Geography, Pedagogy, and Race: Schoolbooks and Ideology in the Antebellum United States

ANNE BAKER

DESPITE—OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF—the multiplicity of racial and ethnic groups who coexisted uneasily within the nation's constantly fluctuating borders, the ideal of a racially homogeneous nation-state—a geopolitical unit in which a single racial identity is coincident with national identity—was a powerful presence in antebellum American culture. This ideal is readily apparent in historical phenomena such as the founding of the African Colonization Society (1817)—designed to return free blacks to Africa—and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which deported hundreds of thousands of Indians to territory west of the Mississippi. The founding of Liberia and the creation of a circumscribed 'Indian Territory' outside the borders of the United States provide highly visible examples of the way race became entangled with nationhood and geography in the nineteenth-century United States.[1] Not surprisingly, that entanglement appears also in literary

I would like to thank the American Antiquarian Society for the Stephen Botein fellowship that enabled me to research this essay. I would also like to thank the staff for helping me to navigate the collection.

1. The establishment of Indian Territory is all the more striking an example of the desire for racial purity because the Indian tribes of the Southeast provided such a clear-cut example of the ability of non-whites to adopt Euro-American ways of life extraordinarily

ANNE BAKER is assistant professor of English at North Carolina State University.

texts. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), though it expresses sympathy for African Americans, sees no place for them in the United States: all the main African American characters either die or emigrate to Africa by the end of the novel. Similarly, works such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823–41) sentimentalize Native Americans, building on the stereotype of the 'noble savage' while at the same time taking as a fundamental premise that the coexistence of Indians and whites within the nation's expanding boundaries is out of the question.

Any discussion of the intersection of national geography and race of course begs fundamental questions. What exactly is 'race'? More precisely, how did the antebellum Americans who debated African colonization, Indian removal, and national expansion, or who read Stowe and Cooper, learn to think about 'race'? How might we begin to gain access to the lived experience of nineteenth-century Americans, whose beliefs and actions concerning race have had—and continue to have—a profound effect on the nation's history?

Antebellum artifacts of various kinds provide the only building blocks with which we can reconstruct an answer to this question. While many printed materials, particularly novels, have been fairly thoroughly mined for information on historical attitudes toward race,[2] geography schoolbooks have been a relatively neglected source. In this essay, I will argue that in fact they offer unique insights into the shifting meanings of 'race' in the first half of the nineteenth century. While building on the rather broad investigations into the *zeitgeist* that have been undertaken by historians and literary scholars, I want to explore how new ideas about race were transmitted on a day-to-day basis through the medium of geography schoolbooks, which were 'among the

---

effectively. See, for example, Duane Champagne, *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments Among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) and Theda Purdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

2. See, for example, Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Elise Lemire, *'Miscegenation': Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), and Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

ultimate bestsellers in the early republic.'[3] For if we are to understand major ideological shifts fully, it is necessary to investigate not only the discourses that shaped them, but also the media through which they were transmitted.

The word 'race' first appeared in English in the sixteenth century, at which point it had a variety of related meanings having to do with offspring and lines of descent (as in Shakespeare's 'Have I . . . / Forborne the getting of a lawful race, /And by a gem of women. . .')[4] and the classification of plants, animals, and humans (used in the way that genus and species would come to be used in biology). The word became more problematic, however, when people began using it to establish fixed subgroups within the human species, as in 'the African race' or 'the European race.' (It is this sense of the word that has persisted, despite the fact that contemporary scientists still disagree over whether the genetic variability between the inhabitants of Africa, Asia, and Europe justifies treating 'race' as a biological category.[5]) Although the eighteenth-century impulse to subdivide the human species into categories based on certain physical characteristics was by no means benign, it became notably more pernicious in the early nineteenth century, when the hierarchy of such characteristics was established in a more formal and widespread fashion, and linked both to moral qualities and intellectual and emotional capacities.[6]

It has become something of a historical commonplace that American and European attitudes about race changed in fundamental ways during the first half of the nineteenth century. While whites had encountered, described, and often exploited nonwhites for centuries, it was only then that a set of doctrines emerged that posited 'the *innate* and *permanent* inferiority of

3. Martin Brueckner, 'Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic,' *American Quarterly* 51 (June 1999): 320.

4. William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act III, Scene xiii.

5. Anthony Appiah, 'The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race,' in *'Race,' Writing, and Difference*, Henry Louis Gates, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 21.

6. For an excellent, concise discussion of the history of the word 'race,' see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

nonwhites' [emphasis added].[7] Scholars have attributed this shift to a variety of factors. Historian William Stanton—author of *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815–59*—points to the development of pseudo-scientific attempts to explain race.[8] The rise of romantic nationalism played a crucial role as well; the idea that each 'nation' or 'volk' possessed special, unique qualities easily lent itself to the development of racist ideology on both sides of the Atlantic. As Henry Louis Gates has pointed out, ideas such as those of Johann Gottfried von Herder's gave rise, in the nineteenth century, to 'the shared assumption among intellectuals that race was . . . an ineffaceable quantity, which irresistibly determined the shape and contour of thought and feeling as surely as it did determine the shape and contour of human anatomy.'[9] No doubt the intensification of European empire-building played a role in the widespread acceptance of such ideas. In the United States, the desire to justify both slavery and the appropriation of Indian lands may have made pseudo-scientific and romantic nationalist ideas about race particularly appealing. As Reginald Horsman has suggested, 'New racial ideas which influenced the whole of Western society . . . fell on especially fertile ground in the United States.'[10]

Debates about annexation and statehood in the West provide some examples of this nineteenth-century shift that are worthy of note, as well as the most paradoxical examples of the ideal of racially homogeneous nationhood. Even as the United States incorporated thousands of square miles of territory inhabited by nonwhites, policymakers from all points on the political spectrum consistently assumed racial uniformity as a desideratum for the

7. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), xvii.

8. William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

9. Henry Louis Gates, 'Writing "Race" and the Difference It Makes' in Gates, *'Race,' Writing, and Difference*, 3. The foundational text of romantic nationalism is Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–91).

10. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 99. The view that ideas about race crystallized in new forms in the first half of the nineteenth century is supported from a more literary standpoint by Toni Morrison. Focusing on *Moby Dick* (1851), Morrison argues that the white whale can be seen to represent 'the ideology of race' at

expanding nation, even though they differed sharply on how annexation and the political organization of western territory might relate to that goal and their attitudes toward slavery. The way that mid-nineteenth-century policymakers responded to the Northwest Ordinance—the 1787 legislative blueprint for how additional territory should be incorporated into the United States—is particularly telling. Although Article 3 of the ordinance provides for the just treatment of Indians and for their permanent residence in the Northwest Territory—and thus assumes that the new states formed there would be at the very least biracial—politicians consistently chose to ignore that aspect of the document.[11] For example, in 1856, lawyer and former attorney general of Pennsylvania, John Read, arguing that the terms of the Missouri Compromise should be honored and that slavery should not be made legal in Kansas, looked back at the Northwest Ordinance to support his case, but completely disregarded the key assumption of racial multiplicity. Read argued that 'its intention was to preserve the soil for a white homogeneous population, which the experience of our country has proved to be the best, the happiest, and the strongest.'[12] In 1849, when debates over the admission of California and Texas to the Union were the hot-button issues, Senator John A. Dix, too, had looked to the Northwest Ordinance as a mandate for racial uniformity. Its object, in his view, was 'to maintain the purity of the system, the homogeneousness of its parts.' In opposing the immediate admission of California, he makes clear that *racial* homogeneity is his central concern. His primary objection to admitting California is that 'its present inhabitants are, to a considerable

'the moment in America when whiteness became ideology.' 'Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,' *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1989): 1–34, quotation on page 15.

11. Article 3 of the Northwest Ordinance reads: 'The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them.'

12. 'Speech of Hon. John M. Read, on the Power of Congress over the Territories, and in favor of Free Kansas, Free White Labor, and of Fremont and Dayton. Delivered on Tuesday Evening, September 30, 1856, at Philadelphia' (Philadelphia: C. Sherman and Son, 1856), 23.

extent, Indians or Mexicans of mixed blood.' Compounding the problem, California (as a result of the Gold Rush) 'is receiving adventurers from almost every quarter of the globe—from both hemispheres—from Oceanica to the European continent and islands.' He adds, 'I wish to see this heterogeneous mass pass through the process of fermentation . . . and settle down into something like consistence, before we undertake to endow it with all the attributes of self-government.'[13] Southerner Robert J. Walker, an outspoken advocate of admitting Texas as a slave state, though he differed radically from Dix in his views on annexation, saw racial segregation by national boundaries as a desirable goal. According to Walker, the annexation of Texas would allow slavery to die out 'gradually, by diffusion' in the United States: 'Overruling Providence . . . will open Texas as a safety valve . . .' and an 'outlet for our negro race.' With Texas functioning as a kind of bridge or doorway out of the South, argued Walker, freed slaves would find an ideal and accessible residence in Mexico and Latin America: '. . . in that delicious climate, so admirably adapted to the negro race . . . the free black would find a home. . . . [A]s slaves in the lapse of time . . . are emancipated, they will disappear from time to time west of the Del Norte, and beyond the limits of the Union, among a race of their own colour; will be diffused throughout this vast region, where they will not be a degraded caste, and where, as to climate, and social and moral condition, and all the hopes and comforts of life, they can occupy, among equals, a position they can never attain in any part of this Union.'[14]

While anxieties engendered by the Mexican War—and the resulting incorporation of Indians and Mexicans into the nation—explain some of this racial rhetoric, it should be noted as well that the comments of Read, Dix, and Walker articulate a new emphasis

13. 'Speech of Hon. John A. Dix, of New York, in relation to territories acquired from Mexico. Delivered in the Senate of the United States,'February 28, 1849' (Washington: Globe Office, 1849), 5.

14. 'Letter of Mr. Walker, of Mississippi, Relative to the Reannexation of Texas: in Reply to the Call of the People of Carroll County, Kentucky, to Communicate his View on that Subject' (Philadelphia: Mifflin and Parry, 1844), 15.

on race as a means of categorizing human beings that began to appear in geography schoolbooks in the 1820s and 1830s. Whereas earlier schoolbook authors had not seemed to regard race as a particularly significant element of world geography, later authors presented material in ways that strongly accentuated race as a framework for understanding the various peoples inhabiting the world. One might argue that the marked changes in the presentation of race in such books simply reflected the changing attitudes in society at large. A careful examination of these schoolbooks, however, suggests a more mutually influential relationship between American culture and schoolbook production, educational reform, and pedagogical theory. In fact, pedagogical reform—in particular a new emphasis on the visual in children's acquisition of information—played a key role in the reification of race and racial hierarchies. Geography schoolbooks, then, provide not only a record of the fact that the category of race shifted in this era, but also clues to help reconstruct a more nuanced understanding of *why* it shifted. The fact that geography was a part of the curriculum at all levels of education—in primary or 'common' schools, in private academies, and later in the public secondary schools—suggests how great the influence of geography schoolbooks may have been.[15]

Perhaps the best-known authors of characteristically eighteenth-century—or what I'll call 'first wave'—geography books were Jedediah Morse and Susanna Rowson.[16] Rowson, better known today for her wildly popular seduction novel, *Charlotte Temple*, was during her lifetime most prominent as the proprietor of Mrs.

15. Stuart G. Noble, *A History of American Education*, rev. ed. (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1954), 257. For the role of geography in American university curricula, see William Warntz, *Geography Now and Then* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1964).

16. My categorization of geography books as 'first wave' or 'second wave' differs from Warntz's paradigm in *Geography Now and Then*. Warntz uses the terms 'first cycle' and 'second cycle' to describe the presence of geography as an academic discipline in American universities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its disappearance in the early nineteenth century (it was regarded, at that time, as more properly taught in secondary schools), and its reappearance as a university subject in the mid-nineteenth century (largely as a result of the influence of European geographers such as Arnold Guyot).

Rowson's Academy, where the daughters of the wealthy were among her hundreds of students. Morse, remembered as the author of the first geography book written by an American to be published in the United States, had nationalistic goals—as one might expect from an author who believes that geographical knowledge and patriotic sentiment are closely linked. In *The American Geography* (1789), for example, his first objective is 'to impress the minds of American Youth with an idea of the superior importance of their own country, as well as to attach them to its interests.'[17] Rowson's geography books, on the other hand, reflect her opinion that a central task of teachers and of writers of pedagogical texts is 'to impress upon the minds of youth a love of order and a reverence for religion.' Rowson's texts are less explicitly nationalistic, lack Morse's outspoken antislavery sentiments, and are more concerned with imparting appropriate moral and religious precepts.[18] Where Morse, as we will see, fears that slavery is the crack in the foundation that may bring down the new republic, Rowson is more concerned that material wealth—taste for luxury and decadence more suited to an empire than a republic—may undermine the nation. 'Forbear!' she warns.[19]

In most other respects, however—including their methods of organizing material and their attitudes toward race and ethnicity—Morse's and Rowson's books are similar and are representative of other geography books of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[20] A survey of schoolbooks from that period reveals that geography book authors of the early republic borrowed shamelessly from Morse, just as he in turn borrowed from earlier English models. Morse's borrowing from English schoolbook writer

17. Jedediah Morse, *The American Geography; or, a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (Elizabethtown, N.J., 1789).

18. Susanna Rowson, *An Abridgement of Universal Geography, together with Sketches of History Designed for the Use of Schools and Academies in the United States* (Boston: John West, 1805), iv.

19. Rowson, *Abridgement of Universal Geography*, 158.

20. A full bibliography of the schoolbooks examined in the process of writing this article is beyond the scope of a footnote. The American Antiquarian Society holds more than two hundred pre-1860 geography books, and that collection has been the primary basis for my argument here.

William Guthrie is particularly striking. Guthrie, for example, describes the Chinese thus: 'The Chinese, in their persons, are middle-sized, their faces broad, their eyes black and small, their noses rather short.'[21] As will be seen below, Morse adopts the same description word for word in *American Geography*. Examples of early American geography books that closely resemble those of Morse both in structure and style include John Hubbard's *Rudiments of Geography* (1803) and Elijah Parish's *Compendious System of Universal Geography, designed for Schools . . .* (1807). In his preface, Hubbard makes clear that Morse's success was a force to be reckoned with by his successors: 'Perhaps it may seem presumptuous in [the author] to attempt such a work when Dr. Morse's geography is so universally celebrated. He [the author himself] feels the full force of this observation, but is confident that [Morse], who has obtained so many laurels, will not envy him one small sprig.'

Morse's geography books typically begin with brief sections, which introduce concepts in astronomy and define geographical terms. Morse then organizes the bulk of the information in his books according to continents and countries, describing first the United States and its various constitutive states and then Europe, Asia, and Africa and the various countries within them. (Rowson's first book, *An Abridgement of Universal Geography*, is organized in the same way, while her second book, *Youth's First Step in Geography*[22] is more explicitly geared toward catechistic recitation and is entirely in question-and-answer format.[23]) Within the sections addressing various nations, Morse, Rowson, and their peers typically address various topics beginning with notable topographical

21. William Guthrie, *A New Geographical, Historical, and Commercial Grammar: and Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World*, new ed., improved and enlarged (London: J. Knox, 1777), 465.

22. The complete title is *Youth's First Step in Geography, Being a Series of Exercises Making the Tour of the Habitable Globe, For the Use of Schools* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1818).

23. Nathaniel Dwight's *Short but Comprehensive System of the Geography of the World*, first published in 1795 and designed for young children, resembles Rowson's *Youth's First Step in Geography* in both its catechistic format and its lack of concern with racial distinctions.

features such as mountains and rivers and then moving on to categories such as 'Character,' 'Religion,' 'Productions,' and 'Agriculture.'

For Rowson especially, the physical characteristics of various peoples, such as skin color or hair texture, are incidental facts to be noted along with the more important question of their religious beliefs. In discussing Africa, for example, *Youth's First Step* presents the following to be memorized by the young geography student:

> *Q. What is the complexion of the Africans in general?*
> *A.* The complexion of the African is either very swarthy or jet black. On the Barbary coast, along the Mediterranean, they are Moors, of a swarthy complexion, and of the Mahometan religion. In Egypt, it is much the same. In Abyssinia their complexion is dark, and their religion a mixture of Christianity and Judaism. In all other parts of Africa, the natives are black, and in general, with curled woolly hair. Some few have lank hair, especially in the African islands; and except where there are European settlements, they are Pagans and gross idolaters.[24]

Rowson does occasionally use terms that imply some general awareness of racial categories. She writes, for example, that the residents of the Comera Isles are 'negroes.'[25] In general, however, race is not an operative category for her.

Morse, too, throughout most of his books treats the physical traits of any given country's inhabitants as simply one incidental fact among many, comparable to population statistics or trading customs. For example: 'It is said that China contains 158 millions of inhabitants, between 20 and 60 years of age, who pay an annual tax. The Chinese in their persons are middle sized, their faces broad, their eyes black and small, and their noses rather short. It is thought good policy to forbid women from all trade and commerce. . . .'[26]

In his geographical writing Morse mentions eighteenth-century theories of race only once, at the very end of *American Geography*.

24. Rowson, *Youth's First Step*, 177.
25. Rowson, *Abridgment of Universal Geography*, 153.
26. Morse, *American Geography*, 521.

There, in a two-page section called 'General Remarks' that has the quality of an afterthought rather than the summation that its title perhaps suggests, Morse writes: 'The varieties among the human race . . . enumerated by Linnaeus and Buffon, are six.'[27] This singular reference to Linnaeus and Buffon—eighteenth-century naturalists who were pioneers in the Enlightenment project of classifying the world's plants and animals—raises two questions, which in fact are two sides of the same coin. First, what does Morse gain by making reference to the racial theories of eighteenth-century naturalists at this point? And second, why if Morse was aware of their systems for classifying people, do they not play a larger role in his work (and that of his imitators)?

One possible answer has to do with Morse's standing in the eyes of his readership. Morse's first book, *Geography Made Easy* (1784),[28] was a simple one written quickly while Morse was teaching school in Connecticut to satisfy a pressing need for geography texts that accurately described the new nation. Pleasantly surprised by its success, Morse resolved to write a far more ambitious text, suitable for use as a reference book for adults as well as for schoolroom use. Although Morse mentions Linnaeus and Buffon in this aspiring work of 1789, *The American Geography*, they are eliminated in the later, expanded version titled *The American Universal Geography*, produced after he had already attained the status of the new republic's premier geographer. This suggests that the reference may have been due at least in part to a desire to demonstrate his own erudition and scholarly authority. When in 1795 Morse again wrote a geography book designed explicitly for schoolchildren, race as an operative category is entirely absent, even from a general description of the earth's inhabitants that stresses their variety: 'The human inhabitants of the earth

27. Morse, *American Geography*, 529.

28. The full title is *Geography Made Easy: being a short, but comprehensive system of that very useful and agreeable science. . . . Illustrated with two correct and elegant maps, one of the World, and the other of the United States, together with a number of newly constructed maps, adapted to the capacities and understanding of children. Calculated particularly for the use and improvement of schools in the United States* (New Haven, Conn. [1784]).

are composed of an astonishing number of different nations, of various colours, features, languages, religions, customs, and occupations; and subject to the various forms of civil and ecclesiastical government. The Russian empire alone, includes no less than 50 different nations, or tribes.'[29]

Ultimately, then, it appears that the racial classes established by Linnaeus and Buffon are not particularly useful or interesting to Morse. For as Richard Moss has proposed, *American Geography* is really 'an extended and complex jeremiad' that 'lamented the sins of the nation and exalted its virtues.'[30] Accordingly, when rehearsing in 'General Remarks' the categories of the eighteenth-century naturalists, which contribute nothing to his moral review of the nation, Morse stops in the middle of his description of 'the negroes of Africa,' who constitute 'the fourth striking variety in the human species,' to deliver a diatribe against the slave trade, which is far more relevant to his overall project: 'But how I am shocked to inform you, that this infernal commerce is carried on by the humane, the polished, the christian inhabitants of Europe; nay even by Englishmen, whose ancestors have bled in the cause of liberty, and whose breasts still glow with the same generous flame!' He then digresses still further in order to give his readers 'a more striking proof of the ideas of horror, which the captive negroes entertain of the state of servitude they are to undergo.' In the story that follows, a captive African woman on a slave ship attempts to commit suicide by jumping overboard, is held back, and then is used as an object lesson by the captain, who believes that the slaves do not understand 'the terrors attending death.' After being let down into the water with a rope tied around her, the woman is 'heard to give a terrible shriek.' The captain, assuming her cries to be the result of her fear of drowning, and thus thinking the lesson finished, has her pulled up, only to find that the

29. Morse, *Elements of Geography*, 3d ed. (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1798), 57. For more on the biographical context of Morse's developing career as an author and geographer, as well as his hopes and fears for the new nation, see Richard J. Moss, *The Life of Jedediah Morse: A Station of Peculiar Exposure* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

30. Moss, *Life of Jedediah Morse*, 38.

lower half of her body has been bitten off by a shark. It is nearly impossible, after first reading this horrific story, to return one's attention to the systematizing efforts of Linnaeus and Buffon. Indeed, it would seem that Morse himself had difficulty focusing his attention on them for very long, so much more interested is he in conveying the suffering of the Africans, and the consequent evil of the slave trade, than in delineating racial differences.

In addition to Morse's own moral and nationalist agenda, generic and disciplinary conventions militate against much concern with racial categories in his books and those of his imitators. At the end of the eighteenth century, the relatively recent impulse to create all-encompassing racial categories for the human species was the purview of naturalists rather than geographers, whose role, for the most part, was to catalogue information rather than to analyze it systematically. The inductive process of developing general categories through observation and then assigning individual cases to those categories played very little part in the work of the 'first wave' geographers. The format in which geographical information was traditionally conveyed reinforced this traditional division of labor. The Danish geographer Conrad Malte-Brun (1775–1826) represents a notable exception to the early geographers' reluctance to systematize: it was he who introduced the categories 'savage,' 'half-civilized,' and 'civilized' in his six-volume *Precis of Universal Geography* (1810–29).[31] It was not until geographers gave up the traditional method of organizing material according to political units exclusively, however, that Malte-Brun's systematizing impulse took hold more generally.

The prototypical 'first wave' geography texts of the early republic appear to have been enormously successful. Morse's books, for example, reappearing in many new editions and imitated by less

31. Malte-Brun spent the last half of his life in Paris, after having been exiled from Denmark for writings that supported the French Revolution. His 'States of Society'—'savage,' 'half-civilized,' and 'civilized'—were operative categories in many geography schoolbooks throughout the nineteenth century. Some schoolbook writers added the additional category 'enlightened.'

prominent authors, shaped the way a generation of Americans thought about the world and their place in it.[32] The educational reform movement that arose in New England during the 1820s, however, sharply criticized the methods of Morse, Rowson, and their peers. Though part of a larger network of New England reform movements, this one also owed a great deal to new ideas imported from Europe about the psychology of children. The Swiss educator Johann Pestalozzi was particularly influential. He believed that the goal of education was to develop children's moral, physical, and mental faculties to their fullest potential, and in order to accomplish this goal he advocated educating rich and poor children together, abandoning punishment, and encouraging children's natural propensity to absorb knowledge through the use of their senses.

Pestalozzi's best-known American disciple was Bronson Alcott, who incorporated a number of Pestalozzian innovations into his famously experimental Temple School. But new ideas about childhood and the psychology of learning inspired by romanticism also influenced a set of 'second wave' geography educators. Morse, Rowson, and their peers had seen their own books as conduits for the transmission of geographical knowledge and, secondarily, as a means of promoting nationalist sentiment or reinforcing correct moral values or religious views. The reformers, meanwhile, saw the nature and purpose of their subject very differently. James G. Carter, for example, in a pamphlet called *An Essay on Teaching Geography*, insisted that geography could be an important tool for assisting children's intellectual development: 'It offers, when studied in the manner I have described, the best discipline for several of the powers earliest developed in the in-

32. Only the Bible and Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book* were found more often in New England households (William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989], 64). *Geography Made Easy* 'went through twenty-five printings in revised versions' (*Dictionary of Literary Biography*, s.v. 'Jedediah Mors.'). For more on geography books in the early republic, particularly the relationship between geography texts and early nationalism, see Brueckner, 'Lessons in Geography,' 311–43.

fant mind.'[33] (Carter put his ideas about educational reform into practice by writing four geography books for children. Three of them are for particular counties, and one is for Massachusetts as a whole. The principle behind these books is that children would begin the study of geography by thinking through the geographical features of places with which they were already familiar. They would then gradually move beyond the familiar and be able to comprehend geographical principles about increasingly far-flung locales.[34])

To say that reformers self-consciously sought to develop pedagogy that would develop children's minds should not suggest that nationalistic or political motives disappeared from the educational scene altogether. But they did take a new form. Carter, for example, was an active member of the 'common school' movement, which under the leadership of Horace Mann agitated for a public school system. As his *Essays upon Popular Education* (1824–25) make clear, Carter was motivated by concern for the nation's democratic institutions. Without accessible education for all classes of citizens, he warned, 'you may preserve and amuse yourselves with the name of . . . a republican government, but you will not be blessed with the reality.'[35]

In their critique of older techniques of imparting geographical knowledge, however, reform-minded educators promoted two innovations that inadvertently complemented new ideas about race. The first was a new emphasis on the *visual* as a key part of

33. James G. Carter, *An Essay on Teaching Geography, Being an Extract from Mr. Carter's Lecture, Delivered Before the American Institute of Instruction, August 23, 1830* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Co. 1830), 12.

34. James G. Carter, *Geography of Worcester County; for Young Children. . . .* (1830); *Geography of Essex County; for Young Children . . .* (1830); *Geography of Middlesex County; for Young Children. . . .* (1830); *Geography of Massachusetts; for Families and Schools. . . .* (1830).

35. Carter, *Essays upon Popular Education (1824–25)*, quoted in Frederick M. Binder, *The Age of the Common School, 1830–1865* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974). For more on the history of education in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980). For an analysis of public education in the United States that begins with the 1830s, see Robert H. Wiebe, 'The Social Functions of Public Education,' *American Quarterly* 21 (1969): 147–64.

the learning process. (The second innovation was instruction in understanding concepts in place of rote memorization.) In the preface to his first book, published in 1822, William Woodbridge, the most innovative of the education reformers, was not only adamant about the advantages of visual aids such as maps, but also critical of the descriptive method that he hoped to supplant: 'It is a fact well known to all who have observed the operations of the mind, that impressions received through the medium of the eye are much stronger and more permanent than any which can be produced by description.'[36] He makes a similar statement in *A System of Universal Geography* (1824), with a characteristic invocation of contemporary theories of mind: 'It is well observed by Watts in his treatise on the Improvement of the Mind, that "The situation of the several parts of the earth is better learned by one day's conversing with a map or sea-chart, than by merely reading the description of their situation a hundred times over in books of Geography."'[37]

Not coincidentally, this new emphasis on the visual in education occurred at the same time that new technologies of printing enabled publishers to reproduce images easily and cheaply.[38] So while

36. Woodbridge seems not to have shared Carter's political motives or his interest in public education, but he was equally adamant about the need for changes in the way children were educated. Woodbridge had visited Pestalozzi's school in Switzerland, and wrote favorable accounts of it in the *American Annals of Education*, a journal that he edited from 1831 to 1838. His interest in nontraditional teaching methods, particularly his interest in the visual, may well have originated with his first teaching position at Thomas Gallaudet's American Asylum, a school for the deaf in Hartford. William C. Woodbridge, *Rudiments of Geography on a New Plan, Designed to Assist the Memory by Comparison and Classification; with Numerous Engravings of Manners, Customs, and Curiosities. Accompanied with an Atlas, Exhibiting the Prevailing Religions, Forms of Government, Degrees of Civilization, and the Comparative Size of Towns, Rivers, and Mountains* (Hartford: Samuel G. Goodrich, 1822), viii.

37. William C. Woodbridge, *A System of Universal Geography, on the Principles of Comparison and Classification; Illustrated with Maps and Engravings; and Accompanied by an Atlas, Exhibiting, in Connection with the Outlines of Countries, their Climate and Productions; the Prevailing Religions, Forms of Government, and Degrees of Civilization; and the Comparative Size of Towns, Rivers and Mountains* (Hartford: Oliver D. Cooke & Sons, 1824), vii-viii. Woodbridge was identified as 'late Instructor in the American Asylum.'

38. Geoffrey Wakeman observes that 'the Victorian period of book illustration was one of constant change and experiment. . .' (*Victorian Book Illustration: The Technical Revolution* [Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1973], 45). For more on nineteenth-century changes in book illustration in a specifically American context, see 'Introductory Sketch of the Development of Early American Book Illustration,' in Sinclair Hamilton, *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers, 1670–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

Morse's and Rowson's books contain very few maps (*American Geography* contained one fold-out map of North America) and no additional illustrations, those that follow Woodbridge regard illustrations as indispensable, and their publishers loudly trumpet the number included in order to persuade parents and teachers that their book offers the best, most painless system of learning geography available on the market. S. Augustus Mitchell's *Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography*, published in Philadelphia in 1840, is a typical example of the way that new ideas about the importance of the visual in education that had originated in the reform movement invaded the publishing world and filtered down to the general public. The number of illustrations included in Mitchell's text is regarded as so important that it is actually incorporated into the book's full title as it appears on the frontispiece: *An Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography: Designed for the Instruction of Children in Schools and Families. Illustrated by One hundred and Twenty Engravings, and Fourteen Maps.* The preface then goes on to announce that these illustrations, 'nearly all from original designs,' are not 'for the purpose of mere ornament.' Instead, these representations of 'the Landing of the Pilgrims, William Penn's Treaty with the Indians, and Pocahontas saving the life of Captain John Smith . . . will probably impress the mind of the scholar more forcibly with recollections of New England, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, than any description . . . and, . . . in many cases, will produce a permanent impression.' By 1840, new ideas about the role of the visual in education had become commonplace: 'The utility of appropriate engravings, associated with descriptive Geography,' Mitchell's publisher announced, 'is now generally admitted; and their importance in communicating more clear and vivid ideas, requires but little argument.'[39]

39. S. Augustus Mitchell, *An Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography; Designed for the Instruction of Children in Schools and Families. Illustrated by Nearly One Hundred Engravings, and Sixteen Colored Maps* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait and Co., 1840). For a different perspective on the increasing use of visual material in schoolbooks of this period, see Daniel Calhoun, 'Eyes for the Jacksonian World: William C. Woodbridge and Emma Willard,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 4 (1984): 1–26.

In addition to emphasizing visual tools, Woodbridge, Carter, and their peers also discouraged rote memorization in favor of encouraging students to grasp underlying concepts. Carter, for example, argues against the kind of rote memorization for which Morse and Rowson's books were specifically designed by comically highlighting the potential negative results: 'The manner of teaching it [geography] by question and answer, which is the manner adopted by the books approved at present, is objectionable, although it enables the young learner *to seem* to have acquired great knowledge of the subject. . . . I apprehend that many a child, who thus delights and astonishes his parents, and gains his books and instructer [*sic*] great renown, would make as sorry a figure, on more careful examination, as the child mentioned by Miss Hamilton. After answering to all his questions, and giving an accurate account of the statistics of Turkey, on being asked, "Where is Turkey?"—a question not in the book—he replied, "*in the yard with the poults.*"'[40] Woodbridge, too, argues against the organizational methods of older books, but grounds his arguments in psychology and science. He is particularly critical of the way 'a variety of dissimilar facts relating to a single country are collected under one head, and there is no association but that of mere locality to aid the mind in its rapid transitions from one subject to another.' To study in this manner, he argues, is '. . . calculated to leave a confused assemblage of ideas in the mind, . . . and to produce the habit of forming loose and indistinct associations.' It is through the comparison and classification of similar objects, he concludes, 'that such beauty and simplicity have been given to modern science.'[41] In his second book, the prolific Woodbridge makes a similar argument and adds the following epigraph from *Jamiesen's Logic:* 'The very essence of science consists in generalizing, and reducing to a few classes or general principles, the multitude of individual things which every branch of human knowledge embraces.'[42]

40. Carter, *Essay on Teaching Geography*, 4.
41. Woodbridge, *Rudiments of Geography*, vi.
42. Woodbridge, *System of Universal Geography.*

As a result of these arguments, and no doubt also of the popularity of innovative texts like Woodbridge's, schoolbook writers of the 1820s and 1830s gradually moved toward adopting his methods. Geography books geared toward children were increasingly arranged, not according to political units (which were 'perpetually fluctuating with the waves of conquest and the tides of revolution'), but according to 'the universal laws of nature, or the stable principles of intellectual and political philosophy.'[43]

The question that arises, of course, is what these 'universal laws' or 'stable principles' are. To judge by his books and those of his imitators, Woodbridge's method involves classifying information according to categories such as 'Rivers,' 'Mountains,' and 'Climates' and ranking the objects within those categories. In *Modern School Geography, on the Plan of Comparison and Classification*, for example, Woodbridge provides an illustration to give schoolchildren not simply a set of statistics regarding individual mountains, but a sense of how mountains compared to one another (fig. 1).[44] To a certain extent, this seems reasonable. Presumably a child would indeed gain a clearer conception of the Amazon's magnitude by comparing its length to that of other rivers, rather than seeing it described in the context of South American trade goods and religious beliefs.

When we turn from facts about the length of rivers to facts about people, however, problems become more apparent. Under the old system of organizing all information according to the primary categories of nation or region, the sub-categories used to describe a place's inhabitants were relatively flexible, and were

43. Woodbridge, *System of Universal Geography*, vii-viii. Just a few of the geography books that followed Woodbridge's lead in organizing information according to general categories rather than political units were: Mitchell, *Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography*; S. G. Goodrich, *A National Geography for Schools, Illustrated by 220 Engravings and 60 Maps* (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1850); D. M. Warren, *A System of Physical Geography. . . .* (Philadelphia: H. Cowperthwait and Co., 1856); and S. S. Cornell, *Cornell's Grammar-School Geography; Forming a Part of a Systematic Series of School Geographies* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1858).

44. Woodbridge, *Modern School Geography, on the Plan of Comparison and Classification: with an Atlas, Exhibiting, on a New Plan, the Physical and Political Characteristics of Countries, and the Comparative Size of Countries, Towns, Rivers, and Mountains*, 3d ed. (Hartford: Belknap and Hamersley, 1846).

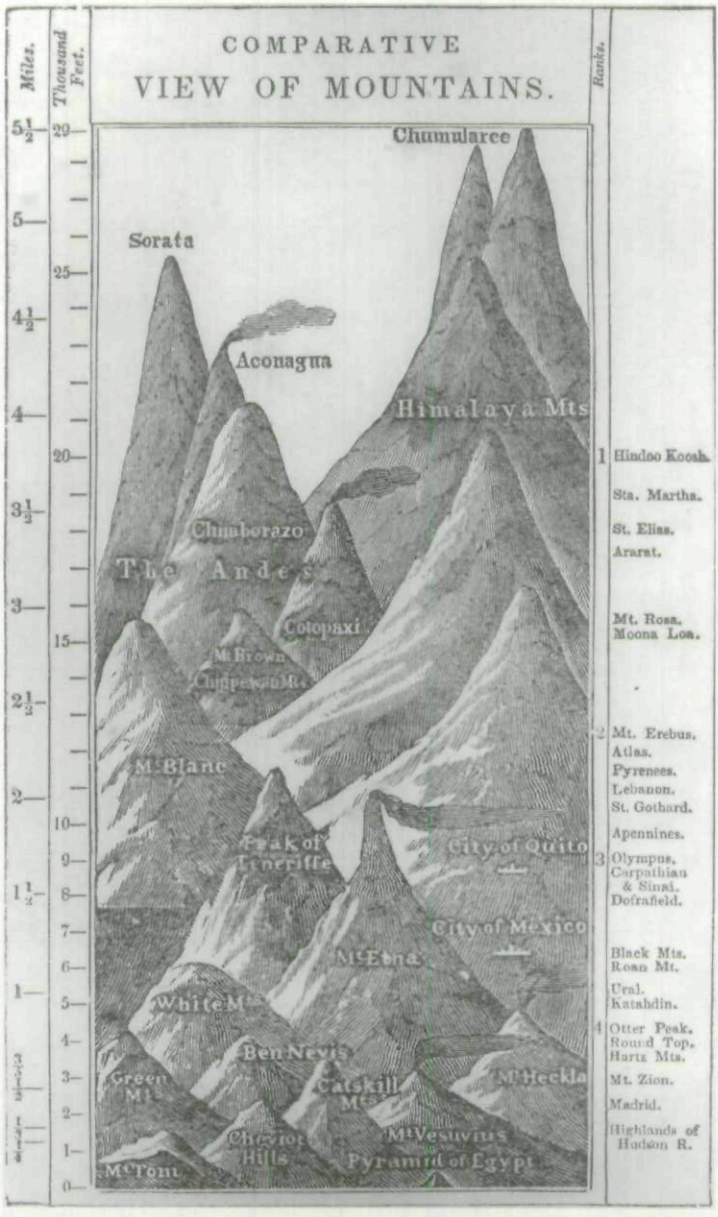

Fig. 1. This attempt to portray particular geographical entities (in this case, mountains) in relation to comparable entities is one of a growing number of similar illustrations in nineteenth-century schoolbooks. William Woodbridge, *Modern School Geography* (Hartford: Belknap and Hamersley, 1846), frontispiece. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

less ideologically charged. Groups of people were often described, for example, in terms of 'manners and customs' or national character. There is no doubt that the tone used in such descriptions is sometimes one of disgust or condescension. Elijah Parish, for example, sounds smugly superior as he describes the French as effeminate and the Arabs as 'pirates, but very hospitable.'[45] But such categories were by definition fluid. 'Manners and customs' described what people *did*, not what they *were*. And as Morse points out in *American Geography* while remarking on the differences between the European nations, 'these . . . become gradually less discernable, as fashion, learning, and commerce prevail more universally.'[46] Such national characteristics, in other words, are mutable, capable of being transformed through education and trade. The new system of organizing geographical information, however, encouraged writers to look at the categories they used to classify people as fixed rather than mutable. 'Race' then becomes the defining factor that enables writers to break down the category 'Man' into groups along the same lines as geographical features or animal species.

At the same time, the new system of describing geographical phenomena encouraged more elaborate, and more problematic, hierarchies based on race. Human physical characteristics became not simply incidental facts about countries (as in Morse's description of the Chinese), but rather manifestations of an unchanging hierarchical system in which 'the European race' is superior to 'the African, or black race' just as, for example, the Mississippi is longer than the Hudson. One can see the results of this movement in geography pedagogy in Mitchell's *Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography*, which states that 'the European or Caucasian is the most noble of the five races of men. It excels all others in learning and the arts, and includes the most powerful nations of ancient and modern times. The most valuable institutions

45. Elijah Parish, *A Compendious System of Universal Geography, Designed for Schools, Compiled from the Latest and Most Distinguished European and American Travellers, Voyagers, and Geographers* (Newburyport, Mass.: Thomas & Whipple, 1807).

46. Morse, *American Geography*, 531.

of society, and the most important and useful inventions, have originated with the people of this race.' He also refers to 'the Negro race' as 'ignorant and degraded.'

This trend continued in schoolbooks published later in the nineteenth century. In *Warren's Common School Geography*, for example, which could serve as a model for the expression of Woodbridge's ideas in its presentation of material and its numerous, lively illustrations, 'Lesson XVII' is titled 'Man,' and the student is informed that 'mankind is divided into five varieties, or races, differing from each other by certain characteristic features.' The first listed is 'The Caucasian, or White race,' of which it is said: 'Most of the nations of Europe and America belong to this race. The Caucasian race is superior to all others in intelligence, energy, and courage.'[47] Similarly, the *Primary Geography* of A. Von Steinwehr divides humans into five races and suggests conversationally that 'You are familiar with two of them—the *white* and the *black*. The others are called the *red*, the *yellow*, and the *brown* races. The *white* or *Caucasian* race,' adds Von Steinwehr, 'is superior to all, and exceeds any other race in power.'[48]

If the new method of organizing geographical information encouraged the adoption of race as a conceptual framework for thinking about people, the nearly ubiquitous presence of illustrations tended to reify the concept of race still further. The frontispiece of *A System of Geography*, by Sidney Morse (son of Jedediah, who in 1844 capitalized on his father's famous name by publishing his own geography schoolbook), reinforces the parallel between racial categories and a new emphasis on classes of geographical phenomena (fig. 2). By juxtaposing illustrations of four racial types with a chart illustrating the comparative height of mountains and length of rivers, the frontispiece implicitly suggests that race is an underlying geographical category as real as physical phenomena

47. D. M. Warren, *The Common-School Geography: An Elementary Treatise on Mathematical, Physical, and Political Geography. For the Use of Schools. Illustrated . . . and Embellished by Numerous Fine Engravings* (Boston: Shepard, Clark, and Brown, 1859), 13.

48. A. Von Steinwehr, *Primary Geography* (Cincinnati: Van Antwerp, Bragg, and Company, 1870), 16.

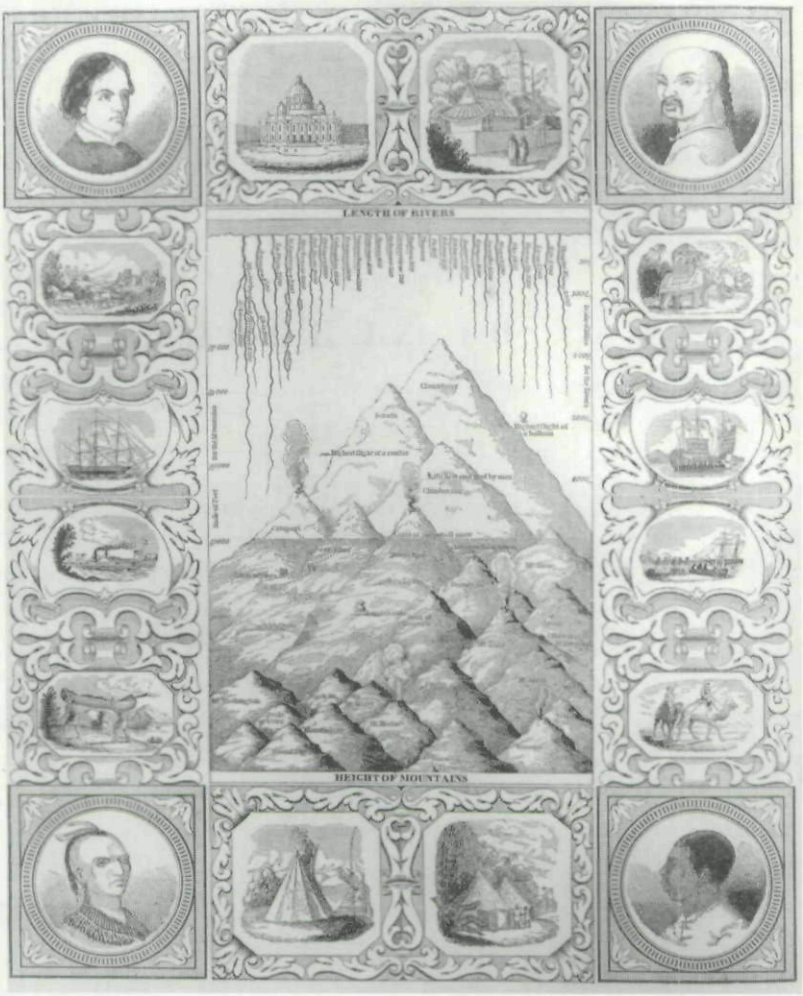

Fig. 2. Information about hierarchies of rivers and mountains (presented with scales to interpret their length and height) is surrounded by engravings of cultural scenes from around the world and, in each corner, a portrait of a representative of each of four racial groups. Sidney Morse, *A System of Geography for the Use of Schools* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), frontispiece. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

such as mountains or rivers. But even more important is the way that visual illustrations by their very nature help occlude the fuzziness or arbitrariness of the relatively recently established racial categories. In almost all geography books written after the 1830s, a single figure, distinguishable from others only by his physical characteristics, stands in for the entire group referred to in the text, so that those physical characteristics come to define the group. Illustrations are designed to produce an archetypal figure that embodies the particular qualities being emphasized. But as the illustrations of race from Mitchell's *Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography* and Woodbridge's *Modern School Geography* (figs. 3 and 4) indicate, the results often verge on stereotype.

An illustration for *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners* (1845) helps to sum up the role that geography schoolbooks played in transforming nineteenth-century worldviews (fig. 5). It depicts a man and five children gathered around a globe, with a map in the background. Holding a book in his right hand, the man points to a location on the globe while the children look on attentively. The caption reads, 'Describing the World, or Teaching Geography.' That 'teaching geography' means 'describing the world' is a simple, even obvious, fact. But its implications can be easily overlooked. As the Peter Parley illustration reminds us, the children have no direct or unmediated access to data about the world. The man in the picture necessarily shapes that data, and may, we can speculate, be doing so by engaging in the kind of geography pedagogy discussed in this essay.

Designed as they were to make the experience of learning geography more meaningful to children, the changes recommended by reformers such as Carter and Woodbridge seem, and indeed are, laudable. It is important to recognize, however, the extent to which the reorganization of geography schoolbooks according to their theories complemented the shift toward a more systematized, hierarchical view of race. Motivated both by pedagogical zeal and the desire to sell more schoolbooks in the expanding national market, antebellum educators encouraged their readers to conceptualize

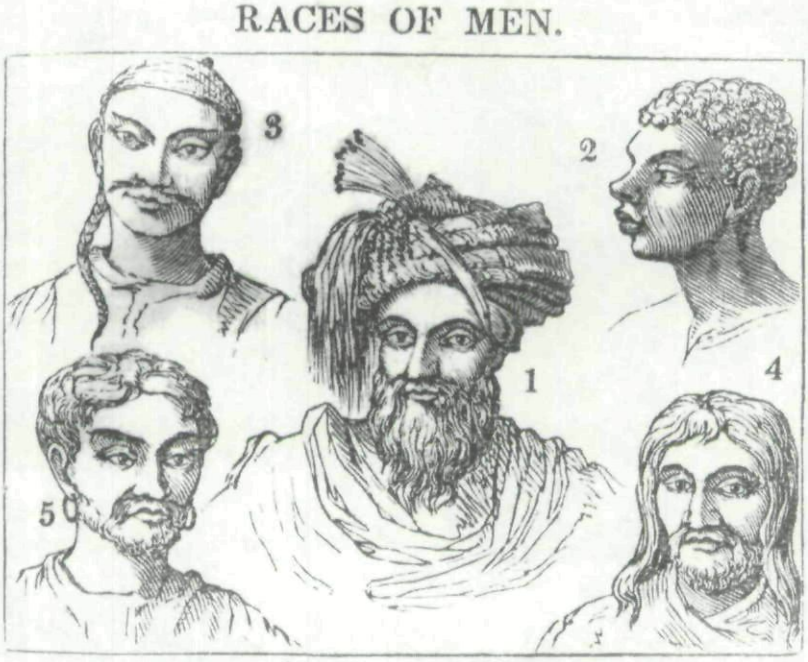

Fig. 3. This illustration from Augustus Mitchell's *An Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography* portrays representatives of five "Races of Men." The European's central location in the group, along with the fact that his headdress and flowing garments make him slightly larger than the other racial representatives, suggest his comparative superiority in the eyes of the author. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

the world in new ways. In the process, they played a powerful role in predisposing them to accept new theories of race. Examining their role in this process highlights the far-reaching and often unexpected results of education reform and also extends our understanding of the range of factors that contributed to a more rigid, systematized racism. To understand this shift fully, I suggest, it is necessary to look not only at its intellectual sources—romantic nationalism and pseudo-scientific fads such as phrenology, for example—but also at the habits of mind, developed in the schoolroom, that made new ideas about race broadly appealing.

The Five Races of Men.

LESSON 21.

RACES OF MEN AND EMPLOYMENT OF MANKIND.

THE whole Human Family are considered as constituting *five different races*, as follows, viz.: *The Caucasian, the Mongolian, the Malayan, the American and the African.*

Fig. 4. As in Figure 3, the centrality of the 'Caucasian' in this illustration from S. Augustus Mitchell's *Easy Introduction to the Study of Geography: Designed for the Instruction of Children in Schools and Families* (Philadelphia: H. Cowperthwait and Co., 1858) suggests the way that the new emphasis on racial classification reinforced racial hierarchies. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

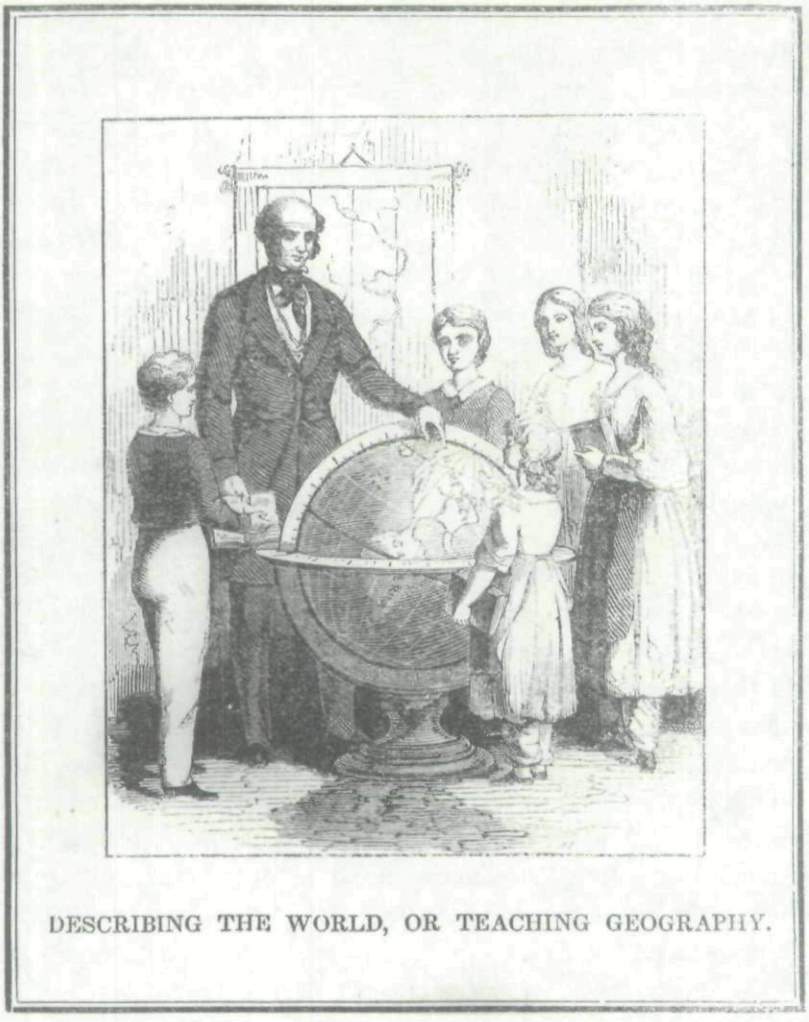

Fig. 5. 'Describing the World, or Teaching Geography.' The teacher draws the connection between the textbook and a place on the globe. The globe and wall map suggest the importance of geography pedagogy in shaping the students' worldviews. Samuel Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Geography for Beginners* (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1847), frontispiece. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Understanding those habits of mind and their roots in geography pedagogy, may also, in turn, allow us to speculate in useful ways about the geography of the nation and about the policy decisions that shaped it. What finally put a damper on antebellum America's expansive energies? Why, after the Treaty of Guadalupe that ended the Mexican War in 1848, did the boundaries of the United States, so dramatically in flux for decades, remain largely fixed? While the Civil War and the internal tensions that led to it may have been the most important factor—obviously the Civil War preoccupied the nation in ways that precluded additional expansion—the anxieties expressed by men such as John Dix and John Read about the racial make-up of newly annexed citizens should not be overlooked. As historian Gavan Daws has pointed out, the United States had the opportunity to annex Hawaii in the 1850s, but chose not to. Americans living in Hawaii were eager to overthrow the Hawaiian monarchy in order to advance their own economic interests. But many opposed annexation because they opposed citizenship for the native Hawaiians.[49] Race may also have played a role in American policy after the Spanish-American War. Although the United States took control of various former Spanish colonies such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines, Americans chose not to incorporate them into the nation as they had New Mexico and California fifty years earlier. Like the children in the Peter Parley illustration, the Americans who made those decisions had been taught to perceive the world in particular ways. Race, to them, was a systematized component of world geography in ways that their great-grandparents—readers, perhaps, of Morse's or Rowson's schoolbooks—could not have imagined, and they shaped national policy accordingly.

49. It is worth noting that some native Hawaiians may have been suspicious of annexation on racial grounds as well. When the possibility of annexation was at its height, the Hawaiian ruler was warned by the British consul (Britain no doubt had self-interested motives) that if they allowed themselves to be annexed they would become part of a nation in which slavery and racial prejudice were accepted norms. Gavan Daws, *The Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1968), 147–53.