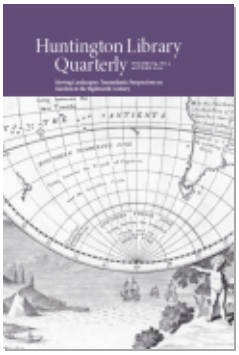
A Transatlantic Dialogue: The Estate Landscape in Britain, the Caribbean, and North America in the Eighteenth Century



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A Transatlantic Dialogue: The Estate Landscape in Britain, the Caribbean, and North America in the Eighteenth Century

Jonathan Finch

ABSTRACT This essay explores the contingent relationships between landownership and status in Britain, the Caribbean, and the East Coast of North America across the long eighteenth century. In Britain, where land was scarce, land was the measure of wealth and status, and the creation of landed estates bound the ruling elite together. As the global economy expanded, driven by colonialism, new relationships were embedded within very different cultural landscapes. In the Caribbean, plantation landscapes were high-risk investments that relied on enslaved labor to ensure returns on highly capitalized production. In America, the availability of land recast the relationship between improvement, landownership, and labor. Land played an important role in defining newfound freedoms increasingly at odds with coercion and enslavement. **KEYWORDS:** ideology of landscape; landed estates; plantations; George Washington; Thomas Jefferson; Henry and George Lascelles; British Caribbean

THE LANDSCAPE HAD A COMPLEX ROLE in the long eighteenth century, as it was fundamental to ideologies of power, privilege, and productivity—as well as liberty and enslavement—while it also sustained the vast majority of the population in terms of employment. It has long been recognized that to view or study the garden as a designed landscape in isolation from the wider landscape is to ignore important contemporary readings of the landscape and to exclude the context from which the ornamental derived meaning and significance.[1] The relationship between the wider landscape and the garden or park was dynamic, and varied radically over time and

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place, yet it is often neglected in scholarship divided between agriculture and gardens as well as between economics and aesthetics.

For contemporaries in the long eighteenth century, the garden, park, and wider productive landscape were understood as distinct yet closely related elements of the whole. The garden was undoubtedly an important focus, located as it was in the immediate environment of the focal house and being a place where investment, skill, taste, and learning could all be exhibited and enjoyed. The garden, therefore, played an important role in the creation of "place" for the transatlantic elite: place as a defined landscape shaped by, and imbued with, ideologies of ownership and power. Indeed, the garden was particularly significant in the transatlantic world: plants drove economic and human exploitation while at the same time being symbolic of the changing relationship between people and nature. However, as it was in the wider rural landscape that the majority of people worked and lived and within which they negotiated their relationships with those above and around them, transformations of these landscapes had a significant impact on the population and can tell us much about how those relationships were perceived and maintained.

In an issue dominated by the garden landscape, this essay will explore the wider landscape and look at the concept of the estate as it moved across the Atlantic world—from England to the Caribbean and North America—to follow a dialogue about landownership and improvement over the long eighteenth century among landowners, improvers, and travelers. It not only draws on research conducted in England and the Caribbean but also explores the issues within a North American context, where both the historical landscape and the historiography suggest significant differences from England and the Caribbean, differences that can in turn shed light back on debates in the Old World. There was a sustained dialogue across the Atlantic world between agriculturalists that—in comparison with that about gardens—has been neglected by scholars. That exchange also raises issues about the comparative importance of the estate in our own dialogue today, since the way we construct our histories says much about our own imagining of landscape.

It is important to define the term *estate*, or at least to explore the range of meanings it drew upon. Its use in landscape is an abbreviation of *landed estate*, and although this is now perhaps its most common usage, it is one that only dates from the mid-eighteenth century, as in William Cowper's use of the term in his poem *The Task,* published in 1785.[2] Its emergence corresponds with the capitalization of land into private property, where before the landscape had been a palimpsest of complex rights of access to resources and jurisdictions. In England, the privately owned estate

1. See, for example, Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986); and Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stroud, U.K., 1995).

2. William Cowper, *The Task, a Poem, in Six Books* (London, 1785), 129: "Estates are landscapes, gazed upon awhile / Then advertised, and auctioneer'd away."

emerged as an important structure within the landscape after the landed elite successfully renegotiated their relationship with the monarchy during the political and social upheavals of the 1640s and 1650s. They succeeded in establishing considerable power within a remodeled parliamentary system that was firmly rooted in landownership and distanced from the arbitrary power of the Crown. Thus, the estate was a manifestation of the new relationships of power that were being forged, and it was also an integral part of the colonial economy that was developing over the same period. The late seventeenth century was also the period when relationships within the landscape were being redefined, as manorial rights and relationships were replaced as land was enclosed, commodified, and increasingly brought into single, private ownership. Only when these new relationships had been imposed on the landscape could the English estate be characterized as "an extensive and continuous or near-continuous area of land, owned as absolute private property by an individual, although not necessarily . . . his or hers to alienate at will."[3]

However, *estate* in this sense grew out of the wider legal use of the term to mean the collected property, possessions, or capital of an individual, which dates from the sixteenth century, and was itself the capitalized version of its medieval use to mean the interests that a person had in lands, tenements, or movable property, whether they owned them or not.

This medieval definition included fees or rights over the land and was not limited to private ownership of the land itself. The association of *estate* with the generation of income and wealth inevitably links the term to concepts and expressions of individual status, rank, and position through its legal connotations, and to an order or class within the realm or body politic in a collective sense that took on meaning in the sense of group interests in state governance. These shifting yet cognate uses of the term *estate* are rarely interrogated, since they developed chronologically and so, historiographically, it is often convenient to identify or use the term in a single sense. However, when the term is examined in a dialogue across the Atlantic world, the plurality and complexity of meaning becomes apparent.

The starting point of this inquiry is the estate landscape in Britain, where landownership in general—and the estate in particular—has been used by historians predominantly as an index of wealth and status. In scholarship on the long eighteenth century, the estate has rarely been studied as an agent of landscape change or recognized as an important and distinct cultural landscape, perhaps because of its ubiquity within the modern era, unlike in earlier historical periods, whose scholars pay considerable attention to the institutions that structured the landscape.

3. Tom Williamson, "Archaeological Perspectives on Landed Estates: Research Agendas," in *Estate Landscapes: Design, Improvement and Power in the Post-Medieval Landscape*, ed. Jonathan Finch and Kate Giles (Woodbridge, U.K., 2007), 1–2.

The Estate in Britain

Although data is difficult to capture on a national scale, there is agreement that large British estates, those over three thousand acres, enjoyed a period of growth from the late seventeenth century onward.[4] The same period saw a marked change in landownership as smaller estates were sold and land was concentrated into large blocks in fewer hands. The smaller gentry and owner occupiers struggled against adverse economic conditions and the costs of enclosure, and the gap between the lesser or local gentry and the large landowners widened further as the consolidation of holdings was the most effective response to falling agricultural prices. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the land market had stabilized, and the balance of power within the landowning class did not change appreciably thereafter. Perhaps the most dynamic element within the elite was the rise of families with new sources of wealth, many linked to the globalization of trade and the increasing opportunities to extract personal wealth from government offices and patronage. However, changes in the inheritance laws and the adoption of strict settlement created a scarcity of estates available for purchase and inhibited the ability of this group to integrate into the traditional landed elite, other than by marriage. The second half of the eighteenth century saw a considerable improvement in the economic prosperity of agriculture as farming profits rose, so landowners raised rents. For the large landowners, these higher rents offset the increased levels of taxation and the costs of enclosure, which fell heavily on the smaller landowners.

The evolving use of terms associated with landownership can be seen in documents relating to land management and husbandry. For example, when William Windham of Felbrigg in Norfolk started keeping annotated accounts of his newly inherited estate in 1673, he broke it down into the "yearly value of my manors, lands & tenements . . . And what farme rents, Quit Rents, Annuityes, Rent cha[r]ges and other incumbrances are upon & issuing out of my estate."[5] The complexities of the manorial system, even in northeast Norfolk, where manorial control was weak, still cast a shadow over the landowner and continued to feature in management and account keeping. A century later, the surveyor and professional land agent Nathaniel Kent, who worked at Felbrigg from around 1770, published one of the first manuals on estate management, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (1776), which sought to "enable gentlemen of landed property to be competent judges whether their estates are properly managed, or not."[6] As a professional agent, Kent had expertise in estate management

4. This is the threshold used by John Bateman in the first systematic survey of landholding, and it serves here, too, although there were important regional variations. See John Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland: A List of All Owners of Three Thousand Acres and Upwards,* 4th ed. (London, 1883).

5. "Rough account and memoranda book," 1672–1683, WKC 5/151, 400x5, Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, U.K.; see also *William Windham's Green Book, 1673–1688*, ed. Elizabeth Griffiths (Norwich, U.K., 2002).

6. Nathaniel Kent, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property* (London, 1776), iv.

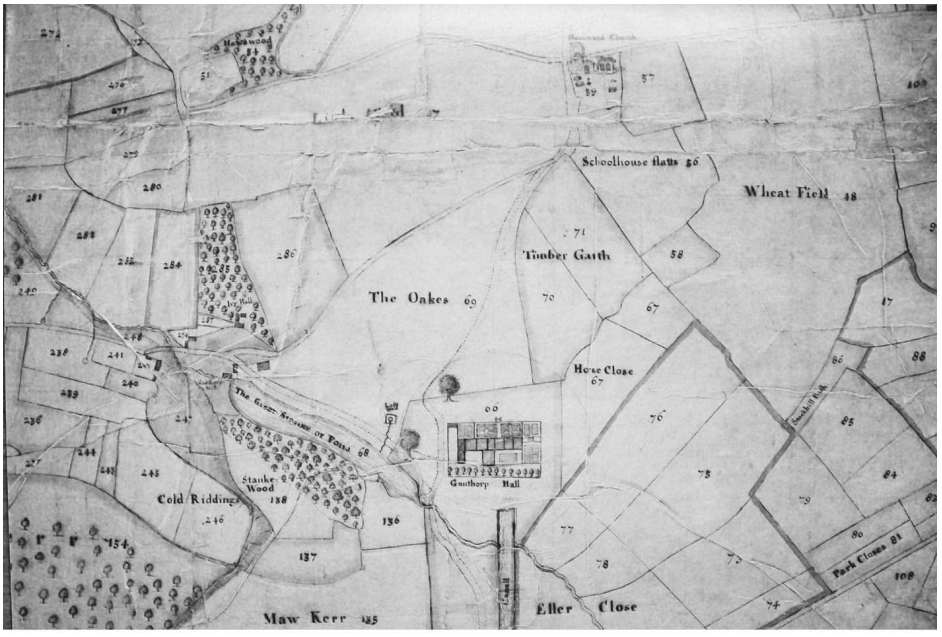
and an interest in promoting the skills needed to manage land and tenantry in the rapidly changing economic world of the late eighteenth century, something he shared with the agriculturalist and improver William Marshall, who titled his 1804 book on estate management *On the Landed Property of England: An Elementary and Practical Treatise; Containing the Purchase, the Improvement, and the Management of Landed Estates*.[7] Both Kent and Marshall prioritized landed property as the core asset rather than the estate, which included a broader portfolio of responsibilities. However, when the Yorkshire factor and estate agent Robert E. Brown published his *Book of the Landed Estate* over fifty years later in 1869, it was the estate that took precedence over the management of what he termed "the resources of landed property."[8]

Estates had a recognizable spatial structure with the house and garden at the core, which from the 1760s were often situated in parkland punctuated by plantations of trees and with an engineered body of water, such as a lake, in the middle distance. The home farm and kitchen garden, which were usually kept "in hand" by the owner and sat within or close to the parkland, were often included on circuit routes, to be displayed to visitors. Beyond the parkland, separated on larger estates by a perimeter belt of trees, lay the working landscape of farms and farmland that were leased to tenants for defined periods of time, interspersed with timber plantations and game coverts, again kept in hand by the owner. In the upland areas of northern England, but more specifically Scotland, the estate would include low-value areas of mountain and moorland. Many larger English landowners also owned Irish estates, where again the relationship between value and acreage was very different from that at the core English estates. Originally used for little more than rough sheep grazing, some upland and marginal areas became remunerative either through mineral extraction or for sporting rights as the eighteenth century progressed. However, as former common land, they also frequently required complex enclosure awards to remove customary community access. It should be emphasized that the regional diversity of British landscapes created a mosaic of landscape types, which had an impact on the relative size and importance of estates across the country.[9] Large estates were able to flourish most readily across the lighter soils, generally in the east, such as west Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and Hampshire, whereas in areas of ancient enclosure and freehold farms, in the southwest, for example, the tenurial structure, and particularly the higher proportion of freeholders, made it much harder and more expensive to accumulate large contiguous estates.

7. William Marshall, *On the Landed Property of England: An Elementary and Practical Treatise; Containing the Purchase, the Improvement, and the Management of Landed Estates* (London, 1804).

8. Robert E. Brown, *Book of the Landed Estate Containing Directions for the Management and Development of the Resources of Landed Property* (Edinburgh and London, 1869).

9. Jonathan Finch, "Making Modern England: The 'New Domesday' and Estate Landscapes during the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Estate Landscapes in Northern Europe*, ed. Jonathan Finch, Kristine Dyrmann, and Mikael Frausing (Aarhus, Denmark, 2019), 59–95.



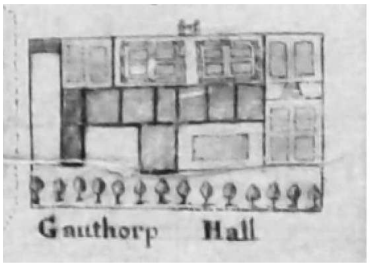


FIGURE 1 AND DETAIL. Plan for the Gawthorpe estate, West Yorkshire, ca. 1698, showing the medieval hall surrounded by an enclosed landscape, with the parish church to the north. Reproduced by courtesy of the Earl and Countess of Harewood and Harewood House Trust.

Harewood House in West Yorkshire, just north of Leeds, the seat of the Lascelles family from the end of the 1730s to the present day, illustrates the transition to the modern estate landscape. The earliest illustration of the landscape dates to the late 1690s, before the Lascelles became owners, and shows a typical early modern manorial landscape, with surviving medieval elements such as the castle, parish church, and, at its heart, the manor house, Gawthorpe Hall. Originally built in the fourteenth century and owned until the late sixteenth century by the Gascoigne family, its formal terraced gardens were set in the middle of a productive landscape (fig. 1). The agricultural landscape on the plan shows signs of early modern change: the medieval deer park had been disparked in the early seventeenth century but was still described as "a Parklike place" in 1656, suggesting it retained much of its character and mature trees.[10] Elsewhere, evidence of piecemeal enclosure abounds, in which medieval

10. "Survey of Harewood, November 10th 1656," WYL250/2/Sur/12a, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, U.K.

strips, formerly in open fields, had been grouped together and then enclosed under individual ownership, creating the diverse landscape that was depicted in a pair of views from the 1720s (fig. 2). They show the manor house surrounded by orchards, the harvest, woodland, the "Great Stank" or fishpond, and the manorial water mill.

Henry Lascelles bought the adjoining manors of Harewood and Gawthorpe in 1739; on Henry's death in 1753, they were inherited by his son Edwin. Edwin Lascelles then set about transforming the landscape and building a new house—both of which indicated that the new owners had very different social and political needs than did the Gascoignes. The new house was begun in 1759; designed by John Carr of York with interiors by Robert Adam, it was furnished with Thomas Chippendale's largest single commission (fig. 3). Gawthorpe Hall was finally swept away in 1774, opening the way for the final stages of landscaping the parkland in a neoclassical style compatible with the new Harewood House. The evolution of the designed landscape was complex. In 1758, Lancelot "Capability" Brown was paid for a plan of the grounds and two designs for the house, and he returned in the 1770s when the new house was completed to work on the creation of the lake. Between those dates, however, first Richard Woods and then Thomas White were both paid to work on the landscape. The relative contribution of the various designers is difficult to isolate, even in such a well-documented landscape, and perhaps detracts from our understanding of the broader relationship between the new style within the park and the remodeled landscape beyond the park pale.

As might be expected, the wider estate landscape was transformed at the same time as the main house and gardens. In line with debates about agricultural improvement as advocated by Arthur Young, the leading exponent of agricultural reform, farm holdings on the estate were consolidated to create more compact farms. Significantly, in this region of Yorkshire, enclosure played a less central role in schemes of improvement than it did in other regions during the late eighteenth century, as the landscape had been subjected to piecemeal enclosure from the fifteenth through to the seventeenth century and was now almost completely enclosed. Only the common had been left as a communal resource, but the Lascelles set about enclosing that, too, at a relatively early date, in the 1740s, and parceled it out into farm holdings.

In the late 1790s, the land agency Kent, Claridge and Pearce conducted a survey of the estate, for which an estate plan was drawn up in 1796.[11] Nathaniel Kent had combined his success at Felbrigg and elsewhere with his publication on land management to establish himself as one of the foremost surveyors of the time, and in the Harewood survey, he expressed his wider ideology of improvement.[12] It is important to note here that "improvement" was not a single discourse—but within

11. "Kent, Claridge and Pearce, Survey of Harewood," WYL 250/3, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, U.K.

12. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Kent, Nathaniel (1737–1810), Land Agent and Writer on Agriculture," by Ronald Bayne and Anne Baker, last modified June 13, 2018, https//doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15421; Pamela Horn, "An Eighteenth-Century Land Agent: The Career of Nathaniel Kent (1737–1810)," *Agricultural History Review* 30 (1982): 1–16.

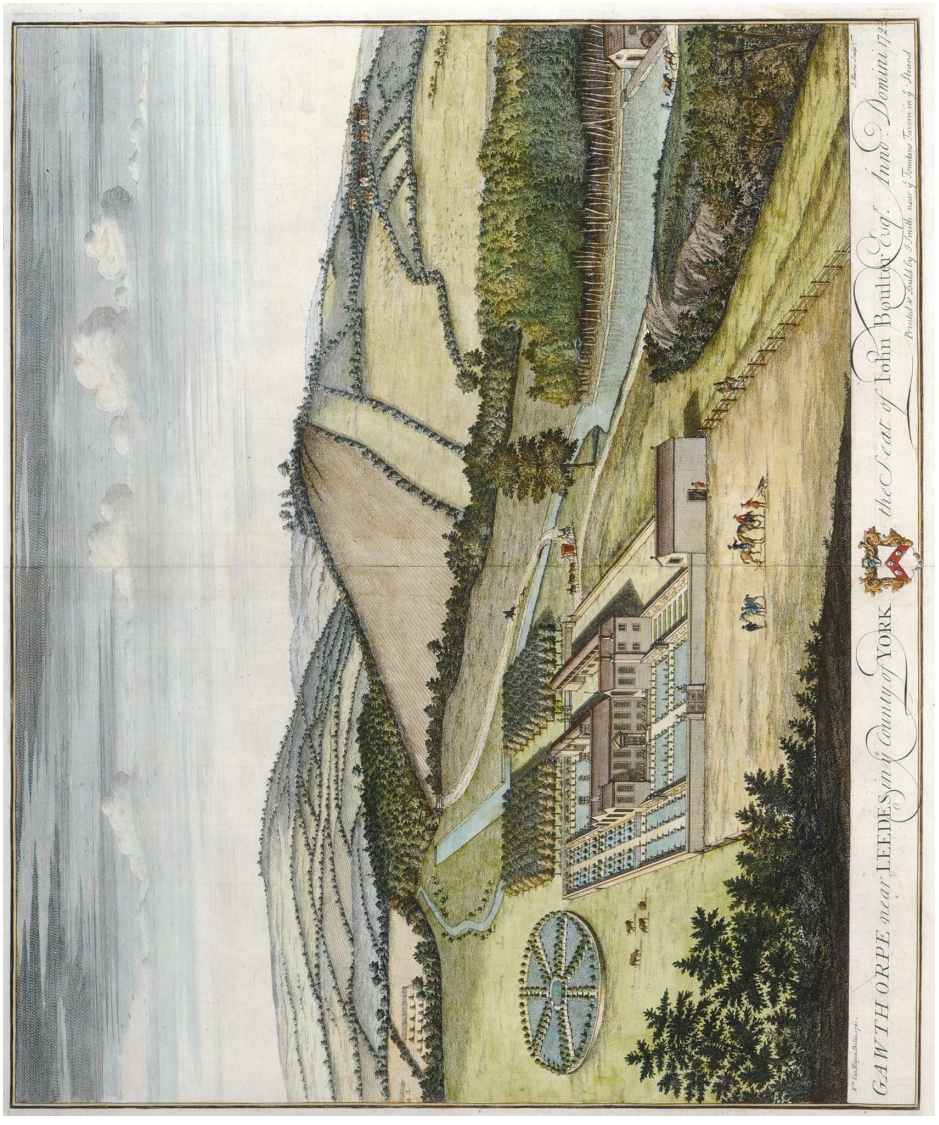


FIGURE 2. *Gawthorpe near Leedes in ye County of York*, by Willem van der Hagen, 1722, which shows the manor house from the north. The distinction between the formal ornamental gardens and the productive landscape beyond is clear. © Leeds Museums and Galleries (Lotherton Hall).

FIGURE 3. The south front of Harewood House. Designed by John Carr of York and built between 1759 and 1771, the new house provided a suitably grand setting for the Lascelles family to assert their status on an international stage. Photograph by author.

it there were subtle differences. Young asserted the need for larger farms of over two hundred acres to take full advantage of the economies of scale offered by enclosure and mechanization, something he considered large landowners and landed estates best placed to deliver. By contrast, Kent's preference was that the landowner provide a range of different-sized farms on estates in order to support as much of the local population as possible and to promote social cohesion, rather than profit's being the sole driver of improvement and estate reorganization.

Kent noted approvingly that the inhabitants of Harewood were allowed to rent small parcels of land "to keep a cow or two" and that some of the land was let "in small Bargains and not in great Farms."[13] However, when we compare surveys carried out at Harewood, it is apparent that the number of tenants renting from twenty to one hundred acres fell by half over the second half of the eighteenth century, with a corresponding increase in those farming over one hundred acres. Large landowners used phases of enclosure to redistribute land between holdings, often creating substantial farms that could support a high rental income by taking advantage of new economies of scale, as rentals provided a regular and important stream of income for landowners. As farms grew in size, and as technological advances became a core part of commercial rather than subsistence farming, the role of tenant farmer became more complex and more expensive, and finding suitable tenants became increasingly problematic.

In order to attract the best tenants and demonstrate the owner's commitment to modern agriculture, the farms themselves were rebuilt on many estates, including Harewood. When the Duchess of Northumberland visited Harewood in 1766, before the new house was even finished, she recorded that there were "Some very shewy Farm houses," while the Reverend Joseph Ismay, who visited a year later, reported,

> I saw some Farm-Houses . . . newly erected, and constructed in a peculiar Manner for that Purpose. . . . I mentioned these new Buildings to Mr. Lascelles's Steward, and told him they seemed fit for some Gentleman's Family in ye Summer Season. He replied, we build fine Houses for ye Farmers in this Country.[14]

The farmhouses and their associated buildings were designed on an increasingly grand scale and design, as Ismay noted, in order to attract tenants with the necessary personal wealth to invest a considerable amount in the enterprise. By the late nineteenth century, the Lascelles had amassed an estate of almost thirty thousand acres, worth £38,000 annually in rents. This put them comfortably within the top three hundred or so "great landowners" who each owned over ten thousand acres in Britain

13. "Kent, Claridge and Pearce, Survey of Harewood."

14. Rev. Joseph Ismay, "A Visit to Chapel Allerton and Harewood in 1767," *Transactions of the Thoresby Society* 37 (1945): 333–44 at 339.

during the 1880s and who then collectively owned about a quarter of the English landscape.[15]

There are four important points to make about the estate in the English landscape. First, the many examples of relandscaping gardens in the second half of the eighteenth century were part of a wider transformation of the working landscape, and they need to be investigated and understood together. Second, whether or not it was effective and profitable, a strong discourse of improvement drove those changes, which commentators such as Arthur Young presented as a national priority at a time of social change and global conflict. It is important, however, to recognize that a wider use of the term *improvement* was applied to designers such as Capability Brown, who were concerned with the ornamental parkland. Third, reforming the agricultural landscape was considered a political act linked to concepts of identity, nationhood, and modernity, while it was also widely perceived as a reflection of personal virtue on the part of the landowner. Fourth, although the agricultural innovation associated with improvement might have been initiated by smaller freeholders in the seventeenth century, larger landowners were expected and encouraged to be the agents of that change by practicing it across their estates in the eighteenth century.

The Caribbean

The development of European landownership patterns in the Caribbean provides a useful comparison with the priorities and assumptions embedded within the English landscape of the metropole. The intensive development of tropical landscapes by colonial powers to grow cash crops is well attested; involving Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, British, and Scandinavian ventures, it demonstrates how rapidly European powers engaged with the opportunities of global trade and exploitation in the New World. Drawing on Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch experiences in South America, the plantation model was quickly adapted to the Caribbean context in the mid-seventeenth century, with two defining characteristics: the economies of scale necessitated by the capital-intensive nature of the sugar industry and the coercive use of enslaved people as laborers.

Much like in the English landscape, there was a consolidation of holdings over the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in the British Caribbean, as the reliance on smallholders and indentured servants to clear and cultivate land gave way to larger-scale operations and the use of enslaved African people as labor.[16] The spread of monocrop sugar cultivation was rapid and, on Barbados at least, came at the expense of the natural environment, including the vital timber resources. In the 1680s, the mean size of holdings on Barbados, for example, was 29 acres, but

15. Bateman, *Great Landowners,* 207; Heather A. Clemenson, *English Country Houses and Landed Estates* (London, 1982); Finch, "Making Modern England."

16. David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987).

the 82 largest owners averaged 250 acres.[17] The industry's high capital costs and high risk pushed smallholders out of business, and their lands were absorbed into the larger units of the plantocracy. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century, land was at a premium, and the combination of scarcity, expense, and high capital costs meant that while smallholders struggled, very large plantations were unusual. By the 1790s, Bryan Edwards regarded 300 acres as a medium-size Jamaican plantation or estate, but he also noted that estates that size were almost impossible to come by with uniform topography and soil.[18] Individual plantations were the basic unit of landholding, and contiguous plantations under single ownership were rare, but a large landowner might own more than one plantation on the same island or across multiple islands. The plantation thus held a position between the metropolitan landed estate, which it could sometimes outperform in terms of profit or income, and the estate farm, to which it was closer in scale and function.

Maps and plans of landholding in the Caribbean took on the familiar form of European cadastral plans, showing the field boundaries and buildings, and sometimes the cultivation, but rarely the relationship with the wider landscape, sometimes making them difficult to locate spatially without further contextual information. Drawn by surveyors trained in Europe, these plans frequently used the term *estate* in the title when showing individual plantations, using *estate* to mean capital holdings, as outlined above. While the British term was *landed estate*, the Caribbean term was *sugar estate*, identifying the crop as the source of income, rather than the rental of the land itself.

Given the huge profits to be made and the risk involved, there is surprisingly little improvement literature on the plantation landscape, but some manuals or handbooks on how to run a plantation were published from the late seventeenth century. Colonel Henry Drax, owner of Drax Hall and Hope plantations on Barbados, was the likely author of "Instructions . . . in the Mannagment of My plantation," probably written in 1679, which survives as a hand-copied manuscript and appears to have been well known before reaching a still wider audience after William Belgrove appended it to his own *Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting,* published in 1755.[19] The improvement discourse that moved most readily between the landscapes of the Old and New World was concerned with manuring, since soil fertility was rapidly degraded on many Caribbean islands, and cultivation extended onto more marginal

17. Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972), 88–89.

18. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London, 1799), 290.

19. "Instructions which I would have observed by Mr Richard Harwood in the Mannagment of My plantation acording to the Articles of Agreement betwene us which are heare unto Annexed," Rawlinson MS A348, Bodleian Library, Oxford; William Belgrove, *A Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting* (Boston, 1755); Jerome S. Handler, *Supplement to a Guide to Source Materials for the Study of Barbados History, 1627–1834* (Providence, R.I., 1991); Peter Thompson, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Sugar Plantation," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (2009): 565–604.

lands that were unsuited to sustaining the sugar crop. The intensive monocrop cultivation led to the depletion of the soil, and manuring became a key feature of sustaining the cash crop. British planters were credited, for example, with developing a new style of cultivation on Barbados that was more labor-intensive but protected each cane plant in a hole rather than trench planting in rows, thus minimizing water runoff and making the most effective use of limited manure.

Plantations were industrial in process, needing heavy capital investment and relying on a coerced or enslaved labor force. The key characteristics of sugar as a crop were, first, that its considerable weight and bulk prior to processing made it extremely labor-intensive to cultivate and harvest; second, that processing had to be initiated immediately after the crop was harvested in order to maximize the yield; and third, that once processed, sugar had a very high value-to-bulk ratio, its saving grace for the plantation owner and investors.[20] In order to reap the rewards of the sugar crop, the plantation owner had therefore to invest heavily in capital equipment and secure indentured or, latterly and more usually, enslaved people as a labor force, thus limiting ownership to wealthy merchants and landowners. In the mid-seventeenth century, Richard Ligon, writing about Barbados, suggested that it would cost around £1,400 to buy the land, construct the factory buildings, and pay for the enslaved workers and necessary servants for a sugar plantation.[21] Fifty years later, Thomas Tryon estimated that an owner would have to spend between £3,000 and £10,000 to buy or set up a plantation.[22] The extent to which the landscape and environment was impacted by the plantation system is apparent on most Caribbean islands. In 1770, 92 percent of St. Kitts's exports was made up of sugar, rum, and molasses, and the island was almost exclusively devoted to the growth of cane; its plantations had risen more than three times in value over the previous fifty years.[23]

It is common—certainly in the archaeological literature—to interpret the Caribbean plantation landscape as one of surveillance, but doing so underestimates its complexity. A number of issues suggest that the plantation was a multifaceted and varied landscape, particularly when compared more widely to other forms of landholding. There are interesting parallels between the metropolitan and colonial landscapes, just as there are differences.

20. Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, 1998).

21. Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes: Illustrated with a Mapp of the Island, as also the Principall Trees and Plants there, set forth in their due Proportions and Shapes, drawne out by their severall and respective Scales* (London, 1672), 111; Watts, *West Indies*, 187.

22. Carl Bridenbaugh and Roberta Bridenbaugh, *No Peace beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (Oxford, 1972), 288.

23. Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 260–61n1.

The Lascelles, for example, used their new palace and grounds in England to project themselves as part of the established landed elite, something they bolstered with family origin myths about having crossed the Channel with William the Conqueror in 1066. The Lascelles's incredible wealth, in fact, lay in another, very different landscape—the Caribbean. Before the eighteenth century, the Lascelles were modest merchants in North Yorkshire, with distant family connections to the Caribbean trade. But after Henry Lascelles joined his elder brother, George, on Barbados about 1711, their wealth rapidly grew. Between 1713 and 1717, the Lascelles trafficked over 1,100 enslaved Africans. In 1715, Henry Lascelles was appointed to the lucrative post of customs collector for Bridgetown, Barbados, and between 1734 and 1747, he held the contract for the provisioning of British forces in the Caribbean, a position to which he specifically attributed his vast wealth.[24] He married twice into planter families on the island, and his eldest son, Edwin, the builder of Harewood House, was born on Barbados in 1713. In 1772, a year after Edwin moved into his new country house in Yorkshire, the Lascelles owned only one sugar plantation, but fifteen years later, in 1787, they owned eighteen plantations, exceeding 27,000 acres in total, on four islands. By the end of the eighteenth century, the average plantation size on Barbados was around 250 acres—nearly twice that of farms on the Lascelles's Yorkshire estates, although on the larger island of Jamaica, with its mountainous interior, some of the Lascelles's plantations covered thousands of acres.[25]

The spatial organization of the plantation has been the subject of considerable scrutiny, predominantly concerned with the surveillance of the enslaved laborers.[26] Yet the landscape also demonstrates the plantation's equivocal status. The residential, or "big," houses were distinctive in terms of their architectural style, room use, and furnishings. Although most retained the scale of a large farmhouse rather than that of the English country house of the eighteenth century, adaptations to the tropical climate produced new internal room arrangements that opened the house to the prevailing breeze through verandas. Tropical storms were also a major consideration, and few seventeenth-century plantation houses survive, as they were predominantly

24. "Henry Lascelles to Edward Lascelles, April 20th 1741," Pares transcripts, H356, fol. 24, in *The Lascelles and Maxwell Letter Books (1739–1769)*, ed. Simon D. Smith (Wakefield, U.K., 2002).

25. In Jamaica, the Lascelles owned three plantations in excess of 1,000 acres, one of around 5,000, and one—Pedros Valley—in excess of 11,000 acres. See B. W. Higman, *Jamaica Surveyed: Plantation Maps and Plans in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1988).

26. Maureen Harkin, "Matthew Lewis's *Journal of a West India Proprietor*: Surveillance and Space on the Plantation," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 24 (2002): 139–50; Hayden F. Bassett, "Plantation Roads and the Impositions of Infrastructure: An Archaeology of Movement at Good Hope Estate, Jamaica," *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* (2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/21619441.2020.1840834; Lisa B. Randle, "Applying the Panopticon Model to Historic Plantation Landscapes through Viewshed Analysis," *Historical Geography* 39 (2011): 105–27.

built of timber. Significant exceptions on Barbados are the Drax plantation house and St. Nicholas Abbey (fig. 4)—both brick-built seventeenth-century gabled structures that retained the size and conventions of the smaller English manor house.

One notable plantation feature that associates it with the estate farm rather than the country house is that the appurtenances of industry were usually held close to the main house, or were at least visible from it. For example, at St. Nicholas Abbey, an early and large (404-acre) plantation in northern Barbados, the approach drive was an avenue lined by mahogany trees, but the owners and their guests looked out of the dining room window to see the chimney of the boiling house (fig. 5).[27]

The most marked difference between the Old World and New World was obviously the use of enslaved people as the labor force. The size and worth of a plantation were more readily measured by the number of enslaved people required to work it effectively than they were by its acreage, as the people were a more reliable index of cultivation and the investment of the owner. The changing perception and status of enslaved workers was expressed through their domestic provision within the plantation landscape, something that has again been interpreted predominantly within the discourse of surveillance and resistance.[28] The "slave" or "negro" villages established on plantations were sometimes close to the house; on early plantations, they were often downwind of the house and close to the factory buildings, although on some later plantations and on larger islands, including Jamaica, they could be placed at some distance from the main house. Others were aligned along drives or approach roads, and some were situated between fields or plantations.

In the early nineteenth century, ideas about locating rural working populations—both free and enslaved, in both the metropolitan and colonial landscapes—shared some characteristics. The Lascelles provided allotments of land on their plantations to accommodate the post-abolition tenantry, but this was also something they introduced into the Harewood landscape around 1813 in an attempt to alleviate post-Napoleonic rural poverty in England and prevent laborers from leaving for urban employment. During fieldwork at Mount plantation on Barbados, the villages proved elusive, but ceramic and glass scatters revealed the former position of chattel houses used by the post-abolition tenantry before the permanent tenantry settlements were established on the boundaries of the plantations in the mid-nineteenth century.[29]

27. Stephanie Bergman and Frederick H. Smith, "Blurring Disciplinary Boundaries: The Material Culture of Improvement during the Age of Abolition in Barbados," *Slavery & Abolition* 35 (2014): 418–36.

28. Theresa A. Singleton, "Slavery and Spatial Dialectics on Cuban Coffee Plantations," *World Archaeology* 33 (2001): 98–114.

29. Jonathan Finch et al., "Surveying Caribbean Cultural Landscapes: Mount Plantation, Barbados, and Its Global Connections," *Internet Archaeology* 35 (2013), https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.35.5.

FIGURE 4. St. Nicholas Abbey, Barbados. A fine and rare example of brick-built seventeenth-century architecture in the Caribbean, it was built in 1658, with ornate Dutch gables and even chimneys, both popular features in contemporary English manorial architecture. Photograph by author.

FIGURE 5. The view from the dining room window at St. Nicholas Abbey, Barbados, showing the nineteenth-century factory chimney where sugar was processed. Although avenues were a common feature of formal gardens in England, such proximity of polite rooms and signs of industry were uncommon. Photograph by author.

In sum, the relationship between the colonial plantation landscape and the metropolitan rural landscape in Britain was more complex than is often realized. There were family links between the two places, and there was traffic in goods, plants, and ideas, most notably between the Caribbean and Britain. But there were also important differences, not just in cultivation and geography but in the Caribbean's dependence on cash profits from a single crop and the associated social relationships—central to which were the brutal conditions of enslavement—all of which had a significant impact on the landscape.

North America

The Atlantic trade is often represented as triangular—between Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean *or* the Americas—but the North American continent formed a staging post for trade and also supplied vital provisions to the Caribbean, as well as taking hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans. British America rapidly developed as an extractive colonial landscape, but one that featured a mixture of European agricultural systems along its diverse Atlantic coast. Despite the variety of ethnic and national groups that were present, the authoritative and customary institutions were eventually imposed from England, which meant that power and authority belonged to the propertied.[30] North America thus provides a fascinating counterpoint to the intensive exploitation of both the English metropolitan agricultural and colonial Caribbean landscapes. It also enables us to question early models of the colonial relationship as one of metropolitan core and colonial periphery.[31]

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Chesapeake landscape was one of tobacco plantations dotted across what seemed, to western European eyes and standards, a largely uncultivated landscape, although it was settled and farmed by Indigenous communities. The colonial system was extractive in both a broad colonial and ecological sense, since in addition to its extraction of raw materials and plant products, most of its produce was specifically for export, rather than for domestic growth.[32] Tobacco plantations involved intensive cultivation, initially on a relatively small scale. But by the mid-eighteenth century, a planter elite had emerged at the apex of a more rigid social hierarchy, and plantation size had increased as tobacco became more profitable.[33] These larger plantations had hundreds of enslaved laborers

30. A. G. Roeber, "Authority, Law and Custom: The Rituals of Court Day in Tidewater Virginia, 1720 to 1750," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37 (1980): 29–52 at 30.

31. See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 2 vols. (New York, 1974); and Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, Calif., 1982).

32. Dennis J. Pogue, "Mount Vernon: Transformation of an Eighteenth-Century Plantation System," in *Historical Archaeology of the Chesapeake,* ed. Paul A. Shackel and Barbara J. Little (Washington, D.C., 1994), 101–14 at 102; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 295.

33. Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), 119; Pogue, "Mount Vernon," 103.

working over thousands of acres. In terms of the landscape, the planter's seat and home farm might accommodate specialized craft production necessary for the plantation, while outlying farms or "quarters" were the more intensive agricultural units.

Scholarship that emphasizes trade with Britain and a plantation system dedicated to tobacco as a cash crop within a global system can overlook the important role that the region played in provisioning the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Sylvester Manor, situated on an island near the eastern end of Long Island, for example, was established at the beginning of the 1650s by four Englishmen to provision and support two sister sugar plantations on Barbados.[34] Similarly, family businesses in England, including the Lascelles's, often had trading partners or trusted members of their extended family network operating on the Atlantic coast to support their Caribbean enterprise with boatbuilding and provisioning, for example, as well as importing enslaved Africans for use on the local tobacco plantations.[35]

Elsewhere, away from the core of plantation agriculture—in Pennsylvania, for example—both James T. Lemon and Duane E. Ball have shown that by 1750, in many of the more populated townships, each colonial farm had, on average, approximately 125 acres of land by 1750.[36] When population levels increased in the second half of the century, farms were often divided and the average size fell, but in other regions, the consolidation of holdings resulted in a slightly higher average farm size of around 143 acres.

The historiography of early American landscapes is marked by an emphasis on the cultural geography of the Atlantic coast and, in particular, on the homes and landscapes of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and Poplar Forest.[37] These form a group of iconic landscapes that played a key role in articulating a new national identity but were also closely linked to the individual philosophies of their owners. Beyond these "homes of revolutionary America," there is relatively little discussion about landownership, particularly revolutionary and postrevolutionary landownership, in terms of estates. Instead, the vocabulary used is *farms* and *plantations*.

Both Washington and Jefferson carefully constructed their public identities as Founding Fathers who fought to eschew the worst inequities of the Old World,

34. Stephen A. Mrozowski, Katherine Howlett Hayes, and Anne P. Hancock, "The Archaeology of Sylvester Manor," *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 36 (2007): 1–15; Heather B. Trigg and David B. Landon, "Labor and Agricultural Production at Sylvester Manor Plantation, Shelter Island, New York," *Historical Archaeology* 44, no. 3 (2010): 36–53.

35. S. D. Smith, *Slavery, Family, and Gentry Capitalism in the British Atlantic: The World of the Lascelles, 1648–1834* (Cambridge, 2006), 14–21.

36. James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country* (Baltimore, 1972), 151; Duane E. Ball, "Dynamics of Population and Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Chester County, Pennsylvania," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6 (1976): 621–44 at 628.

37. See, for example, Robert F. Dalzell Jr. and Lee Baldwin Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary America* (Oxford, 1998); and *Jefferson's Poplar Forest: Unearthing a Virginia Plantation*, ed. Barbara J. Heath and Jack Gary (Gainesville, Fla., 2012).

while maintaining their own problematic engagement with, and defense of, slavery.[38] Yet both were also at the top of the social hierarchy in terms of status, wealth, and landownership—positions they arguably sought to elide or obscure in their writings. At his marriage in 1759, Washington owned an estate made up of three plantations totaling around 18,000 acres and around three hundred enslaved people, and by the War of Independence in 1775, he owned 6,500 acres around Mount Vernon and over one hundred enslaved people. At his death in 1799, Washington owned 49,000 acres in total.[39]

Over the second half of the eighteenth century, Washington transformed the house at Mount Vernon and created an ornamental landscape around it; he also remodeled the working landscape of the wider estate (fig. 6).[40] Between 1757 and 1764, Washington increased the size of Mount Vernon from 2,300 to 5,500 acres in order to cultivate tobacco, a growth in landholding that was paralleled by an increase in the number of enslaved people he owned—which totaled 216 by 1786.[41] Washington owned extensive tracts of land across Virginia and was the largest slave owner in Fairfax County—contributing to its being an area with one of the highest densities of enslaved people in the state.[42] Washington also benefited from land grants he negotiated from the British crown to ex-soldiers: by 1773, the colony had distributed 200,000 acres of land, of which Washington received more than 30,000 acres of prime land in the valleys of the Ohio and the Great and Little Kanawha Rivers (fig. 7).[43]

The difference, of course, between the Lascelles's 30,000 acres in Yorkshire and Washington's eventual estate of 49,000 acres was use, value, and scarcity. Land in North America was abundant compared to England and the Caribbean islands. This led to a very different set of relationships within the landscape; in the North American plantation system, farmers, using enslaved labor, exploited the land for tobacco as a cash crop, often without rotation or manuring, and simply moved on to new ground when the soil was exhausted.

38. Kenneth Morgan, "George Washington and the Problem of Slavery," *Journal of American Studies* 34 (2000): 279–301; Lucia C. Stanton, "'Those Who Labor for My Happiness': Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves," in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville, Va., 1993), 149–50; Howard Temperley, "Jefferson and Slavery: A Study in Moral Perplexity," in *Reason and Republicanism: Thomas Jefferson's Legacy of Liberty,* ed. Gary L. McDowell and Sharon L. Noble (Lanham, Md., 1997), 91–92. For more on Mount Vernon as an expression of Washington's public identity, see the essay by Joseph Manca in this special issue.

39. In comparison, Thomas Jefferson owned 11,000 acres at that time.

40. John H. Rhodehamel, "The Growth of Mount Vernon," *Mount Vernon Ladies Association Annual Report* (1982): 18–24; Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 57–63.

41. Pogue, "Mount Vernon," 103.

42. Morgan, "George Washington," 281.

43. Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 65.

FIGURE 6. *The East Front of Mount Vernon*, by Edward Savage, ca. 1787–92, oil on canvas. H-2445/A, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Bequest of Helen W. Thompson. Savage portrays Washington's house in a manner familiar from European images, but also features the cluster of service buildings, including the House for Families (*far right*), where some of the enslaved workers lived. This explicit depiction of the agricultural, industrial, and labor assets of the estate is rarely found in English art of the period.

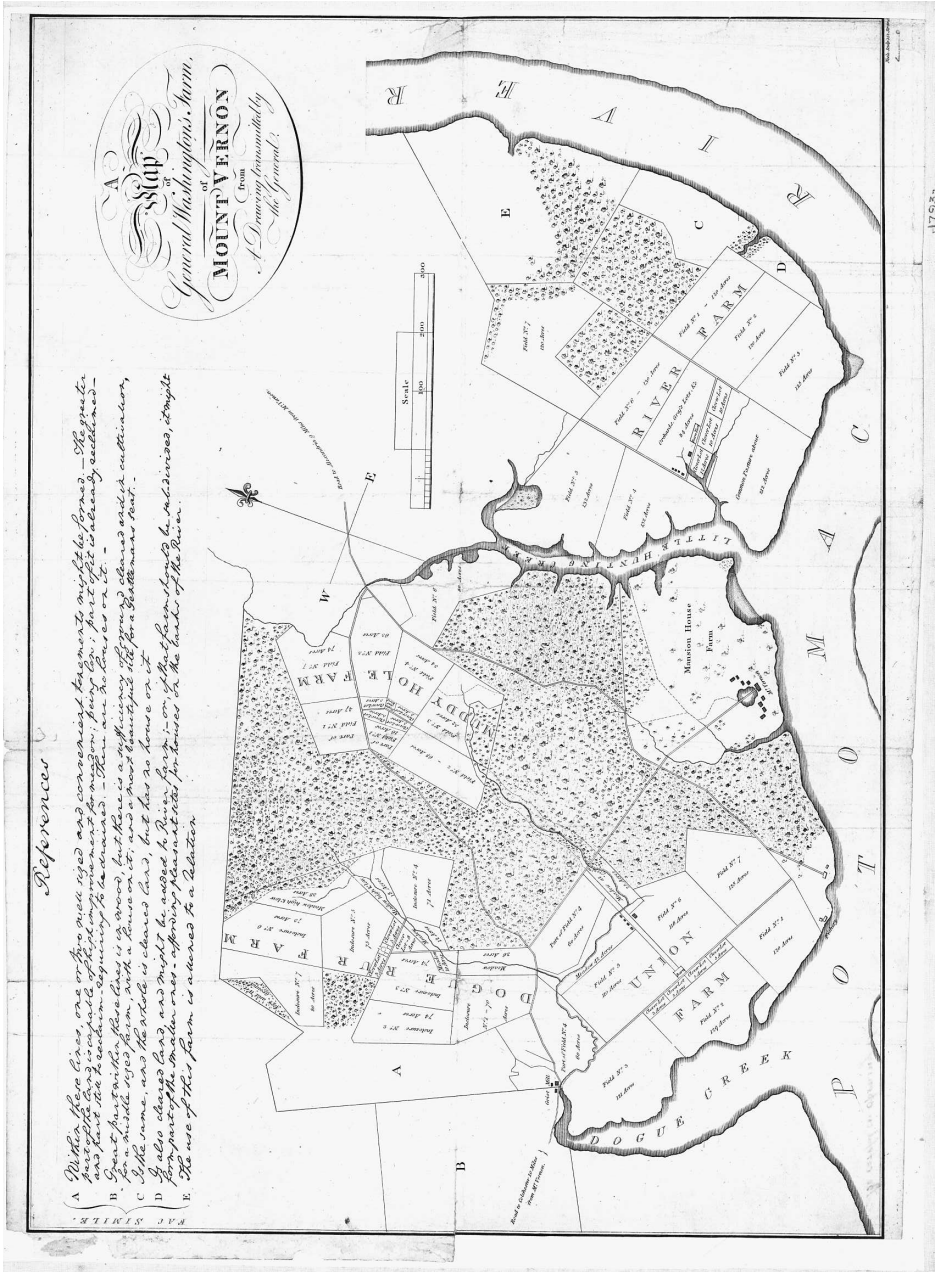


FIGURE 7. *A Map of General Washington's Farm from a Drawing Transmitted by the General, taken from Letters from His Excellency General Washington, to Arthur Young, Esq. F. R. S.* (London, 1801). This plan describes the five farms that might, in other contexts, be referred to as an estate. Photograph from the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

Several European agricultural tourists, including the duc de La Rochefoucauld, were appalled to see farmers sow wheat for seven years without rotation.[44] Washington, however, was keen to embrace improvement in both its agricultural and cultural senses, as he explained to the English agriculturalist Arthur Young in a letter:

> [T]he aim of farmers in this country (if they can be called farmers) is not to make the most they can from the land, which is, or has been cheap, but the most of labour, which is dear, the consequence of which has been, much ground has been scratched over & none cultivated or improved as it ought to have been; Whereas a farmer in England, where land is dear, and labour cheap, finds it in his interest to improve and cultivate highly.[45]

Washington lamented the state of farming he saw around him in Virginia, characterizing it as lazy and slovenly. As a result, he sought an English manager for his estate and English farmers for his farms, as they would be knowledgeable in improvement and, in particular, in systems of convertible husbandry, experts in renewing the fertility of the soil.[46] In this quest, Washington corresponded with Arthur Young and Sir John Sinclair, president of the Board of Agriculture, from 1786 to his death in 1799. Young sent Washington plans for a barn, seeds, and plows and, of course, complimentary copies of his many publications. In his letters, Washington set out his intention to provide American farmers with a model of sustainable farming based on a sense of place and of national identity rooted in agrarian capitalism, something that he developed from Young's vision of improvement but adapted to the American agrarian environment.

Just as Young and Kent had different views on improvement, so too did Jefferson's vision of the role land should play in the new nation differ from Washington's. Whereas Washington admired British agricultural improvement and engagement with international markets, seeing the model as a way to escape dependency on British commerce in the late eighteenth century, Jefferson thought it was essential for America to be self-sufficient in order to avoid national degeneration; he developed a "cult of the soil" that made a direct link between smallholder subsistence farming

44. Duc de la Rochefoucauld, *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London, 1799), 119.

45. George Washington to Arthur Young, December 5, 1791, Founders Online, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-09-02-0153.

46. Arthur Young to George Washington, January 7, 1786, Founders Online, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-03-02-0425.

and an independent American identity.[47] Jefferson was skeptical of Young's periodical *Annals of Agriculture, and Other Useful Arts* (1784–1815), which Jefferson believed was written "merely for money."[48] The distancing of American aspirations from British models was more apparent after 1812, as the relationship between the two countries cooled further, and English agricultural texts were increasingly criticized by American authors as being unsuited to the local environment in America. Instead, new titles sprung up advocating American improvement ideas, led by the *American Farmer* beginning in 1819.[49] This challenge also informed the productive elements within the designed landscapes at Jefferson's Monticello: the nail shop, for example, was a statement of self-sufficient independence that did not necessarily reflect Jefferson's own personal position as a substantial landowner. Jefferson's belief that wheat should replace tobacco as the primary American crop was based on the high price of wheat in the European market, but that had slumped by 1819, exposing the limitations of his vision and prompting emigration westward in search of new lands to exploit.

Both Washington's and Jefferson's writings have strong georgic themes that emphasize the value of hard practical toil in creating a new society. Both men exerted considerable influence on the idea of the American landscape, and an important characteristic of their writing was to downplay inequality and landholding and focus instead on the practicalities of farming in the New World. It was a theme developed and exported to Europe in Crèvecoeur's panegyric descriptions of the landscape in his *Letters from an American Farmer,* published in 1782.[50] But this discourse must be placed alongside a historical and archaeological understanding of the early American colonial landscape. Carter L. Hudgins has identified the "irony" of uncritically accepting Virginia's eighteenth-century landscapes as symbols of a Golden Age. The planters' brick-built mansions and their increasingly elaborate gardens at the center of large and lucrative estates across the Tidewater region were symbolic of the elite's success and growing power, but their fortunes were built on the toil of unfree Black men and women as well as the subjugation of poor free whites and indentured servants.[51]

The internal North American dialogue is important because it provides a cognate but contrasting set of relationships to those found on both the islands of Barbados and Britain. The apparently unlimited access to landscape in North America undermined the close link that had been forged in Britain between ownership and status,

47. Susan Dunn, *Dominion of Memories: Jefferson, Madison, & the Decline of Virginia* (New York, 2007).

48. Jefferson to George W. Jeffreys, March 3, 1817, *American Farmer* 2, no. 12 (June 16, 1820): 93–94.

49. Harold T. Pinkett, "*The American Farmer*, a Pioneer Agricultural Journal, 1819–1834," *Agricultural History* 24 (1950): 146–51.

50. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York, 1782). For more on georgic themes, see the essay by Rachel Crawford in this special issue.

51. Carter L. Hudgins, "Robert 'King' Carter and the Landscape of Tidewater Virginia in the Eighteenth Century," in *Earth Patterns: Essays in Landscape Archaeology*, ed. William M. Kelso and Rachel Most (Charlottesville, Va., 1990), 64.

and yet it is also clear that prestigious landscape holdings, such as those around Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River, held considerable cultural and monetary value. The North American landscape took on narratives of improvement in the late eighteenth century that were closely tied to those about the nature and morality of the new nation, in a similar but often more explicit manner than the ideas of improvement articulated in Britain. However, improvement in North America was built on the acceptance of and reliance upon enslaved labor, as was also the case on the Caribbean plantation.

Conclusion

The English, Caribbean, and American examples provide an opportunity to triangulate cultural values and characteristics embedded within linked but very distinct landscapes. By exploring the social, economic, and political relationships expressed through each landscape, their important similarities and distinctions emerge. The relative scarcity of land and its resources is obviously an important determinant, but so are the social relationships that are inscribed into and imposed on the landscape—including freedom and enslavement. The ideology of landscape reveals much about the manner in which its exploitation is measured, received, and justified. It also demonstrates how important the discourse of improvement was across the Atlantic world and the fact that improvement was deeply entangled with enslavement.

The need to combine and compare our understanding of all the relevant landscape types has become quite apparent. The understanding of the agricultural landscape, the designed landscape, and the uncultivated landscape (real or imagined) all interact and contribute to our engagement with past landscapes, and so it is essential to take a holistic approach—particularly to the ornamental landscape and the agricultural landscape. It is also the approach that allows us to champion the voices of the unheard majority within narratives about the historic landscape. Critically, we can re-envision the landed estate as a cultural landscape most vividly when we reconstruct the dialogues across the Atlantic world.

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