

'A Profound Though Special Erudition': Justin Winsor as Historian of Discovery

WILLIAM A. KOELSCH

I

EVERY CRAVEN, beginning his model historiographical essay on Frederick Jackson Turner, argues that 'Turner wrote less and influenced his generation more than any other important historian.'¹ At the outset of this analysis of an older student of the westward movement, Justin Winsor (1831-97), one is tempted to parody that statement by asserting that Winsor wrote more and influenced later generations less than almost any other important American historian.

Turner himself wrote of Winsor's last book, *The Westward Movement*, that it was 'monumental in its erudition and is a work of the highest importance to students of the beginnings of the West.'² As early as 1937, however, Winsor was entirely omitted from consideration in the standard work on the historiography of the first two generations of American professional historians, the *Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American*

An earlier and briefer version of this paper was read November 17, 1979, at the American Antiquarian Society as part of a session on 'Historians of Discovery' during the Annual Meeting of the Society for the History of Discoveries.

¹ Avery Craven, 'Frederick Jackson Turner,' in William T. Hutchinson, ed., *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography* (Chicago, 1937), p. 252.

² Frederick J. Turner, review of Winsor's *Westward Movement*, in *American Historical Review* 3 (1897-98):556. See also Turner's anticipatory remarks in 'The West as a Field of Historical Study,' American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, vol. 1, Washington, D.C., 1897, p. 283.

Historiography. In the same year, though, historiographer Michael Kraus advised history students to become familiar with Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America* for 'the notes that still earn Winsor's volumes a place on the student's shelf. . . . they are still the open-sesame for many subjects in American history,' an injunction he repeated in 1953. On the other hand, Turner's student Merle Curti, foremost among American social and intellectual historians of his own day, six years later not only classed Winsor, the preeminent critical historian, with the distinctly uncritical compiler Hubert Howe Bancroft, but added insult to injury by identifying Winsor's principal work as the *Critical and Narrative History*.³

The only lengthy treatment of Winsor's life and work as a historian remains an unpublished doctoral dissertation completed in 1950, from which a single short article appears to have resulted.⁴ The recently published *Combined Retrospective Index to Journals in History, 1838-1974*, a computer-assisted comprehensive international bibliography, contains no subject references to Winsor beyond obituary accounts. To the extent that Winsor has been the subject of recent historical research, it has been in relation to the developing field of library history. Indeed, a recently published anthology of his key writings on libraries points out that 'Winsor is little known among contemporary historians,' while arguing that 'his eclipse as a historian has been paralleled by his continued, and even heightened, relevance to modern librarianship.'⁵

³ Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York, 1937), p. 579; Kraus, *The Writing of American History* (Norman, Okla., 1953), p. 229; Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, 1943), p. 588 (Curti's transposition has gone uncorrected in later editions).

⁴ Joseph A. Borome, 'The Life and Letters of Justin Winsor' (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1950); Borome, 'Winsor's History of America,' *Boston Public Library Quarterly* 5(1953):119-39.

⁵ Wayne Cutler and Michael H. Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor: Scholar-Librarian* (Littleton, Colo., 1980), p. 7. This volume is useful for its introductory essay, its selection of works for reprinting, and its brief bibliography of works by and about Winsor. For a complete, annotated list of Winsor's publications, see William F. Yust, *A Bibliography of Justin Winsor* (Cambridge, Mass., 1902), conveniently reproduced as an appendix to Borome's dissertation.

In most recent surveys of American historiography Winsor is either mentioned in passing as a historical editor and bibliographer or missing entirely—though, as always, an occasional exception can be found.⁶ It is not surprising, perhaps, that in the Wonderland of contemporary American historiography Winsor should fade away like the Cheshire cat. But it is noteworthy that, even among historians of discovery, scarcely the grin remains. For the latter group Winsor is as significant a 'Founding Father' as he is for librarians—yet if citations in volumes of *Terrae Incognitae* thus far published be taken as an indication, not a highly acknowledged one.⁷

This essay does not contend that Winsor should be restored to the head of the required reading list for graduate students in American history, as he was in 1897, or that the historical profession has lacked an appropriate and proper degree of respect for the work of a man who was, after all, a founding member of the American Historical Association and one of its early presidents. Like Sir Arthur Evans, who 'discovered' in the Bronze Age palace of King Minos at Knossos a curiously Edwardian life style, historiographers examining the work of neglected forbears risk subtly shaping their argument in the light of their perceived agendas of the present day, if not for

⁶ The principal recent exception is Bert J. Loewenberg, *American History in American Thought* (New York, 1972), pp. 337–38, largely summarizing earlier writers on the subject, such as John Spencer Bassett, 'Later Historians,' in William Porterfield Trent et al., eds., *Cambridge History of American Literature*, vol. III (New York, 1921), pp. 186–87. I have examined the major works on American historiography of the last forty years without finding more than casual, and occasionally inaccurate, references to Winsor's work; almost always these concern the *Narrative and Critical History* alone.

⁷ In surveying vols. 1–13 (1969–81) of *Terrae Incognitae* I have found only one footnote reference to a Winsor publication, a citation of Channing's approval of Manuel José Quintana's biography of Balboa from the *Narrative and Critical History*; see vol. 6 (1974), p. 10. John Parker has recently written in that journal (vol. 13 [1981], pp. 31–32) that an unidentified mentor had, some thirty years previously, advised him that Winsor was still one of two 'best friends' for the historian of discovery, in Winsor's case for 'the substantial notes on the original sources' in *Narrative and Critical History*. It may be that Winsor is used currently as a starting point for literature searches even though not cited, but of course absence of citation furnishes no clues to intensity of use.

the future. The questions posed here are rather more naive: first, what were Winsor's historiographical achievements, particularly though not exclusively as historian of discovery? And second, how is it that these achievements have gone into eclipse since his death?

II

Winsor's incarnation as historian of discovery began seriously only after he became librarian of Harvard College in 1877, and forms the central part of his 'third career.' His first career, as mid-Victorian 'man of letters,' was unmemorable. There was an outpouring of poetry for the *Christian Register* and similar publications; there were reviews, translations, miscellaneous commentary on literary figures, some local history, and a six-volume unpublished work on the life and times of David Garrick. Winsor's output was, in short, precisely what one might expect from an industrious mid-century Bostonian of seventeenth-century lineage, Harvard credentials, an independent income derived from parental mercantile enterprise, and a lack of regular gainful employment.⁸

Winsor's second career, begun in 1868, was as superintendent of the Boston Public Library, where his vigor, methodical habit of mind, and intelligent naiveté enabled him to adapt and synthesize new methods and concepts in 'library economy' in a way that put him and his library at the front rank of librarianship in America.⁹ It was his twenty-year 'third career,' however, as librarian and professor at Harvard University, which provided him both with unexcelled resources and with the freedom and scholarly context in which to make his mark

⁸ Biographical material is drawn from Borome, 'Life and Letters,' and from the numerous biographical memoirs and obituaries listed in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*; plus one useful sketch unlisted by them, 'Justin Winsor,' in Harvard College, Class of 1853, *Report*, 1849-1913 (Cambridge, Mass., 1913), pp. 183-88.

⁹ For the Boston Public Library under Winsor's management, see Borome, 'Life and Letters,' chaps. 4-9; Walter Muir Whitehill, *The Boston Public Library: A Centennial History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), chap. 5; and list of references in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*, p. 187.

as an internationally recognized expert on early cartography and geographical knowledge, as magisterial historian of exploration and discovery, and as a pioneer teacher of courses in that area.

The flowering of historico-geographical scholarship in Winsor during his last twenty years of life came from very early roots. In an autobiographical fragment written for his Harvard classmate and Class of 1853 Secretary Samuel S. Shaw, Winsor claimed that he 'began life with a passion for American history,' and indeed also its historical geography. For as a solitary but precocious adolescent he had begun a history of Duxbury, his ancestral town and summer retreat, not only by examining public records and private manuscripts and interviewing elderly residents, but by making sketches of important sites and drawing maps to scale, as well as incorporating evidence from his youthful rambles within the town. The 350-page book was published during his freshman year at Harvard. In his two-and-a-half-year college career Winsor traveled to numerous Revolutionary War sites, made sketches, pursued research in the state archives, and prepared 'diagram-like maps' for an 1852 presentation on the Revolutionary campaigns in the North.¹⁰

Although it was appointment to the post of librarian of Harvard College by his classmate President Charles W. Eliot which gave Winsor the opportunity to pursue his own research in the history of discovery, his work at Boston Public laid the bibliographical foundation for it. As he wrote Shaw, 'the requirements of my calling compel me to watch the progress of knowledge.' As a scholar-librarian, he felt obliged to make his observations accessible to the general public through the device of the annotated bibliography. Thus, in 1873 the Boston Public Library published his heavily annotated 300-

¹⁰ Winsor to S. S. Shaw, Apr. 25, 1883, Winsor Papers, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Mass.; Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 17-19, 32; Winsor, *A History of the Town of Duxbury, Massachusetts, with Genealogical Registers* (Boston, 1849).

page catalogue of its books on history, biography, and travel, including 'Geography, Voyages, Sketches, and Manners and Customs.'¹¹ Beginning in 1875, the Boston Public Library *Bulletin* began to carry extended bibliographical essays on special subjects. These began with discussions of books on the Revolution, prompted by Centennial demands, but soon extended into a series of six such essays by Winsor on the literature of the history of discovery, exploration, colonization, and cartography.¹²

The year 1877 marked a major turning-point in Winsor's career in two ways. First, discouraged over what he regarded as ill-treatment at the hands of a retrenchment-minded City Council, Winsor resigned and accepted appointment as librarian of Harvard College, with the academic rank of professor, three months vacation per year, and an understanding between himself and President Eliot that he would be free to engage in historical research and writing on what was in effect library time.¹³ Second, he was elected to membership in the prestigious Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), which gave him a forum for historical papers and commentary, the scholarly criticism of local historical gentlemen-scholars of deep commitment and high intellectual caliber, and access to an inter-

¹¹ Winsor to Shaw, Apr. 25, 1883, Winsor Papers, Harvard University Archives; Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 167-70; Boston Public Library, *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Lower Hall of the Central Department in the Classes of History, Biography, Including the Histories of Literature, Arts, Sects, etc., Politics, Geography, Voyages, Sketches, and Manners and Customs, Together with Notes for Readers under Subject-references* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1873).

¹² These included 'America Before Columbus,' Boston Public Library *Bulletin*, 3, no. 37 (Apr., 1876):65-69; 'Early Exploration in America,' *ibid.*, no. 38 (July 1876): 103-6; 'America in the Sixteenth Century,' *ibid.*, no. 39 (Oct. 1876):136-41; 'Notes of Americana—Maps of America, 1540-1600; Discoveries in America: Early Historians and Later Collections,' *ibid.*, no. 41 (Apr. 1877):205-9; 'Early English Explorations in America,' *ibid.*, no. 42 (July 1877):241-44; 'Early History of Virginia. Norumbega. The Popham Colony,' *ibid.*, no. 43 (Oct. 1877): 269-73.

¹³ Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 250, 370; Winsor to Eliot, June 27, 1877, Winsor Papers, Harvard University Archives (quoted in Borome); and Charles W. Eliot, 'Tribute to Justin Winsor,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2d ser. 12 (1899):34. See also Winsor's dedication of his *Narrative and Critical History* to Eliot.

national network of researchers in his special field, the history of cartography and its relation to discovery.

Once at Harvard, Winsor's first major publication was a bibliographical guide to the American Revolution, a revision of material he had published originally in the Boston Public Library *Bulletin*, and a forerunner of projected readers' manuals in various fields. These plans were disrupted, however, in the late fall of 1879, when Winsor was approached by the twenty-seven-year-old map publisher and entrepreneur Clarence Frederick Jewett (1852-1909), whose successful experience in publishing a cooperative history of Essex County had led him to plan a multivolume history of Boston to mark that city's 250th anniversary.

Winsor served as general editor and coordinator of the four-volume *Memorial History of Boston*,¹⁴ riding herd on sixty-four contributors with the assistance of an advisory committee drawn from the ranks of leading members of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Winsor himself contributed introductory matter, critical notes in essay form, and numerous citations to sources, correcting and amplifying the work of other contributors. In addition to chapters on literature and on libraries, Winsor contributed an essay on 'The Earliest Maps of Massachusetts Bay and Boston Harbor' and annotated lists of maps of Boston and vicinity to 1850. These lists long served as a standard finding aid and still have not been superseded for the period after 1800.¹⁵ His interests in more general

¹⁴ Boston, 1880-81. Borome, 'Life and Letters,' chap. 13, 'The Memorial History of Boston,' covers background; see also Clarence S. Brigham, 'Clarence Frederick Jewett,' *Dictionary of American Biography* (1943), 10:66-67; and Mark A. DeWolfe Howe, 'The Makers of Winsor's Memorial History of Boston,' in Boston Tercentenary Committee, Subcommittee on Memorial History, *Fifty Years of Boston: A Memorial Volume* (Boston, 1932), pp. 1-7.

¹⁵ See James Clement Wheat and Charles F. Brun, *Maps and Charts Published in America Before 1800: A Bibliography* (New Haven, 1969); and John W. Reps, 'Boston by Bostonians: The Printed Plans and Views of the Colonial City by Its Artists, Cartographers, Engravers and Publishers,' in Walter Muir Whitehill and Sinclair H. Hitchings, eds., *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670-1775* (Boston, 1973), pp. 3-56 (issued both separately and as Colonial Society of Massachusetts *Publications*, vol. 46).

aspects of discovery were represented by chapters written by others on 'Early European Voyages in Massachusetts Bay' and 'The Earliest Explorations and Settlement of Boston Harbor.' Thanks to the interest of publisher James R. Osgood in the new heliotype process, Winsor was able to include numerous facsimiles of old maps and views, immensely enriching the narrative texts.

The techniques Winsor had worked out in the *Memorial History of Boston* were extended to its greater offspring, the eight-volume *Narrative and Critical History of America*,¹⁶ conceived by Winsor in 1880 as a critical guide to the sources of knowledge about American history. In his original plan the narrative portions were to be very brief summaries of what was known. But at the insistence both of friends in the Massachusetts Historical Society and of Osgood, his publisher, the narrative portions were extended and, it was hoped, the series thereby made more palatable to the general reading (and book-buying) public. Even so, in the final version the critical portions eclipsed their respective narrative essays in several instances.

Of some sixty-six narrative essays by thirty-nine contributors, most of them members of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Winsor is formally credited with at least ten. He also wrote a great many critical notes and bibliographical essays, as well as footnotes to the notes and essays which other authors had originally submitted. As Joseph A. Borome has shown, many of the essays that Winsor did not originally draft were largely rewritten or enhanced in content by him as editor. Only one paragraph of Edward Channing's original draft remains in the appendix to 'Territorial Acquisitions and Divisions'

¹⁶ Boston, 1886-89. The volumes of the *Narrative and Critical History* were originally to be published by James R. Osgood and Company, but financial difficulties forced the firm to suspend plans for publication. Early volumes were copyrighted, and vols. 2, 3, and 4 were actually printed, by Osgood. Winsor purchased the rights to the work from the Osgood successor firm, Ticknor and Company, and resold them to Houghton, Mifflin and Company in late Oct. 1885.

in volume 7, for instance. Although the published essay is credited to Channing 'and the Editor,' it is in fact Winsor's essay, though characteristically he approved payment to Channing as author when he discovered that the latter needed the money. All in all, Borome estimates that some 2,040 of the total 4,840 printed pages came from Winsor's pen; when one considers that most of these notes, commentary, and critical essays were set in small type, it is probably fair to estimate his total share of the content as close to 50 percent.¹⁷ Only the two essays by the Harvard geographer-geologist Nathaniel Southgate Shaler on 'The Physiography of North America' and 'Effect of the Physiography of North America on Men of European Origin,' which together form the introduction to volume 4, appear to have entirely escaped Winsor's annotative spirit.

The *Narrative and Critical History* gave Winsor his first major opportunity to appear before the generally educated public as historian of discovery and of the cartographical evidence for it, as well as master of the vast literature which had grown up over a generation concerning the 'great subject' of the geographical exploration of the New World and its consequences for the spread of European civilization. The content of the *History* included essays by William H. Tillinghast on 'The Geographical Knowledge of the Ancients Considered in Relation to the Discovery of America,' Edward Channing on 'The Companions of Columbus,' British geographer Sir Clements Markham on Pizarro, clergyman-scholar Edward Everett Hale on Magellan and on Hawkins and Drake, and numerous other essays by now-forgotten worthies who wrote on major explorers and explorations in all parts of the Americas.

Aside from his numerous notes on nongeographical subjects and his major narrative essays on 'Pre-Columbian Explorations,' 'Columbus and His Discoveries,' 'Cortes and His Com-

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the making of the *Narrative and Critical History*, see Borome, 'Winsor's History of America'; and Borome, 'Life and Letters,' chap. 14.

panions,' and 'The Struggle for the Great Valleys of North America,' Winsor himself wrote over two dozen critical essays on individual explorers, mapmakers, and cartographical series. These ranged in space from 'The Cartography of Greenland' to 'The Historical Chorography of Latin America'; and in time from the 'Bibliography of Pomponius Mela, Solinus, Vadianus and Apianus' and the importance of these classical and Renaissance cosmographers on European concepts of the New World, up to the maps and reports of Arctic explorations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hardly an essay is not enriched by reproductions of old maps and views inserted by Winsor, followed by his comments and notes on their usefulness, authenticity, history, and location.

Reviewers of early volumes of the *History* sometimes complained of what they regarded as excessive amounts of space devoted to cartographical representation and discussion. In his final editorial statement at the end of the last volume, Winsor responded by affirming his belief 'that the field of historical geography was more intimately connected with that of history in general than had usually been recognized; and that it was difficult to see how any period of discovery could be understood without a constant apprehension of the geographical conditions which the discoverers supposed they were dealing with.'¹⁸

For Winsor, 'the field of historical geography' meant two things: the actual record of the known world as it was accumulated on maps and charts; and the record of the beliefs, true and false, held by the discoverers, scholars, and statesmen who commissioned, made, and used the cartographical record. In other words, what Walter Lippman identified as two related but distinct realms, 'the world outside and the pictures in our heads,'¹⁹ must both be mastered by the historian of discovery.

Thus, in his critical essay 'Maps of the Eastern Coast of

¹⁸ Winsor, 'The Editor's Final Statement,' *Narrative and Critical History*, 8:509.

¹⁹ Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922), p. 3.

North America,' Winsor warned that early map makers did their work 'largely in a spirit of finding what they sought,' and that therefore the interpretation of their artifacts 'depends quite as much on geographical views current in those days as upon geographical facts patent in these days.'²⁰ Winsor therefore raised both the unsolved questions asked by those of his own day about the discoverers, such as whether anyone prior to Magellan had found the poleward limit of South America, and the questions asked by men of earlier days, such as were revealed in tracing the history of the concept of the land called El Dorado. But it was also important to Winsor, as historical geographer, to include a reproduction of Henry M. Dexter's map of the Outer Cape reconstructing the routes of the Pilgrim explorers as Dexter had retraced them using both documentary and field evidence; and to make reference to John Gorham Palfrey's maps reconstructing the geography of New England settlement as it would have appeared to a cartographer in 1644 and 1689.²¹

Historical geography was then, for Winsor, more than the inventory, collection, and reproduction of old maps, though this too was part of his task. In Winsor's hands, critically interpreted, the cartographical record was a central point of entry into the mind and behavior of the discoverer, the settler, and the policy maker of the time. Although his monumental work was many other things as well, on this level the *Narrative and Critical History* was both a plea for recognition and a demonstration of the importance of geographical knowledge

²⁰ Winsor, 'Maps of the Eastern Coast of North America,' *Narrative and Critical History*, 4:33.

²¹ See Winsor's essays on 'The Historical Chorography of South America,' *Narrative and Critical History*, 8:369-412; 'The Amazon and Eldorado,' *ibid.*, 2:579-90; his insertion of Henry M. Dexter's map and the accompanying note in Franklin B. Dexter's essay 'The Pilgrim Church and Plymouth Colony,' *ibid.*, 3:270-71; and his note on 'Early Maps of New England,' *ibid.*, 3:381-84. In his comments on the scope of historical geography, Winsor anticipates themes developed more recently by the so-called perception school in that area of study.

in the interpretation of the history both of the Americas and of the Old World.

III

Winsor's share of the *Memorial History of Boston* and his immensely greater share of the *Narrative and Critical History of America* were both the outcome and the further spur to his lifelong habit of accumulating detailed critical notes of every new book, article, map, and picture which came to his attention. He was also aided by an encyclopedic and photographic memory. Those characteristics which had found expression in his Boston Public Library days in the form of annotated bibliographies continued during his years at Harvard. The Harvard library's *Bulletin*, established by his predecessor as a vehicle for the announcement of the more important accessions, became Winsor's outlet for bibliographical notes on geographical and cartographical subjects such as 'Early Globes' and 'The Geographical Labors of Sebastian Munster.' Some of these notes were then pulled together in a new series begun and edited by Winsor, the Harvard University Library's *Bibliographical Contributions*. To this series Winsor contributed two important numbers relating to the history of discovery. One was on Ptolemy's geographies, which included a list of copies in American libraries. The other was an annotated catalogue of the collection of copies of early maps made by J. G. Kohl and owned by the Department of State, but lent to Winsor during his work on the *Narrative and Critical History*.²²

The various historical societies to which Winsor belonged also gave him an opportunity to bring his immense knowledge of the history of cartography in aid of the work of his contemporaries and to float ideas and specialized studies of his own for criticism and comment. Thus, the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* are sprinkled with 'Remarks' by

²² See Yust, *Bibliography*, for library publications by Winsor during the Harvard period.

Winsor on early maps of Boston, the naming of the District of Columbia, Drake's landfall, and early editions of Columbus's first letter. To the MHS and other societies he also gave papers, many of them anticipations of portions of his later books. Although he was a founder and an early president of the American Historical Association, he seems to have been more comfortable among the older, nonacademically affiliated historians of the MHS and the American Antiquarian Society, for whom the history of discovery was still a central part of American history.²³

Winsor and his contemporaries saw his contribution to that field, however, as resting less in his commentaries, bibliographies, and presented or published papers than on a series of four massive volumes published in the last six years of his life. These were the 660-page *Christopher Columbus and How He Received and Imparted the Spirit of Discovery* (1891); the comparatively brief (379-page) *Cartier to Frontenac: Geographical Discovery in the Interior of North America, 1534-1700* (1894); the 464-page *The Mississippi Basin*, subtitled *The Struggle in America Between England and France, 1697-1763* (1895); and the 595-page, posthumously published work, *The Westward Movement: The Colonies and the Republic West of the Alleghenies, 1763-1798* (1897).²⁴

The study of Christopher Columbus is a strange sort of biography, if it be biography indeed. The first four chapters are essentially critical essays on sources, portraits, and authorities. Contrary to the conventional order of biographies, the subject is not born until page 76, seven pages after a represen-

²³ For an example of one of Winsor's 'off-the-cuff' learned commentaries, see his 'Remarks on the Views of early Geographers Regarding the Continent of America,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 3(1883):32-34. Yust, *Bibliography*, is the definitive listing for papers and minor contributions to learned societies.

²⁴ The planning, execution, and reception of these works is discussed in Borome, 'Life and Letters,' chaps. 15, 17, and 18, on which I have drawn for background and for further references; the judgments expressed here on the works themselves, as on others discussed in this paper, are of course the product of my own readings of the texts except where otherwise noted.

tation of the portrait bust on his tomb in Havana, Cuba. These first chapters stem, in part, from bibliographical notes on Columbus material Winsor compiled while at Boston Public, included in part in his contributions to that library's 1879 catalogue of the Ticknor Library. During the period of his editorship of the *Narrative and Critical History*, Winsor had further extended his Columbian research, part of which emerged in the *History* as a rather 'debunking' essay on 'Columbus and His Discoveries.' It was essentially in that spirit that he conceived and developed the longer work.²⁵

Like the *Narrative and Critical History*, Winsor's *Columbus* is stronger in its use of the critical mode than it is of the narrative. Indeed, since unlike the earlier work no footnotes are included, the main text is littered with critical interruptions, including commentaries on the authenticity of maps or documents, the errors of earlier biographers, and the shortcomings of the Admiral himself. The book is, in short, less a biography of Columbus than a study in the development of geographical knowledge concerning the coastlines of the New World—a compendium of what could be scientifically known or assumed circa 1890 concerning discovery in the Columbian era.

Even those of his contemporaries favorably inclined toward the critical spirit in which Winsor worked tended to value his *Columbus* not as the story of a life but as containing 'a mass of bibliographical and cartographical detail of great value,' as an anonymous annotator in Josephus N. Larned's *Literature of American History* delicately put it.²⁶ For the modern reader, perhaps the most notable feature is a 131-page appendix, characteristically set in smaller type and generously sown with old maps and other illustrations, on 'The Geographical Results' of the Columbus voyages. The essay is essentially a

²⁵ Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 480–81, discusses Winsor's negative view of Columbus.

²⁶ J. N. Larned, *The Literature of American History* (Boston, 1902), p. 63 (entry 783).

synopsis of the rounding out of European knowledge of the shapes and sizes of the two Americas from 1492 onward.

The other three volumes in the series also had roots in Winsor's preparation for the *Narrative and Critical History* and in his special interests in the consequences of discovery and exploration for the European mind, perhaps best exemplified in his paper before the MHS on 'The Results in Europe of Cartier's Explorations, 1542-1603' in 1892.²⁷ Sometime between the publication of the Columbus volume and June 1892, when he shared his hopes with his fellow librarian William F. Poole, Winsor conceived a series of volumes focused on the history of discovery, linking the geography of the new continents to the political consequences of the period of exploration. These he grouped under the title *The Historical Geography of the Two Americas*. In his proposed scheme, the appendix to the Columbus volume would be enlarged to become a volume on the discovery of the American coastlines; two more volumes would trace the development of knowledge concerning the geography of the interior of North America (by the French and the Spanish, respectively); a fourth would relate the geography of the Mississippi Valley to its political history, and two others would do the same for South America.²⁸ Although the full series was never completed, the plan itself shows Winsor's continued insistence that the processes of discovery and settlement must be seen comparatively, and that the New World must be seen as a whole.

The end of such study, for Winsor as for his younger contemporaries, was the elucidation of the roots of our existence as a nation-state. The discovery period, particularly in North America, was seen as the heroic beginning of a process culminating in the emergence of a modern nation. The origins

²⁷ *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2d ser. 7(1892):298-315; also issued as a reprint in seventy-five copies.

²⁸ Winsor to W. F. Poole, June 20, 1892, Poole Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago; Winsor to Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Mar. 20, 1893, Winsor Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; both cited in Borome, 'Life and Letters,' p. 526.

of what Winsor called 'the streams of our national life' were to be found in the great valleys of the interior which connected 'the gulf which Cartier opened and that other gulf which Columbus failed to comprehend,' as he says in the dedication of *Cartier to Frontenac*. The culmination of this interaction between physiography and heroic discoverer was the emergence of the United States in its full 'territorial integrity.' Or, as he put it in the last volume of *The Westward Movement*, by 1790 'the United States, with its *rightful proportions* secured, was now fairly started on an independent career' (emphasis mine).²⁹

IV

Given the cartographical and bibliographical resources of the Harvard College Library, it is perhaps surprising that it took Winsor so long to translate his courtesy title of professor into instructional reality. Given his research and administrative agenda, however, it may appear equally surprising that he ever found the time to teach at all. Yet this lesser-known side of Winsor's activity is perhaps a bolder departure than any other, both in substance and in method, for he appears to have taught the first course in the history of discovery in any American university.

On coming to Harvard in 1877, Winsor had clear views concerning the role of the library in an educational institution which was at once developing a system of free electives and groping toward forms of instruction based on laboratory and seminar methods. Assistant Professor Henry Adams, who left Harvard the year Winsor was appointed, had forced the latter's predecessor John Langdon Sibley to set up a reserve book section and work table for his history students. Adams's example had been followed by a handful of other faculty members. Winsor moved quickly to expand this reserve system, and invited faculty to hold classes in the library as one of a

²⁹ Winsor, *Cartier to Frontenac*, dedication page; Winsor, *The Westward Movement*, p. 574.

series of ways to implement Winsor's startling concept of 'humanizing' the student through direct contact with many books.

'A great library should be a workshop and not a repository,' wrote Winsor in his first *Annual Report*. 'It should teach the methods of thorough research, and cultivate in readers the habit of seeking the original sources of learning.' Addressing the scholars of the American Social Science Association shortly afterward, Winsor asserted his new concept even more strongly, describing the academic library of the future as 'not only the store-house of the humanities, but the arena of all intellectual exercise.'³⁰ His measures as librarian, both administratively and in the development of specialized bibliographical guides, catalogues, and other publicly available means of entry into Harvard's holdings, were directed toward engendering those habits and disciplines which Winsor himself had found necessary for sustained critical inquiry.³¹

In order for his collections to become an arena of intellectual advance in his special field of the history of geographical knowledge, however, it was first necessary to see to the organization of the library's map holdings. As part of his duties at Boston Public, Winsor had reorganized its map collection, and in his first year at Harvard he had called President Eliot's attention to the need for making better arrangements for the care and organization of maps than currently existed.

The foundations of Harvard's great collection had been laid in 1818 when the library acquired the collection of books and

³⁰ Winsor, 'First Report' (1878), in *Annual Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College 1877-1878* (Cambridge, Mass., 1879), p. 105; Winsor, 'College and the Other Higher Libraries,' *Library Journal* 4 (1879):399-402. Both these essays are conveniently reprinted in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*, pp. 133-45.

³¹ Borome, 'Life and Letters,' chaps. 10-12 and elsewhere, pulls together massive amounts of detail and references concerning the Harvard library before and under Winsor; the introductory essay in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*, and of course the writings on academic librarianship they reprint together form a good introduction to Winsor's policies, practices, and values. A more convenient and briefer assessment is Cutler and Harris, 'Justin Winsor,' in Bohdan S. Wynar, ed., *American Library Biography* (Littleton, Colo., 1978), pp. 570-72.

some 10,000 maps, charts, and views relating to America assembled by Christoph Daniel Ebeling, a German geographer interested in this country. A second collection, the books and maps formerly belonging to Daniel B. Warden, had been added in 1823. But the only printed guide to these and other Harvard maps was a brief title-list prepared nearly half a century before, and the whole collection needed both reorganization and additional accessions.³²

Winsor himself supervised the reorganization of the maps and charts relating to America in 1880, just before beginning the *Narrative and Critical History*. He became adept at sketching maps in precise detail, and used his knowledge and abilities in this line to illustrate special lectures, such as one on American mapping before Mercator given at Harvard in 1879. In 1884 a curator was appointed to take charge of the map collection. Henry C. Badger served in this post until 1892, during which time preservation measures were taken, a numbering system designed by Winsor was applied to the maps, and a detailed card catalogue was designed containing size, content, printer, and other useful information. A program of acquiring new maps and facsimiles was instituted, and by the early 1890s Harvard had the largest collection in the country, with some 12,000 flat maps and about 700 bound maps and atlases, including facsimiles. It remained strongest in Americana, having almost all of the American maps listed in the British Museum's printed map catalogue and perhaps an additional 20 to 25 percent.³³

³² Winsor, 'First Report,' pp. 117-18; Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 354-56, 370; Winsor to Charles P. Daly, Feb. 24, 1879, Correspondence File, American Geographical Society, cited in Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 354-55; Frank Carney, 'The Harvard Library Under Justin Winsor, 1877-1897,' *Harvard Library Notes* 13(1939):248. The Ebeling Collection and its acquisition is discussed in Ralph H. Brown, 'Early Maps of the United States: The Ebeling-Sotzmann Maps of the Northern Seaboard States,' *Geographical Review* 30(1940):471-79; and mentioned in Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History*, 1:iii.

³³ Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 356-59; Henry C. Badger, 'Harvard College Library,' *Library Journal* 16(1891):73-74; Badger, 'Floundering Among the Maps,' *Library Journal* 17(1892):375-77. See also Winsor's annual reports for the period,

By the time Winsor began teaching, then, Harvard had a usable assemblage of cartographical and bibliographical resources unrivaled in the country, and perhaps in the world, for the systematic study of the development of geographical knowledge relating to American discovery. At about the same time, following Harvard's administrative reorganization and the establishment of the Graduate School in 1890, the instructional programs of the Department of History expanded rapidly in the area of advanced 'seminary' courses, particularly in American history under Edward Channing and Albert Bushnell Hart. These courses were labeled 'primarily for graduates' in the university's catalogue, but, the historians having anticipated a demand not yet actualized, the courses were opened as well to advanced undergraduates. Given the approaching Columbian quatercentenary, Winsor's recently published study of Columbus and his legacy, and the Harvard organizational context and institutional aspirations of the time, it is not surprising that Winsor should have been asked by President Eliot not only to give the Harvard address marking the anniversary of Columbus's first voyage, but also to offer a half-year course in the history of discovery which would capitalize on the interest aroused by the anniversary period.³⁴

Winsor's course, 'History 23—Geographical Discovery in North America,' can be reconstructed from lecture notes deposited in the Harvard University Archives and from the testimony gathered by Borome in the late 1940s from surviving students of the 1892-94 period. Winsor's notes, largely written on scrap paper of varying grades and previous utility (the first sheet is on the back of a subscription form for the *Classical Review*, for example), began with a brief look at the physiography of the American continents. Winsor then reviewed the

printed in the *Annual Report of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College*, esp. those for 1879-80, 1883-84, and 1887-88.

³⁴ Ephraim Emerton and Samuel Eliot Morison, 'History,' in Morison, ed., *The Development of Harvard University, 1869-1929* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), pp. 155 n. 2, 163, 168-69; see also Eliot, 'Tribute to Justin Winsor,' p. 35.

materials available for discovery studies and the principal scholars, beginning with Alexander von Humboldt, who had worked or were currently working in this area. He also reviewed the great cartographical compilations, such as the Nordenskiöld facsimile atlas, and the publications of the geographical societies. From there he moved to Columbus and his successors of various nationalities and times through the explorations of Vitus Bering, making particular reference to the state of geographical knowledge contemporary with each successive period of discovery, and how that knowledge found successive cartographical expression.³⁵

In spite of the small classes (eight students, all of whom were undergraduate or special students the first year), Winsor relied heavily on a kind of modified lecture method. Some of the lectures, by the second time he offered the course, were written out in complete form (possibly for eventual use as draft chapters), though most survive only in outline. But he also spread facsimile maps and map tracings before the students for their own examination, commenting more informally on how the maps reflected or influenced the development of certain geographical ideas. In this way he brought a kind of laboratory method to the teaching of the history of discovery, paralleling what he described about the same time as 'the most significant development of the college library during the last score years,' that cooperation with instructional programs 'which has made laboratories out of collections of books.'³⁶

The notes also demonstrate that the lectures were not mere

³⁵ My discussion is based on examination of Winsor's lecture notes in the Harvard University Archives. Borome, 'Life and Letters,' pp. 527-29, says that the course 'covered the subject of his book, namely geographical discovery in North America and its effect on the struggle of France, England, and Spain for the possession of the continent,' citing Winsor to Poole, June 20, 1892, Poole Papers. The notes themselves, however, follow the general outline of the appendix to the Columbus volume, and it is more likely that Winsor saw this area an opportunity both to lecture on what he had already mastered and to revise his notes for the volume on the discovery of the American coastlines in the projected historical geography series.

³⁶ Winsor, 'The Development of the Library,' *Library Journal* 19(1894):373, reprinted in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*, p. 160.

narrative, simply covering material which the students might be expected to gain for themselves through parallel reading. Rather, they often posed problems of historico-geographical knowledge to which the critical method might be applied, such as problems of priority in discovery. Here Winsor would expose appropriate texts and maps, cite authorities pro and con, and then indicate his own view of the most probable solution. However constrained the course and its focus might seem to present-day historians of discovery, clearly Winsor's enthusiasm, his vast erudition, his problem orientation, and the hands-on-experience of studying old maps, even in facsimile, captured the attention of his small clutch of students.

Winsor found the role of professor uncomfortable, however. He refused to specify readings, give examinations, or assign grades, which brought him into immediate difficulties with the dean. Essentially Winsor had been flirting with the academic heresy of treating undergraduates as reasonably mature adults with whom he was sharing his extensive knowledge as he might with other junior scholars in the history of discovery and of cartography. He assumed that, having caught his method of inquiry, students would begin to pose their own questions and then, drawing on the bibliographical guides available, dig into the array of scholarly resources newly opened to them. Winsor's method was that of a man he admired greatly as a teacher: Henry Adams, who, in Winsor's words, had 'led his students among the sources of history, and directed them to do their own culling, and to make their own textbooks.'³⁷ What more, indeed, was necessary?

Winsor's philosophy of teaching was not acceptable to the nascent academic bureaucracy of the time, however. After vainly laboring with this self-described 'recalcitrant but dutiful servant,' the dean went to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences to work out a plan whereby the grade of 'passed' was given to all

³⁷ Winsor, 'The College Library and the Classes,' *Library Journal* 3(1878):5, reprinted in Cutler and Harris, eds., *Justin Winsor*, p. 146.

students completing the course in the semester just past, and to label its repetition of 1893–94 in the new catalogue as not creditable toward the A.B. degree owing to the paucity of examinations. This exemption from the usual rules permitted Winsor to add as auditors several guests from outside the college, including some young ladies—which may have compensated for the loss of academic credit for those Harvard undergraduates taking the course. A repetition, under the title ‘Geographical Discovery in North America and Its Cartographical Relations,’ was announced for 1897–98, but it is not clear whether or not a class was actually assembled; in any case, Winsor’s illness and death a few days into the fall semester would have prevented more than one or two meetings.³⁸

V

During his lifetime Winsor’s visibility both in American history and in discovery studies was very high. He was at the center of an ‘invisible college’ in the latter area, an international network of scholars and collectors that included Henry Harisse in Paris, A. E. Nordenskiöld in Sweden, Sir Clements Markham at the Royal Geographical Society, and numerous Americans ranging from geographer George Davidson in California to such highly visible historians as Francis Parkman, Charles Deane, and others in the Boston area.³⁹ He was regularly consulted by younger scholars around the country and served the federal government as cartographical expert in the Venezuelan boundary controversy. In short, at the time of his death in 1897, Winsor was internationally known for what a

³⁸ Borome, ‘Life and Letters,’ pp. 529–32, discusses the grading impasse and its resolution, as does President Eliot in his ‘Tribute to Justin Winsor.’

³⁹ This is a small sample of the correspondents whose letters, often bound into volumes containing their reprints, are buried in the Winsor Collection at the Massachusetts Historical Society. There is not even the most rudimentary of finding aids to this rich collection, and it is especially poorly arranged for researchers seeking specific runs of correspondence.

contemporary called his 'profound though special erudition' in the field of cartographical history and the geographical knowledge associated with American discovery. Yet also, as the editor of the *Narrative and Critical History* and the author of *The Mississippi Basin* and *Westward Expansion*, Winsor was placed by another contemporary 'among the first of American historians.'⁴⁰ Given all this, why has our own century seen him go so deeply into eclipse?

Some of the reasons are personal, others general. Of the reasons peculiar to Winsor, the first limitation is style. Winsor was much better at writing critical notes than at writing narrative; his writings lack drama and movement. In an era still deeply influenced by the ideal of history as a literary art, this shortcoming was noted by his contemporaries. The description of *Columbus* in Larned's *Literature of American History* carries the terse notation 'Style often hard to understand.' Other reviews were blunter: the *Saturday Review* said his essays in *Narrative and Critical History* were 'positively painful to read,' and *The Nation's* critic called his narrative 'uncomfortable' and 'suggestive of trackless forests and rugged portages.' Perhaps the doughty, if perennially patronizing, Thomas Wentworth Higginson said it best when he warned Winsor that his plan for the *Narrative and Critical History* would so subordinate the literary element that it would 'make the book unreadable and a mere quarry for scholars.' Writing at the same time to George Ellis, president of the MHS, Higginson described Winsor as 'a wonderful encyclopedia of details,' but that in itself posed the danger that 'the work may be arranged in a sea of references and authorities, and so remain utterly unread.' It was neither an unwarranted judgment nor a faulty prediction.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Charles William Colby, annotation for Winsor's *Cartier to Frontenac*, in Larned, *Literature of American History*, p. 421 (entry 3689); Turner, review of *Westward Expansion*, p. 561.

⁴¹ Higginson to Winsor, Jan. 6, 1881, Winsor Papers, MHS; Higginson to George E. Ellis, Jan. 31, 1881, Ellis Papers, MHS, both quoted in Borome, 'Life and

Winsor himself admitted cheerfully that he was less interested in narrative than in critical considerations, but claimed that he was thereby only being more faithful to historical truth. 'I may confess that I have made of history a thing of shreds and patches,' he wrote in an 1890 essay on 'The Perils of Historical Narrative.' 'I have only to say that the life of the world is a thing of shreds and patches.'⁴² Perhaps so, but such an exculpatory stance begs several methodological questions, such as the role of serialization and of inference in the writing of history, to say nothing of the writer's obligation to hold the interest of his readers.

Such a stance might be termed 'historical Baconianism,' after the term recently in vogue in studies in the history of American science. In formally rejecting both the romantic-idealist model of Parkman or George Bancroft, as well as the evolutionary model of John Fiske, Winsor asserted that a value-free 'critical' history was an attainable possibility. He shared with many nineteenth-century scientists and some historians the persistent faith that 'reality' could be represented by presenting a steady accumulation of scientifically tested data contaminated neither by observer bias nor by theory, or what Winsor had termed 'the so-called philosophy of history.' In *The Westward Movement*, for instance, he writes, 'In following the course of France in our Revolutionary War, there is every reason to emancipate ourselves from predilections, prejudice and tradition, the three great ensnarers of seekers for historical truth.'⁴³

Yet Winsor was quite unconscious of the fundamental enemy of the historian who claims the role of objective commentator: value-laden language. Ironically enough, the warning just cited closes a chapter entitled 'The Sinister Purposes

Letters,' p. 411; *Saturday Review* critic quoted in Borome, *ibid.*, p. 427; *The Nation* 44(1887):392-93.

⁴² Winsor, 'The Perils of Historical Narrative,' *Atlantic Monthly* 66(1890):297.

⁴³ Winsor, *The Westward Movement*, p. 165.

of France.' Moreover, this culminating volume is one of the best single pieces of evidence for Winsor's nationalistic biases, which often enough were freighted as well with various racial, religious, and environmental determinisms. Writing the preface from a comfortable location in Great Malvern, Worcestershire, and dedicating the book to Sir Henry W. Dyke Acland, Bart., Winsor tells us that *The Westward Movement* is primarily 'a story of how much of our territorial integrity we owe to British forbearance, when the false-hearted diplomacy of France and Spain would have despoiled us.'⁴⁴

The point is not, of course, that Winsor lacked the historian's integrity; he did attempt to tell a story on the basis of critically tested evidence. But it seems clear that he often lacked a self-critical sense of the influence of his own predilections, class prejudices, and traditions on his historical judgments. The author himself, then, was in this respect an enemy of the long-term survival of his books.

A third weakness, of which his contemporaries were also aware, is that his writings smell overmuch of the lamp. Charles Beard once recommended the sixth volume of Edward Channing's 'great work' to anyone wishing information about 'what doctors of philosophy think about the events and characters of the [Civil War] period.' One might equally oversimplify a bit and suggest that Winsor's work is perhaps the best guide to what nineteenth-century librarians had collected concerning the history of discovery. Turner put it more bluntly: 'his classified cards are always in sight.'⁴⁵

Although Winsor makes several allusive and usually fairly general references to archival repositories in the notes and essays in the *Narrative and Critical History*, he appears himself to have worked almost entirely from printed sources in his

⁴⁴ Ibid., dedication page.

⁴⁵ Charles A. Beard, review of Edward Channing, *History of the United States*, vol. 6, in *The New Republic*, 44, whole no. 571 (Nov. 11, 1925):311; Turner, review of *Westward Expansion*, p. 557.

historical writings. The major exception was his personal study of manuscript maps, and copies of maps, in European and American libraries, museums, and private collections.⁴⁶ In a few cases he indicates that he has 'examined' manuscript materials in Boston collections, in the MHS 'manuscript cabinet' or in the hands of descendants of some Revolutionary or Federal worthy. But there is no record of any personal hard digging into French and Spanish archival collections, such as the Archives of the Indies, for example.⁴⁷

Nor, after his college days, except for a brief trip to Michigan in connection with a commencement address, does he appear to have made any extensive trips in search of the geographical attributes of the localities about which he writes. Unlike his friend Parkman or his twentieth-century Harvard counterpart, Samuel Eliot Morison, Winsor explored no landfalls. Indeed, one of the most bitter spats over the *Narrative and Critical History* was related to this rather sedentary historiographical style. Winsor, in an unusually acerbic footnote, had criticized Eben Norton Horsford for 'the most incautious linguistic inferences and the most uncritical cartological perversions' regarding alleged Norse settlements on the Charles River. Horsford's heated reply attacked another weakness of Winsor's method; although Horsford had uncovered what he regarded as archeological evidence of Norse settlement within ten miles of Harvard Yard, Winsor refused his request to go out and take a careful look at it. The indignant Horsford wrote to Charles P. Daly, president of the American Geographical Society, that not only was Winsor's geographical material limited by his refusal to go beyond cartographical and lin-

⁴⁶ Winsor did have some command of American manuscript sources and of course of locations of manuscript maps, but he appears not to have done much work in public archives, especially foreign archives. See his 'The Manuscript Sources of American History,' *American Historical Association, Papers*, 3, no. 1 (1889):9-27; and his letters from a European trip in 1890-91 published in *The Nation* (refs. may be found in Yust, *Bibliography*).

⁴⁷ Turner, review of *Westward Expansion*, pp. 560-61, sees Winsor's reliance on secondary and printed sources as 'a striking illustration of the strange neglect of archives by the recent American historians.'

guistic evidence, but that he dismissed archeological and geographical site work in 'a tone of conscious infallibility better suited to an earlier day and another meridian, an intimation of the proper limit of geographical research, and of who may pursue it, in New England. . . .'⁴⁸

The result of his inability or refusal to get out of the Harvard library stacks means that Winsor's work is lacking in two qualities: the sharp penetration growing out of fresh documentary research of an Alice Bache Gould or of Winsor's contemporary Henry Harisse, and the adventurous comparison of document and site we associate with Parkman and Morison. Indeed, Morison's famous stricture against 'armchair navigators' applies as much to Winsor as to anyone. 'You cannot write a story out of these fifteenth and sixteenth century narratives,' writes the sailor-historian in the preface to his own biography of Columbus, 'merely by studying them in a library with the aid of maps.'⁴⁹

To some greater degree, of course, Winsor's eclipse was a function not simply of his own limitations but of changing trends in American historiography. The broad current of historiographical change has happily obliterated such 1890s benchmarks as the all-too-common commitments to racism and environmental determinism as explanatory hypotheses. It has also displaced the individual historian's confidence in the possibility of 'scientific' history and, less happily, the priority of narrative skill and stylistic grace in historical writing. Beyond these, two other trends specific to American historiography swept Winsor's work out of whatever continuing recognition he might otherwise have merited because of his considerable labors in the cause of American history.

⁴⁸ Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History*, 1:98; Horsford to Charles P. Daly, June 1, 1889, published as *The Problem of the Northmen* (Boston, 1890), p. 8.

⁴⁹ Morison, 'Preface,' *Admiral of the Ocean Sea* (Boston, 1942), p. xvi. In his last book, *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages* (New York, 1974), pp. ix-x, Morison points to his Parkmanian lineage by asserting 'I have contributed something new in retracing [the discoverers'] course at sea,' and claims that 'there is nothing like a personal visit to newly discovered lands to bring home to one the pioneers' dangers and difficulties.'

The first of these trends was the rise and conquest of the Turnerian frontier/sectional interpretation of American history, representing a shift in the geographical center of gravity which might be somewhat frivolously described as the substitution of the view from Lake Mendota for the view from Harvard Yard. Clearly Turnerianism and variants thereon were the major intellectual forces on American history and historical geography from Winsor's death until World War II, and even beyond.⁵⁰ Here at last was what Winsor and his Harvard colleagues had decried, a 'so-called philosophy of history,' one which essentially became the ruling ideology of the emerging subprofession of American history.

Turner's broad general hypotheses captured the imaginations of two generations of American historians in a fashion unreachable by either the high-and-dry critical methodology of Winsor and his younger Harvard associates Ephraim Emerton, Edward Channing, and Albert Bushnell Hart,⁵¹ or the historical and institutional germs diffusing outward from Johns Hopkins. Turnerians too drew upon maps as evidence, but theirs were maps of a different kind, constructed anew from quantitative data and used in a very different fashion from the critical carto-bibliographical historiography of Justin Winsor. Turner too dealt with the territory Winsor had spanned in *The Mississippi Basin* and *The Westward Movement*, but Turnerians were less concerned with the discoverer's heroic vision than with the steady occupation of new territories by the historiographically elusive 'common man.'⁵²

⁵⁰ H. Hale Bellott, *American History and American Historians* (Norman, Okla., 1952), chap. 1, terms the Turnerian or 'Middle Western School' of interpretation 'the most distinctive feature of American historiography in the generation after 1890.'

⁵¹ John K. Wright, in the introduction to his *Human Nature in Geography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 3, says that 'the philosophy of history that animated those who taught me at Harvard was (or I felt it to be) one of disapproval of the espousal of any particular philosophy of history,' although about 1912 he did audit Turner's frontier course.

⁵² In the absence of a consensual definition of the 'common man,' perhaps he may be defined as the deserter who abandoned the blessings of a well-ordered home in New England amidst 'rural beauty which his own hands have helped perhaps to embellish'

Conversely, and more germane to the fate of Winsor as historian of discovery, is what Morison describes as the ebbing of American scholarship in this area of American history in the half-century preceding the establishment of the Society for the History of Discoveries in 1960.⁵³ This decline is in part the obverse of the rise of frontier history à la Turner. More important, it also stems from the restrictions on the scope of American history legislated by Harvard's own younger generation of professional historians.

Winsor's colleagues Channing and Hart, in their influential *Guide to . . . American History*,⁵⁴ define that emerging subfield to exclude pre-Columbian America (on which Winsor had written or commissioned major essays in the *Narrative and Critical History*) as having 'scanty instruction for us.' They also excluded everything in the Western hemisphere outside North America on the grounds that 'the Latin Americans have made no significant contribution to the world's stock of social and political experience.' The focus of American history, then, became 'principally the story of the United States of America, from the earliest English settlements' [*sic*], since out of the English colonies and their successor nation had emerged those 'principles of popular government' and that 'development of the great federal republic' which, for Channing, Hart, and others of their generation, was 'the chief service America has rendered to the human race.'⁵⁵ Judging from his later works,

in order to live among 'the miry sloughs, the puny groves, the slimy streams which alone diversify the dead uniformity of Wisconsin or Illinois.' George Perkins Marsh, 'Address Delivered Before the Agricultural Society of Rutland County' (1848), reprinted in Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz and William A. Koelsch, *American Habitat* (New York, 1973), pp. 359-60.

⁵³ Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages, A.D. 500-1600* (New York, 1971), p. 9.

⁵⁴ Edward Channing and Albert Bushnell Hart, *Guide to the Study of American History* (Boston, 1897), pp. 3-4.

⁵⁵ For Channing and Hart see Morison, 'Edward Channing,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 44(1932):254-84, reprinted in Morison, *By Land and By Sea* (New York, 1953), pp. 299-327; Morison, 'Albert Bushnell Hart,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 66(1942):434-38; Lester J. Cappon, 'Channing and Hart: Partners in Bibliography,' *New England Quarterly* 29(1956):318-40.

Winsor might have shared this latter view of the nation-state, but he would have gotten there by more varied means.

VI

There is one important exception to the pattern of decline in Winsor's standing as a historian in the twentieth century. Like that of his contemporary and sometime collaborator Shaler, Winsor's scholarly aura lingered around Harvard Yard for many years after alien forces had seized the frontier outposts of American historiography. The primary conduit here appears to have been Edward Channing, who had been invited by Winsor to conduct his American history seminar among the American collections of Gore Hall as early as 1886.⁵⁶ Having rejected much of Winsor's specialized field of inquiry as a field of American history on the grounds that materials prior to Columbus were 'too scanty for anything more than an imperfect notion of feeble native communities and a few far-away suggestions of earlier discoveries,' Channing and his colleague Hart were nonetheless generous in their praise for Winsor as an American historian and as a colleague. Referring to him as 'friend and master,' the two acknowledged their dependence on Winsor's 'greatest work,' the *Narrative and Critical History*, for the first edition of their famous *Guide*, and listed Winsor's various books as first among those recommended for study in several areas of their coverage. And in the first volume of his *History of the United States*, published in 1905, Channing asserted that 'only those who have themselves attempted to explore these sources' could appreciate the value of the critical and bibliographical contributions of the *Narrative and Critical History*. 'Students seeking to go to the bottom of things,' he said, would find in Winsor the most useful guide.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Borome, 'Life and Letters,' p. 341.

⁵⁷ Channing and Hart, 'Preface,' *Guide*, p. 6, dated July 1, 1896. In the revision of this work, the equally celebrated Channing, Hart, and Turner, *Guide to the Study and Reading of American History* (Boston, 1912), the acknowledgment to Winsor is omitted in the new preface, but all the principal works are listed. See also Channing,

It is also through the Harvard connection that memory of Winsor's work is preserved in the scant literature of the history of geography in America. The late John K. Wright, librarian and director of the American Geographical Society, was a Harvard-trained historian who had worked with Channing independently on maps and books relating to American discovery and, as a graduate student in European history under Charles Homer Haskins, had devised his own special field in the history of geography, a path Winsor would have approved. In the first edition of his *Aids to Geographical Research*, published in 1923, Wright describes the *Narrative and Critical History* as 'fundamental' and 'a great cooperative work,' praising it for its 'invaluable critical notes on the bibliography of early explorations, settlements and maps. . . .'⁵⁸

This was followed by Wright's 'A Plea for the History of Geography,' given originally as a paper before the History of Science Society in 1925. Claiming, contrary to Channing and Hart, that 'the beginnings of American history are but a chapter in the history of geographical exploration,' Wright pointed to the work of Winsor and those of his contemporaries who had included in that history 'those earlier phases of the history of geography which bear directly or indirectly on the discovery of America.' Wright singled out for special praise in this connection the 'unusually profound study of ancient geographical thought' contributed by Tillinghast to the *Narrative and Critical History*.⁵⁹ In reasserting those linkages between general American history and the histories of dis-

A History of the United States (New York, 1905), 1:26. Channing praises the narrative portion of Winsor's *America* with faint damns; 'the narrative chapters,' he says, 'are as good as can be expected in a cooperative work.'

⁵⁸ Wright, *Human Nature in Geography*, pp. 2-4; Wright, *Aids to Geographical Research* (New York, 1923), pp. 25-26. The dating of Wright's bibliographies suggests a neat pattern of historiographical fall-out for Winsor's work. By 1923, about a quarter of a century after Winsor's death, his substantive work in historical geography had perished. By the half-century mark, in the second edition of *Aids*, published in 1947, there are no references to Winsor's work, even as editor-critical bibliographer.

⁵⁹ Wright, 'A Plea for the History of Geography,' *Isis* 8(July 1926):482; reprinted in Wright, *Human Nature in Geography*, p. 15.

covery and of geographical knowledge which Channing and Hart had attempted to sever, Wright was consciously adopting Winsor as a model for the geographically oriented history Wright himself hoped to develop. But Wright was a sport in his own time within American geography; few other historical geographers working in fields in which Winsor had published appear to have drawn on the latter's work.⁶⁰ As late as the 1960s Wright was calling for a study of Winsor as 'a geographically minded historian,' but that plea, as with many such that Wright made throughout his active professional life, found no respondents within the geographical profession.⁶¹

But of course the principal Winsor legatee within the Harvard context was that indefatigable sailor against the winds and tides of historiographical fashion, Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison. Morison had been interested in explorer-heroes since childhood. But during the spring of 1916, after he had been asked by Edward Channing to assume responsibility for Harvard's colonial history course beginning the following fall, Morison began systematically to master the literature of American discovery and to conceive of a study of

⁶⁰ Winsor's near-contemporary, Ellen Churchill Semple, draws on his *Mississippi Basin and Westward Movement* in her *American History and Its Geographic Conditions* (Boston, 1908). But I have examined germane substantive works of such later historical geographers as Ralph H. Brown, Carl O. Sauer, and Andrew H. Clark without finding evidence of any reliance on Winsor's work. Clark's essay, 'Historical Geography,' in Preston James and Clarence Jones, eds., *American Geography: Inventory and Prospect* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1954), p. 81, contains a glancing reference to Winsor's *Cartier to Frontenac*.

Even though the immensely erudite work of Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley, Calif., 1967), makes reference to the *Narrative and Critical History*, it is probable that most contemporary American geographers are unaware of Winsor's work. The disinterest of American geographers in American cartographical history presumably is at least partly responsible; see John A. Wolter, 'Source Materials for the History of American Cartography' in Robert H. Walker, ed., *American Studies: Topics and Sources* (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 84-85; and J. Brian Harley, 'Conference Report—Mapping the Great Lakes,' *Journal of Historical Geography* 4(1978):228-30.

⁶¹ Wright, 'Daniel Coit Gilman: Geographer and Historian,' *Geographical Review* 51(1961):396, reprinted in Wright, *Human Nature in Geography*, p. 184. Another Harvard-connected worthy who kept Winsor alive by reference into the 1960s is Howard Mumford Jones; see his *O Strange New World* (New York, 1964), pp. 28, 398, 404, 410.

Columbus which would prove 'that Parkman's outdoor methods could profitably be applied at sea.'⁶² Presumably Channing had given Morison as a graduate student the same guidance through the literature that he was giving Wright about the same time, and understandably that included a thorough introduction to Winsor. Morison, like Wright, adopted the Winsor view of the scope of American history and the relation of discovery to it. And like Wright, Morison was still calling attention to Winsor's work into the 1960s.

Morison, like Winsor, had been the skillful editor of a cooperative history, though in Morison's case the editing of *The Development of Harvard University* appears to have been somewhat less imperious. But it was only after this and the four other volumes of the Harvard Tercentenary History had been published that Morison was able to turn again to the field of the history of discovery.⁶³ His research and publication in this field took place between 1936 and April 1974, when he completed the second volume of his *European Discovery of America* in his eighty-eighth year. The output included *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, a two-volume biography of Columbus, and several other, smaller volumes, among which was a collection of documents relating to the Columbian voyages published in 1963 but planned before World War II. In his ninth decade Morison produced a biography of Champlain and two volumes in which, for the first time since Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History* was published, an American historian

⁶² Biographical data on Morison and the development of his work is taken from scattered references, especially in his own works; and from Walter Muir Whitehill, 'Foreword' to Emily Morison Beck, ed., *Sailor Historian: The Best of Samuel Eliot Morison* (Boston, 1977), pp. xi-xxix; and Wilcomb E. Washburn, 'Samuel Eliot Morison, Historian,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 36(1979):325-52. Other recent memoirs include William Bentinck-Smith, 'Samuel Eliot Morison,' *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 88(1976):121-31; and P. A. M. Taylor, 'Samuel Eliot Morison: Historian,' *Journal of American Studies* 11(1977):13-26. An earlier version of Whitehill's essay is found in his *Analecta Biographica: A Handful of New England Portraits* (Brattleboro, Vt., 1969), pp. 223-43.

⁶³ Morison, 'Introduction' to Beck, ed., *Sailor Historian*, pp. 1-2.

attempted to provide a comprehensive general account of the discovery period for all of the Western Hemisphere.

The fact that Morison covered the same territory as Winsor in a number of respects gives us, through an examination of Morison's citations, some measure of Winsor's continuing worth as appraised by perhaps his most important twentieth-century successor. It would appear, at first glance, that Morison is Winsor's greatest twentieth-century defender and exponent. Morison continually praises Winsor's work—though primarily as editor, bibliographer, commentator, and project director of the *Narrative and Critical History*.

In Morison's *Three Centuries of Harvard* (1936), however, Winsor appears only as the innovating librarian; and, in Morison's portion of the history of Harvard's history department in *The Development of Harvard College*, Winsor appears only as a source of aid for Channing and Hart. By 1942, in his *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, Morison makes reference only to George E. Ellis's essay on Las Casas in the *Narrative and Critical History*, and omits mention of Winsor's own work, including his Columbus book. Since Morison draws freely on the work of Winsor's contemporaries in Columbian studies, such as Harisse and Edward G. Bourne, one has to assume that Winsor's *Columbus*, while known to Morison, appeared in his judgment to have little contemporary value. Similarly, in his 1972 biography of Champlain, Morison cites as the key reference to nineteenth-century interest in Champlain the chapters in the *Narrative and Critical History* by Edmund F. Slafter and Charles C. Smith. Although Morison praises the 'valuable critical notes by Winsor himself' on these essays, Winsor's *Cartier to Frontenac* is not mentioned in Morison's list of secondary works.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1942), 1:75; Morison, *Samuel de Champlain, Father of New France* (Boston, 1972), pp. 272–73; Morison, ed., *The Development of Harvard University*, 1869–1929, p. 168; while there is an earlier footnote (p. 155) mentioning Winsor's course at Harvard, it is not clear whether that was written by Ephraim Emerton or added by Morison as editor.

Morison's two volumes on *The European Discovery of America* are the clearest parallel to Winsor's work. They contain between them a total of twenty-six references to Winsor's work, twenty-five of them to the *Narrative and Critical History*. These comments almost always praise the erudition Winsor displays in his critical analysis of the literature, including the maps, but on particular points Morison also asserts the continuing relevance of the work of others of the scholarly amateurs Winsor brought together in these volumes. Thus, Tillinghast's essay on ancient geographical knowledge 'is still the best scholarly account of the subject.' John Gilmary Shea's chapter 'Ancient Florida' is repeatedly praised, and Shea's essay on the de Soto expedition 'remains the best short account,' according to Morison. Edward Channing's chapter on 'The Companions of Columbus' also draws Morison's accolades, and portions of other chapters are noted with phrases like 'still of some value,' often for aspects for which we can assume Winsor was responsible.

Winsor himself is praised both for his comprehensive knowledge and his good judgment. Thus we are told in one place that he 'reviews the subject with common sense.' Elsewhere we learn that Winsor's description of one minor explorer is still 'the best account'; his review of the Frobisher literature is 'the most comprehensive' to its date; a list of American publications is still 'very useful'; and his review of various opinions concerning Vespucci is 'masterly.' Winsor's discussion of Magellan's map, in Morison's view, 'has never been bettered,' and his chapter on the early cartography of the Caribbean 'has never been surpassed.' Taken as a whole, Morison finds the first four volumes of the *Narrative and Critical History* 'an irreplaceable work' for historians of discovery, an achievement which 'in my opinion, will always stand first' in the literature of the field.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ See Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages* (New York, 1971), pp. vii, 9, 11, 106, 337, 490, 511, 579; *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages* (New York, 1974), pp. 205, 306-7, 398, 529-30, 532-35, 659.

In the two *European Discovery* books, Morison draws on Winsor's model primarily for his structural pattern, such as the end-of-chapter bibliographical commentaries, and the generous use of contemporary maps and pictorial material. Technical advances in printing, of course, permitted Morison to use photographs to serve the purposes to which Winsor had put the heliotype process, but the two are methodologically equivalent. Yet beyond these superficial similarities, Morison is a very different kind of historian of discovery than is Winsor.

For one thing, Morison is immensely greater as a narrative historian. As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., reminds us, Morison was 'the last link to the classic past . . . the apostolic succession' of the nineteenth-century New England literary historians.⁶⁶ For another, Morison as bibliographer does not pretend to be either as comprehensive or as fair-minded as Winsor; as a result, his notes are far more entertaining, if more obviously judgmental. Finally, the Anglo-Catholic sailor-historian Morison could muster up far more empathy for his largely Roman Catholic discoverers and explorers and more appreciation of their practical achievements than the Unitarian rationalist librarian and map curator.⁶⁷ It is not inappropriate, too, that the physical commemoration of the latter was the Justin Winsor Map Room of the Harvard College Library, while Morison was to be commemorated by a statue in sailing costume in the open air of Boston's Commonwealth Avenue Mall and by the

⁶⁶ Schlesinger to Emily Morison Beck, quoted in preface to Beck, ed., *Sailor Historian*, p. viii.

⁶⁷ Winsor was criticized in his lifetime for an anti-Roman Catholic bias; see Borome, 'Life and Letters,' esp. pp. 190 and 534. Correspondence and other materials in the Winsor collection at MHS appear to indicate a strong religious rivalry permeating discovery studies, related to upper-class nativism and ethnic tension during the late nineteenth century. The underlying question was one of who the 'real' American was—he who could claim affinity to the Catholic discoverers or he who was descended from the Protestant English settlers. The whole subject is worth exploring in its own right, perhaps beginning with Winsor's Columbus anniversary address, 'America Prefigured,' *Harvard Graduates' Magazine* 1 (1892-93):234-42.

U.S.S. *Samuel Eliot Morison*, a guided-missile frigate of the United States Navy commissioned on October 11, 1980.⁶⁸

As one more bit of evidence bearing on Winsor's changing historiographical fortunes, one might examine the *Harvard Guide to American History* (1954). During the preparation of the first edition of this lineal successor to Channing and Hart's 1897 *Guide to . . . American History*, Morison was still active on the Harvard faculty and is listed as one of the editors. The *Narrative and Critical History* is described, probably by Oscar Handlin, as a 'monument to meticulous scholarship which will always be useful,' terms which by then had become both conventional and operationally meaningless.⁶⁹ The 1954 *Harvard Guide* also lists Winsor's *Boston*, *Columbus*, *Mississippi Basin*, and *Westward Movement* among the books still deemed worthy of consultation in their respective fields, but omits his *Cartier to Frontenac*.

By contrast, the 1974 edition of the *Harvard Guide*, edited by Frank Freidel, elides all of Winsor's later historico-geographical volumes and retains only the *Narrative and Critical History* and the *Memorial History of Boston*. The *Narrative and Critical History* can never, of course, be excised, but only two of the individual essays from those volumes are separately cited. Neither of these are Winsor's own; they are George Ellis's essay on the Loyalists and Tillinghast's essay on the geographical knowledge of the ancients, the latter a rather peculiar choice for a guide to American history published in the mid-1970s. But it seems fair to conclude that, at least among

⁶⁸ See, for an example of Morison's affinities, *Northern Voyages*, pp. 142-43, and *Southern Voyages*, chap. 8 and esp. the penultimate paragraph of the work, on p. 737, in which Morison really states his own credo. For comments on Morison's religious faith, see Walter Muir Whitehill's 'Foreword' to Beck, ed., *Sailor Historian*, pp. xxvi-xxvii (quoting Rev. G. Harris Collingwood). For memorials, see 'Frigate Morison Joins Navy Fleet,' *Boston Globe*, Oct. 12, 1980; 'Historian Honored,' *Boston Globe*, Oct. 16, 1982.

⁶⁹ Oscar Handlin et al., *Harvard Guide to American History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 5.

the present-day historians of Harvard Yard, Winsor's own wide-ranging work as historian of discovery appears to have been largely forgotten. He seems to be remembered rather more favorably for his work as an editor who pulled together some useful work on early American and local history.⁷⁰

VII

What, then, was Winsor's achievement, that he should be remembered in our own day? His methodology, seemingly scientific and certainly acute in critical detail, was flawed by unrecognized, sometimes irrational value commitments which that serenely confident Unitarian mind could never freely acknowledge. His narrative skills were weak, for as Turner put it rather pompously, 'he was wanting in that historical imagination which fuses the separate elements of historical knowledge into a single and pleasing presentation.'⁷¹ His major work, the *Narrative and Critical History*, sits on the library shelves undeseccated by the student's grubby fingerprints; if anything, it is his *Memorial History of Boston* which survives usefully in this era of studies of highly limited range (what the British call 'parish-pump' historiography).

Certainly in this century no American historian but Morison, who begins his *Northern Voyages* with primitive man and Hesiod, would begin a 'Chronological Conspectus of American History' with reference to 'the geological and prehistoric periods' and to the geographical views of Homer, as Winsor does in the *Narrative and Critical History*. Furthermore, few American historians have the broad linguistic competence of Winsor, who in addition to Latin and Greek mastered French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian.⁷² As Mori-

⁷⁰ Frank Freidel et al., eds., *Harvard Guide to American History*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 2:613, 700.

⁷¹ Turner, review of *Westward Expansion*, p. 557.

⁷² Morison was fond of patronizing younger Americanists for their lack of competence in foreign languages. See, for example, in *Northern Voyages*, pp. 9-10, 'Our young aspirants to the mantle of Justin Winsor suffer from two handicaps. Having

son says of him, 'nobody in the present century has followed Winsor in attempting to cover the entire field of New World discovery.' And even the intrepid Morison, who comes close, concedes that he is unable to handle the cartographical evidence in any fashion other than 'with respect, but somewhat gingerly.'⁷³

Having taken the whole literature of American discovery, including its cartography, to be his province, Winsor cultivated it with erudition and thoroughness according to the best standards of his own time. He saw a massive task in the organization of knowledge to be done in the interest of advancing both scholarship and history teaching, and he did it undeterred by a later generation's paralyzing commitment to narrow specialization and the claims of professionalization. That quality of dedicated and informed amateurism (which successive generations of American historians would be conditioned to regard as genteel dilettantism), plus the territorial and chronological breadth of his view of American history, the thoroughness of his grasp of historical bibliography, his judicious appraisals of textual and cartographical evidence, and the civilized fashion with which he freely shared his 'profound though special erudition' with others, all make him worthy of remembrance in an era when such characteristics seem to be in short, and perhaps diminishing, supply.

One closes, as one began, with Turner, certainly not an uncritical admirer. Yet Turner ends his review of Winsor's

been deprived of a classical education, they find the learning of a foreign language very difficult, and they dislike getting their feet wet.' Winsor also disliked getting his feet wet, and Morison also ignored the inconvenient fact that his own mentors, Channing and Hart, had argued the value of American history on the basis that it did *not* require such linguistic competence: 'There is an historical school which holds no history to have much training value unless to require the use of several languages. . . .' But they make it clear they are not of that school; to Channing and Hart (and many historians of their era), the 'most valuable' history was American, where by virtue of the 'large body of sources in English,' students could make the 'broadest and surest' historical judgments. Channing and Hart, *Guide*, p. 8; see also John Higham, *History* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), p. 37.

⁷³ Morison, preface to *Northern Voyages*, pp. vii-viii.

posthumously published *Westward Movement* with this assessment: 'To have edited the *Narrative and Critical History of America*, and to have followed that by the series that began with Columbus and ends with *The Westward Movement*, is to have established his ability in so wide a range of fields, requiring such stores of knowledge, and such a diversity of historical equipment that Winsor cannot but be granted a position among the first of American historians.'⁷⁴

Social historians and Boston chauvinists would quickly point out Turner's omission of the *Memorial History of Boston* from that sequence. Yet it is a tribute both to Turner's empathy and to his historical judgment that so much of the statement remains true more than a hundred years after the beginning of Justin Winsor's third career.

⁷⁴ Turner, review of *Westward Expansion*, p. 561.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.