

Bernd Engler & Oliver Scheiding (Eds.)

**Key Concepts in American Cultural History:
From the Colonial Period
to the End of the 19th Century**

2nd Edition


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TO THE READER

A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself.

(Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso, 1991, 5f.)

In recent years, numerous anthologies have been published in Early American Studies – among them Myra Jehlen’s and Michael Warner’s *The English Literatures of America, 1500-1800* (1997), Reiner Smolinski’s *The Kingdom, the Power & the Glory: The Millennial Impulse in Early American Literature* (1998), Susan Castillo’s and Ivy Schweitzer’s *The Literatures of Colonial America* (2001), Carla Mulford’s *Early American Writings* (2002), and David D. Hall’s *Puritans in the New World* (2004) – all of them greatly broadening and enriching the student’s awareness of the diversity of America’s cultural development since colonial times. They seek to remap the field of American culture, either with a particular focus on the literary production of ‘British America’ (Jehlen/Warner), the proliferation of a prominent idea such as millennialism (Smolinski), the multiplicity of trans-national voices that shaped the cultures of the Americas from pre-colonial times to the late eighteenth century (Castillo/Schweitzer and Mulford), or the centrality of Puritanism for the formation of America (Hall). In comparison to the vast scope of texts and cultures which these collections explore in their attempts at revisioning earlier, more monolithic notions of American culture, this anthology pursues less ‘expansive’ intentions. It responds to a need to supply students in Europe and elsewhere with a less specialized, but nevertheless comprehensive, tool for investigating American culture. This need is clearly proven by the fact that a second edition became necessary within less than two years after its original publication in 2005.

Key Concepts in American Cultural History does not seek comprehensiveness by covering a vast array of texts and the diverse cultures they display, but aims at tracing some of the more pervasive ideas and concepts that shaped America from the early settlements to the end of the nineteenth century. Although many of the concepts that the texts of this anthology highlight have a defining power for the present, they do not capture the diversifications and many new trends of twentieth-century American culture. The editors are aware of the fact that this will require a further volume that they hope to see realized in the near future.

Given the fact that this anthology intends to trace prominent ideological concepts, it wishes to follow a twofold approach: It wants to focus on historical contexts that encompass central ideas and thoughts which are closely linked to particular epochs in American culture. It is also based on the observation that, in spite of its diversity, American culture is informed by a relatively limited set of ideas which were highly adaptable to new social and political situations. These ideas could thus be easily appropriated to individual and communal needs for orientation and sense-making in a world that changed dramatically as America developed from a colonial society to an industrialized

world power. The fact that the number of those concepts that keep defining American culture is quite restricted has proven to be an enormous advantage in the formation of an ‘American ideology,’ as the constant re-articulation of these concepts and their ensuing ‘visibility’ in the public sphere led to a wide-spread identification with the beliefs and cultural norms they represented and propagated. The ‘key concepts’ that this anthology foregrounds – for instance the belief that America was singled out by divine providence as a model for the world – have been continuously rearranged in ever new configurations in order to explain current events and define political goals and agendas. Thus, to give just one example, the notion of America’s particular mission was circulated in the late sixteenth century in English promotional texts, in which their authors advertized the ‘New World’ as a second Eden. Then it was transformed into the comforting ideology asserting the existence of a ‘New Covenant’ between God and his chosen people. In this way, it served as a means of moral sustenance in times of distress which resulted, for instance, from bad harvests, droughts, or other disasters as well as constant colonial and Indian warfare during the period of the early settlements. The same belief was then employed in the service of reform movements (both in terms of individual conversion and of communal utopias during the Great Awakening or the nineteenth century), but also made its appearance in the form of ‘Manifest Destiny’ in which it functioned as the principle justification for America’s mid-nineteenth-century expansionism and later imperialism.

Similar continuities and transformations can be investigated in the shape of various other ‘key concepts’ which this anthology traces in its fourteen sections, for instance within the context of “Early Conceptualizations of America,” “Images of Native Americans,” “Providential Readings of American History,” “Millennialism,” or “Expansionism.” Although these sections often highlight particular historical phases in the development of American society and its diverse cultures, they should not function as confining lenses and instruments of ‘mental compartmentalization.’ Instead, this anthology wants to encourage cross-segmental and diachronic readings that make the student aware of the continuities as well as discontinuities of ideological ‘formations’ which are incessantly ‘re-formed’ in response to the changing functions they have to perform in order to promote, naturalize, and universalize beliefs by which cultures negotiate contesting interpretations of social reality.

The editors wish to thank all those who have made the publication of this anthology possible by their unflinching dedication: first of all, those who were willing to share their expertise and knowledge, and took part in this project by providing contributions and introductions to the sections – Melanie Fritsch, Dennis Hannemann, Charles T. Johnson, Frank Kelleter, Isabell Kläiber, Günter Leyboldt, Gesa Mackenthun, Frank Obenland, Margit Peterfy, Clemens Spahr, and Jan Stievermann –, then all those who invested their invaluable energy and proficiency in the process of editing and proof-reading the documents, and getting this anthology ready for publication – Lilian Chaitas, Christiane Goldkamp, Jonathan Majors, Eva-Maria Rettner, Caroline Reuter, Bettina Steiner, Christian Stindt, Maria Constanze Schwenk, and, once again, Melanie Fritsch, Frank Obenland, and Clemens Spahr.

Editorial policy

The texts collected in this anthology follow the editions quoted at the end of each document. According to our editorial principles, all texts have been reproduced in their earliest available print version without any modernization in spelling, punctuation, ligatures, etc., with the exception of a standardization of the frequently exchangeable use of “u” and “v” in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century texts according to modern orthography, as well as the substitution of the “long s” [“ſ”] by a “round s” [“s”] and of the “ß” by a “double s” [“ss”].

In order to make the texts more accessible to the modern-day reader, we have standardized all idiosyncrasies of print that can be found in many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, particularly on title pages. The printers’ frequent mixing of two or even more display types such as bold, italics, spaced, gothic, etc., in one text is standardized in the following way: all capital letters were replaced by small capitals and gothic letters by italics; all italics and small capitals remained; spaced letters and boldface were eliminated.

Ongoing e-Text Project

The editors will supply additional documents on an electronic text website that complements the publication of this anthology (<http://www.amerikanistik.uni-mainz.de/key/>).

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EARLY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF AMERICA

Early conceptualizations of the 'New World' unfold a double process of inventing America and redefining Europe. The European encounter with the New World challenged many of the well established affirmations of previous writers about geography, religion, and history. The idea of a tri-partite world was deeply embedded in European thought. According to medieval cosmography, the world consisted of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. This Christian division of the world mirrored the *orbis terrarum* already known to classical geographers, into which the new fourth continent and its people were difficult to assimilate. As sixteenth-century writers and mapmakers began to acknowledge the existence of a new continent to the West of Europe (cf. docs. 2-4), they were forced to find answers to three problems that the discovery of America had raised: First, America's geography had to be incorporated into Europe's mental image of the natural world. Second, the Native Americans had to be assigned a place among the peoples of mankind. Finally, America had to be integrated into Europe's conception of historical progress.

The liminal position of America, which resulted from the division of the world in three parts, can be seen in Heinrich Bünting's "Die gantze Welt in ein Kleberblat" (1581, doc. 5). Bünting's map builds the world around Jerusalem as the spiritual center of the earth. Excluding America, the map arranges the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, like the three leaves of a clover plant, around the Holy Land. Bünting's triple division of the world also exposes the distribution of power. The map advocates the leading role of the Catholic Church, and conceives of America in terms of Rome's global legacy. Bünting's map also suggests that Protestant nations like England play only a marginal role in both the history of salvation and the conquest of the New World.

Since the Middle Ages, geographical limits coincided with the boundaries of 'humanity.' Monstrous creatures with two heads, three arms and the like were supposed to inhabit those regions beyond known geographical boundaries. Hartmann Schedel's *Das Buch der Chroniken* (1493, doc. 1), published shortly after Columbus's discovery of the New World, unfolds the regional and geographical scattering of the sons of Noah that held a prominent place throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Bible maintains that the descendants of Noah peopled the three parts of the world. Europe belonged to the sons of Japheth, Africa to those of Ham, and Asia to the sons of Shem. Many illustrations of America that appeared in Europe depicted the New World as the land of cannibals and devilish fiends. As such, the people of America had no capacity for Christianity, and there was, therefore, never any possibility that they might achieve salvation.

Incorporating North America into the geographical views of the Protestant nations, English promoters of colonization drew a dividing line between the cannibals that inhabited 'America,' a name initially used to describe the southern regions of Spain's dominion in the New World, and the savages who occupied its northern portion. While the mental and social worlds of the cannibals were the outcome of the Devil's handiwork, the northern Indians were intelligible and would thus welcome the achievements of the English nation. Therefore, most English colonizers conceptualize the region of North America in terms of England's prominent role in the history of salvation. Carrying the light of the "True Church" into the vast regions of America implies that America has remained in darkness for such a long time since it was God's plan to open the continent for English expansion only at the beginning of the Reformation.

Among the European nations that considered the New World as a western extension of their imperial agendas, throughout most of the sixteenth century, Spain took the lead in both exploiting the land and converting the Indians. Not only Columbus's *Journal of the First Voyage to America* (doc. 6), but also François van den Hoeye's allegorical illustration of America (doc. 11) reveal the materialist motivations behind the Spanish conquest and settlement. Contrary to the Spanish colonization efforts overseas, England remained, however, a late-comer. Thus, the English promotional literature in this section draws attention to a strong anti-Spanish, pro-expansion lobby that began in the late sixteenth century when English privateers, merchants, and clergymen offered an alternative foreign policy much more dedicated to transatlantic conquest than the official views of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I. Their tracts and pamphlets show that a militant Protestantism sustained English expansion throughout the seventeenth century.

At the intersection of the diverse colonizing projects and interests in late sixteenth-century England, was Richard Hakluyt the younger. In 1589, a year after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, he published his massive epic of English colonization, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Various promotional tracts and reports of exploration and settlement followed in subsequent years. Among these, was Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588, doc. 10), an eyewitness account of Sir Walter Raleigh's second voyage to Virginia, which included compelling descriptions of North Carolina Algonquian native culture. These accounts, as well as the accompanying maps and illustrations of the New World, marked the beginning of what historians have called the "imperial archive," a collection of documents and a fund of knowledge that influenced and propelled English expansion overseas.

The English propagandists of trade and settlement included in this section rearrange the triple division of the world as they move the spiritual center to the North. Since the sons of Japheth, as the sons of "true Religion," now occupy England, pamphlets like Hakluyt's *Discourse of Western Planting* (1584, doc. 7) proclaim the enlargement of Japheth in terms of England's extension to the West. English writers relocate the center of salvation by interpreting the discovery of America in light of the progressive course of Reformation history. In a co-authored pamphlet, Edward Hayes and Christopher Carleill unfold the westward course of civilization (doc. 12). They endow America with the vision of a Christianizing mission and cherish the idea of an empire in the west. As such, the woodlands and the inhabitants of North America finally enhanced the mental picture that Protestant England formed of America and inspired the colonial imagination of British America.

Thomas Hariot's report was the first published book about America by an English explorer. The pamphlet stirs the reader's fantasies of everything being "farre greater" in the New than in the Old World. While Hariot describes the geography, climate, vegetation, wildlife, and the manners of the "natural inhabitants" of Virginia, John Smith (doc. 15) turns the settlement of New England into a secular venture of exploration and appropriation of the land. His emphasizing of planting and building a plantation by "Gods blessing and his owne industrie" anticipates the rhetoric of opportunity that later characterizes the American Dream.

The religious writers that this section highlights – Alexander Whitaker, John Cotton, and Robert Cushman – expound on England's special role in the Atlantic world that had long been heralded by Richard Hakluyt and the apologists of English colonization over-

seas. Their promotional efforts involved the recovery of the newly discovered world and its inhabitants, from the influence of “Popish Spain,” and the prevention of its being further corrupted by French Catholicism. Whitaker, who became known as the apostle of Virginia, was the first writer to advertise a belief in an English plantation assigned by God’s providence (doc. 14). To promulgate the idea of a Puritan migration to the New World, eminent ministers such as John Cotton and Robert Cushman (cf. docs. 16 and 17) recalled the concept of improvement that had made an early appearance in Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). More had stated that those who keep the land idle, forfeit legal possession of it. Conceptualizing America as a vast and empty space to be improved by Puritan settlers justified the possession of the land.

The three poems by Thomas Tillam, Samuel Sewall, and George Berkeley (docs. 19-21) that conclude this section contain an ironic twist on the exclusion of the New World from the history of salvation, since it becomes obvious that the fourth continent, once the devil’s domain, now regenerates the Old World. The inclusion of America into eschatological schemes brings about the progressive conviction of America’s manifest destiny. It is the West that turns into a field of futurity. Accordingly, ideas of progress and manifest destiny that have shaped conceptualizations of America during the colonial era as well as the revolutionary and early national periods, result from the rearticulation of Christian global designs during the sixteenth century.

Oliver Scheiding