The concept of "empire" haunted the American early republic. While many feared the return of British dominion, others saw the new nation becoming an empire itself.\footnote{In 1810, Charles Jared Ingersoll traced a brief transition "from the wise and peaceable commonwealth to the belligerent empire."} Writers from Patrick Henry to Mercy Otis Warren feared the development of imperial ambitions as the federal government consolidated itself into a singular nation-state, governing by imperium—command—rather than consent.\footnote{That it did so is, of course, manifest in its treatment of racial minorities; it had never been wise and peaceable to those groups. However, the Revolution had promised a change in the treatment and the opportunities for liberty for white Americans; and, to a certain degree, along the eastern seaboard, this was the case. Nonetheless, Ingersoll's foreboding recognition of the new nation's potential to be either a commonwealth—a liberty-based and culturally diverse alternative to British dominion—or an empire—a state and culture which seizes the liberty of others—sets the stage for the use of postcolonial theory in the study of the early United States. As the new nation looked to expand itself westward and, in the process, check the threat of British counterrevolution coming from the ceded but still occupied west, its behavior was neither wise nor peaceable, not only in its treatment of the American Indians it displaced but also in regard to the white settlers and emigrants to the trans-Appalachian regions. That is, through an effort that combined military, economic, and cultural forms of colonization, the new
nation demonstrated important insecurities about its own stability by vacating the liberatory rhetoric in which it had announced itself. The early republic's fears for its own legitimacy manifested both publicly and privately. Alexander Hamilton’s and George Washington's overreaction to a small disturbance on the western frontier reflects that insecurity. This essay argues that the Whiskey Rebellion of the early 1790s in western Pennsylvania demonstrates the imperial intent of the federal government to subjugate not only racial minorities but also other geographic regions to unify a centralized national state and consolidate a singular national identity. Furthermore, in the rebels' resistance to the economies, rhetoric, and actions of the federal government, we can see dramatic similarities to responses in other settlement colonies.4

This study therefore both participates in and expands the notion of “settlement” postcolonialism. Alan Lawson, Peter Hulme, and others have suggested that colonies of the British empire which were invaded, occupied, and settled by Europeans and their descendants represent a distinct category of postcolonial studies.5 In general, they argue that white populations in places like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the post-Revolutionary United States are simultaneously “colonizing and colonizer” or, rather, at once both postcolonial and imperial, depending on their political status as either colony or former colony. Initially, each of these settlements was clearly colonizing—displacing and slaughtering natives, possessing and redefining the land. At the same time, the white settler population also recognized themselves as colonial; as second-class citizens on the margin of the empire, denied the rights of citizenship and often classed with indigenous populations in imperial representations and policies. From this difficult position, a peculiar variation on the “postcolonial” has emerged. In Writing and Postcolonialism in the Early Republic, I suggest that certain writers chastised their leaders for overemphasizing the colonizing side of the new nation's history and ignoring its experience as a colony. They accused elite politicians and writers of yearning to construct the United States as a community based on Eurocentric standards of social hierarchy and cultural unity to stress their continuation of Europe's conquest of the world. Checking what they viewed as the premature rigidification of a post-Revolutionary culture, they suggested that a deliberate historical myopia was being used to justify the new nation's encroaching imperialist attitudes in regard to issues such as slavery, women's rights, local self-rule, and aristocratic pretension. In their reminders of the nation's identity as former colony, such writers requested that American readers recognize their commonality with other colonized peoples, a sympathy that might prevent the nation from becoming an empire.

However, while this debate was going on in the metropolitan public spheres of the eastern cities, in the western colonies, more imperially inclined Americans were less challenged in their plans to colonize the Ohio Valley as an obedient extension of New England.6 Plans such as those for the Muskingum Valley, developed and realized in 1787 by Manasseh Cutler and the Ohio Company, imagined the settlement as nothing but a loyal colony: at once an outlet for surplus population, a source of natural resources for eastern industry, and a buffer between the East and the American Indian, British, and Spanish threats to the nation. In Cutler's notion of systematized settlement, the Yankee colonizers were most concerned with the threat to republican hierarchy posed by the white settlers whose contact with the wilderness, Indians, and nature made them ill-suited to be the “republican machines” necessary to maintain the East's notions of citizenship.7 As I describe in part 1 below, these tensions would result in violence in western Pennsylvania in the summer of 1794.

Peter Hulme avers that “as a postcolonial nation, the United States continued to colonize North America.”8 The postcolonial Yankees learned from the mistakes of the departed British colonizers when they engaged their own imperial agenda in the 1780s. For the new United States, a new form of colonialism was needed, one which made the colonists feel both a part of the nation and willing to accept their marginality in national and imperial self-definations. Eastern writers from Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur to Gilbert Imlay and others viewed the backwoodsman as a source of potential corruption and anarchy, a necessary evil in the opening of the frontier; he required assimilation, forced if necessary, or removal. Most efforts to tame—or, more accurately, to colonize—the backwoodsmen were cultural rather than military—Filson's domestication of Daniel Boone, for example.9 “Colonialism,” write Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, “is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of discourse. They are always already written by that system of representation.”10 While the discourse of western expansion in the early republic was hardly systematic, its most consistent theme was that threats to the stability of the nation came in many shapes and sizes, including, and perhaps most dangerously, the noncompliant white on the frontier.

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's articulation of the commonly held view of white frontiersmen in the early republic—the “new-made Indian”—is then my starting place for understanding the treatment of the settlers.11 The placement of the settler somewhere between the imperialist binaries of “savage” and “civilized”—as well as the settler's struggle to resist such pigeonholing—stands at the center of frontier culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Successful colonization depended on the settlers believing that their function bore the weight of moving history forward, of running the course of empire westward, and of doing it with proper respect for values brought forth through the depths of Western civilization. If they resisted such a role, for all intents and purposes, they were threatened with a loss of their privileged status as “white.” Colonial discourse in the early republic strove to keep the settlers loyal to their race and mission as the component of a larger process of imperial self-identification.

The trail of documents and narratives left by each side query the conflict's implications as they reveal how the nation imagined itself as an empire and how various regions responded by understanding themselves as colonies, as Jennifer
Rae Greeson's chapter in the current collection reflects. After foregrounding the conflict in part 1, in part 2, I describe how government documents produced in the wake of the Whiskey Rebellion at once both put down the rebels themselves and misrepresented the rebellion as an anomaly in the otherwise smooth conquest of the west. Part 3 completes the study by describing how the rebels grew to see themselves as colonials both in and after the Whiskey Rebellion, articulating an awareness of their difficult ambivalence toward the East. In brief, the Whiskey Rebellion shows Americans acting as both colonizers and colonized all at once. The question asked by Hugh Henry Brackenridge on behalf of the rebels serves as the title of this essay—"If Indians can have treaties, why cannot we have one too?"—and reflects the intercultural and interracial confusion of the frontier in the post-Revolutionary period. His ironic request for an acknowledgment of his own status as outsider to the universal Yankee nation sets the tone for our reassessment of the nation's invention of itself.

Part 1: The Colony of a Colony

The Whiskey Rebellion has generally been given, at best, a marginal place in the national master narrative of westward expansion. However, in it we can observe, in epitome, the late eighteenth-century emergence of the settler as a problematic third presence in the usual binary oppositions of imperial historiography. These settlers had often claimed lands in informal fashion and were, as often as not, Revolutionary War veterans not of the officer class, many of whom had immigrated from Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, France, or Germany—an ethnic heterogeneity which troubled the more Anglo-centric East. In the early 1790s, white settlers in western Pennsylvania were being taxed for the debts of the nation without enjoying the benefits of national citizenship—protection from external hostilities or free access to a broadened market for their goods. Nonetheless, on the level of rhetoric, as pioneers, they were celebrated as running the course of empire westward.

However, as "new-made Indians," they found themselves politically underrepresented in the government to the East and underprotected from British and their paid American Indian mercenaries to the west who resisted their assigned work of nation building. The defeats of Generals Josiah Harmar in 1790 and Arthur St. Clair in 1791 by British-backed Indian forces further west compelled the settlers to understand their isolation from the new nation and doubt the federal government's ability to protect them. In 1791, Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton attempted to impose an excise tax on the whiskey that farmers in western Pennsylvania distilled from the grain they could ship neither down the Spanish-controlled river nor over the mountains on account of prohibitive cost. In the ensuing debates, they called into question the right of the East to govern them and pondered the potentials of secession from, at times, both the United States and Pennsylvania. At the same time, they flirted with allegiance with the British and Spanish colonial administrations further west of the mountains.

By the summer of 1794, there were a few riots, boisterous meetings, some tarring and feathering incidents, a dozen or so haphazard deaths, and, finally, the arson of the home of the federal agent in charge of the excise—General John Neville—and that was it. As summer ended in late August, most of the rebels accepted an amnesty from the state of Pennsylvania and went home. Earlier in August, however, Hamilton, angered by the resistance, had gathered thirteen thousand troops at Harrisburg (the "Watermelon Army") and marched them west to Pittsburgh, only to find that the remnants of the rebellion and its most violent leaders had fled further west. Washington returned to Philadelphia, but Hamilton persisted, concerned less with quashing the rebellion and more with establishing a dramatic federal presence in a region earlier characterized by its stolid anti-Federalism. An investigation was launched, arrests were made, and damages sought. As a "rebellion," the Whiskey Rebellion itself was remarkably insubstantial. However, as a moment when we can observe larger transitions in the shape of the post-Revolutionary nation regarding its own ambitions on the rest of the continent, its significance should not be underestimated: it reveals Federalist attempts to stabilize such important concepts as nationalism and states' rights and to eliminate leftover Revolutionary notions of local self-determination and older, pre-Revolutionary patterns of settlement.

The fear of regional secession permeates public discourse on the West during the 1870s. In his definitive The Whiskey Rebels, Thomas P. Slaughter writes that "the cultures of East and West were so contrary during those years that both sides predicted violent conflict... Eastern predictions of western intrigues for separation arose from educated appraisals of geographic and economic realities, from knowledge and rumors about machinations on the frontier, and from interregional prejudices. Nationalists melded fact and suspicion into a highly negative vision of the more locally oriented frontiersmen." In brief, these settlers found themselves as colonials, and not just in the sense of being people living in the colonies. Instead, they were experiencing a dichotomy more familiar to later generations of white settlers throughout the imperial world, an instability Hamilton meant to suppress in his imposition of federal order, an instability rooted in conflicted loyalties to both imperial and local cultures.

At once, the settlers represented the metropolis's interest in the acquisition of territory and the subduing and subjugating of indigens; simultaneously, they were marginalized, misrepresented, and alienated from the metropolis's discussion of the frontier and policy. Not surprisingly, then, just as American rebels had dressed as Indians during the Boston Tea Party, likewise the Whiskey rebels dressed as Indians when harassing excise officers sent from the East. In both, the disguise—intercultural cross-dressing—represented the contradictory and paradoxical nature of settlement experience: the settler was neither colonizer nor colonized, or maybe entirely both. These settlers acted out the contradictory and
misrepresentative nature of any binaristic thinking in colonial settings: the white presence on a border or in a colony was by no means unified, and dominion operated along the axis of place as well as race.

Alan Lawson has explored the “state of interphase” of white colonials such as the western Pennsylvanians; recognizing that there are “binaries with which we have inscribed our cultural condition,” he notes that it is “just a reading position.” White settlers are “preoccupied with dichotomy, disjunction, and polarity,” and they respond by “collapsing the binary structure while retaining its elements. . . . The achieved modal operation, then, is not antiblack but ambivalence, a word whose roots I need to revive to insist on its meaning as ‘power of both.’” Settlers come to understand themselves as partially among the colonized only when they perceive the internal conflicts of their place on the border between what they are and what they have been told to be. Only when they become aware of how the empire oversimplifies and misrepresents both them and their place on the margin, combined with the threat of virtual deracination, can they confront “the whole colonial syndrome” as it becomes a permanent fact of their lives rather than a temporary inconvenience, as it had been promised in the rhetoric of empire. Once this position is recognized, the settler approximates a postcolonial subjectivity.  

As he describes the Whiskey Rebellion as an event that reveals the actual and discursive divisions within the early republic, Slaughter divides the incident’s principal figures and its two centuries of students between the “friends of order” and the “friends of liberty.” While this arrangement is still oppositional, it transcends the usual signifiers of difference in colonial discourse: this conflict was intraracial and, ultimately, ideological, often reflecting differences reflective of metropolitan party affiliation, an intracultural fissure usually absent from discussions of imperialism. As such, I will retain these distinctions but will rephrase them as the “Friends of Empire” and the “Friends of Settlement.” What divided them was not so much loyalty to region or nation but rather the articulation of distinct and opposed conceptualizations of how the new nation should imagine itself—what Lawson would call a reading position. The friends of Empire during the rebellion—Alexander Hamilton, John Neville, and Alexander Addison—and their nineteenth-century adherents—Neville Craig, for example—implicitly furthered an agenda of empire building, antidemocratic and autocratic in nature. The Friends of Settlement—Hugh Henry Brackenridge, William Findlay, and, later, Henry Marie Brackenridge—favored a more provisional localism, exploring the dichotomies of frontier-border experience. The crucial issue for each was representation—both political and rhetorical—and whether the settlers were capable of representing themselves on either plane. In sum, the Whiskey Rebellion revealed the sources of regional alienation and difference in the trans-Appalachian West as based in the early republic’s imperial aspirations.

Part 2: The Friends of Empire

In the words and actions of the Friends of Empire during and, more importantly, after the Whiskey Rebellion can be traced a more tenable discussion of the difficulties of expanding a republican monocolony to territories whose topographies, demographics, and histories were wildly divergent from the East’s. But how do we decode the imperialist agenda in these documents in general and those relating to the rebellion in specific? David Spurr writes that colonial discourse “seeks to dominate by inclusion and domestication rather than by confrontation which recognizes the independent identity of the Other.” The Whiskey Rebellion was vitalized by the sense of an independent identity in the West; the Federalist response sought to assimilate, absorb, and consume that identity with an overwhelming rhetoric of domestication in both the treatment of the rebels and in the ways they described the conflict.

Central to the Federalists’ prosecution and investigation of the rebels was a misrepresentation of them as irrational and violent, hardly yet suited for the responsibilities of citizenship in their republic but, it must be added, nevertheless ripe for retraining and assimilation. Furthermore, as the cases against the rebels were brought to federal court in Philadelphia in late 1794 and early 1795, Hamilton avoided the real firebrands of the riots—David Bradford, for example—and went after longtime dissidents associated with anti-Federalism: Brackenridge, William Findlay, and Albert Gallatin, none of whom were actually manufacturing whiskey. Each, like most of the settlers, was an immigrant from, respectively, Scotland, Ireland, and Switzerland. The West, unlike the East, was populated by a more heterogeneous combination of immigrants who brought other languages, faiths, and customs which the East perceived as threats to their construction of American nationhood. For example, among the prevalent Scots-Irish settlers of western Pennsylvania, a long-standing suspicion of acts of endocolonialism, intraracial in nature and emanating from the metropolis, existed. Just as their ancestors mistrusted London, so the rebels suspected New York. Just as Britain had, presumably, united its kingdom before conquering other territories so, it might be said, intended the Federalists.

Foreshadowing these attempts to stage show trials, Hamilton had prejudicially and from the start described the rebellion in strikingly antidemocratic terms. Hamilton’s report to George Washington of August 5, 1794, is remarkable for two reasons. First, it completely ignores the regional difference between East and West, a difference which pervaded most writing on the subject. Save for the names of counties, the rebellion might have occurred anywhere else in the republic. Hamilton’s exclusive focus on the excuse as the source of the trouble ignores dozens of other cultural and regional aspects that explain and undergird the activities of the rioters. The rebels come off as merely criminal and reactionary, hardly the victims of a complex matrix of impoverishing conditions and regional asymmetries. Second, Hamilton equates noncompliant dissidence with overt criminality when he discusses the rebels’ 1791 request that
the residents of western Pennsylvania employ “every other LEGAL measure that may obstruct the operation of the LAW.” Hamilton responds:

The idea of pursuing legal measures to obstruct the operation of a Law needs little comment. Legal measures may be pursued to procure the repeal of a law, but to obstruct its operation presents a contradiction in terms. The operation, or what is the same thing, the execution of a law, cannot be obstructed, after it has been constitutionally enacted, without illegality and crime. The expression quoted is one of those phrases which can only be used to conceal a disorderly & culpable intention under forms that may escape the hold of the law.\(^{24}\)

At the time of Hamilton’s writing, the worst riots had not occurred and, importantly, means of legal repeal were being explored through negotiations with the Pennsylvania authorities. The question of state or federal jurisdiction in the matter was far from settled. Writing on behalf of the federal government, Hamilton is, in a sense, asking the settlers to obey a law that they considered to be temporary and asymmetrical. His tone is as important as his meaning: his barely concealed contempt and condescension supersedes his supposed equanimity. In both word and tone, Hamilton writes as a “belligerent imperialist” (recall the terms of Ingersoll).

By contrast, Secretary of State Edmund Randolph on the same day submitted his own report to Washington on the rebellion, a report in which he urges patience and negotiation. Randolph communicates an implicit recognition of the legitimacy of the rebellion’s sources and an acknowledgment that the settlers should be treated almost as a foreign power with respect to divergent interests and needs from the eastern parts of the nation. Further, Randolph concedes the rebellion as a western regional phenomenon which could lead to secession, and not as the random violence of a few anarchic miscreants.\(^{25}\) Randolph begins by conceding Hamilton’s notion that the president is legally justified in calling out the militia but asserts eleven reasons why doing so would be unwise. Further, Randolph refuses Hamilton’s claim “that a government can never be said to be established until some signal display has manifested its power of military coercion” by stating that “the strength of the government is the affection of the people; and while that is maintained, every invader, every insurgent, will certainly count on fear of its strength, as if it had with one army of citizens mown down another.”\(^{26}\) The conflict here is, at heart, between two competing versions of what the nation will become. Randolph’s stress on a thoughtful consideration of the West’s interests and his insistence on taking the threat seriously ultimately favor liberty more than order, in Slaughter’s terms, and privilege settlement rather than empire, in my terms.

Nonetheless, Hamilton’s plan earned Washington’s favor and they both marched west with the army. When they arrived in Pittsburgh with the army, the same condescending tone traveled with them. First, Hamilton overrode the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s successful efforts to defuse the rebellion—a peace negotiated by September 2, 1794. Next, in his written instructions to the general in command of the federal army—Richard Henry Lee—Hamilton proceeds with an implicit assumption of guilt and asks Lee “to suppress the spirit of riot and opposition to the laws.”\(^{27}\) Further, he distinguishes the “riots” from the “unlawful assemblies” and orders the leaders of both to be arrested, a distinction that violates First Amendment guarantees of peaceable assembly. Blind to the fact of his own lawbreaking, Hamilton’s mission in general was to assure compliance to the laws; what makes his actions imperial in nature is his treatment of the insurgents as second-class citizens, as Other to Americans from more compliant communities, not seeing them, as Randolph had, as just one other group of citizens whose rights must be preserved.

Hamilton’s recommendations of extreme and extravagant military response, furthermore, undergird his paranoid fear of the settlers as a threat to the gains of the Revolution rather than its true heirs. Hamilton is more concerned with the display of military might and federal dominion than with the facts of the insurrection itself. The fiction of order he means to dramatize is meant more to intimidate than to conquer. Last, his focus on Brackenridge, Findley, and Gallatin, combined with both his unwillingness to pursue Bradford and the other firebrands further west and his willingness to disarm and send home the bulk of the rebels, demonstrates his desire to erase dissidence by means of domestication. The advocates of violence are removed, the common people are reassimilated and coddled by the army from the metropolis, and the dissident leaders, all of whom had pleaded moderation, are converted, nearly, to criminals—at least on the level of representation.

In later writings, John Neville’s son-in-law and grandson, Alexander Addison (1794) and Neville Craig (1856), respectively, carried on the politics of misrepresentation in subsequent representations of the rebellion.\(^{28}\) Addison represents it as the actions of a few violent radicals eventually overwhelmed by the “well-disposed” men of western Pennsylvania. He domesticates the problem by downplaying it as a temporary disruption in the otherwise smooth political harmony of the local republican elite spreading itself westward. Sixty years later, Craig likewise criminalized Brackenridge and Findley to exonerate his own family’s questionable behavior on behalf of empire. Each demonstrates, like Hamilton, a recognition that, in settlement colonies, martial force alone is an ineffective means of colonization since the presence of the metropolis’s army only serves to remind the colonized—white or native—of their difference. More effective is a program of cultural coercion. Addison makes the crucial distinctions:

Those, without property to secure their attachment to the government or the country, accustomed to a regular industry, and trained to a rambling life, had the arms in their hands, were known and associated to
each other, and could, without any sacrifice, remove to wherever they pleased. It was this kind of men that were the great terror during the troubles, and now only remained to keep those troubles arrived. The well disposed were more inclined to quiet, were not generally armed, and had as yet no compleat system to bind them together.29

Hereafter, American colonization would be more systematized. Addison rhetorically purged western Pennsylvania of its unassimilable elements within the white population and assured the East that the remaining “well disposed” population was more in step with federal goals; they were a colonial elite whom Benedict Anderson calls the “bourgeois gentilhomme” in other settings.30

In 1856, long after the frontier had moved far to the west of Pittsburgh, Craig carried on a similar hierarchization of Yankee and dissident elements in his history of the Whiskey Rebellion. Writing in the post-Leatherstocking public sphere that valorized rather than vilified the lone frontiersman, Craig, ironically, celebrates Bradford and the violent insurgents and condemns the educated moderates: “Of the leading actors in this insurrection, Brackenridge, Gallatin, Findley, Smiley, all foreigners by birth, all subsequently partook largely of popular favor; and Bradford alone, a native born, the bravest and best among them, fled to Louisiana.”31 The semi-civilized frontiersman posed no threat to the establishment of eastern-modeled colonies because of his willingness to keep moving west; however, the dissident settlers, those understanding and resisting their marginality as a permanent aspect of regional identity, represented a greater and more lasting threat to the stabilization of the colony.

Mary K. Tachau suggests, “It is quite possible that the Federalists won a greater victory in the history books than they did in Pennsylvania.”32 The practice and profession of early American history, largely written, researched, and published in the East, has, until fairly recently, been a lingering manifestation of the region’s efforts to retain cultural and social centrality in the evolving definitions of the American nation. The rhetorical erasure and dismissal of the Whiskey Rebellion by East-based historians is emblematic of the imposition of a triumphalist masuer narrative that retains the imperialist binaries along racial and national lines challenged by the rebels. Only recently—in books such as Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick’s The Age of Federalism and Saul Cornell’s The Other Founders—has the rebellion been taken seriously as a meaningful event in the early republic. For these historians, the mitigating facts that the excise was not an onerous taxation and that the rebellion’s violence was more symbolic than genuine—a gesture, not a threat—are less important than the rebellion’s exposure of the suppression of democratic and localist tendencies, demonstrating Federalism’s hunger for empire, even as early as the 1790s. Finally, it initiates a narrative of regional hierarchization that would persist throughout the nineteenth century in the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, or even Caroline Kirkland: a shared narrative that tames the rougher edges of imperialism by disguising it as mere law enforcement and expansion.

### Part 3: The Friends of Settlement

By their reckoning, the farmers of western Pennsylvania had settled the land and not colonized it. Their sense of place was more like the “frontier of inclusion” established by French and British in the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes regions from 1650 forward than a “frontier of exclusion,” such as Cutler’s Ohio Company settlement at Marietta, established by eastern Americans. The farmers’ attitude toward the region was certainly less structured and more fluid than that of the easterners who came west after the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. While they periodically clashed with the Indians—as the Indians did with each other—their goal was more like cohabitation rather than dominion. This distinction is made to demonstrate how federal policy restructured the Anglo-American occupation of the “west” in ways that made the Ohio Valley a colony of the “old thirteen” and emphatically not the product of any organic process of settlement.

Historians such as John Mack Faragher, Richard White, and Michael McConnell have revealed that, prior to the 1780s, settlement of the upper Ohio and eastern Great Lakes watersheds had mostly carried on the rather haphazard and unsystematic approach of earlier British and French in the region.33 Corroborating this finding, narratives such as Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s “The Trial of Mamachitega” (1786) reveal an intercultural frontier community with a mixed population where a Delaware tribesman sentenced to death could still go into the woods and find homeopathic cures for the jailer’s ill son. While the wars were going on further west on the Wabash, behind them, a zone of measured intercultural exchange was creating a region of unfixed and unstable racial, political, and economic alliances. While the settlers were by all means representative of the encroachments of Europe, their presence was by no means programmatic or associated with a larger teleology of “civilization’s” progress. Almost like another tribe on the “Middle Ground,” to use Richard White’s term, they are colonials—settling and staying—but not really colonizers—conquering, ordering, and dominating.

By the summer of 1794, the rebels had flirted with secession and even entered discussions with both British and Spanish agents concerning possible future alliances. Moreover, they had established a network of fellow dissidents on the western slope of the Appalachians down through Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and western parts of Virginia (now West Virginia), united in common resistance to the excise. The development of this loose alliance was never a threat to the new nation in itself; secession was discussed more as a bargaining chip than as a real possibility. However, it did constitute a threat to the regional hierarchy implicit to documents like the Land Ordinance of 1785 or the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, both of which firmly established eastern control over the ways westerners would construct their communities and connect both to the East and to each other. As is the case in most alienated colonies, however, the mere anticolonialism of the rebels’ flirtation with secession expended itself quickly, and in its place emerged a more sober examination of the difficult relation of
colony to empire. The emphasis on undiluted oppositions—both in the colonial setting itself and in our historical analysis of it—is ultimately self-defeating, and a more open-minded perspective must be established to account for inter-regional entanglements.

To their credit, the Friends of Settlement sought the exploration of such a balance. Important to our understanding of the actual events of the rebellion is our reading of the documents produced in its wake and our understanding of how those narratives reveal ideas about both the region and the nation, ideas at odds with those created by Federalist rhetoric. In them, we find voices exploring postcolonial potentials in debates over American expansionism through a rigorous question of the policies and culture of Federalist nationalism. While Edmund Randolph was certainly a friend of settlement, he writes from the perspective of a Virginian. As such, he reveals the fissures and inconsistencies that make any imperial policy vulnerable to subversion from the margin. However, while he shares a hope for a more horizontal model of nation with the rebels and in opposition to Hamilton, he is by no means part of the western “colonized” population and so cannot express their colonial perspectives. The Friends of Settlement—Findley and the Brackenridges (Gallatin wrote little of it in his long career)—express a desire to explore the space between the counterproductive binaries which enable and constrain both colonialism and anticolonialism. Such white colonials are “both mediator and mediated excluded from the unmediated authority of Empire and from the unmediated authenticity of the indigenous,” to use Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson’s definition of colonial subjectivity: these writers engage the “half-empowered limbo” of the American settler.

William Findley is best known to literary historians as the real-life version of the unlettered weaver who defeats Captain Farrago for a seat in Congress in Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s Modern Chivalry. In fact, Findley had been in politics since 1763; and, when he faced Brackenridge in the fictionalized election, he was running on the anti-Federalist ticket against the momentarily Federalist Brackenridge in the 1788 contest to represent the west in Pennsylvania’s Constitutional Convention, where Findley argued vehemently for democratic reforms. By 1794, Findley and Brackenridge, by then a judge, were political allies after the latter’s defection from the Federalist party in 1789, a defection foreshadowed by his 1785 defense of a local farmer’s resistance to an earlier excise tax. In the meantime, Findley had served in Congress successfully and been reelected. The Whiskey Rebellion, however, forced both into a difficult position of being loyal to the United States from positions of leadership over an increasingly volatile western populace. Findley, as congressman, largely represented the rebels to the government, and Brackenridge, the government to the rebels. Most importantly, however, both asked for time to allow a more complete understanding of the conflict to emerge, one which would reveal it more as the product of distinct and divergent western regional interests than simply as a battle between moonshiners and revenuers.

In his 1796 History of the Insurrection, Findley largely blames the rebellion on the inconsistent enforcement of the excise between 1791 and 1794. After indicting Hamilton for his unconstitutional assumption of powers—“Did the laws give him any more power to dispense with the application of their coercive powers than it did to the people in their noncompliance?”—Findley goes so far as to suggest that Hamilton deliberately provoked the riot: “the revenue department conducted the execution of the law in the western district in a manner that was calculated to promote the event that happened.” The excise officers had deliberately identified compliant Federalist distillers, whom they brought into a circle of preferment by selecting their whiskey for sale to the army, and punished the noncompliant according to their history of anti-Federalism. In short, Findley accuses Hamilton of corrupt political favoritism, of conspiring to use the excise to suppress larger issues of regional and political divergence. Findley cites two means of prevention which would have defused the crisis but which were both ignored by Hamilton: the establishment of a state court in Pittsburgh before July 1794 to allow the issue to remain local; second, the appointment of a local man to operate the excise office, a position in which Findley repeatedly volunteered to serve without pay. This was also true in the Northwest Territory—the federal government in the East favored keeping the courts in the East and, when necessary, establishing its own kind of offices of authority, the imperial administration symbolizing the ascendance of the metropolis to the colonized. Once acquired in 1796, and despite his alienating both the government through his defense of the rebels and the people through his moderation, Findley represented Pittsburgh in Congress until 1817.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge, by far the best known man both today and then in western Pennsylvania, has always fallen outside of the categories of historical representation, a legacy he would have embraced. Cantankerous, egotistical, and thoroughly unorthodox (his son Henry Marie was sent to Missouri to be raised by strangers at age eight), Brackenridge was both Federalist and anti-Federalist, westerner, easterner, and Scotsman. He first came to public attention in the 1770s for his poetic and dramatic Revolutionary literary propaganda, before moving west to Pittsburgh in 1781. In 1794, he was out of political favor and contemplating a move further west. The rebellion, oddly enough, along with the simultaneous publication of the early sections of Modern Chivalry, returned him to both the republic of letters and political viability. His 1795 explanation of his activities during the rebellion, Incidents of the Insurrection, has recently been revived as his best work and as a sophisticated narrative of the “psychological, social, and philosophical motives for his action.”

Brackenridge wrote in an effort to exonerate himself to both the government and the insurgents. Incidents succeeded remarkably and helped ease him to a seat in the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania Supreme Court by 1799. Incidents as a whole, like Findley’s work, problematizes the oversimplification of the accounts of the rebellion presented by the Friends of Empire by identifying a sequence of regional differences from the East, differences which made the enforcement of the excise unethical, immoral, and unnatural.

At the same time, Brackenridge opposed the violent leadership of Bradford
and his companions, exposing himself to assassination plots as a result. His speech to the Committee of Sixty on August 29, 1794, however, stands as the conflict’s most important statement on either side. At the time, Pennsylvania authorities had offered an amnesty, and Hamilton’s army had not yet headed west. Moderates were urging the acceptance of the amnesty, and the radicals were urging preparation to fight Hamilton and the army. At length, Brackenridge responded:

It seems to be an idea entertained by the people that we can remain a part of government and yet wage war against it. That is impossible in the nature of the case; we are known to the government by representation only and not by force. We must therefore either overthrow it or it must overthrow us. But we have sworn to support it. If we contemplate overthrowing it, where is our oath of allegiance? But can we overthrow it? We might as well think of tossing the Allegheny mountain from its base... But cannot we secede from the union? Not, and remain part of the government at the same time. We must dissolve our connection with Pennsylvania before we can cease to be under the government of the United States. But have we a right to dissolve our union with both? An individual may emigrate from society and a part of the society may emigrate from the whole, but an individual cannot leave a state in war because he owes service for the benefits he has enjoyed in peace. He cannot leave it without discharging debts he owes to individuals or to the public. How then can a part of the community separate before it has discharged the obligations contracted by the whole?

But is it in our interest to secede? Having no seacoast, we are at the mercy of impostors all around us, even for the necessities of life. If the weight of the union, in the scale of nations, cannot procure us the surrender of the western [British] posts, peace with the Indians, and the navigation of the Mississippi, how shall a half uninhabited, uncommercial extent of a hundred and fifty square miles command it? There is no manner of question but the time will come when the Western country will fall off from the Eastern, as North will from the South, and produce a confederacy of four.

Foreshadowing Lincoln’s first inaugural address, Brackenridge correctly distinguishes between the right and wrong times to contemplate secession and urges union. From there, he moves to the practical impossibility of secession and urges pragmatism. Unlike later generations of American secessionists, Brackenridge perceives a difference between sectionalism and regionalism. In its reactionary antinationalism, such as that of the Confederacy, sectionalism fails by embracing the same oppositional terms imposed initially by the empire. On the other hand, regionalism, as theorized by Brackenridge, exists outside of such oppositional thinking, in a place where the plurality of local and national needs might be negotiated from a less close-minded perspective. Most importantly, though, he perceives the future divergence of several regions and points ahead to the necessary reformulation of the United States as a looser confederacy more able to respond to and represent local needs rather than the monolithic nation-state imposed by Hamilton and the Federalists.

By implication, only an unnaturally monolithic state could govern such a diverse and diverging collection of regions. Other, more serious rebellions would likely darken its history as the colonies constantly chafed against the empire. In this scenario, Brackenridge sees the regions’ divergences as healthy, as a process that assures accurate and appropriate locally based means of self-determination. Brackenridge’s speech convinced the delegates, and the amnesty was accepted by a vote of thirty-four to twenty-three, only to be ignored by Hamilton. As such, Hugh Henry Brackenridge and the Friends of Settlement were not the enemies of nation, as it were, but enemies of the empire Hamilton meant to hide under the cloak of nation. In their actions, the Friends of Settlement engaged a difficult dichotomy that would dog generations of non-eastern Americans: How can one be both local and national in one’s loyalties? Ultimately, it had to do with requiring the nation to act less like a “belligerent Empire” and more like a “wise and peaceable commonwealth,” to recall the distinctions made by Ingersoll.

During the 1850s, with its rhetoric of southern sectionalism and secession, the Whiskey Rebellion became a bête noire as issues of section and union came to the center of national attention again. As discussed above, Neville Craig’s History of Pittsburgh deliberately colored the rebels in the same terms as the southern secessionists. Craig’s book was used extensively by Orville J. Victor in his History of American Conspiracies (1863) and Richard Hildreth in his History of the United States of America (1849–1852) while Findley and Brackenridge were ignored, written off as anarchists espousing dangerous threats to national stability. The mid-nineteenth-century Friends of Empire served the ends of empire by grouping the rebels (perhaps to their credit) with slaves, Indians, and other non-Yankee sources of threats to national security. In 1859, Henry Marie Brackenridge wrote back to represent the insurgency more accurately and to distinguish it from the issue of southern secession, a connection he found wholly inapplicable.

H. M. Brackenridge, despite his father’s unorthodox parenting, had become a successful historian, journalist, and public official. Like his father, though, his best writing came in response to the rebellion’s misrepresentation. In his History of the Insurrection (1859), his contribution to the rhetoric of the Friends of Settlement, ultimately, is his elevation of the debate to the level of representation and the cultural politics at work within competing versions of the events. In brief, he concludes with a devastating statement of how the Friends of Empire had controlled representation to serve their own “sinister influences [through] misrepresentation”:

Why did not the atrocities just related ring through the country, when told by two contemporary [sic] historians [Findley and Brackenridge]?
Because the interests, the pride, and the passions of party would not permit the truth to be told. It would reflect too seriously on the existing administration. Its defense was silence; and it was the only way in which it could be met, except by gross and unmeasured contumely cast on the western people... How hard to turn the current of obloquy when it has once received a wrong direction?

The Federalists and generations of historians have shared their vision of the nation as empire, that is, they have acted as if the Whiskey Rebellion was mere mischief and regional tensions were less important than the nation’s expansion of itself. To the younger Brackenridge, though, Hamilton’s report and its acceptance in the East as the only reliable account of the rebellion superseded all evidence to contrary in the minds of the easterners and the subsequent generations of historians. Because Findley and H.H. Brackenridge were westerners, they were taken less seriously, a hierarchized reading practice that has historically excluded colonials from around the world from the processes of their own representation.

Henry Marie Brackenridge concludes his History by noting that, with the approach of the army, Bradford and hundreds of other alienated settlers fled further west and that their lands were taken up by soldiers in the Federalist army, more compliant colonists. Such lands could be taken up only by portraying the rebels as criminals whose property was forfeited by their crimes. The Friends of Settlement sought to undo this linkage by suggesting that white settlement of the West might be something other than the systematic expansion of Federalist hierarchies, that localist and democratic preferences in the transmontane region could still be accommodated within a more flexible reckoning of American nationhood. This formulation implies a horizontal relation of different communities and regions within the nation, an epistemological shift from the verticality of Federalist policies and other forms of imperial discourse that characterized nineteenth-century English and American expansion around the world. Nonetheless, a rhetoric of verticality won the day, and the Whiskey Rebellion was either excluded from or trivialized in American historiography.

Conclusion

Richard White has observed of the Ohio and Great Lakes basins that the American incursion into these regions represented a sea change in the modes of settlement: “The middle ground withered and died. The Americans arrived and dictated.” The Whiskey Rebellion proved that the “arrival and dictate” of the Americans had less to do with nationality or race and more with dominion and control. The earliest white settlers found themselves, with the French and the Indians, as the victims of an aggressive scheme of both political and cultural colonialism. Like modern postcolonials, they recognized political decolonization as incidental to the longer processes of social decolonization, cultural localization, and regional self-representation. Even today in Australia or Canada, fostering a distinct postcolonial identity is more important than whether or not the British Queen is still on their currency. Nonetheless, the British Commonwealth was based on a series of negotiations on both the inclusion and the local self-determination of the settlers, a treaty-based agreement.

That is, they got what Brackenridge sought: a treaty between the settlers and the empire, one that recognized and codified their difference and distinction from the metropolis. Chadwick Allen has recently suggested that treaties gave indigenous peoples in North America and New Zealand at least the grounds for rehabilitating colonized identity: “Because treaties recognize indigenous nations as sovereign, they continue to offer strong legal and moral bases from which indigenous peoples can argue land and resource rights, as well as cultural and identity politics.” The settlers who became the rebels, lacking such a clear statement of the rules of dominion and colonization, were left relatively unprotected from the politics of nationalism practiced by Hamilton and the other Friends of Empire. By means of conclusion, soon after the rebellion, its immediate causes were removed. General Anthony Wayne’s victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and the subsequent Treaty of Greenville in 1795 removed the threat of British-backed Indian incursions on the western frontier; and, of course, the Louisiana Purchase opened the Mississippi River to the transport of crops from the Ohio Valley.

What remained among the settlers as the nineteenth century began, however, was a more lasting sense of being abandoned, misrepresented, and maltreated by the government. The Friends of Settlement’s allusions to the legitimacy of local interests announced an important challenge to a developing American imperial discourse. Just as the British reconfigured their own colonial policy after the American Revolution to avoid the same in its other colonies, so too did the Federalists. In both empires, the most immediate threat to empire was not only the conquered indigenous populations but also the disgruntled settlers unwilling to accept a lower rung on the imperial hierarchy. The difference was that the Americans were more successful: their colonies were integrated into the nation. Nonetheless, as former colonies, these places should not be excluded from our study of the legacies of colonialism. Modern regions historically absorbed into empires operate under a colonial marginalization different from more obvious forms of imperialism, but one nevertheless authentic as a source for the study of local issues and identities. Suggesting that the achievement of nationhood for former colonies is a precondition for inclusion in the postcolonial field of study writes postcolonial identity within a Eurocentric narrative—nationalism as the only and teleological destination of decolonization. A precise view of engaging the whole colonial syndrome is less concerned with such superficialities, since empires have always crossed and often disregarded national boundaries.

In any case, as each empire proceeded into the nineteenth century, older means of assuring imperial stability—conquest and domination—were replaced by subtler and more subjective means of subduing and stabilizing unruly
elements among the settlers. The model westerner was now Addison's notion of the "well disposed" gentleman—the colonial willing to accept the terms of empire offered by the metropolis. The question asked by Brackenridge—"If Indians can have treaties, why cannot we have one too?"—resonates as a reminder that empire building is not only about race: it is about control. Whether that control be territorial, economic, political, or otherwise, empires work by imperium.

Notes

This essay is adapted from my book An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

1. Recent readings on "empire" in the early republic include Peter Onuf, Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); and Francis Jennings, The Creation of America: Through Revolution to Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). My own reading of this development is informed by Jack Ericson Ebben's notion that "The [Northwest] Ordinance of 1787 was more in tune with British colonial experience than the law it replaced. One can argue that Monroe extracted from his knowledge of pre-Revolutionary colonial history those elements he considered to have been essential to the evolution of British colonial government and that he systematized and institutionalized them in the draft Ordinance. ... In this light, the Ordinance cannot be viewed as innovative or progressive in any basic sense, even in the provision for statehood: on the contrary, its system of colonial government was decidedly more authoritarian than that of the British." Jack Ericson Ebben, The First and Second American Empires: Governors and Territorial Governments (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), 42.


3. The anti-Federalists in general feared that the Federalists would move toward a more centralized state in which democratic input would be minimal. Saul Cornell, The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 51–80, provides the most recent and cogent discussion of anti-Federalist fears.

4. Steven Slemmon provides the most cogent and brief histories of how and why "settlement colonies" are energized by tension with the lingering colonial presence. Steven Slemmon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 104–110. In their benchmark volume, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature (New York: Routledge, 1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin write, "The critical questions raised in these settler colonies cluster around a peculiar set of problems which highlight some of the basic tensions which exist in all postcolonial literatures. The three major issues they raise are the relationship between social and literary practices in the old world and the new; the relationships between the indigenous populations of settled areas and the invading settlers; and the relationship between the imported language and the new place. In critical practice these are often inextricably interwoven." (ibid., 125).


6. Aside from Jennings, in The Creation of America: and Ebben, in The First and Second American Empires; John Seelye, in Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan, 1755–1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Eric Foner, in Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), also comment on the colonization of the region. Foner writes, "Despite their enormous debt to the lenders of the Revolution, many Ohio valley squatters regarded national power mistrustfully: despite their enthusiasm for the abstract principle of western development, national leaders often acted with horror to the society that was already taking shape there" (ibid., 236–237). They responded by creating "unifying public institutions that could bring into the social order and prepare settlers to be competent and responsible citizens" (ibid., 253). In particular, Foner writes, "The earliest squatters in the valley were, in general, unimposing constituents for a nation-building project" (ibid., 246).


8. Hulme, "Including America," 122.


15. Francis Jennings discusses this fear but suggests that, for easterners, the threat was more personal: “Besides taxes, the federal government needed income from the sale of western lands that dwindled from the effects of Indian raids scaring off purchasers. Eastern large-scale land investors feared the loss of their investments unless the Westerners and the Indians were reduced to reliable obedience” (*The Creation of America*, 307). On the payment of natives, see, among others, Colin Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 272–290.


18. In “Including America,” Hulme writes, “If ‘postcolonial’ is a useful word, then it refers to a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and probably is inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena” (120).


21. On eastern paranoia, Gjerde notes that western settlements “were possible staging areas where practitioners of the foreign mind—Roman Catholics in particular—could ultimately use the landed wealth and republican tradition of the United States, ironically two of the lynchpins of American greatness, to threaten the American state and society” (*The Minds of the West*, 7).

22. See, for example, C. A. Bayley’s *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World* (London: Longman, 1989); or Klaus Knorr’s *British Imperial Theories, 1580–1830* (London: Cass. 1963) for separate narratives of this process.


27. Alexander Hamilton’s “Instructions to Richard Henry Lee” are reproduced in H. M. Brackenridge’s *History of the Insurrection*, 283–285, see 285. My knowledge of the jurisdictional issues is based in Richard Hep’s argument in “Treason in the Early Re-


34. Gareth Griffiths has commented on this subject in regard to current scholarly prac-
tice: “Unfortunately, because the simplistic construction of resistance as overt opposition has been dominant in most debates, these issues have not been given the attention they deserve.” Gareth Griffiths, “The Postcolonial Project: Critical Approaches and Problems,” in *New National and Postcolonial Literatures*, ed. Bruce King (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 164–177, sec 169. Then and now, simple reactionary opposition constrits and precludes a more accurate evaluation of local conditions.


41. In "Including America," Peter Hulme has created a context for including regionalism in our discussions of postcolonialism by de-emphasizing "flag independence": "One misconception is that 'postcolonial' represents some kind of badge of merit, a reward for having purged one's writing or one's intellect of the evils of colonialism. . . . 'Postcolonial' therefore should not be used as if it were an adjective describing a condition that is automatically and for all time assumed once a formal colonial status has been left behind, any more than it should be taken for granted that the change in formal status automatically implies that the psychological, economic, and cultural effects of being a colony can be sloughed off like a snake's skin" (122–123, emphasis Hulme's).


44. White, *The Middle Ground*, 523.

45. For example, Simon During writes that so long as nationalism "is not used against large minority tribal/racial groups," it "can retain a link with freedom in allowing us to resist cultural and economic imperialism." Simon During, "Literature—Nationalism's Other? The Case for Revision," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1991), 138–153, see 139. During's detachment of non-hegemonic nationalisms from imperialism is implicit in the argument of the Friends of Settlement.