

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

attributes that marked land as improved: it was cultivated and enclosed; and as such, English land was *property*.¹

Throughout his chapter on property in the *Treatise*, Locke refers to North America to make his point about land lying in waste. For Locke, as for the colonists, the notion of waste, long associated with certain use rights on the English manor, had very specific visual meanings and markings. The primary attribute of waste is the absence of cultivation and enclosure. Cultivation and enclosure, in turn, were easily verifiable, the former through plow marks made by draft animals, the latter through walls, hedges, or fences surrounding cultivated land. Despite tracts of agricultural cultivation—not to mention the fact that early colonists learned certain agricultural techniques from Native Americans—Amerindian land was still considered waste by Locke and others before him because it was tilled by hand. Thus, even when planted, Amerindian land was still considered waste—uncultivated and unimproved because it was farmed improperly. This idea of the New World as waste was the defining element in justifying the taking of Amerindian land.²

Colonists who influenced Locke defended their right to Amerindian land by referring to it as empty. Descriptions of America as a *vacuum domicilium* or vacant land pervade early colonists' descriptions. Vacant or waste land, in turn, was identifiable if there were no signs of private ownership. The conclusion was that, absent ownership, land is available for the taking.³

Among the most vigorous and able defenders of England's right to appropriate the land of Native Americans on the basis of this logic was John Winthrop, the first Governor of Massachusetts. Winthrop asked how the appropriation of land was moral and legal: 'What warrant have we to take that land, which is and hath been of long time possessed of others?'⁴ He answered by insisting that Amerindian land is 'without title or property,' and thus waste. The Indians possessed no property, Winthrop argued, because 'they inclose noe land.'

1. Stuart BANNER, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 46–47; Kathy SQUADRITO, 'Locke and the Dispossession of the American Indian,' in Julie K. WARD and Tommy L. LOTT (eds.), *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 101–24.

2. Patricia SEED, *American Pentimento: The Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 34–37.

3. ARNEIL, *John Locke and America*, 109.

4. *Ibid.*, 108–09.

GARY FIELDS

If Indians were left with sufficient land, Winthrop reasoned, 'we may lawfully take the rest.'¹ Winthrop's assessment would prove prescient.

As colonial agriculture expanded during the 17th century, gradually filling New England with a landscape of enclosed cultivated fields, and as colonists prospered—in contrast to their impoverished beginnings—their experiences provided Locke with the evidence to cast aspersions on Native American land as unimproved waste despite evidence to the contrary.² By Locke's reasoning, the conclusions for colonial land policy were obvious: in the absence of improved land, Native Americans had no rightful claims to their land. Moreover, the focus in Locke on land improvement undercut any claims to landed property based on occupancy. If the existing occupants on the land did not improve it, then, in Locke's logic, their occupancy was insufficient to claim ownership. At the same time, those who improved what Locke saw as wasteland had moral and legal justification for claiming title to those portions of the unimproved landscape into which they had sunk their labor. In this way, Locke created a legal as well as a philosophical opening for a process of appropriation and dispossession.

Whatever the accuracy of Locke's depiction of Amerindian society, his theory of property had enormous influence on the leaders of the new republic. Lawyers, preachers, and politicians all made use of Locke's improvement-driven, labor-based labor theory of property to define rights to land. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judge argued forcefully along the lines of Locke that those who improve land have rights of dominion over it.³ At the same time, Brackenridge asserted that 'savages who do not cultivate the soil, are in the same situation with the beasts.' While Brackenridge opposed taking Indian land by conquest, he provides a prescient vision of an imagined future geography when he writes how he 'would justify encroachment on [Amerindian] territory until they are reduced to smaller bounds.' The Reverend John Witherspoon, President of Princeton University, also emerged as a pivotal figure in outlining a vision of what the United States would be. In his 1802 *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, Witherspoon frames a principle of

1. William CRONON, *Changes in the Land: Indians Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 130.

2. Alan TAYLOR, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 15–45; BANNER, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 46–47.

3. Information on Brackenridge comes from Maureen KONKLE, 'Indigenous Ownership and the Emergence of U.S. Liberal Imperialism,' *The American Indian Quarterly*, 32 no. 3 (2008): 297–323.

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

property that he terms 'a right to the fullest use.' Following Locke, he insists that the individual has a right to what can be put to industry, and then proceeds to inquire as to the limits of such ownership. 'Must I take only what is sufficient for the present moment,' Witherspoon asks, 'or may I provide for future necessities and enjoyment?' He then inquired prophetically: 'In vacant lands must I take only what I and my present followers can sufficiently occupy, or may I touch a continent and call it mine, though I shall not be able to fill it in many ages?' What both Brackenridge and Witherspoon outline is a territorial vision founded on a doctrine of property rights that would become the foundation of U.S. Government policy by the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries.¹

Despite the characterization of Amerindian land as unimproved waste by Locke and his predecessors and disciples, what actually differentiated colonists from Amerindians was not improvement and land ownership *per se*, but the *meaning* of improvement and ownership. For Native Americans, what could be owned was the right to use land, not bits of the ground itself. In the absence of ideas about owning plots of ground, Amerindians had no concept of so-called 'improvement' embedded in a piece of the earth. By contrast, Anglo-Americans, in treating land as a fixed and measurable commodity capable of being plotted on a map, created a notion of improvement and ownership fixed in identifiable plots of the earth. From this perspective, ownership inhered not in the use of land, but in specific pieces of the ground itself where improvement resided. When the Anglo-European concept of 'fixity' in property rights and 'improvement' sought to replace the Indian concept of 'use,' conflict between the two groups was all but inevitable.²

In the early period of U.S. state-building, ideologues for the new nation succeeded in fusing the improvement-driven concept of property rights inherited from Locke with a newer idea of a teleological, if not Divine mission of settling North America and civilizing the continent through the practices of colonizing and cultivating land. Even prior to independence, colonists such as Benjamin Franklin already described a 'destiny' for Americans to fill up territory to the West. Later, Thomas Jefferson expressed similar messianic visions, insisting that Americans settlers would eventually populate the continent, forcing Native Americans to assimilate. In 1811, John Quincy Adams gave explicit recognition

1. John WITHERSPOON, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, Varum Lansing Collins (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1912), 78; ARNEIL, *John Locke and America*, 169–200.

2. Daniel K. RICHTER, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 54; CRONON, *Changes in the Land*, 53.

GARY FIELDS

to a divine role in American colonization in observing how the ‘whole continent of North America appeared destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one *nation*.’¹

Embedded in these sentiments of a divine mission was an imagined vision of the American landscape. Echoing Locke’s improvement-driven theory of property, American colonists and their political leaders reconceived the landscape of North America as a westward-expanding grid of mostly small property owners, intent on cultivating and thus improving the land. In this imagined geography, land used by Native Americans was designated as unenclosed and unimproved, available to those of pioneering spirit committed to improving it through cultivation and hard work.

One of the most potent symbols of this outlook of appropriation that was both a reflection of an imagined geography and an instrument for diffusing this vision more widely to the public was the map of the United States created in 1816 by cartographer John Melish (see Figure 3 below). His map is a poignant example of how cartographic representation, far from an objective picture of an existing territorial reality, is instead best understood as a type of text communicating arguments about territory. As Harley and his disciples emphasized, often times it is the map that precedes territory, emerging as a model for, rather than a model of, what it purports to represent. In this way, a map structures territory in our imagination while at the same time it helps forge territory on the landscape itself. Melish, rather than transcribing the boundaries of the still young republic, instead projects what he imagines and idealizes the territory of the U.S. to be—an area from ‘sea to sea.’ In describing his map, Melish echoes the spirit of destiny expressed by Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams, while giving cartographic reality to a geographical vision. ‘The map so constructed,’ notes Melish, ‘shows at a glance the whole extent of the territory of the United States, from sea to sea; and in tracing the probable expansion of the human [*i. e.*, white] race from east to west, the mind finds an agreeable resting place on its western limits.’ A vision of appropriation and conquest emerged as a cartographic representation. Seemingly benign, Melish’s map provides a picture not of the U.S. as it was, but as it would become; a territory in which Indian Removal emerged

1. Robert J. MILLER, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 130; Jeffrey OSTLER, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13–14.

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

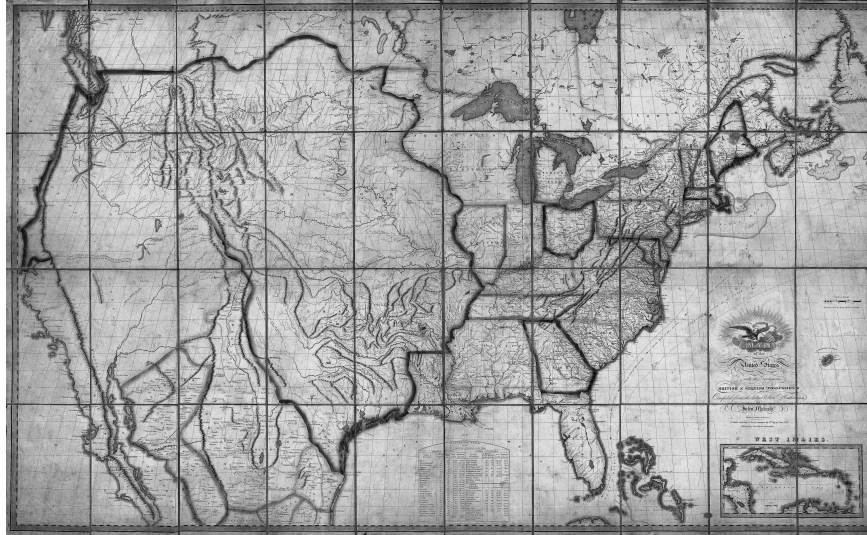


Figure 3. — John Melish, *Map of the United States* (1816). Reproduced by permission of the David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.

as the basis of a nation stretching, as Melish predicted, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.¹

5 Imagining Palestine

In the late 19th century, a segment of European Jewry embraced the long-standing Jewish aspiration of a 'return to Zion' to liberate the Jewish people from anti-Semitic prejudice.² By 1897, this sentiment had matured into an organized political movement, Zionism, with an official institution, the World Zionist Congress (WZC), with the aim of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. In 1901, the World Zionist Congress established the Jewish National Fund (JNF) with a mandate of buying land in Palestine for distribution to Jewish immigrants who would constitute the citizens of the imagined state-in-the-making. The following year, one of the founders of the JNF, Herman Shapira, came up with

1. SHORT, *Representing the Republic*, 132–36.

2. Shlomo AVINERI, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 3.

GARY FIELDS

the idea of placing a box in every Jewish home throughout the entire world to collect money for this enterprise of land acquisition which would then be sent to the headquarters of the JNF in Vienna. Initially, the boxes had a very simple design: a Star of David. But by 1934 the blue box had undergone a metamorphosis with the Star of David giving way to a *map*. Why did this change occur and what was the meaning of the map representing what Zionists described as *Eretz Israel* [The Land of Israel]? The key to answering this question lies in understanding the origins and aims of Zionism as an ideology and political movement.

Although Zionism has its origins as a movement confronting religious intolerance, Zionists were influenced by 19th-century nationalism, which promoted the idea of liberation for certain oppressed groups through the creation of nation-states. What emerged from the fusion in Zionism of a return to the homeland and the newly ascendant idea of the *nation* was a largely secular ideology with religious overtones. From this fusion, early Zionists framed an imagined vision of Palestine as a state for the Jewish people, culled from their own culturally-based narrative of returning to their historical roots, and from 19th-century nationalism.¹

The transformation of this early Zionist idea of Palestine into a more widespread set of beliefs dates from the work of Theodor Herzl and his vision of a homeland for the Jewish people. Insisting that anti-Semitism was intractable, Herzl argued that only a Jewish state offered safety to the Jews. Herzl argued for a Jewish state almost entirely in a secular discourse of development and modernization. As part of his effort to justify Palestine for the project of state-building to overcome anti-Semitism, Herzl characterized the Palestinian landscape as primitive, uncultivated, and undeveloped. In addition, with the exception of one brief reference to the 'native population,' Herzl made no mention of Palestine's existing inhabitants. For Herzl, the depressed landscape and the commitment he envisioned of Jewish settlers to cultivate and improve it—alongside the moral legitimacy of Jewish statehood—conferred upon Zionists a right to the land of Palestine for purposes of state-building.²

What was largely unresolved in the early Zionist imagination was the fate of Palestine's Arab population. In 1897, when Herzl organized the first Zionist

1. Yael ZERUBAVEL, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13–22.

2. Theodor HERZL, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question* (2nd ed.; London: Central Office of the Zionist Organization, 1934); Avi SHLAIM, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 3–4.

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

Congress in Basel to explore the idea of Jewish statehood, Jews in Palestine constituted roughly 4% of the population. This demographic fact posed a daunting problem for the Zionist project. In his *Diaries*, Herzl made a fleeting reference to 'spirit[ing] away' the Arabs, but Zionists, with the notable exception of Vladimir Jabotinsky, tended to underplay the dilemma of creating a Jewish state in a place with an overwhelming majority of non-Jewish inhabitants. At the 1897 Congress, Zionists adopted as a strategic aim 'redeeming' the land of Palestine, with redemption having a very specific meaning; for Zionists, redeeming Palestine meant restoring the Jewish character to this territory. The establishment of the Jewish National Fund stood at the center of a program to establish Jewish sovereignty over Palestinian territory by promoting a demographic overhaul of the area through immigration, land purchase, and settlement.¹

During the first two decades of the 20th century, Zionists had some success in promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine, but the gains were slow. In 1917, however, the Zionist movement received enormous help when Britain, through the Balfour Declaration, provided official backing to the Zionist cause by declaring its intention of enabling Jews to establish a homeland in Palestine—which the British were in the process of seizing from the Ottoman Empire as part of the spoils of World War I. After 1917, the rate of Jewish immigration and settlement increased markedly. Nevertheless, even by the late 1920s, Palestinian Muslims and Christians still constituted over 80% of the Palestinian population. As a consequence, the Jewish National Fund decided to adopt a more aggressive posture in its outreach to potential Jewish settlers.²

In the late 1920s, as part of this campaign, the JNF commissioned a series of maps aimed at disseminating a representation of Palestine with an unmistakable geo-political meaning. The first of these maps, prepared by graphic artists rather than cartographers, appeared in 1928 on the cover of the official JNF journal, *Karnenu*, revealing a territory corresponding roughly to the area of the British Mandate with the title *Eretz Israel*. *Eretz Israel* was represented as an area of Jewish settlement in an otherwise empty geographical space absent any indication of an Arab presence or even of neighboring Arab Territories. In 1934, the JNF used one of these maps to adorn the most widespread and recognizable

1. Raphael PATAI (ed.), *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, translated by Harry ZOHN (5 vols.; New York: Herzl Press, 1960) 1: 88; SHLAIM, *The Iron Wall*, 3-4; Walter LEHN and Uri DAVIS, *The Jewish National Fund* (London: Kegan Paul, 1988), 1-4.

2. Jacob METZER, *The Divided Economy of Mandatory Palestine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xv, 28.

GARY FIELDS



Figure 4. — Jewish National Fund Charity Box, circa 1934, from a private museum collection, which requests anonymity.

symbol of the Zionist effort, the celebrated Blue Box. By 1940, millions of these boxes with the map found their way into Jewish homes, schools, and synagogues all over the world, including in Palestine itself. Although the Blue Box circulated as a Jewish cultural symbol, the message it contained about territory was aimed at three constituencies: the international community; the indigenous inhabitants of that land, the Palestinian Arabs; and, most importantly, the Jewish community itself. To all three of these constituencies, the map on the Blue Box was an argument with an unmistakable message: ‘This is our land.’¹

There were three major political arguments used in this map to communicate the message of Palestine as a Jewish territory. The first and arguably most important focused on the issue of the *borders of Eretz Israel*. Indeed, there was some disagreement within the Zionist leadership as to what territorial claims the Zionists should pursue. A group of Maximalists wanted the entire British

1. Yoram BAR-GAL, *Propaganda and Zionist Education: The Jewish National Fund, 1924-1947* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 137, 141, 147.

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

Mandate for the eventual Jewish state, with boundaries extending into Southern Lebanon and Jordan. Moderate Zionists would accept less than the entire Mandate territory, with some proposing territory now part of modern Jordan, others suggesting the Jordan River (the present day border with Jordan) as a boundary. Accordingly, in a compromise, the JNF rendered the map without borders. Nevertheless, in a clear concession to the Maximalists, the map demarcated a land area extending from the Litani River in Lebanon, south to the Negev Desert, and east, covering major portions of Transjordan with the center of the map depicting the Jordan River. Leaving the question of the borders open, the map on the Blue Box projected a vision about the size and scope of Jewish territory.

The second argument focused on the character of the so-called non-Jewish geographical space of Palestine. It was decided to make this space denote the idea of emptiness and therefore it was left white. There are no Palestinian cities on this map and even the large historical Palestinian urban centers of Nablus and Al-Khalil (Hebron) are not to be found. Mapping, in this sense, amounted to an erasure, making places disappear.

Third, the map makes an argument about the Jewish geographical space. In direct contrast to emptiness, Jewish settlement is highlighted on the map, emphasizing progress but admitting the need for additional settlement, and most importantly additional settlers. In effect, the map on the Blue Box represented an overt set of cartographic arguments and projections elevating the identity of the land as Jewish while rendering British and especially Palestinian presence invisible. In adopting the design of the map and in deploying it on an article of mass culture circulating within the world Jewish community, the JNF and the Zionist leadership used cartography as a political and propaganda tool.¹

As the 1930s progressed, intense debates occurred within the Zionist movement on the nature of the so-called demographic problem and Jewish statehood. Revisionists inspired by Jabotinsky insisted that Palestinians could not be spirited away, arguing that a Jewish state in Palestine would involve the use of force in what Jabotinsky had earlier metaphorically termed an *Iron Wall*. Other

1. Yoram BAR-GAL, 'The Blue Box and JNF Propaganda Maps, 1930-1947,' *Israel Studies*, 8, no. 1 (2003): 1-19. The territorial meaning of Palestine depicted on the Blue Box diffused to other geographical representations. Bar-Gal references a 1938 map of the Galilee region in Hebrew geography textbooks that depicts Jewish settlements with place names and representations of houses and tractors, while Arab towns are completely omitted. The only Arabs on the map are Bedouins, whose locations are represented by goats. Yoram BAR-GAL, 'The Image of the 'Palestinian' in Geography Textbooks in Israel,' *Journal of Geography*, 93, no. 5 (1994): 224-32 (225-26).

GARY FIELDS

Zionists with a very different political orientation, such as Judah Magnes and Martin Buber, argued for a state with equal rights for Jews and non-Jews alike.

What eventually emerged as the dominant perspective within Zionism for solving the demographic dilemma of Jewish statehood drew upon notions of force from Jabotinsky while embracing the idea of spiriting away the Arab population from Palestine to make way for Jewish statehood that had roots in Herzl. In this regard, David Ben-Gurion, who would become Israel's first Prime Minister, played a pivotal role. Initially reluctant to entertain the idea of forcibly removing Arabs from Palestine, Ben-Gurion by the late 1930s embraced the concept and emerged among a cadre of Zionist leaders including Yosef Weitz and Chaim Weizman willing to consider the 'transfer' of Arab Palestinians in order to realize Jewish sovereignty on Palestinian land. By 1937-38, Ben-Gurion insisted that transfer had always been the aim of Zionist colonization. 'I support compulsory transfer,' Ben-Gurion would say. 'I don't see in it anything immoral.'¹

It is possible to trace a line of continuity between the argument projected in the map on the Blue Box and what emerged as the dominant outlook within the Zionist movement. Zionists came to embrace notions of a territory without Palestinian Arabs while cultivating the idea of transferring this population in order to attain this end. In this way, the vision of the Blue Box map became part of the dominant collective mindset about territory. It would only be ten years before Zionists were presented with the extraordinary circumstances of war that enabled them to put this vision into practice. What was 'on the map' became embedded in the mind, and eventually inscribed onto the landscape itself.

6 Concluding Remarks

In the last quarter of the 16th century, cartography in England assumed a new level of importance marked by the demands of the ruling Tudors and landed elites for visual representations of the English realm and their own landed estates. In this period, cartographic representation emerged as the end product of the newly burgeoning practice of surveying land and was invariably referred to

1. Benny MORRIS, 'Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948,' in Eugene L. ROGAN and Avi SHLAIM (eds.), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37-59 (44); Nur MASALHA, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

as the act of *plotting*, while maps themselves were typically termed *plots*.¹ For mapmakers of the period, such as John Norden, plotting enabled the lords of estates to visualize the structure of their tenancies so that they could assert greater levels of control over rents and leases and make more rational decisions about such matters as enclosing the land itself. Not by accident did Norden's contemporary, William Shakespeare, pick up the obliquely conspiratorial implications of this linguistic association between maps and plots when his *King Lear* announces in the opening scene to those assembled before him: 'Meane time, we will expresse our darker purposes; The map there; know we have diuided in three, our kingdome.' What Norden and Shakespeare were suggesting was that maps were more than passive representations of territory; maps were integral elements in a process of laying claim to land.

The three cases discussed in this essay reveal how maps projected arguments about territory, enabling groups with territorial ambitions to claim land while contesting the claims of others. Edward Said used the idea of imaginative geography to describe how such groups come to think of the territory they covet as their own. These groups invent meanings of the territorial landscapes they seek that justify their right to possess and in some cases even take the coveted territory. Said sought to connect collective consciousness to a very specific type of historical outcome, namely territorial dispossession. This essay is an effort to add an integral element to Said's argument. Maps are part of the imagination by which groups with territorial ambitions come to see what they want to seize. If dispossession has elements of conspiracy, maps are often part of the plot.

1. Garrett A. SULLIVAN, Jr., "'Arden Lay Murdered in that Plot of Ground': Surveying, Land, and Arden of Faversham,' *English Literary History*, 61, no. 2 (1994): 231–52; Martin BRUCKNER and Kristine POOLE, 'The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama, and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England,' *English Literary History*, 69, no. 3 (2002): 617–48.