characterizing for his readers so appealing. Because Westgard's imagery is grounded in depictions of American natural beauty from William Cullen Bryant's *Picturesque America* to John

¹¹⁹ Westgard's lack of comment on the "extermination [of Bison] as wild game" and the failure of the U.S. government to purchase the herd suggests an admiration of the animal as a symbol, but no reservations regarding the transformation of the landscape that domesticated the wild creatures.

Burroughs nature writings, and because, like Price, he echoes the rhetoric of the See America First movement, Westgard's prosaic landscape writing rehearses recognizable narratives about America's natural environment, and they do so in a way that promulgates motor accessibility.

In addition, Westgard takes particular delight in narrating uncommon events and adventure stories. For example, while traveling with an Englishman anxious to gather some impressions of the United States, his companion complained that he had expected the West to be more "woolly" with "desperadoes, road-agents, gamblers, and cut-throats." Thus provoked, the locals of the Arizona town where the Englishman had complained staged a hold up of Westgard's company. Westgard describes the joke: "In the most approved fashion two masked horsemen rode out from behind large boulders alongside the trail in a desolate section, and with leveled 'six-guns' demanded 'your money or your life'" (176). The supposed robbers meet with Westgard's crew at the next town, and without telling the visitor spend his money on rounds of drinks. He is never informed how he had been duped by any of the party and is convinced that the West is "some country for red-blooded experiences" (176). In his years of driving, Westgard narrowly escapes being consumed in a forest fire, comes under fire from Mexican banditos, is startled by a ghastly desert mummy, and is caught in a storm that rained frogs. For Westgard such adventures are precisely what makes motor travel invigorating. Indeed the trope of adventure inherited from Twain's travel writing in America echoes through Westgard's tales, projecting American, and particularly Western adventure into the automobile age.

Finally, Westgard's unmatched breadth of geographic experience and authority position him to comment on the politics of the expansion of automobility. In other words, the development of an infrastructure of automobility, no matter how sporadic and partial, has contributed to certain changes in political realities, which Westgard has witnessed first hand. For instance, at a time when concern that immigration was bringing waves of political agitators into the country occupied headlines,¹²⁰ Westgard draws on his vast experience among the various populations of the country to assert that even among isolated emigrant populations where English was barely spoken, and the people retain fashions and foods of their native lands, they "strongly maintain that above all they are Americans and with great indignation resent any assertions which tend to impugn their whole-hearted loyalty to the Stars and Stripes" (111). Conversely, Westgard witnesses many rivalries between adjacent regions for trade, industry, roadways, and even political recognition. And while he believes that a certain amount of competition and rivalry is good, he is also sure that there are cases where it causes damage. His broad experience in this arena leads him to deplore, for instance, the North-South rivalry of California:

the development of a network of good highways within the commonwealth, a matter upon which the two sections seem to agree and cooperate, will eventually do away with any sectional bitterness and will bring about a tolerance and unity of general efforts which must inevitably redound to the benefit of all sections. (160)

Westgard makes a similar case regarding Texas, and in both of these examples it is clear that, though he limits his comments to the particularities of individual states, his

¹²⁰ During the progressive era immigration was cited as contributing to labor shortages on the West Coast leading to America's gentleman's' agreement with Japan that limited the immigration of Japanese laborers. German immigrants were attacked for supposed affiliations with either the Kaiser or anarchists. Irish and Italian immigrants were blamed for corruption in politics, the Tammany Hall machine being the most often cited example. And Eastern European and Russian immigrants were troubled in the scare over communism following the Bolshevik revolution. This general anxiety of immigration is what Westgard references in his defense of immigrant populations.

argument extends to the entire nation. As one of the most vocal advocates of good roads and the infrastructure of automobility, Westgard saw roads as binding the sympathies of the nation together and so making the Union stronger. As a prescriptive encouragement to try automobile travel, his book argues for the extension of this unifying ethos.

The construction of good roads throughout the nation will bind the diverse and widely distributed populations together in mutual sympathies, he reasons, because it will create multiple points of contact between populations, and contact dissolves sectional division. Touting the embrace of the automobile by the middle classes as the symbol of modernity, he argues:

This blessing of modern times, in my opinion, is proving itself the greatest educator in history, because it compels acquiring knowledge, first of one's own section, then of one's own State and finally, as the network of good roads spreads, of one's entire country, besides broadening one's vision of life and appreciation of the problems of facing other regions outside of one's own. This education will have a powerful influence on our politics and tend to cultivate toleration and sympathy, and at the same time it will wipe out sectionalism. (167)

In the course of his motoring, Westgard has seen some of these changes first hand. He tells a story from his early days of motoring. Breaking down once in New England, a Yankee farmer from whom he borrowed some tools spoke of his travels out West, and when Westgard politely inquires of his experiences the man speaks of Utica, New York. Prior to the automobile, Westgard notes, this man would have been considered quite a traveler, but Utica even from the perspective of Connecticut would hardly be thought of as out West in the days of the automobile. Thus, automobility stands for him as a powerful symbol of national progress, because it broadens individual ideas of the nation and national concerns. "Of all the modern methods of communication," he points out, "the strongest and most potent antidote to ignorance is the motor car, because it teaches

while it gives pleasure and health” (168). This education, the understanding of the national conditions brought about through auto-mobile explorations of the national geography, will make the country a stronger, more democratic union. Westgard’s political logic follows that as each individual explores the country by car that person is in due course transformed into a better-educated citizen, and legion of these better citizens make for a stronger, more tightly bound nation. This philosophy of political progress through automobility binds together all the various subjects of Westgard’s motor pioneer stories, resonates with much of the nationalist political rhetoric of See America First and Good Roads movements, and draws the politics of Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road” into the modern age.

Drawing on his broad perspective on the history of automobility’s ascendancy, Westgard confirms that distance motoring is getting easier yet still calls for greater investment. Gasoline is broadly available, he remarks; suitable hotels are more numerous; roads are well marked and in some places well built and maintained. Given the quantity of Westgard’s Good Roads rhetoric, the inference is that this is only the beginning. In this Westgard parallels Pope’s Good Roads rhetoric and Joy’s Lincoln Highway promotions. His road writing reflects and participates in the general production of automobility, calling for bridges, hotels, fueling stations, and roads by providing a set of narratives that justify motoring both for diversion and the good of the nation. Investments in the production of these infrastructures, Westgard reasons, will make for a smarter and stronger citizenry, more efficient industry and transportation of goods, and a stronger state. Westgard’s vignettes, and the relationships to national space that they reflect, all support his framing of progress as based upon the development of national highway

networks. But most importantly Westgard's stories serve as an inducement to others to follow tracks he laid out for the pleasure, the adventure, and the progressive politics of doing so.

Following in the Ruts of the Pathfinding Pioneers

Westgard was exactly right when he claimed "The days of the pathfinder of motor-car routes are about over" (10). As S. M. Johnson puts it in his foreword to Westgard's book, "Every intelligent citizen in the United States knows that the next big job for America now that the war is over is to construct road beds as perfectly adapted to the economic operation thereon of motor vehicles as the road bed of the railway is adapted to the use thereon of its rolling stock" (7). Westgard and Johnson both refer to the momentum building behind the Townsend Federal Aid Road Act since the end of the war. With Harding's campaign promises to advance the Good Roads cause and create jobs¹²¹ the act needed only to make it through the gauntlet of Congressional politics. With the passage of the Federal Aid Road Bill in 1921 leading to the construction of major thoroughfares across the country and the economic boom of the mid-twenties making automobiles increasingly affordable, the country quickly lost track of the doubts and challenges formerly associated with distance motoring during the first decades of the twentieth century. By the late nineteen-twenties new rituals of automobile travel more fully based on consumerism had begun to crystallize, and automobility, though still celebrated, was increasingly taken for granted. The construction of the national road

¹²¹ Punning, Harry Price lauds Harding for making good on his campaign promise to support Federal Road Aid in "Drive for Jobs Wins." *Washington Post* 10 Nov 1921 (1).

network and subsequent ease of travel eliminated the need for excessive forethought for motor travel, and signage, free oil company road maps, and the first road atlases eliminated doubts as to how to go and what accommodations might be available upon arrival.¹²² With the development of this infrastructure, road travel narratives lost the qualities of prescription and challenging adventure that make Price, Post, and Westgard's books so representative of their historical moment. Nevertheless, as a popular genre road travel books continued to be written. Where books like Dallas Lore Sharp's *The Better Country* (1928) and Lewis Gannett's *Sweet Land* (1934) would lose the armature of encouragement and detailed prescription, they would continue to develop the themes of adventure, self discovery through national exploration, and fascination with regional difference that are traceable through to late century road travel books like William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* (1982). Thus in short, the works of Effie Gladding Price, Emily Post, and A. L. Westgard represent the earliest formulations of a narrative form of geographic writing that would continue to occupy road writers and readers alike as the century progressed, and as such Price, Post, and Westgard represent the link between formulations of national geographic sensibilities of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

¹²² Rand McNally published the first American road atlas in 1924.

CHAPTER 5

“MERELY TO SEE”: THEODORE DREISER’S CHARTING OF GEOGRAPHIC HISTORY, CULTURAL CRITICISM, AND NATURALISM IN HOOSIER HOLIDAY

Theodore Dreiser’s 1916 *A Hoosier Holiday* is a record of a trip taken by Dreiser and Franklin Booth, illustrator for *The Masses*, in Booth’s new 1915 Pathfinder touring car. The trip came about because Booth attended a party that Dreiser had given in honor of Edgar Lee Masters’ debut of *Spoon River Anthology*. At the party, Booth invited Dreiser to accompany him on a drive to their native Indiana. Dreiser, who had always wanted to return to Indiana and write a book about the trip, happened to be between projects at the time, having just completed *The Genius*. He proposed writing a book about their journey, which Booth could illustrate. The two quickly agreed to make a go of it.

From the very first, Dreiser wanted to write something different, something original, and he recognized that the route would powerfully influence the narrative.¹²³ As would have been typical for the day, the pair’s original plan is to travel north out of New York City along the Hudson and then west along the Erie Canal toward Lake Erie, allowing them to avoid rough terrain and rougher roads. Yet, Dreiser is annoyed at the

¹²³ Gary Totten observes that Dreiser like to think of himself as “no ordinary tourist,” criticizing prescriptive travel books like the Baedeker guides. Renate Von Bardeleben notes that Dreiser had been frustrated with the editing job done on his European travel book, *Traveler at Forty*, which transformed it from an autobiographical work to a publishable travel guide. He surely had such things in mind during the composition of *Hoosier Holiday*.

idea of the Hudson Valley route. “This route irritated me from the first,” Dreiser complains. For him this ground was thoroughly covered by both tourists and travel writers. He prefers another idea, writing, “Give me the poor, undernourished routes which the dull, imitative rabble shun, and where, because of this very fact, you have some peace and quiet” (21). He pleads his case for a more directly western route to Booth: “I’d like to make a book out of this. . . if the material is interesting enough, and there isn’t a thing that you can say about the Hudson River or the central part of New York State that hasn’t been said a thousand times before” (21). Booth agrees to the detour as long as Dreiser would chart the route, which he happily did, discovering a less popular “scenic route” (46-7).¹²⁴ Two weeks later, chauffeured by another Indiana native named, appropriately, Speed, they leave New York. During the tour they do not always manage to follow the routes that Dreiser had imagined and would have preferred to travel, but meandering is an integral element of motor touring for Dreiser and, therefore, *A Hoosier Holiday*.¹²⁵ He writes, “what a fine thing it was to motor in this haphazard fashion—how pleasant it was not to know where you were going or where you would be tomorrow” (73).

¹²⁴ Included in Dreiser’s papers associated with the *Hoosier Holiday* project are two maps, a “scenic tour” map compiled by the Automobile Club of America and an Empire Tours brochure highlighting sites of historic interest, Indian nomenclature, and the good roads and hotels of New York State. They more or less followed the route of the scenic tour map, which Dreiser apparently tore out of a book, until Elmira New York. Then, the Empire tours maps has handwritten notes marking route from Elmira to Avoca on route 509, then north to Danville and Avon on 433. Then from Avon a course west on 321 through Batavia to Buffalo is marked. The intersection of 501 and 544 is circled and “Caledon” is written in blue ink. An uncharted note records the name of the Lafayette Hotel, probably in Buffalo. The map includes scenic pictures, and lists of points of interest. Published by Empire Tours Assn, 1914. Compiled by Automobile Blue Book Publishing Co. The purpose of Dreiser’s notes is unclear, but it’s nevertheless obvious that he put a lot into the route of the trip. Box 173 Rare books UPENN Library.

¹²⁵ From New York they headed west toward Patterson and through the Delaware Water Gap into Pennsylvania. Then, they turned north toward the better roads and easier grades of western New York State. At Binghamton they turned west toward Buffalo and from there followed Lake Erie to Cleveland. From Cleveland they proceeded southwest into Indiana, arriving at Carmel and the Booth family home.

Dreiser's narrative is neither deliberately prescriptive, nor promotional. Thinking of himself as an artist, he disdained commercial work and propaganda.¹²⁶ Also, unlike Effie Gladding Price and Emily Post, Dreiser takes motor travel for granted, stating at the beginning of his narrative, "I assume that automobiling. . . is an old story to most people" (24). Nevertheless, certain points of comparison exist between Dreiser's road book and those of promotional and prescriptive road writers. Like other road writers Dreiser compares, for instance, automobile and train travel, exulting, "the prospect of new and varied roads, and of that intimate contact with woodland silences, grassy slopes, sudden and sheer vistas at sharp turns, streams not followed by endless lines of cars—of being able to change your mind and go by this route or that according to your mood—what a difference" (93). He takes distinct pleasure in weighing the chance of a decent road against the likelihood of adventure on a "scenic route" at every turn. He cherishes the opportunity to go visit one place or another "merely to see" (480). He glories in making random stops, rejoicing in the motorist's "freedom to seek ideal nooks and secluded places, and thus disport ourselves" (265). He merrily embraces the accessory uncertainty of occasionally becoming lost. Depending on the weather, he alternately relishes and despises the exposure to the elements of riding in an open car. He celebrates random encounters with foolish and lovely Americans along the way. He relishes the "everchanging panorama" (82-4) and the endless possibilities lying just around the next bend in the road. Finally, with his early preference for the risky "scenic routes" rather

Finally, they toured Indiana together, revisiting Dreiser's youthful haunts—Warsaw, Versailles, Evansville, and Bloomington.

¹²⁶ During a slump in his literary career in the late nineteen tens, Dreiser took an editorial job for Butterick Publishing Company, which was devoted to the sale of dress patterns. According to Swanberg, Dreiser hated the work but loved the money. He writes, "The artist in him languished, but the materialist in him had a whale of a time" (127).

than good well-traveled roads, Dreiser registers road conditions like the brick road running from Buffalo to beyond Cleveland, about which he exclaims, “From East Aurora into Buffalo there was a solid, smooth, red brick boulevard, thirty feet wide and twelve miles long, over which we raced as though it were a bowling alley. . . if many such roads are to be built. . . America will have a road system unrivaled” (169).¹²⁷

Freedom of geographic choice, picturesque scenery, eccentric encounters, the thrill of moving ever onward, and discourses on road conditions are part of what for Dreiser is the old story of automobiling; thus, his emphasis lies elsewhere. Dreiser’s interest in motoring is “The difference. . . to the man who is making the trip” (24). Singularly, Dreiser’s depictions of the commonplaces of motor touring propel extended, original meditations on American life and the philosophy of naturalism. These meditations reflect his ongoing psychological responses to the country. For example, recounting a nocturnal drive, Dreiser characterizes motoring’s distinct effect on his mind:

The night was so fine and the wind so refreshing that I went off into dreamland again, not into actual sleeping dreams, but into something that was neither sleeping nor waking. These states that I achieved in this way were so peculiar that I found myself dwelling on them afterward. They were like the effects of a drug. In the trees that we passed I could see strange forms, all the more weird for the moonlight, which was very weak as yet,—grotesque hags and demons whose hair and beards were leaves and whose bony structures were branches. They quite moved me as in childhood. And on the road we saw strolling lovers occasionally, arm in arm, sometimes clasped in each other’s arms, kissing, couples whom the flare of our headlights illuminated with a cruel realism. (185)

This heightened sensibility drives Dreiser’s prolonged meditations. The state of mind he describes as being “mentally poised in inquiry” arises directly from the experience of

¹²⁷ Dreiser had been publishing articles on good roads as far back as 1900: “Good roads for Bad” and “Rural Free Mail Delivery,” republished in *Theodore Dreiser’s Uncollected Magazine Articles, 1897-1902*, Yoshinobu Hakutani editor. The promotional work of the Good Roads Movement is inflected in such remarks as the comment that the brick roads along Lake Erie “when completed will be the rival of any scenic route in the world” (201).

stasis within mobility characteristic of motoring, according to Dreiser, and it defines his narrative. That is, Dreiser presents himself as driving through America in a state of sensitized meditation, and on this framework he hangs a prolonged, engaged reflection on life in America. A story of a prodigal's return, *A Hoosier Holiday* is a narrative geography of national space and personal memory.¹²⁸ As such, the drive exposes and generates ambivalences within Dreiser as an individual, and the book is fundamentally an opportunity for Dreiser to judge how far he has come and how much he has changed by comparing his personal growth with the modernization of his country as he travels. Specifically, Dreiser's tour plots his memories of places like Cleveland, Toledo, Buffalo, and his small-town, childhood home of Warsaw, Indiana against the current state of the nation.

Meanwhile as his meandering automobile route passes through new places, he synthesizes these experiences into his preexisting geographic imaginary, a process he characterizes as exposure to "the spectacular" in life. In fact, he justifies his trip, his musings, and his book in part as the product of his personal exposure to the spectacular. Dreiser remarks, "Life was intended for the spectacular, I take it. It was intended to sting and hurt so that songs and dreams might come forth. When it becomes mere plethora and fixity, it is nothing—a stultifying world" (240). The plethora he refers to is the industrial

¹²⁸ Dreiser summarizes the purposes of his trip in a query letter for publishers: "Recently (August 11th to September 1st inc) I made an auto trip of my native state with a view to visiting all the places I had never been before leaving the state finally in 1886 – a sort of "me childhoods happy days" stunt. For years I have been intending to do this with a view to contrasting my impressions then (4-16 years of age) with my impressions and conclusions now. The trip was a psychologic success. We had perfect weather and a new to a full moon all the way. I found everything I had ever known about as it was, only the surroundings greatly changed. We had a speedy car and Franklin Booth the illustrator went along to make pen sketches. You may have seen his work in Scribners, Colliers, and elsewhere" (Document # 433, box 173 Rare books, UPENN Libraries).

production of consumer goods for the masses, and the fixity that troubles him is the return to the same places by the same routes. “Only the dull can love sameness” (93), he remarks, comparing rail travel to motoring and embracing automobility. The spectacular is, then, the brilliantly vivid experience of new and varying places, which are made more conveniently accessible by automobility. Significantly, encounters with the spectacular inspire and define higher art like, Dreiser hubristically implies, his own.

Charting his personal geography through his mechanized-mobile musings, Dreiser decides that memory, imagination, and expectations are continually flouted because real life refuses to conform to ideations, making self understanding ultimately impossible. This is the “cruel realism” that the Pathfinder’s headlights illuminate. Stark reality continually exposes the romantic dreams of the lovers and, likewise, the happy scenes the tourist sees continually slide out of the viewer’s framing gaze to be replaced by new scenes which defy memory and expectation. The two facets of this figure represent human existence as a closely circumscribed horizon of perception within an isolated and ultimately unknowable present. Significantly, in Dreiser’s view most Americans are completely unaware of this because they favor religious superstitions and dogmas and so hide from new and spectacular experiences that enrich life. Such is the nature of cultural life in America that Dreiser, casting himself as an objective outsider, witnesses and ruminates upon while riding with his companions through the country.

Dreiser insists that this combined revisit and exploration structure of the trip and the book would not have been possible had he taken a train over the same routes that the train always travels. Booth and his Pathfinder made the trip possible in a completely original, spectacular way, much to Dreiser’s delight. Casting himself as a critical tourist,

an “overland citizen,” making geographical comparisons, Dreiser builds on the particularities of automobile travel to analyze his geographic history, criticize American culture and politics, and articulate his naturalist existential philosophy.¹²⁹ There are earlier models for this enterprise, of course. The influence of Mark Twain and Henry James as traveling cultural critics is strong; yet, Dreiser builds formal techniques appropriate to automobile travel onto the established travelogue formula to create a chronotope of sociological and philosophical exploration of America. Additionally, Dreiser recasts Walt Whitman’s abiding sentiment for the American people and their places into his own more cynical perspective while retaining the quality of Whitman’s cataloging language. Thus, *A Hoosier Holiday* makes a significant and unique contribution to the construction of the geography of automobility by rendering Dreiser’s own relationship to national space and history in a way that critically engages transformations in national culture and institutions while philosophically exploring the conditions of existence.

Uneven Development: Dreiser’s Automobile Geography

Dreiser’s geography builds upon the detached way in which he and Booth view the country and its population. Dreiser sees himself and Booth and Speed as members of

¹²⁹ Obviously to label Dreiser an existentialist is anachronistic. Yet, Dreiser’s formulation of naturalism, in *A Hoosier Holiday*, is deeply concerned with the nature of existence. While it is likely that Dreiser is a significant precursor to the existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, Dreiser’s meditations on existence are decidedly not existentialism. Thus the references to existential philosophy in this essay are limited to Dreiser’s singular meditations on the nature of existence in *Hoosier Holiday*.

a broader world of experience possessing an outlook not limited by local customs. He explains, “We are, as it were, overland citizens and the judgments of Binghamton do not convince us of anything any more than the judgments of other towns and crossroad communities along our route. Every little community has its standards and its locally successful ones” (105-6). Locally circumscribed perspectives are stultifying and, in general, characterize for Dreiser the established American mindset. The ethos of the overland citizen with broad geographic and social ideas marks the best people he encounters. As an overland citizen Dreiser observes first hand the uneven development of modernization and is therefore able to expose socio-cultural connections which bind the nation together despite broad dispersal in physical space.

As a broad minded tourist, Dreiser finds America more imaginable when contrasted with Europe. For instance, in response to the idea which he has seen generally expressed that America is “not nearly so interesting as Europe, or Asia or Africa” to travel in, Dreiser asserts that considering “the youth of a great country” America far surpasses Europe (61). While he acknowledges that when it comes to being a “well organized or historic land” America “is a mere child as yet, or an uncouth stripling at best—gaunt, illogical, elate.” He suggests that in human and architectural terms his country as he sees it is not so far behind Europe, but when it comes to mechanical advancement, he thinks Europe trails. Where else, Dreiser asks rhetorically, are the lines of communication so well developed and distributed as in the U.S.? Where else can one pass through hundreds of miles of prosperous agricultural lands populated by such “spirited, genial, and even witty people—a really happy people.” He concludes, somewhat prescriptively, “I take that to be worth something—and a sight to see” (61).

Thus, frustrated and fussy though he is with certain American customs and turns of mind, Dreiser favors his native country. For “all I could sum up against America,” he reasons, “it was actually better than Europe. . . because of a certain indefinable something—either of hope or courage or youth or vigor or illusion” (169). Echoing the environmental determinism of Frederick Jackson Turner in making his comparison, Dreiser concludes that the “average American, or the average European transplanted to America, is a better or at least a more dynamic person than the average European at home, even the Frenchman. . . He has more grit, verve, humor, or a lackadaisical slapdash method which is at once efficient, self sustaining, comforting.” The American is more free; there are no betters to the citizen, Dreiser exclaims: “He sings, whistles, jests, laughs boisterously; matches everybody for cigars, beers, meals; chews tobacco, spits freely, smokes, swears, rolls to and fro, cocks his hat on one side of his head, and altogether by and large is a regular ‘hell of a feller’” (128).

Dreiser’s positive assessment of the American character and institutions is not unequivocal, however. For all its strength of energy and assertiveness, America also sustains, according to Dreiser, particularly insidious forms of social control and coercion. For instance, in his experience touring Europe, he has witnessed that “the eager American abroad is free to dance and carouse and make up, in part, for some of the shortcomings of his situation here” (309). In his experience, open minded Americans must venture abroad in order to really express themselves: “Yes, you may see them there, the sons and daughters of these factory builders and paint manufacturers, a feverish hunger in their faces, making up for what Indiana or Illinois or Iowa would never permit them to do” (399). He declaims the more puritanical tendencies of his nation like strict control of

sexuality and laws against vices like drinking and smoking. Though he believes America is destined for greatness, Dreiser recognizes that not all that it does is necessarily great, and its greatest weakness is its refusal to recognize and openly accommodate what he would term human nature.

America lacks also, Dreiser notes, the historic charm of Europe, but it makes up for such a shortcoming with native vitality. He observes this driving into Buffalo, the sight of which brought to his mind “those older hill cities of Europe which one sees across a space of land from a train, but which are dead, dead.” Conversely, Buffalo is alive: “Here is life. . . only here nothing has happened as yet, historically; whereas there men have fought to and fro over every inch of the ground” (169). He proceeds to project a future history of America attempting to visualize how great monuments, buildings, bridges, and industries will in time define the terrain. He imagines museums crowded with the great but almost forgotten art of the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second centuries. According to Dreiser, such things define a great city, which Buffalo is not exactly, not yet. To this assessment, Dreiser adds some personal history with Buffalo, reporting on his youthful striving after a career in journalism there and taking special care to note how he and the city have each changed. Tying his individual career into the sweep of history Dreiser asserts that he was part of Buffalo’s vitality, and part also in the defining transformation of the place which, he imagines, future historians will recall and map.

Another striking feature of American existence that Dreiser examines is the contrast between the country and the city, a contrast Dreiser represents as mediated throughout by his memories and romanticizations of regional differences. For example,

when Dreiser and his companions are first struck by the singular character of the country towns they pass through, Dreiser begins to “sing the delights of rural life,” but Speed contradicts him: “that’s all well enough,” he asserts, “but after you’ve lived here awhile you mightn’t like it so much.” Dreiser’s reply is characteristic of the pastoral idealizations to which he is prone. He exclaims gaily, “but there are the cows and the trees and the little flower gardens and the farmers moving hay and—” (76). Despite his own awareness of the false sentimentality of his notions about the pastoral, Dreiser resolutely protects these idealizations. For him they are harmless in ways other ideas about the country are not.

The country appeals to Dreiser because it contrasts with the crowdedness and concrete barrenness of the city, but he’s not so taken with it that he overlooks coerciveness, ignorance, and philistinism. Remarking on Columbia City, an Indiana town that Dreiser remembered as popular among more experienced boys, Dreiser states, “I wanted to see what it was like although I already knew—courthouse, courthouse square, surrounding stores, and then a few streets with simple homes and churches. Exactly” (278). This “Exactly” emphasizes his disappointment with the town after he had idealized it in his yearning youth, as “a kind of Cairo of the Egyptians.” The town is too typical, and the commonness stings him as his hopeful expectations deflate. “It was like all the others,” he complains. Such provincial imitativeness indicates for him a lack of intelligence, which inspires both disdain and pathos. Examining the crowd gathered in celebration of Founder’s Day, Dreiser remarks, “Life takes on at once comic and yet poetic and pathetic phases the moment you view a crowd of this kind in the detached way we were” (278).

The only consolation available to him in such places is the curiosity, energy, and productivity of youth. Heading for East Aurora, New York, the travelers stop to ask directions of a precocious young man at a garage. Dreiser is particularly impressed with the young man, and sees him as a metonymy of the American spirit:

America is so brisk and well informed. Here was a small, out of the way place, with no railroad and only two or three stores, but this youth was so plainly well informed on all the current topics. The few other youths and maids whom we saw here seemed equally brisk. I was surprised to see the Broadway styles in suits and dresses—those little nuances of the ready made clothes manufacturers which make one feel as if there were no longer any country nor any city, but just smart, almost impudent life, everywhere. It was quite diverting. (163)

In contrast, the older generations Dreiser sees as reactionary, holding tightly to stultifying religion and traditions. American youth, however, seems to him open and exuberant, telling of national promise because they desire a larger understanding of the world than their forebears. Again, Dreiser draws on memories to develop the comparison. In his own youth he had dreamed of greeting the larger world: “All the world was outside and I . . . all alone used to wonder and wonder. When would I go out into the world? Where would I go? What would I do? What see?” (77); and just as Dreiser himself dreamed, so too dream the young people he meets along the wayside. They dream; they become frustrated with small town life; they move to the cities where life is large and anything can happen.

Dreiser reveals, however, a pathetic poignancy to such yearning when it’s stuck in stultifyingly conservative, country places. One young woman he meets in Peru, Indiana complains of her town when Dreiser asks her if she likes it: “Like it? This old town? I should say not.” When Dreiser pushes her, asking why not, she continues, “you ought to live here for a while, and you’d soon find out, It’s all right to go through in a machine, I suppose.” When asked where she would rather be, she irritably snaps, “Oh, what’s the

use wishing—lots of places. It never does me any good to wish” (351). This girl and the boy in New York both represent the brisk desire which characterizes, for Dreiser, the will to overcome a constrained childhood and get out and experience the world, to learn, to love, and to build that characterizes what is best in the American mindset. According to Dreiser, those who get out into and experience as much of the spectacular as the world may offer will be stripped of the foolish and backward conventional notions that occupy the dull and cowardly who live in a timid and limited way. Such willfulness drives modernization and the move to cities that characterize modernity, and thus Dreiser reverses Turner’s theorem that the frontier strips the pioneer of conventional notions by implying that the return to the city of the masses of Midwestern youth strips these modern pioneers of conservative notions because they have “so much more with which to satisfy themselves” (361).

Such youthful spirit and, conversely, the lack of it have the power to define a place for Dreiser. For example, contrasted with Columbia City, Terre Haute seems to possess a certain youthful liveliness. He explains, “it seemed more vital than most of the other places” (396). Booth remarks on Terre Haute’s reputation as a “hot town,” with “a young, hopeful, seeking atmosphere” (396). This formulation strikes Dreiser as particularly felicitous. “That’s just how it seemed to me,” he states. Although it is a smaller than average city, he notes, “it had the tang and go of a much larger place.” This “seeking atmosphere” is, he maintains, “something which I have always noticed about American cities and missed abroad, more or less.” Despite a few examples, Europe lacks what America possesses in abundance, “a crude, sweet illusion about the importance of all things material.” For Dreiser, the fundamental acquisitiveness which is the essence of

youth accounts for the life and energy of certain American towns like Terre Haute. Yet, considering himself separate, observing the vitality of the town inspires pity. Dreiser remarks, “These little girls and boys, these half developed men and women with their white faces and their seeking hands—oh the pathos of it all!” (396). The spirit of Terre Haute represents the modernization of America both materially and culturally.

Throughout, Dreiser’s comparisons of places present America’s modernization as decidedly uneven. While places like Terre Haute are modern and progressive, other places are backward and conventional. The same holds of people; some are open and progressive while others are traditional and small-minded. For instance, nearing the end of his trip, with all the prosperous towns and cities occupying his thoughts, parts of deeply rural Indiana stun the world weary writer:

We followed hot, wet bottom lands to Boonville, a poorer town even than Sullivan, with unpaved streets and skimpy county fair not to be compared with the one of Knox County, in which Vincennes was situated. Then we struck northeast through a region where the roads were so bad that it seemed we should never come through with the car. Water puddles, and streams even, blocked the way. . . We saw poor homes, poor stores, wretched farms, shabby almost ragged people. (471)

A young girl they meet asked if they had seen the fair, saying, “It’s fine isn’t it,” a remark which Dreiser leaves hang with poignant and pathetic irony. Further illustrating the remoteness of this region, Dreiser comments, “You can imagine the isolation of this region when I tell you that our automobile attracted universal attention; that we saw only one other between Boonville and Huntingberg; that dogs and ran horses ran away frightened at the horn; and that children ran out to see. This did not seem quite possible” (472). The disrepair of the roads, the scarcity of motorcars, the hemmed-in world view, and the pooriness of the community all indicate a state of isolation and backwardness that

seems incredible to Dreiser. As a member of the modern world and an overland citizen, he can scarcely believe his eyes. Automobility exposes this isolated world which rail travel would have hidden and brings home for Dreiser the uneven development of the nation as a whole. Some places are fully industrial, others fully urban, and still others seem to be caught in a bygone day.

The gradations of uneven development and what they reveal are then the building blocks of Dreiser's sense of America in *A Hoosier Holiday*. As they enter one town or another, Dreiser looks for local variations on the trend of modernization. The town of Conneaut, for instance, embodies for Dreiser several contradictions of American culture arising with uneven modernization. At the docks of Conneaut, minerals mined from different points among the Great Lakes are traded for coal mined in Pennsylvania, and Dreiser is awed by the enormous supplies and the "machinery of transshipping" which lifts whole coal cars and empties them into steam ships. Thriving off this transshipping business, the town is "an interesting illustration of the rural American grappling with the metropolitan idea" (199). This is illuminated by an exchange Dreiser has with a young woman. Prohibition has been imposed locally, and at the local soda fountain they sell "what are sometimes called near drinks." Dreiser fiendishly orders a bottle of imitation champagne after establishing that the "conventional but rosy cheeked girl" who waited on him had never tasted the real libation. He tries to induce her to merely taste the enticingly named "Sparkade." Even though Dreiser has made clear, through the girl's own explanation, that the sparkling beverage is not an intoxicant, she refuses all temptation flatly because, as she says, "Our church is opposed to liquor in any form" (199-200). This symbolizes, for Dreiser, firmly held prejudice perpetuated by religious dogma. He

sarcastically remarks, “the church rules here—a moral opinion. That’s the way to bring up the rising generation—above corruption.” Dreiser and Booth conclude that “the East is more schooled in vice and sensuality, and show and luxury, perhaps, and that these people were sweet and amusing and all right—here” (241). Thus in Conneaut, where shipping rules the economy but the church rules the mindset, Dreiser finds in the presence of “near drinks” an awkward compromise between the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, and a compromise that is appropriate for the place so long as it stays in place, allowing him and his overland companions to pass through.

In contrast with the poor roads of rural Pennsylvania and Indiana, Dreiser interprets the road between Buffalo and Cleveland as a symbol of modernity, one that applauds automobility, but he reviles the injustices of its impacts. As he marvels at the three hundred miles of brick paved roads, he concludes, “the vitrified brick road of this sort appears to be seizing the imagination of the middle west, and the onslaught of the motor and its owner is making every town and hamlet desirous of sharing the wonders of a new life” (176). This onslaught is punctuated by the factories, the shipping centers, and the oil derricks along the road. Yet, among these markers of modernization, the rabble of workers live in destitute, squalid, polluted conditions alongside factories where the water “was so slimy or oily, or both, that it constantly emitted bubbles or gas which gave the neighborhood an acrid odor” (178). Likewise, at the Tackawanna Steel Company with “its scores of tall, black stacks belching clouds of smoke and its immense steel pillar supported sheds showing the fires of the forges below,” Dreiser laments the dilapidated shacks of the workers, the crowds of immigrants, the lonely toil of the wives of poor subsistence laborers (181).

This region contrasts sharply, for Dreiser, with central northern Indiana where more rural commitments find balance with modern industry, and in this mixed region he uncovers an emblem of the geographic and historical changes defining modern American life. He describes the region:

Unlike Ohio, there was no sense here of a struggle between manufacture and trade and a more or less simple country life. The farmers had it all, or nearly so. The rural homes were most of them substantial, if not markedly interesting to look upon, and the small towns charming. There were no great factory chimneys cutting the sky in every direction, as farther east, but instead windmills, and silos and red or grey barns, and cows, or horses, or sheep in the fields. (259)

Yet, among the pastoral scenes of northern Indiana, Dreiser and his companions visit the Haynes automobile company. Impressed by the motor works, Dreiser meditates on modernity. “I never saw so many automobiles and parts of automobiles in all my life,” he explains, “whole rooms piled high with auto carriage frames or auto motors, or auto tops or auto bodies. I never imagined there were so many processes through which all parts of a machine have to be put to perfect them, or that literally thousands of men do some one little thing to every machine” (353). It occurs to him that the masses are unaware of the industrial processes that produce the inexpensive goods they work to buy. He asserts, “We pay very little, comparatively, for what we buy, considering the amount of time spent by thousands in supplying our idle wants” (353). He is so amazed by the factory’s machinations and productions that he becomes “quite lost and could only develop a headache thinking about them afterward” (353). He continues:

Actually, life loses itself at every turn for the individual in just such a maze. You gaze, but you never see more than a very little of what is going on about you. If we could see not only all the processes that are at work simultaneously everywhere, supplying us with what we use here, but in addition, only a fraction—that nearest us—of the mechanics and physics of the universe, what a stricken state we would be in! Actually, unless we were protected by lack of

capacity for comprehension, I should think one might go mad. The thunder, the speed, the light, the shuttle flashes of all the process—how they would confuse and perhaps terrify! For try as we will, without tremendous enlargement of the reasoning faculty, we can never comprehend. Vast, amazing processes cover or encircle us at every turn, and we never know. Like the blind we walk, our hands out before us, feeling our way. Like moths we turn about the autogenetic flame of human mystery and never learn—until we are burned, and not then—not even a little. (353-4)

On the factory floor, enveloped by the thundering machines and crowded micro-mechanical processes, Dreiser imagines the culmination of all that he has seen from the transshipping facilities, steel manufacturers, railroads, and coal mines to rural farms that feed the workers and buy the factory produced equipment. Dreiser believes that this is the factory floor of the first American automobile,¹³⁰ and so it exhibits for him the processes transforming the country. This transformation involves every aspect of American life creating links and spreading its influence across the country, and so it becomes the centerpiece of his geography of the country's modernization. Comparing the geographic dispersal of people, industries, and agriculture to a maze, he epiphanically glimpses the cycles that surround and influence (if not determine) the behavior, activities, and uneven development of the nation. However, he hastens to add that the limited perception of any individual person makes it impossible to imagine the entirety of the processes of modernity, much less the universe.

¹³⁰ He is actually wrong about this. The Haynes automobile, a make which would not survive the twenties, was not the first American car; that honor goes to the Duryea. However, Haynes maintained that his was the first American car despite all evidence, evidence of which he was aware, to the contrary. Dreiser and Booth, and even Speed who is more closely associated to the auto industry, all apparently take Haynes at his word. Even though misinformed, or because he is misinformed, the Haynes factory serves, for Dreiser, as an exemplary symbol of the processes transforming the nation.

“Battle Hymn of the Republic”: Cultural Criticism and the limits of Democracy

Coupled with his geography of American modernization, Dreiser’s aloof, overland citizen status leads to highly critical and ambivalent conclusions regarding the state of American democracy. The implications of the geographic connections represented in the motor works are the basis of Dreiser’s pathos for the American people, animating his criticism of American culture. At Factoryville, Pennsylvania, for instance, Dreiser articulates his concern for the American people. Observing the quaint differences that make the small town such a relief for “one weary of metropolitan life,” Dreiser waxes poetic:

Dear, crude, asinine, illusioned Americans! How I love them! And the great fields from the Atlantic to the Pacific holding them all, and their dreams! How they rise, how they hurry, how they run under the sun! Here they are building a viaduct, there a great road, yonder plowing fields or sowing grain, their faces lit with eternal, futile hope of happiness. (78)

This Whitmanesque catalogue summarizes all that Dreiser thinks of America and Americans. It holds the sweep of land from sea to sea and speaks to all the daily round of activities. “Dear, dear, darling Yankee land—‘my country tis’—when I think of you and all your ills and all your dreams and all your courage and your faith—I could cry over you wringing my hands,” he exclaims, making both a patriotic avowal of sorts and an ironic, critical lamentation. Recalling the vision of unaware, modernized, industrialized, consumerist state that Dreiser envisioned in the Haynes factory, this pathos laden lamentation precedes a warning to the great and the greedy whom Dreiser despises:

But you, you great men of brains—you plotters of treason, of taxes which are not honest, of burdens too heavy to be borne, beware! These simple souls, my countrymen singing simple songs in childish ignorance and peace, dreaming

sweet dreams of life and love and hope. Don't awake them! Let them not once suspect. . . or you may see the bonfires of wrath alight. (78-9)

Directed at men of power, who he believes greedily exploit the masses, Dreiser's warning, based on two popular patriotic songs, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "America: (My Country tis of Thee)" does not exactly condemn the behavior, even if he does think it in some ways criminal. Rather, alluding to the French Revolution, the Paris Commune, and Marxism, Dreiser instructs the powerful never to let the masses find out they are being duped. Whereas on the one hand limitations of consciousness protect the masses from comprehending the cycles of the mazed system which he had glimpsed at the Haynes factory, on the other hand if the people were to understand their exploitation their fury would be unlimited. Depicting himself as an observer above allegiances, Dreiser suggests class warfare in America is potentially imminent; yet, for the moment the uneven distribution of wealth is protected by the uneven spatial dissemination of modernity which blinds the masses to the real conditions of their existence.

As a socialist sympathizer, Dreiser fosters a sympathetic sense of the democratic, a Whitmanesque identification with the common, but this is countered by his sense that the American masses are a disdainfully ignorant, short sighted, greedy, philistine population.¹³¹ In Buffalo, Dreiser articulates some of this ambivalence:

Sometimes, you know, I remember that we are a mongrel race and think we may never achieve anything of great import, so great is my dissatisfaction with the shows and vulgar gaucheries to be seen on all sides. At other times, viewing the upstanding middle class American with his vivid suit, yellow shoes, flaring tie and conspicuous money roll, I want to compose an ode in praise of the final enfranchisement of the common soul. (175)

¹³¹ This notion Dreiser shared with the likes Henry James, Ezra Pound, H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, and Sinclair Lewis, among others.

Considering the empowerment of the democratic masses, Dreiser asks if these foolish and beautiful millions with their ready-made, up-to-date fashions are actually better off free than serving as bondservants to a snobbish and equally shallow aristocracy. He is torn. On the one hand, Dreiser, the world weary, mobile citizen and critic finds himself endorsing control of the masses, whereas the Dreiser who remembers fondly his youth of poverty cries out for the democratic and communitarian against the greedy and powerful. While he identifies with the individual will to power of the great, a feeling supported by his belief in his own genius, he is seduced also by the common. This tension haunts the narrative and is inflected throughout the meditations that make up his geography.

Out of Dreiser's ambivalence arises a sharp critique of American political culture. If amassing "large fortunes making routine things that merely increase the multitude who then sit back and do dull routine things" is the sole result of democratization and industrialization, then America is in his view a failure (240). His depiction of the crowd at the Old Settler's Day Festival in Columbia City affirms this pessimism:

I wish those who are so sure that democracy is a great success and never to be upset by the cunning and self-interestedness of wily and unscrupulous men, would make a face to face study of these people. I am in favor of the dream of democracy, on whatever basis it can be worked out. It is an ideal. But how I should ask is a proletariat such as this, and poorer specimens yet, as we all know, to hold its own against the keen, resourceful oligarchs at the top. (280)

As long as he can recall, people have been attesting to him the righteousness and fitfulness of democracy, yet Dreiser remains skeptical. His sense of the wisdom of the democratic masses is undermined by his skepticism about the religious ideology that supports it. He had come out of this region of the country as a young man believing in democracy and the Christian ideal as right and true, "and that it really prevailed in life,

and that those who did not agree with it were thieves and scoundrels,” but with experience he went on “only to find by degrees that this theory had no relationship to the facts.” The fact is, rather, that “self-interest and only self-interest ruled—that strength dominated weakness.” Big ideas eclipse small ones. The large minded and strong of will rule the small and average and unassuming. As a young man he was shocked to discover that the supposedly all powerful people were controlled “mentally by a theory that had no relationship to life whatsoever.” “All of us,” he explains, “were mouthing one set of ideals and acting according to a set of instincts entirely opposed to our so called ideas” (280). Hypocrisy and futility are all Dreiser can see in the beliefs that Americans hold dear. Nevertheless, he cannot help but identify and sympathize with these deluded and illusioned people, because their cherished ideas are tools of manipulation and control used by greedy capitalists and industrialists who would just as soon destroy the republic if it did not suit their purposes quite so well as it does. Thus, *Hoosier Holiday* introduces into its geography a mitigated jeremiad against American civic failures. As Dreiser swings back and forth between the poles of his own frustrated ambivalence with each new town and encounter, he unfolds the personal tensions within this critique without expecting to convert or save anybody.

The best America can hope for, Dreiser concedes, is conscientious leadership willing to fight the greedy, power grubbing activities of the elites. He finds an emblem of this political ideal in Tom Johnson, the former reform mayor of Cleveland who had become wealthy by patenting a paybox for trolley cars. As a leading Progressive mayor of the era, Johnson took on the political bosses and moneyed business interests in the name of civic reform. The centerpiece of his municipal reform work called for public

ownership of utilities, and although most of his ideas were never realized, his work raised civic awareness.¹³² Observing the fabulous but cold houses that line Euclid Avenue on the way into Cleveland, including the former home of John D. Rockefeller, Dreiser notes some construction work on rail lines which jar with rest of the neighborhood, and he questions a policeman as to whether the lines are being put in or taken up. The officer explains, “Put in. . . They’ve just finished a long fight here. The rich people didn’t want it, but the people won. Tom Johnson began fighting for this years ago” (224). In Dreiser’s illustration, between the greedy exploiters like Rockefeller, with his big, cold, conservative mansion, and the helpless proletarian masses lay Tom Johnson’s municipal rail lines.

Dreiser thinks powerful and capable men like Tom Johnson have the capacity to direct the energies of the swarming masses toward the greatest good. Johnson’s rail lines, for Dreiser, reflect an effective politics that can take into account the general inability of the masses to rule and protect themselves without giving governance over to the greedy and powerful. “Tom Johnson!” Dreiser exclaims, “In the face of the upspringing horde of financial buccaneers of that time—Hanna, Rockefeller, Morgan, Harriman, Ryan—he stood out as a kind of tribune of the people” (224). Though skeptical, Dreiser optimistically situates Johnson among other progressive leaders like Henry George, William Jennings Bryan, John Altgeld, Hazen “Potato” Pingree, the labor sensitive clothiers Hart, Schaffner and Marx, and Henry Ford. Comparing these men to the likes of

¹³² Building his career on the success of his patent, after various stints working in different executive capacities among public transit and railroad companies, and also serving briefly in the US House of Representatives, Johnson became mayor of Cleveland. Dreiser would have been deeply familiar with Johnson’s work due to his research on Charles Tyson Yerkes, the corrupt stock jobbing financier responsible for Chicago’s El who was his model for Frank Cowperwood in his novels *The Financier* and *The Titan*.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus Christ, St. Francis, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and Walt Whitman (225-6), Dreiser elevates them to the level of prophets who “are not always thinking of themselves” but are “dreamers and poets and seekers after the ideal” (225). According to Dreiser, such men recognize when circumstances become woefully unbalanced in favor of one class and step forward to challenge the powerful and corrupt. There can be no universal panacea, no system of laws, no economic arrangement that can insure justice, he argues, but in the face of human nature by which self interest and only self interest rules idealism can occasionally rise up and balance the scales of fairness. Although a cynic, Dreiser indulges just enough political idealism to allow that with more citizens like Tom Johnson, that is more dreamers, America could actually be what it claims to be.

This is an awkward intellectual compromise. Yet, coming as it does from a hesitant socialist, a devotee of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, the prophets of social Darwinism, and the most prolific of America’s naturalist writers, this politics is not entirely surprising. While on the one hand Dreiser admires great men of genius and talent, he sympathizes with the common and average because of his impoverished upbringing, yet he remains confident that humans amount to little more than passive victims of will or desire or social forces in an unconcerned world. He identifies with Walt Whitman and Tom Johnson as people who challenge the status quo, and who apply their unique and original skills to helping people who do not possess their talents. Recognizing the competing sides of his personal inclinations, sympathy for the common versus admiration for greatness, Dreiser precariously synthesizes multiple seemingly incommensurate lines of thought and represents a sober attempt to find a

stable ground among competing ideologies during a turbulent political age. Thus charting the uneven development of modernity as he drives from New York to Indiana, the narrative of his journey allows him, in a way his novels, earlier autobiographies, and travel writing had not, to explicitly synthesize his ambivalent political ideas.

Spectacular Life and Nothingness: The Nature of Dreiser's Memorial Geography

Beyond providing a platform to voice his geographically based politics, Dreiser uses the mobile meditative experience to articulate his naturalist theory of existence. The automobile trip itself is, both literally and figuratively, the vehicle for developing his existential ideas, because automobility allows Dreiser to meditate on juxtapositions of his memories or expectations of different places with their realities and so reflect on the imbalance between ideation and real life. At Fort Wayne, Dreiser is torn between his memories which had made the town personally sacred and his current perspective which makes it seem dull. He remarks, "looking at it in the cold practical light of a middle-aged automobile tourist" the town holds nothing of the spectacular which he so desires. His disappointment is palpable. Likewise, at Scranton, impressed by the banality of the decorations of his hotel and the architecture of the entire town, Dreiser feels an uncommon desire to live in such a common place. The reason he can not settle in what would be for him a dull place is that he is a thinker. "Oh to escape endless cogitation!" he pleads. He craves satisfaction and comfort in a trivial perspective, but cannot find it:

To feel that a new centre table or a new lamp or a new pair of shoes in the autumn might add something to my happiness! To believe that mere eating and drinking, the cooking of meals, the prospect of promotion in some small job might take away the misery of life, and so escape chemistry and physics and the horror of the ultimate brutal law. (66)

He wishes he could find satisfaction in the putatively coeval myths of Christianity and democracy, but he cannot do it, cannot deny the laws of physics and chemistry that drive the universe and give the sting to life that inspires art. Rather than believing in a myth of a deity, or any of a number of other stories that supposedly make sense of an utterly incomprehensible universe, Dreiser's compulsive intellectualism forces him to constantly confront the fact that the universe is utterly cold and unknowable.

Dreiser's thinking was based on the empiricism of those engaged in scientific research into the patterns of nature. A literary Naturalist, Dreiser attempted objective, scientific observation of human behavior through fiction. In general Dreiser argued that human activities are driven by the same animal tendencies observable throughout the natural world.¹³³ In *Hoosier Holiday* he marks patterns in nature and life, and presumes the presence of fundamental, brutal laws operating behind those patterns, but he further reasons that far more is unknown than is known. "Personally," he suggests, regarding human knowledge of natural processes, "I am one who believes that as yet we have not scratched the surface of underlying fact and law. . . nature is merely dark to us because of her tremendous subtlety and our own very limited powers of comprehension" (343). On the basis of this hypothesis, Dreiser further concludes that human beings are merely tools within the processes of nature which lumber irrevocably toward purposes humans could

¹³³ James Lundquist explains, "Dreiser projects an image of secretive, mysterious Nature, seemingly indifferent to man's haphazard and fumbling progress (if progress it is)." He notes that Dreiser saw people as driven by biological chemistry (111-112).

no sooner comprehend than a tree could comprehend the purpose of a sawmill. Thus, he reasons, all our culture, social systems, and technology may be nothing more than the expression of creative forces beyond our comprehension, the ultimate ends of which lie somewhere in a distant, unimaginable future. On this point Dreiser echoes, though far less optimistically, Whitman's eidolon rhetoric from "Passage to India." The key difference is that in Dreiser's geography of uneven modernization is not a sign of incomplete teleological progress toward social perfection but of brutal evolutionary struggle.

Like Shelley, Dreiser references the promethean myth to explain the ultimate catastrophe of the human quest for understanding he presumes. According to Dreiser, humanity thinks that it extracts minerals from the earth, creates electricity, burns gas, build cars, all for its own purposes, but this is vanity. Humanity thinks it advances knowledge with each plodding discovery, but with every new generation arises not further understanding but more confusion and the compounding of misunderstanding. Humanity, Dreiser claims, "stands confounded for a time, a slave to illusion, toiling with forces and by aid of forces which he does not understand, and effecting results the ultimate use of which he cannot possibly grasp." To toil and grasp is a compulsion of "the flaming, generative chemistry of our bodies." Allegorically comparable to Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven to give to humans, humanity will be brought low by its own aspirations and impulses and will never understand how or why. Citing the war in Europe wherein the belligerents were attempting to bludgeon one another into submission with mechanized warfare, Dreiser presumes that "at the critical moment when man becomes too inquisitive he may once more be chained to the rock, Prometheus like,

and the eagles of ignorance and duty set at his vitals” (345). Dreiser’s revision of the myth of Prometheus allegorizes human history based on patterns observable in nature. Yet, it is an allegory which allows him to sympathize with and embrace the fundamental human impulse to dream and create.

Having caught at the Haynes factory a glimpse of the maze of cycles that dominate and produce modern American existence, the line of reasoning reflected in the promethean allegory springs from Dreiser’s meditations on human nature. For example, passing into Pennsylvania, Dreiser is astonished by the rural mountain scenery: “as we sped along, I was greatly moved. Life orchestrates itself at times so perfectly. It sings like a prima donna of humble joys, and happy homes and simple tasks. It creates like a great virtuoso, bow in hand, or fingers upon invisible keys, a supreme illusion” (38). The ramshackle homes, the rural chores, the sound of cowbells, the smoke from chimneys, the falling shadows, indeed the entirety of the lifeworld stuns him with its beauty; yet, the beauty, he realizes, is but an illusion, and this inspires anguish. He asks, if life is a supreme illusion, illusory of what, and hiding what? Dreiser defers proposing an answer. Later, he returns to this figurative language:

All nature improvises a harmony—a splendid harmony—one of her rarest symphonies indeed. . . . And tonight as we sped out of Owego and I rested in the deep cushions of the car it seemed as if some such perfect symphony was being interpreted. Somewhere out of the great mystery of the unknowable was coming this rare and lovely something. What is God, I asked, that he should build scenes such as this? His forces of chemistry! His powers of physics! We complain and complain, but scenes like this compensate for many things. They weave and sing. But what are they? (116)

Nature here is synonymous with Life in the passage above, and Dreiser’s “God” here is neither the tender loving God, nor the vengeful God of Judeo-Christian mythologies, but

nature, being, life, organic processes or, perhaps, the life force. Thus, awed by the mystery but loath to define it authoritatively himself, Dreiser indulges in appreciation of the scene. This is his “spectacular.” Comfortable in uncertainty, poised in his mobile state of inquiry, he pursues a tumble of raw questions without posing answers. There is no mysticism here, certainly no dogma, just animal curiosity and wonder folded in with a hearty skepticism while he admires the picturesque beauty of the passing scene.

Though full of wonder, and aesthetic appreciation, Dreiser’s view of life and nature leads him inexorably to thoughts of the emptiness and meaninglessness, at least to human comprehension, of existence. Eastbound through New York State, he articulates his philosophical exhaustion:

as we dashed along toward Warsaw under a starry sky, with warm summery wind blowing. . . I allowed myself to sink into the most commemorative state. When you forget the now and go back a number of years and change yourself into a boy and view old scenes and see old faces, what an unbelievably strange and inexplicable thing life becomes! We attempt solutions of this thing, but to me it is the most vacuous of all employments. I rather prefer to take it as a strange, unbelievable, impossible orchestral blending of sounds and scenes and moods and odors and sensations, which have no real meaning and yet which, tinkling and kaleidoscopic as they are, are important for that reason. I never ride this way at night, or when I am tired by day or night, but that life becomes this uncanny blur of nothingness. (152-3)

The play of memory in the rush through passing scenery draws Dreiser headlong to the conclusion that authoritative explanations of life are useless and meaningless, but that does not necessarily make life itself meaningless, only the attempts to formulate authoritative solutions. Dreiser’s personal solution is to appreciate the beauty and pathos of existence, and ponder its questions without necessarily constructing a rigorous metaphysics, mythology, or dogma—to do so would empty life of its pleasures. “Why reason anyway,” he asks, “And to what end? Supposing, for instance, that one could

reason through to the so called solution, actually found it, and then had to live with that bit of exact knowledge and no more forever and ever and ever!” (153). Rather, rejecting attempts toward rationalization, Dreiser embraces play and beauty. He exclaims, “Give me, instead, sound and fury signifying nothing. Give me the song sung by an idiot, dancing down the wind. Give me this gay, sad, mad, seeking and never finding about which we are all so feverishly employed. It is so perfect, this inexplicable mystery” (153). Such critical distance and open appreciation of the vagaries of life allow Dreiser to criticize American culture while paradoxically sympathizing with Americans. His viewpoint alternatively draws him into association with the people and places of his trip, and then a moment later, with a slight turn of mood and bend of the road, he is just as strongly repulsed by them. Such shifts are reconcilable in his logic because meaning, being, appreciation, and experience are all anchored in the immediate present. He can change his mind and be inconsistent because, like an idiot dancing on the wind, he is only obligated to consistency in the moment and the location of the thought, and identifying his mode of thought with his method of travel he registers the fact that inconsistency and change are the only constants in life.

Exploring the fluidity of memory within consciousness while traveling through this memory filled territory amplifies Dreiser’s conclusions about the meaninglessness of life. Ruminating on all the little towns with their houses, lawns, trees, Dreiser frankly expresses his nostalgia: “If one only could go back—supposing one could—unreel like a film, and then represent one’s life to oneself. What elisions would we not make, and what extensions! Some incidents I would make so much more perfect than they were—others would not be in the film at all” (267). “Why do our memories lie so?” Dreiser queries,

amazed at the diminutive appearance of a house he remembered as grand. He asks, “could anyone or anything be a greater liar than the average memory?” For Dreiser, the making of such reconstructions highlights the distance between psychological needs and the realities of life. These distortions are the inevitable result of the combined influence of self protection and misapprehension. At Warsaw, Indiana, a place where every sight triggers memories, Dreiser becomes dejected. “Alas for intentions and opportunities!” he states, deprecating his own designs for this pilgrimage. In a place so rich in his own personal history, he does not feel inclined to browse and commune as he thought he would:

What was there really to see, aside from the mere exterior or surface of things? It is all very well to dream of revisiting your native soil and finding at least traces, if no more, of your early world, but I tell you it is a dismal and painful business. . . Life is a shifting and changing thing. . . All that is left of what you were, or of what was, in your own brain, is a dwindling and spindling thing. (323)

He decides all he wants to do is to leave. Such commemoration “was all very well—but—” (323). The dangling “but” would presumably be completed by some such phrase as “but life and journeys must proceed even if only for the sake of accumulating more hollow surfaces of memory.” Of all his hopes and intentions for return, he leaves in emotional shambles with a headache, feeling “dreadfully depressed and gloomy” (330).

In fact, memory and change are the crux of the book. Driven by impulses to see this or to stop there, yet constrained by closed roads, borders, and the will of others, Dreiser’s automobile geography articulates the interplay of life’s creative forces, particularly the interaction between his memories, imaginings, and actual experiences of America’s environments. This is why Dreiser’s reflection on the floor of the automobile factory is laced with language about the incomprehensibility of both the fundamental

mechanics and creative forces of the universe and the distribution of the elements of modernity throughout the country. The social and natural forces that define, create, and destroy are far too vast for any individual to even imagine. His epiphany in the factory does not reveal the all-defining secret of the universe; rather, it exposes its fundamental incomprehensibility. As a symbol of both modernity and the creative forces of nature, the automobile factory represents the intersection of the barely conceivable historical and geographic trends that have defined America and Dreiser himself within it.

Such uncertainty, for Dreiser, results paradoxically from close examination of life. It comes with proximity to the spectacular. It comes, in fact, by traveling. Rather than learning more about himself and his nation on the road, Dreiser learns that his own conceptualizations of both are strikingly limited. For example, looking at another old home, Dreiser states, “As I stood looking at this I had once more that sinking sensation I experienced in Warsaw and Terre Haute. Life moves so insensibly out from under you. It slips away like a moving tide” (425). The emptiness and meaninglessness of an identity culled out of fleeting memories and fluid misconceptions is the basis of a completely different road of life metaphor than that advanced by Whitman and most road writers. Life slips away, Dreiser maintains, and this is its very beauty. This slipping away, like the scenery that races past an open car racing along, is the very stuff that makes life spectacular, as Dreiser would have it. This passing of self and life, and the shady deluding mists of memory make for the “sting and hurt” that brings forth the “songs and dreams” Dreiser so relishes (240).

Motor Mobility and Narrative Form: Dreiser's Modernization of the Travel Memoir

A Hoosier Holiday is, Dreiser implies, an artful, dreamful song born of Dreiser's own meticulous observation of life in America. The narrative is an opportunity to work together fresh experience, memory, worldview, politics, and personal geography as, formally, a representation of the act meditating during an automobile trip. That is, Dreiser creates in *A Hoosier Holiday* a chronotope appropriate to his geographically mobile subject matter. There are several instances where Dreiser illustrates the formal considerations that went into *A Hoosier Holiday*.

In Warsaw, New York, the morning after their arrival it was raining, and so the companions made a slow start of it. Partially to fill the time, and partially out of curiosity, Dreiser peruses a set of photographs handed to him by Speed. It turns out that Speed, a capable automobile man from the vicinity of Indianapolis, was recruited to assist in the cross country expedition made by Carl Fisher and associates of the Indianapolis Auto Club in 1913, the very trip which was presumed by the public, including Speed, Booth, and Dreiser, to be the pathfinding mission for the Lincoln Highway.¹³⁴ Evidently, Speed had been speaking of this earlier trip, and had handed Dreiser his photographs from it.

Addressing his reader directly, Dreiser remarks on the pictures:

I wish you might have seen these pictures selected by Speed to illustrate his trip. Crossing a great country like America, from coast to coast, visiting new towns each day and going by a route hitherto not much followed, one might gather much interesting information and many pictures (if no more than postcards) of beautiful and striking things. (159-60)

¹³⁴ Actually, the Lincoln Highway was not laid out on that trip, but on a separate excursion led principally by Henry Joy. See Chapter 3.

Disappointed, Dreiser apparently expected to see a collection of pictures of natural wonders and local color, but Speed's photographs were all of the cars. Any picture that might be of picturesque interest was marred, according to Dreiser, by having a car in the foreground (160). The problem is emphasis. In Dreiser's view, Speed has emphasized entirely the wrong thing, or rather he overly emphasizes a single thing without sufficiently incorporating elements which, to his lights, would be necessary and fundamental to properly narrating, by photograph anyway, a cross country tour.

Yet the point is not to criticize Speed personally, far from it. Speed's photos represent the average to Dreiser's discerning eye. He affirms that looking through the pictures, "I could tell exactly how Speed's mind worked, and it was about the way the average mind would work under such circumstances." Representing the average, Speed had made the subject of the cross country tour the automobile and the roads, good and bad, traveled. If any other material were included, it was peripheral or background to the car and its track. "The cars and their occupants were the great things about this trip,"

Dreiser complains:

and wherever the cars were, there was the interest—never elsewhere. . . whenever the cars rolled into a town or along a great valley or near a great mountain, let the town be never so interesting, or the mountain, or the valley, the great thing to photograph was the cars in the procession. It never seemed to occur to the various photographers to do anything different. Cars, cars, cars, here they were, and always in a row and always the same. (160)

Disappointed and weary though he was with the content of the pictures, he returned them to Speed, "letting him think that they were very, very remarkable—which they were."

The remarkableness is not, as Dreiser allows Speed to assume, due to the record of the mechanical accomplishment, but because the photographs record only the mechanical

accomplishment and none of what he thinks of as the essential aspects of such an undertaking. So if Speed represents the average mind, he represents also the limitations of road writing as Dreiser sees it, which is that it focuses mainly on the automobile itself. Dreiser's narrative, conversely, does not repeat this same old story.

Dreiser does not eliminate the motorcar from his depiction; rather, he incorporates it seamlessly into his composition. That is, he moves beyond the standard contemporary approach to road story narration by isolating several of the essential qualities of automobiling and creating narrative techniques modeled on these qualities. For instance, from the very beginning, Dreiser associates the sound and motion of the automobile with song. Outside New York City, Speed could really open the engine's throttle for the first time, and watching the speedometer climb Dreiser comments on the musicality of the moment: "It was a smooth-running machine which, at its best (or worst), gave vent to a tr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r which became after a while somewhat like a croon" (26). Later, at Wilkes-Barre, Dreiser confesses that though rather tempted to remain for the night in a town that he liked a good deal, he "could think of nothing better than motoring on and on. That feel of a cool breeze blowing against one, of seeing towns and hills and open fields and humble farms go scudding by! Of hearing the tr-r-r-r-r-r of this sound machine!" (63). What follows this decision to go on is the narration of the "most delightful portion of this trip." Driving in Pennsylvania Dreiser exults, "And what a day! The everchanging panorama—how wonderful it was." From here, each point of visual reference seen from the traveling automobile is punctuated with the "tr-r-r-r-r-r" as though it signifies for Dreiser a line break in his mobile prose poetry:

Tr-r-r-r-r and we were descending a steep hill, at the bottom of which lay a railroad track. . . Tr-r-r-r-r, and now we were passing a prosperous farmyard, aglow with strident flowers, one woman sewing at a window, others talking with the neighbor at the door. Tr-r-r-r-r, here we were swinging around a sharp curve, over an iron bridge, noisy and shaky and beneath which ran a turbulent stream. . . Tr-r-r-r-r, and now came a small factory or foundry section with tall smokestacks. . . Tr-r-r-r-r and here we are at the farther outskirts of this same small town with more green fields in the distance. . . Tr-r-r-r-r—how the miles do fly past, to be sure! (82-3)

Dreiser does not include the “Tr-r-r-r-r” every time he narrates what might be usefully termed the mobile picturesque,¹³⁵ but by establishing the trend early in the narration, when he enters depictions of the mobile picturesque the sound of the engine is continually implied through the book. Symbolizing for Dreiser the “magic of the road,” the onomatopoeic “tr-r-r-r-r” is a graphic representation of the Pathfinder’s noise, and associated with both song and motion it is synonymous with the presentation of Dreiser’s mobile meditations and, therefore, his narrative.

Another recurring formal theme in *Hoosier Holiday* is the postcard, and Dreiser reports on the acquiring of postcards as a tourist activity elemental to the experience of auto-touring; yet, he also incorporates the postcard as an inspiration for the scenic representations of local color. For example, the night of their first stop, Dreiser bought “all the truly indicative postcards” he could find, an act repeated at every stop of the trip. The activity allows Dreiser to take account of the local scenery and encounter some local person who becomes for him, fairly or unfairly, a sort of barometer of the character of the town. For instance, in one resort town Dreiser takes the store proprietor’s familiar interpellation, “need any stamps, cap?” (48), as indicative of America’s cultural singularity and social stability.

¹³⁵ The mobile picturesque can be defined as the adaptation of resonant romantic tropes of the appreciation of picturesque beauty to auto-mobile exploration of American scenery.

A popular American form of the representation of the spectacular, the postcard is also for Dreiser a marker of how modernization was transforming not only modes of travel, but the experience of place for travelers. Dreiser notes that while he was a boy, the only postcards one saw were of big cities. That trend had changed, he reflects, by the time he was on the road with Booth:

On this trip there was scarcely a village that did not contain a rack somewhere of local views, if no more than of clouds and rills and cattle standing in water near an old bridge. By hunting out the leading drugstore first, we could almost invariably discover all there was to know about a town in a scenic way, or nearly all. It was most gratifying. (217)

In some cases, the presence of postcards influences the places they stop, thus defining the character of the trip. For instance, driving along Lake Erie they had nearly passed by without stopping to see Cedar Point until they saw picture postcards of the beautiful beach at a department store and backtracked to visit the scenic wonder (239). Dreiser took pleasure in hunting out postcards to make a record of the trip. He explains, “walk into any drug or book store of any up to date small town today, and you will find in a trice nearly every scene of importance and really learn the character and charms of the vicinity.” So doing, he found himself impressed with “the spirit of these small towns. . . which seeks out the charms of the local life and embodies them in colored prints” (448).

Defining in their way modern travel, Dreiser implies that post cards inform of his book. At Hicksville, for instance, on the border between Ohio and Indiana, Dreiser makes a direct association between postcards and poetry. As they enter the town at dusk, Dreiser witnesses what he describes as the epic of the cycles of daily life: “Poets may come and poets may go, a Gray, a Goldsmith, a Burns in every generation, but this thing which they seek to interpret remains forever” (268). The thing here is life, in Dreiser’s enlarged sense

of the word. Poets pass through it, coming and going both temporally and spatially, but life itself in its daily cycles remains constant, Dreiser maintains. He thinks about historical painters like Vermeer and Inness who made classic representations of works and days and, taking comfort in Booth's drawings, Dreiser states that Hicksville "was so delightful to me in all its rural naiveté and crudity, that I wanted to sing about it or sit down in some corner somewhere and rhapsodize on paper" (269). Instead of composing verse, however, he goes in search of picture postcards of the town. The postcards serve as a substitute for the poetry he might have written on the spot. Rather than write his impressions, he seeks the postcard to serve as a souvenir for the recollections he will develop later into his narrative, thus allowing the postcards to influence the trip not only by suggesting sights to see, but also by influencing individual memorialization of local color.¹³⁶ Implicitly postcards then serve multiple purposes, as little pictorial lyrics, as impromptu guides, and as souvenirs that arranged can partially narrate the course and local color of the trip, all of which were missing, in Dreiser's assessment, in Speed's pictorial story of the Lincoln Highway.

Additionally, Dreiser uses the travel narrative form to reflect and augment what for him is the actual experience of motoring and meditating on life. Where the body of early automobility narratives had failed to adequately incorporate the broader topics arising out of motor travel, Dreiser added the complex explorations of ideas and scenes. The analysis of social, political and economic conditions, as well as his unique philosophical perspective are distributed throughout the book in such a way that they prevent the recitation of sights and scenes from becoming tedious. Just as the peculiar

¹³⁶ Gary Totten observes that the ephemera of tourist culture like postcards and travel brochures are central to Dreiser's travel writing, directing Dreiser's "gaze and experiences" (25).

experience of riding “poised in inquiry” allows Dreiser the mental state to develop extravagant ideas, the fluctuation between expositional narration of plot points, and Dreiser’s elaboration on his own theories and criticism structures the narrative. *A Hoosier Holiday* is a sizable book, and Dreiser is able to sustain his prose only by shifting among multiple modes of narration. The development of his theories is repeatedly deferred by new geographic material that interrupts his musings, a beautiful scene, a bridge, a town, or an encounter. The shifting narrative focus keeps the reader in a poised state of attention reflective of Dreiser’s poised state of attention in the car. Thus in presentation the larger ideas of the narrative develop slowly and always in response to immediate stimulus as the author moves through the country. Thus, Dreiser’s philosophical perspective appears to develop organically out of his experience in American space, and the result is that his thinking is not apparent on the surface of his narrative but must be dug out from among the various observations and meditations embedded within the sweeping narration. This form of narration is not entirely Dreiser’s invention. The features of this mode of writing are common to the travel narrative genre in general, especially American travel writing by Henry James and Mark Twain.¹³⁷ Dreiser’s innovation is in the adaptation of his peripatetic assemblage of reactions and ideas accumulated while traveling to the particular form of travel in which he is engaged.

Finally, Walt Whitman’s influence on Dreiser’s approach to *Hoosier Holiday* bears further analysis, because Whitman is the poet whom Dreiser most often cites as a

¹³⁷ See James’ *The American Scene* which struggles to narrate the experience of auto travel in New England; Wharton’s *Motor Flight through France* in which Wharton speaks practically only of sites in the towns where they stop; and Twain’s *Roughing It* and *Following the Equator*, neither of which include the automobile, but both of which depict travel in a loosely jointed, peripatetic way.

model in this book.¹³⁸ For instance, outside of Buffalo, while Booth sketches the industrial landscape, Dreiser studies the houses of the people who live in this modern waste land, a prospect which brings him to ideas of poetry: “I spent my time speculating as to what sort of people occupied the small drab houses which faced this picturesque prospect. I imagined a poet as great as Walt Whitman being able to live and take an interest in this grimy beauty, with thieves and pickpockets and prostitutes of a low order for neighbors” (178). Later, when Dreiser cites his examples of the poetic idealists, the dreamers who would give back to the people, Tom Johnson, Henry George, John Altgeld, Henry Ford, the only true poet he mentions in association with these men is Whitman, sounding his “barbaric yawp, yawping over the roofs of the world” (either a misquote of or an improvisation on Whitman, 226). Moreover, Whitman’s principal formal device of “Song of the Open Road” is the repetition of the French imperative, “Allons,” let us go, which serves as a poetic device that allows Whitman to expand his themes over broad horizons. Likewise, in one instance Dreiser shifts from elaborate philosophical abstraction to narrative exposition, saying “Allons!” (406). Later in the book, after discoursing on life’s tendency to “slip away like a slow moving tide” (425), Dreiser sympathetically takes “one backward glance” (427) on the yearnings of a little girl he had encountered before moving along. When Dreiser recites memories of walking dusty Indiana roads with his brother, he mimics qualities of Whitman’s lyrical phrasing: “and then late in the afternoon, after hours of this wonder world, we trudge home, along the

¹³⁸ Dreiser’s biographer, W. A. Swanberg, is suspicious of whether Dreiser ever read Whitman. Despite the obvious correlations between the two, such as openness about sexuality, interest in evolution, and democratic sympathies, Swanberg assumes that because Dreiser rarely mentioned Whitman he must not have really read him. Swanberg reports that Richard Duffy made a present of a volume of Whitman’s poems to Dreiser but wonders, “Did he read Whitman, find in him a poetic father, a rebel who had suffered similarly? One wonders, for he never had much to say about him.” (99)

warm, dusty yellow country road; the evening sun is red in the West, our feet buried in the dust. Not a wagon, not a sound. . . Brown legged, dusty, tired, we tramp back to the kitchen door.” Thus citing Whitman as a forebear in affinity for the democratic and echoing his lyrical phrasing, Dreiser’s own backward glance over traveled roads in *A Hoosier Holiday* updates Whitman’s road for the twentieth century.

Dream On

Much like Emily Post’s friends, Edgar Lee Masters had tried to convince Dreiser that the trip would bore and disappoint him. In some ways Masters is right. Thus, at the end of the trip, given the pity he finds for his fellow citizens, and the psychological trauma of confronting the disappointments of his own maturity, Dreiser wonders rhetorically whether the trip was worth it. This resonates with an earlier encounter with a woman who had obviously never been anywhere. Dreiser comments, “I wished heartily she might ride all the long distances her moods might crave. ‘Only,’ I thought, ‘would it be fair exchange for all her delightful wonder?’” (37). As an aging man who feels tortured by the intellectualism of his large overland experience, Dreiser illuminates every question that he has been weighing in his mobile meditations. Who would want to be dull and stay in one place? Or who would not want to drive on and on to discover that driving is all there is? How can one aspire to knowledge that amounts to nothing more than a fleeting dream? Can one embrace progressive, democratic, or socialistic politics knowing that they are delusions, and can one embrace a people knowing that they are deluded? In

short, is broad experience worth disillusionment? He asks, does what he has learned justify this drive?

Reconciling his overt pessimism with a banal sort of optimism, Dreiser decides that America is child-like and free yet bound up in illusions. Americans, he figures, are blinded by hopeless political ideals and petty entertainments; they are “a heavily though sweetly illusioned people.” So for all its “health, wealth, strength, [and] enthusiasm,” he reckons that America “cannot survive ultimately. . . . In the vast universal sea of motion, where change and decay are laws, and individual power is almost always uppermost, it must go under—but until then—” (511). Until then, he will cheer for the Republic. If life is but chance, change, and emptiness, and if people are its victims, why not, he attests, go down dreaming. Settling on a Pascalian compromise, Dreiser concludes that America must continue to strive as a protest against the inevitable, and he will strive with it. He maintains, if “one country, one state dares to dream the impossible, why cast it down before its ultimate hour? Why not dream with it? It is so gloriously and truly a poetic land. We were conceived in ecstasy and born in dreams” (512). “Dream on,” he charges, and someday historians in distant lands will say:

Once there was a great republic. And its domain lay between a sea and sea—a great continent. In its youth and strength it dared assert that all men were free and equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights. Then came the black storms of life—individual passions and envies, treasons, stratagems, spoils. The very gods, seeing it young, dreamful, of great cheer, were filled with envy. They smote and it fell. But, oh, the wonderful memory of it! For in those days men were free, because *they imagined they were free*— (Dreiser’s emphasis 513)

What, he ponders, did two thousand miles teach him about himself, Indiana, and America? Dreiser states, “The land had yielded a strange crop of memories and of characteristics to be observed” (506). Mapping the oppositions between Europe and

America, the country and the city, past and present, the traditional and the modern, political realities and idealism, the spectacular and the fleeting dreams it conjures, Dreiser wrestles openly with ideas and ideals as he works his way through the territory of the nation in search of self understanding and a mode of artistic expression sufficient to his vision of America. Modeling himself as the overland critic who is as liminal as he is cynical, Dreiser implicitly argues that an engaged critical relationship to the nation ought to develop out of automobility; yet, he is skeptical that many will follow his lead. So rather than parroting the jingoism of See America First and Good Roads Movement rhetoric, Dreiser's geography in *A Hoosier Holiday* singularly represents the automobile American road as a space for the exploration of the individual's relationship to national space and history, as a social space that reflects historical transformations in national culture and institutions, and as a metaphor that represents his idea of the natural conditions of existence. With this he leaves America to its fantasies.

CHAPTER 6

DRENCHED WITH THE VISION OF AMBER DISTANCES: THE GEOGRAPHY OF AUTOMOBILITY IN SINCLAIR LEWIS'S APPRENTICESHIP NOVELS

At the height of his career, Sinclair Lewis was popular, critically acclaimed, and also reviled for his inflammatory antagonism of traditional America values like village life, religion, and class distinction. Lewis's popularity, critical acceptance, and infamy indicate a complicated history of literary reception. He did not begin to achieve this level of fame, acclaim, and notoriety until the publication of *Main Street* in 1920, after he had already published numerous short stories in the slick pages of popular magazines like *Smart Set* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, and five novels as well.¹³⁹ In what John T. Flanagan has termed Lewis's apprenticeship writing, meaning everything prior to *Main Street*, Lewis honed the craft of his fiction, which at its best combines a sharp ear for idiom and dialect, a documentarian's eye for realistic detail, a journalist's sense of the topical, and a satirist's critical wit enlivened by thoroughly American humor.¹⁴⁰ With these qualities, Lewis's fiction was ideally suited for popular readership, and his

¹³⁹ It is on the strength of his novels of the twenties (*Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, and *Dodsworth*) that Lewis earned his literary reputation and ultimately the first Nobel Prize for literature awarded to an American writer.

¹⁴⁰ See Brown, Daniel R. "Sinclair Lewis's Satire—A Negative Emphasis" in *Sinclair Lewis: Modern Critical Views*; Flanagan, John T. "A Long Way to Gopher Prairie: Sinclair Lewis' Apprenticeship"; Austin, James C. "Sinclair Lewis and Western Humor."

approach allowed him to vividly represent various aspects of the drama (or comedy) of contemporary American life to his mass market audience, particularly socio-cultural changes of modernity like, significantly, automobility.¹⁴¹

Lewis was infatuated with the idea of adventure, of travel, of exploration, and the rise of automobility during his youth only fed his romanticization of life in motion.¹⁴² As a youthful, idealistic poet, he had romanticized the idea of the vagabond life, writing, “Princess, Princess, silver maiden, / Throw your casement open; see— / On the terrace I am singing; / Come and take to the road with me” (qtd in Lingeman 45). According to his first wife, Grace Hegger Lewis, his greatest thrill (greater even than having an entire 5th Avenue bookshop window devoted to *Main Street* or receiving the Nobel Prize from the King of Sweden) was the day he pulled up in front of his family home in a newly purchased Model T, chiming “How about a little ride?” (98). Upon finishing *The Job*, he and Grace designed and constructed modifications converting their Model T into a camper and drove from their Minnesota home to Seattle.¹⁴³ When they sold the car to some college students, the Lewises wept as their little Ford sped away (Grace Hegger

¹⁴¹ Stephen Conroy has argued that Lewis cultivated a sense of the drama of life as reflected in the struggles and triumphs of individuals buffeted by the cross influences of neighborhood, city, and social class with an authority born of what he terms Lewis’s “sociological imagination.” Conroy’s terminology is apt in that Lewis developed a form of narrative that was consistently modern with regards to addressing the complicated realities of the rapidly changing social order. As John Flanagan puts it, “all of Lewis’s published fiction, even the relatively unsuccessful novels published before 1920, forms part of an American comedy which embraces the world of business, religion, politics, industry, education, and farming—an impressive whole with twenty or more parts picturing the national scene” (95). Regarding Lewis’s early popularity, according to Lewis biographer Mark Schorer, after publishing his short story “Nature Incorporated,” Lewis took the advice of George Horace Lorimer, the editor of *Saturday Evening Post*, to become a household name publishing short fiction with mass appeal (229). Defining Lewis as a popular artist whose expertise as a craftsman occasionally allowed him to transcend himself, Stephen Conroy points out that Lewis “reaches out to the people” (“popular Artist and Elite Standards” 198, 201).

¹⁴² According to John T Flanagan, for Lewis, “The desire for change, for travel, for freedom was always close to his own heart and epitomized much of his own past life” (94).

¹⁴³ Ford actively encouraged such modifications, encouraging inventive Model T owners to submit for publication diagrams and photographs of such modifications along with narratives of camping experience.

Lewis 108). In his writing, Lewis thrills to the idea of setting out on the open road with only the vaguest of destinations for the mere sake of tramping, vagabonding, gypsying. He had written an essay entitled “Home Without Books” in which he lauds those who prefer an actual motor trip to reading (Schorer 229), and later published a series of articles entitled “Adventures in Autobumming” in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Likewise, his apprenticeship fiction, from *Trail of the Hawk* to *The Innocents* to *Free Air*, actively developed a new ethos of free citizenship based on automobility.

Just as Americans were greedily buying up every car that the automobile manufacturers could turn out, Lewis was developing a record, an ethos, and a mythology that lent legitimacy and significance to the new national geography being created in response to the automobile. In “Adventures in Autobumming,” a three part series that Lewis wrote for *The Saturday Evening Post* late in 1919, Lewis advances his case for larger investment, both popular and political, in automobility. “The motor trip,” he suggests, “is to be considered not merely as a vacation but as a duty for all conscientious citizens, for there is nothing which so swiftly and painlessly reduces swellings of the head” (“Gasoline Gypsies” 5). He represents automobiling as modern adventure. He warns that distance motoring is an acquired taste, “but after ten days [the motorist] will revel in being part of the land, of long roads and quiet fields and sloping lovely hills and placid people content to live alone” (5). Driving teaches humility, the “good fellowship of the road” (6), and perhaps most importantly social responsibility. Lewis laments what he calls “The Great American Frying Pan” and pleads that conscientious motorists and citizens owe it to each other and the entire nation to “kick” for decent and clean service in the hotels, restaurants, and garages throughout the land. As the demands of this

conscientious consumerism are met, “autobumming” will become easier and more pleasurable for all, and traveling, he argues, will be experienced as it was meant to be, “not mere getting somewhere but going for the sake of going” (66). In “Want a Lift,” Lewis extols the practice of offering rides to strangers. “The liveliest pleasure of autobumming,” he claims, “is picking up stray people and learning how curiously like millionaires and famous sculptors they are” (24). In traveling, as Lewis would have it, the autobum is thrown into intimate contact with all the various people of the country, and thus “it’s pretty hard for an autobumbo to go on being clever and cynical about people along the way.” Implied in these essays is a modernization of Whitman’s articulation of the Jeffersonian belief in neighborliness is the foundation of democracy—when one spends any amount of time driving around the country, he or she develops a sense that all the citizens of the nation are neighbors. The shared concern, fellowship, generosity that makes one a good neighbor makes one also a good motorist and, implicitly, a good citizen. Published in the wake of the Army Convoy’s cross country trip and with the public debate over the extension of the Federal Aid Road Act, “Adventures in Autobumming” stabilizes an ethos of citizenship and progress based on automobility and crystallizes the ideas by which Lewis contributed to the production of automobility in his apprenticeship fiction.

Lewis’s novels, *Trail of the Hawk* (1915), *The Innocents* (1917), and *Free Air* (1918), use his vivid sociological imagination and concern for popular attitudes to narrate the significance of automobility. Because Lewis’s stories were accessible, dealing in familiar narrative styles and plots, and because they responded to American concerns

rather than imitating European aesthetic sensibilities,¹⁴⁴ they were all the more readily accepted by popular publishers and a popular readership.¹⁴⁵ Lewis's early novels consistently shore up the notion that automobile exposure to American spaces dispels sentimental illusions and thus fortifies the character of American citizens. Narrativizing the arguments of the See America First campaign and Good Roads Movement, Lewis's chronotopes cast road travel in America as lending itself to a dawning consciousness; that is, a new more realistic understanding of the nation and the position of the individual within it. This dawning understanding contributes to the development of confident individuality, ultimately leading to the realization of a condition of greater freedom for the individual. The open road provides Lewis's characters an outlet for self discovery, rejuvenation, and the fortitude necessary to confront the numerous pressures of modern society. For Lewis, the motor narrative is a vehicle for picaresque social criticism. On the road, Lewis's characters are compelled to think for themselves, live by their wits, and confront the various character types of America. Echoing Walt Whitman and Frederick Jackson Turner, Lewis's early writing suggests that exposure to the American frontier

¹⁴⁴ Roger Forseth argues in "Can you Go Home Again? Sinclair Lewis: Main Street and Paris" that Lewis' lack of acceptance among the avant garde American writers living in Paris in the twenties is the result of his choice to cultivate a popular American readership. Based on the criticism of Arthur Symonds, Parisian Imagists, Amy Lowell, and pretentious bohemian salon culture that Lewis includes in the novels analyzed here, it might be argued that Lewis panders to the tastes of a popular readership; yet, it might also be the case that, following Whitman, Lewis endeavors to develop a literature appropriate and original to the American experience in an effort to foster a stronger nation and democracy supported by the arts. Likely Lewis is at one and the same time pandering to vulgar tastes and celebrating American institutions like Midwestern austerity. Regardless of Lewis's motives, his fiction was enviably popular.

¹⁴⁵ According to Alfred Harcourt in a letter to Lewis, "Do you know *Free Air* is making a hit? My neighbors and their wives are saying it is one of the most interesting and refreshing things they have seen in the S.E.P. for some time" (qtd in Lingeman 124). The "Free Air" serial in Saturday Evening Post was so popular that officials in Minnesota worried about the upcoming tourist season wrote a concerned letter to the Post's publisher, G. H. Lorimer about Lewis's representation of their state: "The opening chapter. . . is creating a great deal of unfavorable comment in Minnesota, owing to the fact that it is appearing at the opening of tourist season, picturing the roads of Minnesota as actually impassable" (qtd in Forseth 189). They feared that this unfavorable representation would adversely affect tourism in their state.

newly opened by the automobile remakes and prepares his characters to confront the petty ideologies cultivated in stultifying drawing rooms, tea houses, and village councils. The confidence and individuality his characters acquire through their travels make them potent representatives of social progress in the face of traditionalism.¹⁴⁶ This chapter analyzes Lewis's molding of the idea that exposure to national space as integral to the formation of model American character in his popular narratives, *Trail of the Hawk*, *The Innocents*, and *Free Air* and shows how Lewis contributes to the revision of American geography for the automobile age.

The Tramp-Mechanic as Modern Knight Errant in *Trail of the Hawk*

Trail of the Hawk is the story of Carl "Hawk" Ericson who, having grown up in provincial Joralemon, Minnesota, becomes a famous aviator and eventually automobile executive. An American romance that stresses the significance national exploration for the development of personal freedom, *Trail of the Hawk* is broken into three narrative segments. The first reveals Carl's youth in Minnesota, ending with his expulsion from College. The second segment depicts Carl's life tramping throughout America, his success as an auto mechanic, and his climb to fame as an aviator. The final portion narrates Carl's entry into the automobile business, courtship of a New York socialite, and

¹⁴⁶ James Lea argues in "Sinclair Lewis and the Implied America" that "Lewis assumed that there *had been* a better world, or at least a better America, and that his twentieth century had betrayed the potential for freedom and productive happiness implicit in the people, life, and very land itself. . . Lewis's novels. . . are always played against a back-drop depicting the America that has been, and that by extension could be, but is being perverted" (184-5).

then recovery of his nearly failed marriage through shared tramping. Casting his hero as a mechanic, and making tramping integral to the development of the romantic plot, Lewis links the automobile and exposure to the American continent to the realization of success in business as in life in America.

As a young man, Carl is a progressive thinker for Joralemon, voicing his own freedom to roam and arguing for the viability of new forms of mechanized travel. For instance, Carl's simpering, romantic neighbor suggests that Carl should:

read King Arthur and Galahad and all them instead of *Scientific American*, and about these fool horseless carriages and stuff—There never will be any practical use for horseless carriages, anyway. . . My mother says she don't believe the Lord ever intended us to ride without horses, or what did he give us horses for? And the things always get stuck in the mud and you have to walk home. (29)

Carl replies, "Son, let me tell you, I'll own a horseless carriage some day, and I bet I go an average of twenty miles and hour with it, maybe forty" (29). Later, when he finally actually sees an example of the cars he has been reading about, his sense of the world changes: "Out of this wholesome, democratic, stuffy village life Carl suddenly stepped into the great world. A motorcar, the first he'd ever seen, was drawn up before the Hennepin House." "I will own one," he insists, "Rats! I'm going to own a horseless carriage, and I'm going to tour every state in the union. . . . Think of seeing mountains! And the Ocean! And going twenty miles and hour like a train!" (34). Seeing the car inspires Carl to go to college to study mechanical engineering. The car stands for Carl as a means to leave the constrained world of Joralemon and so metonymically represents the possibility of seeing the whole country.

Carl briefly attends Plato College but is expelled, which liberates him from conformity to provincial attitudes. He begins “to understand that he was actually free to take youth’s freedom:”

He saw the vision of the America through which he might follow the trail like the pioneers whose spiritual descendant he was. . . Cities of tall towers; tawny deserts of the Southwest and the flawless sky of cornflower blue over the sage-brush and painted butte; silent forests of the Northwest; golden China dragons of San Francisco; old orchards of New England; the oily Gulf of Mexico where tramp steamers puff down to Rio; a snow piled cabin among somber pines of northern mountains. Elsewhere, elsewhere, elsewhere, beyond the skyline, under larger stars, where men ride jesting and women smile. Names alluring to the American he repeated—Shenandoah, Santa Ynez, the Little Big Horn, Baton Rouge, the Great Smokies, Rappahannock, Arizona, Cheyenne, Monongahela, Androscoggin; canyon and bayou; sycamore and mesquite; Broadway and Camino Real. (121-2)

Thus, freed by fortune from social and familial ties, the whole spectacular American continent is open to Carl, and he thrills to just go, “elsewhere, elsewhere, elsewhere.” Rather than college, tramping and supposedly real world experience set Carl up for success. During his adventuring days, Carl’s “young joy of wandering matured into an ease in dealing with whatever man or situation he might meet” (127). Becoming an aviator, he wins national fame with daring flights and victories in major aeronautical races. As an aviator he is able to combine his desire to travel with his mechanical talents, and because of his fame is welcomed among the highest social circles as a sort of modern knight errant.¹⁴⁷ However, the real dangers of flying soon become apparent, and Carl drops out of aviation and disappears to Europe.

¹⁴⁷ See Martin Light, “The Quixotic Motifs of *Main Street*” on the tendency in Lewis’ fiction for characters to romanticize situations: “The tensions between romance and reality embodied in *Don Quixote* lived within Lewis himself throughout his life, becoming the subject of his fiction and the source of his misery” (175).

In the next phase of his life, Carl returns to New York with an enthusiastic recommendation letter from the president of the Aero Club, plans for the “Touricar,” and capital to invest, all of which lands him a position with the VanZile Motor Corporation. The Touricar is the obvious outgrowth of Carl’s hobo spirit. It is a modified motorcar with a bed that folds out, a canopy that opens over the car, and storage for camp equipment. He explains, the Touricar could quickly be converted into a “refuge cleaner than country hotel and safer than a tent” (227). Thus, Carl sees himself as revolutionizing the way people see the world. He brags:

Authors seem to think they’re the only ones who have ideals. Now I’m in the automobile business, and I help to make people get out into the country—bet a lot more of them get out because of motoring than because of reading poetry about spring. But if I claimed a temperament because I introduce the motorist’s soul to the daisy, everyone would die laughing. (264)

Carl’s polemic here is driven by an annoyance with the pretentious artistic types he finds everywhere in New York. However, Lewis self-referentially criticizes snobbish authors who rhapsodize about getting out of the city into pastoral scenes and lionizes the practical mechanics and engineers who legitimately make automobility possible. This echoes Henry Ford’s idea of building a car in which the average man could take his family out into the country (Chapter 3).¹⁴⁸ Thus, while Lewis elevates the practical hero, he at the same time provides an accessible narrative of automobility that reinforces the popular ethos of escape which has its foundations in the frontier idea of America as an outlet for disaffected seekers of freedom. Referencing this narrative in a scheme to market the Touricar, Carl hatches the idea of a promotional tour from New York to San Francisco (363). Linking the motorcar to notions of freedom and discovery which already informed

¹⁴⁸ Lewis admired Ford enough that when talk of his Peace Ship went around he suggested that he would be aboard (Schorer 1961, 196).

popular conceptions of national space, Lewis favorably reflects the production of promotions for good roads and motorcars while also contributing to the promotion of automobility by giving such labors a popular, accessible narrative.

Despite his hackneyed plot and comfortable ideologies of frontier freedom, Lewis introduces an element of criticism to the social order and a guarded concern for the potential realities of automobility. When Carl suggests to the lead salesman of VanZile “that the Touricar might not only bring them money, but really take people off to a larger freedom,” the salesman scoffs: “I don’t care a hang where they go with the thing as long as they pay for it. You can’t be an idealist and make money. You make money and then you can have all the ideals you want to, and give away some hospitals and libraries” (325). Obviously, the salesman references the philanthropy of wealthy capitalists like Andrew Carnegie with his libraries and Henry Ford with his Hospital, but the drive to profit from the motorcar precedes any benefits it may foster. This idea is jarring to Carl. Thus, Lewis represents the profit motive as constricting. One works to make money and in making money is obligated to spend that money on consumer goods. Idealism is only appropriate for the rare, super-wealthy capitalist. As for the rest of the wage slaves who desire the supposed freedom of cars and the whole round of consumer goods, “the tyranny of nine to five is stronger, more insistent, in every department of life, than the most officious oligarchy” (324). The book’s closing sentiment, spoken by Carl, “how bully it is to be living, if you don’t have to give up living in order to make a living,” exposes the problem that the freedom promised by automobility is unremittingly tied to a form of consumer slavery. Like Carl, Lewis is an anxious socialist and does not allow this theme to linger in his narrative. Nevertheless, Lewis is perceptive and critical enough

to represent a glimpse of the capitalist economy of automobility which contains the nascent potential to delimit the very liberties it would purport to unleash.

Once in New York and settled with VanZile, Carl learns the real distance his years of tramping carried him from Joralemon. Carl discovers that Gertie Cowles, his childhood love, is in New York, and he rushes up to spend an evening with her during which he feels that he is home and able to relax for the first time in a long while. However, the pleasures of this partial homecoming are short lived, and Carl becomes depressed when he comes to realize that Gertie, though living in New York, has simply brought her Midwestern provincialism with her. Having seen so much of the world, reminders of little Joralemon depress Carl. He flees one of Gertie's parties and finds an all-night garage, hires a racing-car, "and at dawn he was driving furiously through Long Island, a hundred miles from New York, on a roadway perilously slippery with falling snow" (245). The racing car supports Carl's need to escape Gertie and the comfortable but dull provincial stasis she represents.

Recovered from his youthful devotion to Gertie, Carl begins to pursue Ruth Winslow, daughter of a prominent New York family, but Carl's courtship of Ruth is complicated by several geographic factors. First, Carl must overcome the fact of his undistinguished, Midwestern upbringing, which he is able to do because he is the famous Hawk Ericson, an identity totally dependent upon his years spent bumming and tramping. In addition, Carl must also locate and solidify in Ruth an openness to the idea (if not the actual experience) of a life of traveling. So he constantly proposes to Ruth the possibility of shared tramping. For instance, he tells Ruth of the Touricar, prompting her to exclaim, "I think it's so wonderful. . . I want to go off tramping through the Berkshires. I'm so

tired of going to the same old places” (278). Carl takes Ruth tramping, because he can’t take her to the theater or New York club parties, and their courtship amounts to a series of small adventures in locales around the city. He takes her hiking along the Palisades where the narrator observes quixotically, “it was too splendidly open for them not to rejoice in the freedom from New York streets and feel like heroes conquering the miles” (290). Ruth later asks if Ninety-second Street will be big enough for the stars Carl has shown her, showing her own broadening horizons. Later, a cross country skiing jaunt in New Bedford proves Ruth’s heartiness in the outdoors, and riding back to the city the two imagine making a home together. In spite of the separate worlds of their backgrounds, their mutual attraction and visions of a life as tramping playmates win out.

The sophistication and practicality with which Ruth and Carl court each other blossoms into romantic idylls in the heat of young love. The narrator rhapsodizes, “The aviator and the girl who read psychology, modern lovers, stood hand in hand, as though the age of machinery were a myth; as though he were a piping minstrel and she a shepherdess. Before them was the open road and all around them the hum of bees” (375). Yet, as Ruth and Carl confront the realities of marriage, the irony of this passage is exposed. Their plans to tramp fall by the wayside as Carl’s time becomes increasingly consumed by marketing the Touricar. Meanwhile, thinking of the broader world Carl has opened to her, Ruth feels increasingly closed in by their small apartment and her flagging interest in the petty concerns of her Society friends. She continues to broaden her horizons with settlement work while he settles into the office routine. While his life consists of the trip to and from the office, she “was finding new voyages” (385). When war breaks out and Carl’s investment in VanZile Motors appears to be in danger of

evaporating, Carl overburdens himself with office work and takes ill. Although nurturing the idea of themselves as tramping playmates, Ruth and Carl fail to follow through on their tramping plans, and their marriage suffers as a result. They begin to fight with each other. Eventually, Carl discovers the problem: “Ruth and he had to be up and away, immediately; go any place, do anything, so long as they followed new trails, and followed them together. . . They were not just a man and a woman. They were a man and a woman who had promised to find new horizons for each other” (404). They could not talk about finding new horizons; they actually had to do it. Business starts picking up as the economy adjusts to the war: “Within a few weeks all sorts of motor-cars were selling well, especially expensive cars. It was apparent that automobiles were no longer merely luxuries. There was even a promise of greater trade than ever, so rapidly were all the cars of the warring nations being destroyed” (394). So as the novel concludes, the reconciled couple pack off to find together the new horizon of Argentina where Carl will represent VanZille Motors.

With their escape into the sunset, so to speak, Ruth and Carl represent not the idyllic couple with bees buzzing alongside their open road, but rather a confident modern couple charting a future down a modern open road with engines humming. Their mutual escape, his from the provincialism of the Midwest and hers from a careful climb up the hierarchies of the Social Register, extend from Carl’s exposure to the larger world via the new technologies of aviation and automobility and Ruth’s openness to and hardiness for the same. Their openness and exposure to different lands make them a model modern couple. Because they travel, the narrative implies, they will neither be easily illusioned nor prone to abstruse theories about life. The narrative ironically and critically implies

that the very instrument of modern freedom presents a real danger to the actualization of Carl and Ruth's shared dreams of exploration. Carl and Ruth only actually become free when they recognize that their freedom to find new horizons is mutual, shared, and integral to the success of their marriage. The narrative suggests that the capitalist system that makes for automobility might also destroy its benefits if individuals are not careful. This critique of romanticism and deluded idealism in favor of pragmatic solutions to social ills is what sets Carl and Ruth out as modern heroes emblematic of the citizens who will lead the nation into a motor-mobile future.

Pedestrians in the Motor Age: *The Innocents*

The Innocents, a serial that Lewis penned for the *Saturday Evening Post* and later published in book form, is even more cloyingly saccharine than *Flight of the Hawk*. It is the story of Seth Appleby and his wife, an elderly couple who leave their secure life in New York City to open a roadside tea house. The tea shop fails, and after shifting around for a while, the two take to the road, tramping. What they learn is that wandering in and of itself is a thing revered by people who cannot and/or do not do it. More importantly, the Applebys develop a certain self confidence and self reliance that restores their youthfulness and paves the way to eventual success. The story ends confirming values of perseverance, atomistic success, and romantic love. However, as with *Flight of the Hawk*, despite the story's idealistically romantic appeal, Lewis embeds realistic social criticism and reflection on the burgeoning revolution in automobility within the saccharine

framework of this popular story. *The Innocents* presents automobility as in some ways utterly new and transformative and in other ways tied to fundamental American values like freedom, the transformative power of the continent, and individual success.

Automobility serves as a causative factor in all the turns of the plot. It is on their annual vacation to West Skipsit near Cape Cod that the Applebys' life turned from being economically centered on a respectable New York shoe shop to, as Lewis would have it, adventure. Uncle Joe Tubbs, their friend who runs the small bed-and-breakfast they visit every year, has a son-in-law who owns a car:

That car changed their entire life. Among the hills of peace there was waiting for them an adventure. . . . Father and Mother went wheezing about the country with him. Father had always felt that he had the making of a motorist, because of the distinct pleasure he had felt in motor-bus rides on New York Sundays, and he tactfully encouraged the son-in-law in the touring mania. So it was that they found the tea room. (23)

While touring they stop at a roadside tea shop and are amazed at the exorbitant prices charged for tea and miniature sandwiches. Father Appleby estimates the profit and hatches a scheme to open a similar tea shop along the road between New York and Boston. He convinces Mother Appleby of the soundness of the venture, and soon they are scrimping and saving to start their own little tea shop. The Applebys chose the location of their shop exceedingly well:

near the Applebys' door ran the State road, black and oily and smooth, on which, even at the beginning of the summer season passed a procession of motors from Boston and Brockton, Newport and New York, all of them unquestionably filled with people who would surely discover that they were famished for tea and preserves and tremendous quantities of sandwiches, as soon as Father and Mother hung out the sign, 'The T Room.' (40-1)

Business swells with the opening of tourist season, and the happy couple revel in dreams of success. Yet in time customers drive past their shop, and business slackens. Given

their prime location, it is some time before the Applebys discover that another tea shop, this one complete with European pastries, a literary salon, and tacit approval of Brahmin society, had opened nearby and is the reason for the decrease in their business. In spite of the fact that their venture is well located, their attempt at independent business fails because there does not yet exist enough of a clientele who would appreciate Mother's quality, wholesome, and unpretentious American fare over the effete, European imitativensness of their competition. There simply are not enough people along the state road yet to support more than one tea shop, and those who are there are decidedly the early, wealthy motorists who predate the Fordist revolution in popular automobility.

The Applebys return to New York, trying to start their old life over again; however, Father's age and insecurity keep him from locating a stable position in a shoe shop, and Father's bad luck throws the couple into a downward spiral that ends in a suicide attempt. Barely surviving, Father argues to Mother that they have struck absolute bottom and lost all pride, and without pride or money they are completely free to take to the open road and try the larger world. "New York doesn't want us," he pleads, "But somewhere there must be a village of folks that does. We'll start out right now, walking through New York, and we'll hunt till we find it, even if we have to go clean out San Francisco. . . Travel like we've always wanted to!" (138). Mother agrees to this scheme because, devotedly and romantically, she would rather be alive and tramping on the fringes of society with Father than dead without him, and so they set out.

Once into their journey, the Applebys immediately begin to show signs of transformation. Father feels the call of openness and freedom everywhere and begins thinking of himself as "Appleby the pedestrian." When queried where he belongs he

jauntily replies, “Everywhere” (160). As they travel he begins to feel younger, stronger, and more capable. Likewise, Mother Appleby makes a powerful impression on some salty vagrants they take up with by cooking and protecting them from the cops. One hobo describes her, “This here lady has got more nerve than ten transcontinental bums put together—woman, lady like her, out battering for eats and pounding the roads!” (166). Mother shows her new strength by becoming the leader of a hobo camp and inspires her crew to at least try to live honestly even if they will not or cannot settle down, and her influence turns some of the hoboes into the respectable sort of tramps that “folks” can esteem.

Reflected in the eyes of the people they meet, the Applebys are cast as special simply because they have set out. The first woman they beg a meal of reveals the significance of their tramping: “to this woman, this drab prisoner of kitchen and woodshed, it was wonderful to meet a man and woman who had actually started for—anywhere.” She yearns to them, “Gawd! I wouldn’t care how cold we got. Just get away for a month! Then I’d be willing to come back here and go on cooking up messes.” Father recognizes, “Mother and he were, to this woman, a proof that freedom and love and distant skies did actually exist, and that people, just folks, not rich, could go find them” (144). In a saloon that hosts the couple to a meal, the other patrons eagerly listen to Father discourse on various subjects because they presume him to be a savvy world traveler. When they press upon him money taken up in collection, Father accepts the money because “he realized that to these stay-at-homes the Applebys’ wandering was a thing to revere, a heroism, like prize-fighting or religion or going to war. But he didn’t psychologize about it. He believed in ‘the masses’ because he belonged to the masses”

(148). In time, the couple comes to be written up here and there in local papers until, “Finally a feature-writer on a Boston paper, a man with imagination and a sense of the dramatic, made a one-column Sunday story out of the adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Seth Appleby. . . The idea of these old people making themselves a new life caught many imaginations. The Sunday story was reprinted and reprinted till the source of it was entirely forgotten” (180). As the Applebys become national heroes, the narrative affirms the notion that wandering is an estimable pursuit.

Lewis revises the belief that hoboes and tramps are dangerous, dirty people on the fringes of society and advances an image of the tramp as a virtuous seeker of a place to belong to affirm an ethos of geographic liberation reminiscent of the Turner’s frontier thesis.¹⁴⁹ For example, “Sometimes,” the narrator states, “they were fêted adventurers who were credited with having tramped over most of the globe. Sometimes they were hoboes on whom straggly women shut farm house doors” (156). The various responses to the Appleby’s reflect Lewis’s privileging of the personal freedom and adventure of tramping and, further, indicates a social critique. He mounts his approval of tramping on a formulation of the frontier as an escape route for the disaffected and, therefore, challenges the notion that tramps are dangerous criminals by implying that they are rather simply disenfranchised poor seeking a place in the world to belong. Accordingly, Lewis implies, those who would reject the Applebys’ pleas as they seek a place in the expansive American continent misunderstand the real America. Those who allow regular folks to pick up and go by kindly and graciously supporting their efforts understand and represent the best of the American character and institutions. Because anyone and everyone can

¹⁴⁹ For more on tramping and discrimination see John Seelye, “The American Tramp: A Version of the Picaresque.”

and may someday need to set out for greener pastures, as it were, the politics of this narrative argument represents the larger populace tacitly, if not instrumentally, supporting the tramp as the emblem of personal freedom and tramping as essential to real freedom. Just as Mother converted the hoboes in her camp to virtuous tramping, the narrative suggests, so could the rest of the nation if tramps were treated with the dignity they deserve as symbols and keepers of real American freedom.

The idea that the tramp is (or could be) a virtuous hero of a purely American provenance is supported by Mother and Father's transformation during their travels in as much as tramping makes them strong and eventually successful. The Applybys become healthier and more self-reliant, more confident because of their traveling. Along the way, in each town Father peeks at the windows of shoe shops, cataloging the successes and failures in marketing the product, an experience which amounts to an important business education, an education he lacked when starting the tea shop. Yet, he is also "learning something more weighty—the art of handling people, in the two aspects thereof—bluffing, and backing up the bluff with force and originality" (157). This skill in dealing with people is something father could not and would not have learned as a minor clerk in a New York shoe shop. He learns, "it was just as easy to be unusual, to live a life excitedly free, as to be a shopbound clerk. Adventure, like fear of adventure, consisted in going one step at a time, keeping at it, forming the habit. . . Seth Appleby began to think for himself, to the end that he should be one of the class that rules and is unafraid" (175). The process by which Father and Mother shed their fears and become intrepid is completely born of their free exploration of America on the roads. Being "star-eyed with the expectation of new roads" allows them, like Carl Ericson, to learn that they are

capable of succeeding in America (177). They become a model of a heartier citizenry liberated from the constraints of society and the brutal city. Unlike the typical Horatio-Alger tale where the young scamp is shown the ropes by the experienced older man before he can prove himself, Lewis's tramps learn how to succeed through adventurous exposure to the places of America.

Tramping pays off at the end of the novel when father goes into a shoe store to replace his worn out footgear. The proprietor of the shoe store immediately recognizes him as Appleby the pedestrian and makes a remark about the marketing potential of associating his shop with the famed, walking explorer, which allows Father to talk his way into a partnership in the shop. The narrator explains, "The Lipsittsville Pioneer Shoe Store found Mr. Seth Appleby the best investment it had ever made" (193). People would drive in from all around, even from towns with their own shoe shops to speak to and buy from Appleby the pedestrian, because none of the other towns "had a real up-to-date hero with all modern geographical improvements" (195). Already pairing its name with the notion of the frontier, Lipsittsville's shoe store now has the modern version of the frontier theory of American development. Thus, "geographically improved," the Applebys have moved in the opposite direction of so many young people in the nation at the time, from the city to the small town: "They were, in fact, as glad to get into the open as the city-seeking youngster is to get away from it" (42). This implies that there is a place for everyone in America if only they can become free enough of obligation, duty, respectability, and certainly fear to find it. Moreover, father's initial foray into business failed because he didn't understand his market; yet, in the Midwest where relations

between people are simple and folks will drive to buy shoes from a hero of Midwestern values, he succeeds because of automobility.

At the height of the Applebys' tramping, the narrator interjects firmly "it is earnestly recommended to all uncomfortable or dissatisfied men over sixty that they take their wives and their mouth-organs and go tramping in winter, whether they be bank presidents or shoe-clerks, or writers of fiction or just plain honest men" (158). Based on this ethos the Applebys tap into the fundamentally American belief in the freedom to relocate to the most appropriate place for individual success. Children of the Civil War era, the Applebys are pedestrians, and their business success is found in dealing what Father Appleby knows best—footgear. They are symbols of American freedom to move across the continent, but their method is a soon to be bygone one, the same late-nineteenth-century road celebrated by Walt Whitman. In setting his characters out on the road, walking, exploring, reinventing themselves, Lewis is implicitly accepting the bard's call in "Song of the Open Road": "Allons! after the great Companions, and to belong to them! / They too are on the road—they are swift and majestic men—they are the greatest women" (lines 149-50). The Applebys' road is a slower road, a road of different infrastructure and architecture, so they cannot possibly serve as embodiments of the modernization of American geography the way Carl and Ruth Erickson in *Flight of the Hawk* or Milt Daggett and Claire Boltwood in *Free Air* can. Nevertheless, they link the new geography to the persistent idea that America is fortified through its citizens' autonomous, open-road exposure to its broad regions. Thus, *The Innocents* represents the changes in America's relationship to national space by affirming that access to a frontier is the fundamental element of the development of leadership, strength, and economic

success and that automobility is incidental but not necessarily contradictory to the fundamental assumption that geographic freedom is the root of what is best in American institutions.

Delight in a Democratic Country: *Free Air*

While in both *Trail of the Hawk* and *The Innocents* the ascendancy of automobility is the context in which the narrative unfolds, in *Free Air*, 1919, automobility is integral to the narrative. Indeed, the main characters of *Free Air*, Claire Boltwood and Milt Daggett, fall in love while exploring America in automobiles. Worlds apart at the beginning of the story, Claire and Milt are transformed by exposure to the continent into free thinking and confident individuals. As such they overcome misconceptions about America and themselves that they had each developed in their home communities. Because they drive from Minnesota to Seattle, they are able fall in love with each other based not on received, prejudicial ideas, but on personal choice supported by real experience in America. This narrative is the result of Lewis's drive with his wife from Minnesota to Washington, so Lewis draws on first hand experience of the challenges and rewards of early American automobility that he did not have in *Trail of the Hawk* and *The Innocents*. Written originally as a serial expressly tailored for the popular readership of *Saturday Evening Post*, *Free Air* translates tropes of the quixotic and romance traditions to narrate the significance of the country's geographic reorientation. As one early reviewer puts it, *Free Air* is the "lightest kind of fiction" but it "really seems to catch the

sweep and exhilaration of the great open country over which his characters wind their way.”¹⁵⁰ While basically a love story, *Free Air* ultimately advances an argument for the Good Roads Movement and the parallel See America First campaign by incorporating Whitman’s perspective that American literature ought to be drawn from real American experience. So through his sociological imagination Lewis gives automobility a modern narrative geography.

At the beginning of the story, Claire Boltwood of Brooklyn Heights is emblematic of the pampered daughter of Eastern wealth and respectability. Habitually dainty, “She was used to gracious leisure, attractive uselessness, nut-center chocolates, and a certain wonder as to why she was alive” (11). In her life’s round of parties and social events, she had met various suitors, solid young men, dancing young men, and her set’s quota of intellectuals, but none of them particularly suited her. One man, Jeff Saxton, older, dependable, successful, stood out, and Claire “watched the hulk of marriage drifting down on her frail speed-boat of aspiration, and steered in desperate circles” (13). Claire wanted to travel but was never able because her widowed and hard laboring father would not consider the idea. However, after a nervous collapse, Mr. Boltwood passively “consented to drive with [Claire] across two thousand miles of plains and mountains to Seattle” (14). Claire would finally get her wish to really travel and so postpone, however briefly, her inevitable marriage to Jeff Saxton.

Prior to departure, Claire is full of misconceptions about her country. She “didn’t know much about the West. She thought that Milwaukee was the capital of Minnesota. She was not so uninformed as some of her friends, however. She had heard that in Dakota

¹⁵⁰ Anonymous review of *Free Air* reprinted in *Critical Essays on Sinclair Lewis*.

wheat was to be viewed in vast tracts—maybe a hundred acres” (13). The irony here exposes Claire’s ignorance, but as she moves and sees more of the country, Claire learns to appreciate the raw beauty of the land. She is prone to illusions, at first, imagining buffalo still roaming, and an Indian in full war-bonnet headdress looking over a butte.¹⁵¹

Yet, as she moves along, deeper impressions register:

Her impression of the new land was not merely of sun-glaring breadth. Sometimes, on a cloudy day, the wash of wheatlands was brown and lowering and mysterious as an English moor in the mist. It dwarfed the far-off houses by its giant enchantment; its brooding reaches changed her attitude of brisk gas-driven efficiency into a melancholy that was full of hints of old dark beauty. (101-2)

As she travels, Claire begins to see and understand the real character of the country beyond her romanticizations:

The Great Transcontinental highway was colored not by motors alone. It is true that the the Old West of the stories is almost gone; that Billings, Miles City, Bismark, are more given to Doric banks than to gambling hells. But there are still hints of frontier days. Still trudge the prairie schooners; cowpunchers in chaps still stand at the doors of log cabins—when they tired of playing the automatic piano; and blanket Indians, Blackfeet and Crows, stare at five-story buildings—when they are not driving modern reapers on their farms. (121)

Seeing the country as it really is by driving through it, Claire gathers a deeper sensibility for its significance. At Yellowstone, she becomes enraged with “tourists who, she alleged, preferred freak museum pieces to plain beauty; who never admired a view unless it was labled by a signpost and megaphoned by a guide as something one ought to admire—and tell the Folks Back Home about” (131). Seeing the country for what it really

¹⁵¹ Native Americans peeking from outcrops at a passing motor was common imagery on published road maps. For instance, the road map Dreiser used for his scenic route through Pennsylvania used this image as did Rand McNally’s first road map published in 1924. Evidently, calling attention to this popular trope, Lewis is attempting to reference it as an illusion of geographic experience and ethnographic authenticity, and perhaps ironically satirize it.

is rather than uncritically accepting others' ideas about it "shocked me into reality," Claire says.

Claire is equally ignorant when it comes to the people and institutions of the larger country. She presumes that "all farmers have hearts of gold, anatomical phenomena never found among the snobs and hirelings of New York" (16-7). She quickly discovers, however, that many farmers are as likely to cheat and steal as anyone. Likewise, in Gopher Prairie (the fictional town that Lewis would return to in writing *Main Street*), Claire meets several people upon arrival after her first exhausting day of driving across the rain soaked landscape of Minnesota who strike her as surly, rude, and impertinently forward. The next day, however, Claire is better rested and more receptive, and sees the people of Gopher Prairie not as rude and uncivil but friendly. The narrative shows Claire learning to see and accept people as they are, without prejudice, so that by the end of the novel she is able to tell her wealthy peers that she found the people delightful rather than frightfully common.

Milt Daggett, on the other hand, is a child of the Midwest, and just looking for any reason to go anywhere when Claire Boltwood passes through Schoenstrom in a Gomez-Deperdussen roadster on her way west Milt hops into his own Teal Bug and follows. Honest, practical, and pragmatic Milt has lived in Schoenstrom his whole life and also does not really know America, particularly Claire's urban, urbane social world. Nevertheless, although Milt's horizons are limited, like Claire his desire to travel and broaden his horizons truly defines him. When he first meets Claire, he tells her:

I've never been out of Minnesota in my life, but there's couple mountains and oceans and things I thought I'd like to see, so I just put my suitcase and Vere de Vere [his cat] in the machine and started out. . . And the ocean! Lord! The ocean!

And we'll see it at Seattle. Bay anyway. And steamers there—just come from India! Huh! Getting pretty darn poetic here! (31-2).

“All that big country,” he exults to his cat riding in the passenger seat, “Ours to see, puss! We'll settle down some day and be solid citizens and raise families and wheeze when we walk, but— All those hills to sail over and— Come on! Lez sail!” (85).

The crux of the narrative is Claire and Milt's getting to know each other as they are transformed by their exposure to the country via automobile. Indeed, automobility and the places it opens to them make their romance possible. Were Claire and Milt to meet in Schoenstrom or Brooklyn Heights, the story implies, their relationship would freeze at the level of acquaintance, but because they are driving the same route west, the couple is able to make enough time together to see past surface differences of class and custom. Moreover, although time together because of the drive is integral to their courtship, Claire and Milt only become compatible because they are each individually matured through the experience of the drive. If not for automobiling, Claire would marry Jeff Saxton, and Milt any of a number of young ladies from the Prairie, and never would their paths cross or worlds collide. Yet, because they are drivers, Milt and Claire have something significant in common upon which they are able to locate other points of attraction, and their maturation springs from their revision of misconceptions of American geography through real experience in the country. Thus Lewis's open road chronotope represents automobility as implicitly transforming individuals as it does the nation, and so this motor romance can be read as a revision of American geography. Together Milt and Claire become emblematic figures representative of national trends,

and their maturation on the road is an allegory of the nation coming of age and confidently facing the future without blind regard for the traditions of the past.

Claire starts off her trip as a spoiled and habitually dainty and leisurely young lady, but by the end of the novel she is a confident, self-assured, autonomous young woman. Her entire life, Claire has been served. When they get stuck in the Minnesota mud, Claire explains to her father, "I've always had people do things for me. Maids and nice teachers and you, old darling! I suppose it's made me soft. Soft—I would like a soft davenport and a novel and a pound of almond-brittle, and get all sick, and not feel so beastly virile as I do just now. But—" The hanging "But" punctuates the fact that out in the middle of the prairie of Minnesota, stuck in the mud, with her sick father, there is no one who can cater to her needs. "One of the good things about an adventure like this," she asserts, "is that I must do things for myself" (14-5). Making do for herself, attempting on her own to extricate the Gomez-Deperdussen from the Minnesota mud marks the beginning of Claire's transition from spoiled girl to autonomous woman. As she gathers brush to try to put under the tires to get some traction, the narrator reports that she was like a pioneer woman, laboring hopefully with the elements.

Additionally along the way Claire's eyes are opened to the democratic customs of Middle America, and she begins to embrace them. For instance, when her father suggests she get help to free the car from the mud, she complains, "But get who?" He corrects her, "Whom!" and Claire replies defiantly, "No! It's just 'who,' when you're in the mud" (14). Later, when she moves to a first name basis with Milt her father demurs, but Clair persists, saying, "Milt is, oh, he's folks!" suggesting that she too is learning to be "folks" and will act accordingly (156). In another instance Claire, her father, and Milt are forced

to camp out near Yellowstone, and in the morning Claire looks like a different person to Milt: “he looked up at Claire standing against a background of rugged hills, her skirt and shoes still smug, but her jacket off, her blouse turned in at the throat, her hair blowing, her sleeves rolled up, one hand on her hip, erect, charged with vigor—the spirit of adventure” (164). Just a few days earlier in Yellowstone Park, Claire had worried to Milt, “I won’t always be driving through this big land. But— Will I get all fussy and ribbon-tied again, when I go back?” Milt answers, “No. You won’t. You drive like a man” (143). Driving, camping, standing arms akimbo, speaking plainly, as she slowly takes on customs of the West, Clair evolves into an independent woman.

Yet, as the crux of the narrative, Claire’s transformation is complicated. For example, drawn to each other but agitated by points of apparent incompatibility, Clair and Milt fight over Clair’s concern for luxuries. Along the ascent into Blewitt Pass through the Cascade Mountain Range, “crouched at the edge of a rock, where she would have been frightened, a month before” (213), Claire stands up to Milt as he tries to delegitimize her desire “to go back to tea and all that junk” (214). “I’ve had enough roughing,” Claire laments. Milt, worrying that once they arrive in Seattle Claire will find him common, proposes to kidnap her to protect her in the wilderness from the softening influences of civilized society. Claire contradicts him:

Listen to me, Milton. You have been reading fiction, about this man sometimes he’s a lumberjack, and sometimes a trapper or a miner, but always he’s frightfully hairy—and he sees a charming woman in the city, and kidnaps her, and shuts her up in some unspeakable shanty, and makes her nice cold boiled potatoes, and so naturally, she simply adores him! A hundred men have written that story, and it’s an example of their insane masculine conceit, which I as a woman resent. . . You may not know it, but there are women today who don’t live to just please majesties’ fancies. . . I have more courage than any of you! (215)

This proto-feminist defiance of Milt sets the stage for the denial of her family's wishes and her ultimate acceptance of Milt as her suitor. Her voicing of such a position is only possible, the narrative suggests, because of her exposure to the continent and her embrace of what are represented as America's true customs, and her ambivalent shifting appreciation of luxury and rough adventure registers the slow fortification of her autonomy.

Milt's journey, on the other hand, is not so much to transform the way he sees and thinks about the world by accepting America, like Claire's is, but to make himself presentable enough to win the respect of plutocrats like Claire and Mr. Bolwood. Whereas Claire begins to see the world more democratically, Milt learns to see and negotiate the social distinctions which Claire takes for granted. For example, even though Milt reads Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, and Lew Wallace, and is as informed as Claire when it comes to modern sculpture and politics because they both read the same magazines, Milt's lack of familiarity with things like fashion, grammar, pronunciation, and old vaudeville jokes separate him from Claire. Milt recognizes this and self-consciously grooms. Camping outside of town where Claire is staying in a hotel, while trying to clean the grease from under his fingernails, Milt berates himself, "what's the use? I can't ever be anything but a dub! Cleaning my nails, to make a hit with a girl that's got hands like hers! It's a long trail to Seattle, but it's a darn sight longer one to being—being—well, sophisticated" (65).

Despite his obstacles, in the spirit of American perseverance, Milt forebears. Every night in town, Milt goes to the movies, no longer watching Westerns, but choosing "films in which the leading men wore evening clothes, and no one ever did anything

without being assisted by a ‘man’” (86). Also, unlike Claire who associates traveling salesmen with tawdry commerce, Milt sees them as “pioneers in spats,” who as they travel the country show retailers how to build trade and young men how to dress, shave, and cut their hair. Thus, “it is to the traveling men, not to supercilious tourists in limousines, that Milt turned for suggestions as to how to perform the miracle of changing from an ambitious boy into what Claire would recognize as a charming man” (87). Eating dinner with the traveling men in hotels before sneaking off to a roadside camp outside town, Milt now “studied forks as he once studied carburetors, and he gave spiritual devotion to the nice eating of canned shrimp” (88). Further, “he peeped with equal earnestness at the socks and the shirts of the traveling men. Socks to him had been not an article of faith but a detail of economy. His attitude toward socks had lacked in reverence and technique” (89).

To his new socks, Milt adds new shirts, new ties, and most importantly a new book:

The book was rhetoric. Milt knew perfectly that there was an impertinence called grammar, but it had never annoyed him much. He knew that many persons preferred ‘They were’ to ‘They was,’ and were nervous in the presence of ‘ain’t.’ . . . But Milt discovered that grammar was only the beginning of his woes. He learned that there were such mental mortgages as figures of speech and the choice of synonyms. He had always known, but he had never passionately felt that the invariable use of ‘hell,’ ‘doggone,’ and ‘You bet!’ left certain subtleties unexpressed. Now he was finding subtleties which he had to express. (90)

The new book represents Milt’s understanding that he cannot simply look the part if he will ever win Claire’s attentions, but he must act it too. So he begins to voice his new sense of expression by describing the passing scenery to his companion, the cat he calls

Lady Vere de Vere.¹⁵² He practices, “The prairies are the sea. In the distance they are kind of silvery—no—they are dim silver; and way off on the skyline and the Islands of the—of the—Now what the devil was them, were those, islands in the mythology book in high school? . . . Hesperides! Yea, ’bo!” (91). Thus, the narrator explains, while Claire was being freed by gaining consciousness of “sun and brown earth, so Milt’s odyssey was only the more valorous in his endeavor to criticize life. . . Staring at towns along the way, Milt saw that houses were not merely large and comfortable, or small and stingy; but that there was an interesting thing he remembered hearing his teachers call ‘good taste’” (91). The refined things Milt endeavors to commit to memory reflect the land he passes through on the long road to Seattle as he “drenched his soul with the vision of amber distances” (94).

Milt’s transformation is as complicated as Claire’s. Behind Milt’s study of “poetic expression and the use of forks was the fact that his purpose in life was to know Claire” (94). Milt cannot simply take on the markers of sophistication in order to know Claire. That is, he can’t imitate the East; he must, rather, learn to be smart but remain true to his practical, Midwestern roots. So when Claire commands Milt to stop following her, he is deeply stung, and thrown back to his old life. “I thought I’d do big things,” he complains, “And then the alarm clock went off. I’m back in Schoenstrom. For keeps, I guess” (95). He is not literally back in the town of his birth, but he feels as though he is because Claire’s forceful tone in demanding that he not follow her put him in his place, so to

¹⁵² The name of the cat is taken, aptly enough, from a character in a Tennyson poem. The eponymous Lady Clara Vere de Vere is a wealthy noblewoman who seduces and ruins poor young men. The speaker of the poem, a dramatic monologue, is a poor youth on whom Lady Vere de Vere has set her sights. He rebuffs her advances, reasoning, “‘Tis only noble to be good. / Kind hearts are more than coronets, / and simple faith than Norman blood.”

speak. As Milt nurses the wound to his pride, the narrator explains, he “was a young poet, a poet rhymeless and inarticulate” (97). Lewis echoes Whitman’s argument that exposure to the nation leads to rough, rude poetry befitting the land and its people by showing that Milt can’t imitate what is for him foreign poetry. Earlier, Claire had given Milt two books as a gift and reward for helping her, and Milt reads to pass the time. In Compton MacKenzie’s *Youth’s Encounter*, Milt finds a different world from that in which he was raised, a refined world of laughter, dancing, and social manners in London. The book makes him uncomfortable so he puts it away to pick up Vachel Lindsay’s *Congo*. In this, “he found his own motor pilgrimage from another point of view” (97-8). In Lindsay, Milt finds a poetry with which he can identify: “I didn’t know there were books like these! I thought poetry was all like Longfellow and Byron. Old boys. Europe. And rhymed bellyachin’ about hard luck. But these books—they’re me” (98). Milt begins to learn that imitating the language and poetry of other worlds is not really appropriate to express the beauties of his America. He begins to see that he is better being exactly what he is rather than putting on airs. When Milt later hears a young man trying to flirt with Claire describe the mountains “’tis far heaven my awed heart seeks / When I behold those mighty peaks,” Milt mumbles to himself, “I never could get much het up about this poetry that’s full of Ah’s and ‘tises” (134). As the youthful, Midwestern mechanic learns his life and speech are respectably poetic, Lewis’s chronotope suggests, so does America. Following the traditions of Whitman and American realism by taking subjects for literature from American characters and language, Milt’s maturation into sophisticated and cultivated adulthood reflects the maturation of the nation.

If the lovers can really come together they'll both have to adapt to each other's worlds. The litmus test of the transformations both characters have undergone on their drives is their arrival in Seattle. After their adventure, the two become hastily and secretly engaged. Yet, Claire worries if she's insane for pledging herself to this boy before seeing if he can pull off fitting in to society: "Will I hate him when I see him with nice people?" she wonders. However, the novel ends affirming the democratic, class leveling principles that make a match between Claire, a spoiled Eastern rich girl, and Milt, a practical son of the Midwest, possible. Milt takes Claire for a ride in a rented Teal Bug, and she discovers that in "huge cars she had been shut off from the road, but in this tiny bug, so close to the earth, she recovered the feeling of struggle, of triumph over difficulties, of freedom unbounded. And she could be herself, good or bad, ignorant or wise, with this boy beside her" (365). Claire muses, "I wonder what lies at the top of this climb?" Milt answers, "More mountains, and more, and more, and we're going to keep on climbing them forever. At dawn we'll still be going on. And that's our life." Claire agrees, "Ye-es, providing we can still buy gas" (369). Implicitly, their relationship and future will soar so long as there is a road to drive and a car in which to ride. Romantically, Claire will always have a taste for "Free Air," and she will seek it out with her beloved Milt.

The idea of "Free Air" comes to Claire at a garage early in her trip and becomes her motto for the journey. After learning in Gopher Prairie that the townspeople are not surly and meddlesome but kind, Claire concludes that she's got a lot to learn about the world, and while the car was being gassed up, she notices a sign above an air-hose reading "Free Air." "That's our motto for the pilgrimage," she declares (47). Indeed it is. The narrative argues that the air is free to those who would take it in an open car

careening across the country, just as it is in the service stations along the way. It is the free air of the open road that supports Milt's idea that everyone, kings and coal-heavers are "just folks," and that as a couple Milt and Claire are their own society. Claire's resistance to such ideas as the cheering "stories and. . . optimistic editorials in the magazines" is overcome by the open road. Milt and Claire's transformation from children of separate spheres to equals mutually engaged in building a life together optimistically represents the democratic nation where differences are less important than openness and the perseverance to look boldly into the future. Claire and Milt are, thus, emblematic figures that define the national character, and their development on the road is an allegory for the modernization of the national character. Claire and Milt are symbolically modern pioneers, defining a new era of geographic exploration and American nationhood. They have each encountered people from the country and the city and discovered that not every farmer has a heart of gold and not everyone in the city is unkind. They have learned that the way a person speaks or dresses is no indication of her or his character. They have seen prairies, plains, mountains, and finally the sea, and they have been awed by the wonders of nature. Like Carl and Ruth Erickson, Claire and Milt represent the modern couple that will make the future of the nation. They are not deluded by popular misconceptions, because they have seen America for what it really is. They are resourceful, knowing how to encounter and overcome obstacles. Her from the East and an urban background, him from a Midwest, rural upbringing, they bring together the two principal regions of the nation and, taking the best from each, together develop a hybrid character with which to build their future.¹⁵³ Claire and Milt represent pragmatism and confidence and together

¹⁵³ Describing Lewis's narratives, Martin Bucco remarks, "if the idyllic west is antidote to the cramped

are the quintessential modern Americans, but only because they have driven cross country. Automobility, thus, points the way to America's future strength and prosperity by cultivating the best in its citizens.

Central to Lewis's story, and precisely what would make it appealing to the readership of *Saturday Evening Post*, is the sentimental romance affirming American mythologies of frontier exceptionalism and democracy while documenting cross country motoring. Ultimately *Free Air* argues that progress symbolized by the automobile is not detrimental to basic American values. Indeed, the automobile, as Lewis presents it, is the culmination of these values. In other words, *Free Air* uses the received stylistic devices of popular magazine fiction to shore up certain preferred ideological notions of democratic exceptionalism supposedly lost during the corruption of the Gilded Age. Just as the United States was emerging from the war, and the military's motor convoy was gearing up to assess the condition of the nation's roads, and the automobile manufacturers were retooling their shops for the return to consumer production, Lewis's *Free Air* captured the concerns of the nation preparing itself to settle into the prosperity that it was presumed would follow victory in the First World War. Before the country would arrive at full blown automobility, however, the idea that the automobile was a chariot of sin, a devil wagon, or a passing fancy would have to be fully buried, and *Free Air* participates in this transition in thought by narrating an automobile geography consistent with popular notions.

East, then the Cultivated East, in turn, is antidote to the blank West—and the remedy for both is the open road—anywhere!” (66).

Good Fellowship of the Road

Paving the way for the passage of the first state gasoline tax that would earmark funds for road construction in 1919,¹⁵⁴ and the Federal Aid Road Act of 1921, Lewis's apprenticeship fiction embedded arguments for increased investment in automobility in sentimental romance narratives. Whether depicting actual motor travel or not, Lewis's tramp characters represent an ethos of mobile, practical, unillusioned citizenship. For all their saccharine sentimentality, Lewis's road chronotopes show that really seeing America in a motorcar dissolves provincialism, dispels weakness, and exposes the falsity of class distinction. Drawing on Whitman and Turner to suggest that exposure to the continent fortifies the American character, Lewis also draws on Dreiser to satirically critique aspects of American culture, particularly roadblocks to the development of automobility like provincial conservatism, high class reluctance to rough it, and people who either deliberately or tacitly allow motor travel to remain uncomfortable and difficult. Building on the tradition of accessibly written American realism to accurately represent the particularities of the American experience, Lewis's apprenticeship fiction formulates for his general readership a new narrative geography based on automobility. Obviously, Lewis would repeat similar tropes of automobile geography in his own later fiction, but more importantly Lewis's apprentice fiction road narratives establish the outlines of a road fiction tradition that echoes through Harry Leon Wilson, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, through to Jack Kerouac.

¹⁵⁴ See John Burnham, "The Gasoline Tax and the Automobile."

CONCLUSION

THE STORY OF THE ROAD STORY

The American road is a socio-cultural space that is produced through multiple social practices and cultural products originating from various sources and perspectives, various discourses. Because of the multiplicity of its uses and sources, and given the enormous capital investments required to build and sustain automobility in America, its ongoing production can serve as a barometer of the collective tastes, preoccupations, and concerns of the nation. From the horseless carriage to the hybrid engine, and from the state route to the limited-access interstate, the production of automobility has been integral to the production of America itself in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁵ Understanding the American road as a produced space means understanding the stories that its builders and users—its producers—with all their various perspectives tell about it in the process of its production. Given that automobility integrally defines life in America today, uncovering the foundations of the production of this social space positions us to critically evaluate the spaces we produce either actively or through tacit acceptance of received geographies.

¹⁵⁵ I would further argue that the production of all collective geographies, like for instance modern urban spaces or the continental space of the nineteenth-century railroad, is integral to the production of national identity.

Such critical engagement with the production of built environments is indebted to the theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre and John Brinkerhoff Jackson. Lefebvre's idea of socially produced space and Jackson's idea of landscape both position us to analyze human relationships to built environments by studying the environments themselves and the cultural narratives and social practices which produce them. Following Lefebvre and Jackson, in this dissertation I have shown how America used narratives to imagine and justify the construction of an automobile infrastructure in the early twentieth century. Understanding how the construction of this space is supported by cultural geographies, it's essential to recognize the exchange of geographic ideas among multiple discourses. Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope in narrative exposes the overlap of formal and thematic trends in road stories from these various discursive registers. Thus, in this dissertation I have tried to show how the themes embedded in various discourses like poetry, architecture, history, promotional journalism and advertising, prescriptive travel writing, travel memoir, and fiction combine to establish the plausibility of the modern American road because road narratives produce and define a particular set of imaginary relationships to real space and consequently justify the construction of new lived spaces.

There is far more research to be done into the production of American automobile geography and, I hasten to add, the production of human geographies in general. This dissertation opens a much larger research project which would delve into the socio-cultural production of the space of the American road up to the present day. The history of the production of American automobility could be usefully separated into three phases. The first phase, which this dissertation covers, runs from the earliest introduction of automobile technology to American popular consciousness to the enactment of the

Federal Aid Road Bill in 1921. The second phase of the production of American automobility runs from 1921 until 1956 when President Eisenhower signed the Federal Interstate Highway Act into law. The third phase of this production runs from 1956 into the 1990s when the last sections of the interstate highway were completed. In each phase narratives from various discourses model human relationships to national space, shape different desires, fantasies, and concerns, and influence the material construction and popular reception and use of this space. Thus, the Columbian Exposition, the enactment of the Federal Aid Road Bill, the enactment of the Federal Interstate project, and the completion of the Interstate Highways conveniently mark the pivotal moments in American cultural geographic history. Crucially, these markers align with turning points in the development of American modernism and postmodernism.

From the introduction of practical automobile technology to the American popular consciousness in 1893 to the enactment of the major revision of American political forms represented in the Federal Aid Roads Bill, the ascendancy of automobility parallels the Progressive Era. Frederick Jackson Turner's acknowledgement of the census bureau's official closing of the American frontier as a category reflected the popular sense that the project of Manifest Destiny was complete. With this and four transcontinental railroads binding West to East, the nation was poised to reorient its geographic self portrait just as the automobile hit the American scene. Individual exploration of the regions of the country in a motorcar promised to combine the appeals of entertaining diversion, personal edification, and political unification. However, because automobility lacked the necessary infrastructure in both roads and tourist services the potential benefits which modernists saw in the motor car were frustrated. Thus, the early production of

automobility, both ideologically and concretely, was invested in reform and citizenship narratives which contributed to the revision of the national geographic profile in the popular imagination.

During the formative years of the automobile age, road geographies accumulate a set of narratives which have roots in the nineteenth century but are revised to become thoroughly modern. Road writers embrace ideologies of freedom and democracy when describing their motoring experiences. Similarly, many make comparisons of the American experience of automobility with that of Europe, in both deprecating and laudatory terms depending on whether she or he is writing about the condition of the roads or the grandeur of the landscape. In addition, Progressivism is often woven into discussion of the automobile and its impact. Commentators describe the impact of the automobile in terms of its commercial or economic benefits, articulating the importance of the technology to public as well as private reform. The automobile is often described as bringing people closer to nature, the picturesque, and the sublime. The town versus country dichotomy depicted in many testimonies represents access for rural habitants to the social and cultural benefits of the city and city dweller's access to the natural and spiritual benefits of the country. Finally, many comment on their own inability to adequately explain or describe the experience; they decry the absence of adequate language, or they espouse the notion that the experience is so original that new literary or artistic forms are necessary to capture it. Early road narratives establish these themes which define the American road narrative genre, justify investments in the construction of its infrastructure, and influence the expectations and social practices of real tourists as the twentieth century progresses.

After the Federal Aid Road Bill reoriented the relationship between the Federal Government and the States regarding the construction of public works, the novelty of automobility slowly evaporated, and with this the social practices and cultural products of automobility were increasingly presumed to be perfectly natural and consequently taken for granted. Like modernity, by the twenties the automobile was so woven into the fabric of national culture that it no longer needed justification in the face of reactionary traditionalism. Nevertheless, modernists continued to produce narratives that made sense of automobility and defined what the nation was making of itself as seen from the open road. As automobility shifted from an emergent to a dominant form of socio-cultural order, contentious disagreement over the significance of the basic principles of automobility arose. No longer did writers argue over whether or not the nation should construct infrastructures necessary for automobility, rather they wrangled over what form it should take and what America was becoming. With Alfred Sloan at the helm, General Motors eclipsed Ford as the premier automobile manufacturer and revised automobile tastes while the chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, Thomas MacDonald, implemented the Federal Aid Road Act, eliminating the ambling, popular named trails in favor of expedient numbered routes. Travel writers like Dallas Lore Sharp and Lewis Gannett describe themselves as ever frustrated in their ongoing search for some utopic land just beyond the horizon. Yet Norman Bel Geddes' theatrical *Futurama* exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair imagined America as a utopia of easy and smooth automobility. Throughout his career, in novels from *Flags in the Dust* to *The Reivers*, William Faulkner charted the impacts of modernization on the agrarian South, producing a geographic history of American culture that emphasized the evolving significance of roads and modes of travel.

Likewise, in *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Wayward Bus*, and *Travels with Charley*, John Steinbeck returned often to the space of the road in efforts to critically evaluate American culture. And following in the ruts laid down by Dreiser, Henry Miller used the road travel book form as an opportunity to criticize the inanity and philistinism of America in *The Air Conditioned Nightmare* and *Remember to Remember*. Thus while boosters like Alfred P. Sloan, Norman Bel Geddes, T. H. MacDonald and other New Dealers exulted in automobility as the very symbol of progress in America, modernists resisted such nearsighted optimism, asserting counter-narratives that criticized the notion of the automobile road as the apotheosis of the American spirit and national progress.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's enactment of the Federal Interstate highway project in 1956 marks a third phase of American automobility and arguably serves as a convenient marker of the turn toward the postmodernism as the dominant cultural order.¹⁵⁶ Defined by its promoters as the ultimate expression of the American will to mobility, entertainment, economic efficiency, logistical expedience, and national defense, the interstate is characterized by detractors as a space of total standardization that is monopolized by a limited set of franchisers prepackaging for easy consumption hyper-real versions of regional Americana. While the Big Three automakers (GM, Ford, Chrysler), the Federal Department of Transportation, and the American Association of State Highway Officials collaborated to construct the largest public works project in human history, depictions of the American road reflected tensions. Postmodern road stories struggle to reconcile the poles of diversionary traveling pleasure on the one hand and terror under the total standardization of national space on the other. For instance,

¹⁵⁶ I reference here Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism* where he defines postmodernism as the dominant or hegemonic cultural order of late capitalism.

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, published a year after the enactment of the Federal Interstate Highway Act, blithely celebrates the license and autonomous pleasure of the American road and so became something of an anthem of youth culture in the 1960s; however, later works like *Desolation Angels* depict road travel as a grind of compulsory motion and discrimination. Likewise, Kerouac's friend and fellow Beat writer Allen Ginsberg struggles between the joy of cross continental mobility and the horrors of the capitalist state in *The Fall of America* and "Wichita Vortex Sutra." Similar tensions occupy road novels like *Cadillac Jack* by Larry McMurtry and *The Franchiser* by Stanley Elkin. Likewise, road travel writer William Least Heat-Moon celebrates America's "blue highways," the non-interstate routes, as representing a superior but fading ethos of national geographic understanding, and so he embraces the joy of the American road experience while denigrating the interstates and the mindset that accepts them as destroying the best in the American road experience. Meanwhile postmodern critics like Robert Venturi, Umberto Eco, and Jean Baudrillard both revel in and revile the postmodern double-coding, hyper-reality, and flattened, simulacral experience of the American road.

Since the nineteen-nineties when the interstate highway project was completed, Americans have continued to struggle over definitions of their relationship to national space, and the threat of global warming and the contribution of the nation's oil dependency to disastrous foreign policy have exacerbated the intellectual, ideological, and political tensions over our current geographies. While it's difficult to realistically imagine alternatives to our received spaces and geographies, the fact is that these arrangements were constructed in a very short time and seemed radically revolutionary at

the time of their construction. If we develop an understanding of the process by which our inherited geography was constructed and recognize that we are now and always in the process of defining our geographies through social activities and cultural products, then we can make informed, deliberative, and engaged choices about the ways we want to live in and share this American space and this planet.

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