Claiming Panama: Genre and Gender in Antebellum U.S. Isthmiana

Jake Mattox

> [W]e have arrived at that dreadful place. . . . [I]t is the most beautiful spot I ever saw.
>
> Mary Jane Megquier
> Chagres, Panama
> March 13, 1849

> I was too weak to attempt to cross the Isthmus; therefore, all hope of returning home was abandoned.
>
> Mrs. D. B. Bates, *Incidents on Land and Water, or Four Years on the Pacific Coast* (1857)

> [T]he United States guarantee positively and efficaciously to New Granada . . . the perfect neutrality of the before mentioned Isthmus, with the view that the free transit from the one to the other sea, may not be interrupted or embarrassed in any future time . . . [T]he United States also guarantee . . . the rights of sovereignty and property which New Granada has and possesses over the said territory.
>
> Article 35th, "Bidlack–Mallarino Treaty," signed December 1846 and ratified by New Granada in 1847 and the United States in 1848

0026-3079/2014/5301-117$2.50/0 American Studies, 53:1 (2014): 117-147

In March 1849 Gold Rush emigrant Mary Jane Megquier journeyed across the Central American isthmus with her husband, arriving in the Pacific port city of Panama only to find hundreds of encamped travelers scrambling for limited berths on absent steamships to San Francisco. While in a note to her daughter back in Maine (referenced above) she finds the isthmus at once "dreadful" and "beautiful," a subsequent letter to a friend offers additional nuance: "[Panama City] is surrounded by a wall twenty feet high and as many feet thick, on the water side it is surmounted by enormous big guns weighing two or three tons which the Americans have worn quite smooth sitting astride them looking for the steamer."[1] In her description Megquier evokes the city walls and old cannons—persistent symbols of the declining Spanish empire—as background for restless forty-niners, who scan the horizon for long-delayed ships. Anxious as the travelers are, they also form part of a frozen and static scene repeated day after day; they are powerless to do much more than look out to sea from this isthmian perch. Moreover, Megquier's prose establishes her independence by positioning her as an observer, at a distance from this group marked as "Americans," who also display the masculine prerogative of publicly straddling a cannon. And throughout her letters from Panama and from California, Megquier continues to outline differences between herself and her fellow migrants, including her husband Thomas. After two voyages together to California, each followed by a visit home to Maine, Megquier made her third trip solo, leaving Thomas behind with their children.

Approximately one year after Megquier wrote her letters, "Mrs. D. B. Bates" also found herself in Panama City. She and her ship-captain husband had just endured an around-the-horn adventure in which they had to abandon not only his burning ship at sea but, if the narrative is to be believed, their next two vessels as well, and for the same reason. They then spent a week shipwrecked on an "uninhabited" Peruvian beach, all prior to even reaching the isthmus. For someone in Bates's situation, such a bustling locale as Panama, with its markets, shelter, fellow USAmericans,[2] and simple *terra firma*, could have seemed like an oasis. Instead, in her adventure narrative, *Incidents on Land and Water, or Four Years on the Pacific Coast* (1857),[3] Bates presents the isthmus as an obstacle, a threat, a place of ultimate sorrow that highlights the separation from loved ones and "home." For instance, as in the second epigraph above, she wrote of being stuck on the *wrong* side of the isthmus, a symbolic captive with no choice but to continue to the north and west to San Francisco.[4] Four years later, her eastward crossing—as she finally heads back to the Atlantic side of the isthmus—would mark the end of her California experience and, apparently, the end of her marriage, as her narrative implies their separation due to her husband's neglect and possible philandering in Gold Rush–era California.

The writings of Bates and Megquier juxtapose the derelict guns of old empire with the frantic and anxious Gold Rush–travel of the new. They also register the perceived threats to body, morality, and family prevalent in ideas about this particular "foreign" space in the Americas. Yet they also point to a

deeper ambivalence within the discursive construction of Panama during the mid-nineteenth century as they inscribe Panama, on the one hand, as undesirable, threatening, and to be traversed as quickly as possible and, on the other, as a logical and naturalized part of a growing U.S. hemispheric purview. These writings place Panama as a unique spatial and temporal locus within a delimited hemisphere—as an atemporal, in-between site at once dangerous *and* integral to personal and national progress.[5] This essay focuses on Megquier's letters and Bates's personal narrative as two examples of what I call "isthmiana": a bourgeoning body of representations of the Central American isthmus central to the process of defining and incorporating hemispheric spaces.[6] These representations proliferated after the discovery of California gold, as tens of thousands avoided the overland route in the 1850s and took steamships to Panama or Nicaragua, made the isthmian crossing, and finished the journey by sea. In such forms as travel writing, guidebooks, express company pamphlets, short stories, journals, letters, and adventure/captivity narratives, these representations contribute to the idea of Panama as a space defined by a New York–California hemispheric nexus stretching through the isthmus. This encompassing formulation draws upon many established tropes of travel writings about the Americas and the "tropics," replete with anti-Spanish sentiments and intertextual emphases on colonial decay and natural abundance.[7]

The epistolary form contributes uniquely to isthmiana because of the *public* nature of letters and their formal interactions with a spatial and temporal identity in Panama defined by patterns of delay and acceleration, calm and hurry. Such patterns emerged from the practical experience of late 1840s and early 1850s Gold Rush travelers. Megquier's letters from Panama on their first journey to California make up a small fraction of her total writings back home and they reflect the long delays that could be part of the isthmian crossing from 1849 to 1853.[8] I read these letters *as letters* to consider how they separate Panama from the U.S. through tropes of cultural difference and by emphasizing basic *spatial* and *temporal* distance, even as they disguise that distance by discursively linking isthmian and California spaces. That is, a demonstrable hemispheric nexus established through the letters' content and form links both spaces as undeniably USAmerican geographies. Such an ambivalent hemispheric vision—stressing the foreign nature of the isthmus even while framing it within a national purview—contributes to, and draws from, discourses of domestic economy, racialized labor, and a representational tradition emphasizing a lack of recognizable visual and social order. Additionally, such a literary form often considered as private serves to mediate and challenge a specifically gendered and patriarchal order; in Megquier's letters, Panama becomes both a site of undesirable space and exciting and potentially liberating chaos.

Quite distinct from the epistolary form, though it contributes to isthmiana, is another form of travel writing that combines adventure, morality tale, and captivity narrative. Like the epistolary form, this travel writing clearly configures the isthmus as both a space apart from of U.S. systems of meaning and as a site that

can be culturally and politically contained within those same systems. *Incidents on Land and Water, or Four Years on the Pacific Coast. Being a Narrative of the Burning of the Ships* Nonantum*,* Humayoon *and* Fanchon*, Together with Many Startling and Interesting Adventures on Sea and Land* (1857), by "Mrs. D. B. Bates," records the sensational journey of Bates and her husband, the captain of the *Nonantum*. The book went through multiple editions within five years, offering an "insider's" view of Gold Rush California that comes after an account of their disaster-prone journeys around Cape Horn and an exasperating stay in Panama.[9] I consider *Incidents* as hybrid in form as it separates isthmian and California spaces as foreign and from which she must escape, even as it collapses those geographies within a single U.S. American hemisphere. Bates largely delivers accounts of life in California via morally instructive anecdotes that she has heard or occurrences she has witnessed directly, with clear temptations and dangers, corrupting villains or influences, and tragic consequences. Writing of her experience as a type of hemispheric captivity, Bates focuses on family bonds broken far from "home," on the other side of the isthmus. Furthermore, Bates's text functions on the levels of form and discourse to establish Panama as a threat both to her personally and to the nation. But rather than formulating (as Megquier does) such a threat as part of a larger challenge to patriarchal privilege, Bates's narrative seeks above all to reinscribe her own moral authority *within* a more conventionally gendered framework.

Finally, isthmiana might also be seen as drawing upon and contributing to the logics of official discourse, most notably in the 1846 "Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty" between New Granada and the U.S.—ratified by the former in 1847 and the latter in 1848—which marked a deep U.S. interest in the isthmus. Its official name was "A General Treaty of Peace, Amity, Navigation and Commerce Between the United States of America and the Republic of New Granada." As in this essay, it is sometimes referred to in the U.S. as the "Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty," after Benjamin A. Bidlack, the U.S. Chargé d'Affairs to New Granada—of which Panama was a part[10]—and Manuel María Mallarino, that nation's Secretary of Foreign Relations. Framing the writings of Megquier and Bates alongside the treaty helps illuminate how their ideological and formal strategies resonate with the treaty's paradoxical logic, which essentially proposes the sovereignty of one nation by asserting the very right of another to violate it. In other words, if such official agreements offer language asserting U.S. privilege via an ambiguity in which local authority and worth are both affirmed and denied, then the body of isthmiana, as suggested in the following two examples, suggests the ways that writings both "public" and "private," both male- and female-authored, were central to this ambivalent expression of U.S. claims within the hemisphere.[11] Studying these forms thus allow insights into the fraught logic of empire, which disavows—even while enacting—discourses and practices upholding claims to space.

I do not claim that the arguments contained in the writings of Megquier and Bates are exhaustive of the range of possibilities in published and archival

narratives of the isthmian crossing, nor do I use their writings to investigate the dynamics of individual women's lives or the specificities of the journey. Instead, I read their texts from a literary-historical perspective that forces a consideration of the intersections of gender, genre, and expansionism. I view Megquier's letters and Bates's narrative as case studies showing a range of implicit and fundamentally ambivalent logics that underlie the formation of U.S. expansion and empire, as spaces which are both claimed and disclaimed, and where power is both asserted and denied. These two authors point to how one example of the epistolary form and one example of a hybrid personal adventure/captivity narrative work within larger frameworks of discursive power that add the voices of women in an expansionist project marked by the similarly ambiguous moves of government and capital.

Women's Travel Discourse, the "Tropics," and the U.S. American Hemisphere

An analysis of isthmiana necessarily engages with several interrelated questions regarding the relationships between travel writing and discourse, gender, imperialism, and U.S. accounts of "tropical" spaces. Travel writing and related discourses are *always* a negotiation or assertion of cultural, political, and representational power,[12] yet they also occupy a space of tension contributing to and fracturing any sense of a unified and consistent ideological message. As many scholars have suggested, the functioning of travel writing cannot be reduced to a simple one-to-one relationship of travelers as agents of a single, discrete, and dominating culture. Their ideas, practices, and representations are both shaped by the people, institutions, and geographies they visit. Their "home" is never a self-contained and stable entity in the first place; there is no unified imperial voice of the travel writer making claims to space and resources.[13] Contested gender roles help determine the nature of a text's engagement with empire and expansionism, and a consideration of those processes depends upon the important archival recovery work that finds the experiences and accounts of women as worthy of inclusion into the historical narrative.[14] Yet the accounts themselves are not transparent evidence of unmediated and singular experience or of an unequivocal gendered empowerment brought about through travel and the authoritative voice of writing.[15] Further, what might otherwise appear as separate discursive formations—in particular, the "foreign" and the "domestic"—are often mutually constitutive.[16] These dynamics become especially important in the writings of Megquier and Bates, whose senses of isthmian and Pacific Coast space are inseparable from the conditions of their travel and labor, each shaped importantly by their personal relationships and engagement with the assumptions and practices of domesticity and of national identity. Their writings are embedded in a larger cultural context in which discourses can be inconsistent and contradictory but never discrete.

Beyond a consideration of the instability and complex interactions of discourse, central to isthmiana are the characteristics and complexities of travel writing as a literary genre, which establishes an asynchronous relationship to time that necessarily affects the textual composition of experience, space, and travel. On a formal level, travel letters establish a unique discursive rhythm that conspicuously separates the writer from the temporality of the recipient.[17] As just one basic example of this discontinuity, Mary Jane Megquier began her March 24, 1849 letter to her daughter with "We are still at Panama" (17)— with the present tense at best conditionally true at the time of first reading, likely weeks later in Maine. And as was especially true with the erratic rush and delay of isthmian travel, the often-unpredictable movements and daily temporal schedules of the traveler are necessarily embodied in the structures and irregular productions of the letter form.

In addition, though, the term "travel writing" reflects a multiplicity of practices, circumstances of travel, and textual goals. For isthmiana, producers include anxious people on their way to California in search of economic security (such as Megquier), writers of guidebooks, travelers whose movements seem inadvertent and unwilling (such as Bates), and others with enmeshed scientific, leisure, career, and political aspirations—such as noted travel writer and diplomat John Lloyd Stephens. "Travel writing" thus accords a useful frame only to the extent that analyses pay close attention to those different circumstances of travel and forms of writing produced. What especially distinguishes isthmiana in this sense is, again, the predominant imperative of its writers, who are often *peripatetics*—willingly (as Megquier) or unwillingly (as Bates) moving from one space to another, especially in search of economic opportunity—rather than "tourists" or even "travelers."[18] Such a distinction opens up important questions: who is traveling and for what reasons, how do they see and construct themselves as travelers, and how do they position their texts? Megquier, Bates, and others traversing isthmian space experienced travel and positioned their writings differently from those whose circumstances involved a pace of leisure, a goal of permanent relocation, and/or a focus on producing a unique, public, and "literary" text.

Furthermore, as hemispheric travel writing outside of North America, isthmiana participates in the invention of the idea of the "tropics."[19] To tropicalize, for Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, is to "imbue a particular [Latin American] space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values. These intersecting discourses are distributed among official texts, history, literature, and the media, thus circulating these ideological constructs throughout various levels of the receptor society."[20] Left fairly undetermined in this definition is precisely what constitute "official texts" and "literature"; crucial, though, is the sense of the way that such writings and ideas are then circulated *throughout* a given society and relate to imperialistic claims. Epistolary communication, often marginalized in discussions of literature, then assumes a more arguable importance in the study of tropicalizing texts, for it functions

both at the interpersonal and public levels in ways distinct from other textual forms. Moreover, tropicalizing texts often produce a simultaneous attraction and revulsion—a tension between fixation and disavowal—to the locales and people constructed.[21] Isthmiana, and in particular the writings of Megquier and Bates, frame Panama as such an ambiguous "tropical" space both within and without a U.S. progressive temporality. Moreover, they couple 1850s-era California with Panama: both become spaces inside and outside of time, spaces of stasis and movement, and locations of disorder and chaos both empowering and in need of discipline.

Key to such ambiguity is an enfolding of the two spaces within a larger set of cultural narratives and political and economic practices constructing a specifically possessive antebellum vision of the hemisphere. One component of such a vision was James Monroe's 1823 speech warning European powers away from the Americas. However, Monroe's ideas were not re-articulated by a subsequent president until the 1840s in a context marked by an escalating assertion of Manifest Destiny.[22] By the 1840s, the isthmus—which had long been an important site of international economy—was central to such a geospatial claim.[23] From 1848 through the 1850s, the passage across Panama—stretching from Chagres and Colón on the Atlantic to the city of Panama on the Pacific—was the most heavily traveled isthmian route to and from the mining regions of California, with a crossing at Nicaragua as its closest competitor.[24] This was facilitated by the largest single investment of U.S. capital in Central or South America at that time: a trans-isthmian railway built between 1850 and 1855 by the Panama Railroad Company, founded by, among others, New York merchant capitalist William H. Aspinwall, who had acquired the congressional contract for mails from Panama to Oregon for his Pacific Mail Steamship Company.[25]

For the U.S., inseparable from the geospatial interests of capital was the Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty. Under the terms of this unique accord, New Granada lifted discriminatory duties and granted that the "right of way or transit" across the isthmus be free and open to U.S. travelers and shipping. In return, the U.S. guaranteed New Granadan sovereignty over Panama (a New Granadan province) and continued open transit across the isthmus.[26] This agreement could assist the New Granadans in defeating any moves by local Panamanians toward increased autonomy or independence, and it could presumably safeguard against the two main entities likely to assert themselves: Great Britain and the United States.[27] Moreover, the treaty encapsulates much of the complexity I consider in my readings of isthmian travel accounts. The U.S.'s promise to assert authority on the isthmus (i.e., defending against foreign intrusion and ensuring free passage) coincides with a larger disavowal of territorial claims (i.e., guaranteeing New Granadan sovereignty). Casting the U.S. as exerting its promises and authority only at the *behest* of New Granada, the treaty could thus absolve the U.S. of criticism for taking military action on the isthmus—which it would several times in the century.[28] While the treaty publicly and energetically disavows U.S. interest in controlling, dominating, or annexing the crucial isthmus of Panama,

its fundamental assumptions rest upon the ability and the right of the U.S. to protect that same stretch of land from foreign threats as well as dangers coming from within. The idea of one nation guaranteeing another's sovereignty is pivotal here. Doing so implicitly recognizes the more powerful nation's ability to dispute that sovereignty; claiming the right to protect it also presupposes the right to challenge it.[29] This ambiguous logic appears as well in the writings of Megquier and Bates, which seem to deny the value and desirability of the isthmus as a whole while claiming—usually implicitly or at the level of form—the space of transit across it.

Mary Jane Megquier and the Temporality of Isthmiana

Mary Jane Megquier, a Maine resident traveling to San Francisco with her husband, Dr. Thomas L. Megquier, wrote at least seven letters from the isthmus during a roughly ten week stay in 1849, most of which was spent, unwillingly, in the city of Panama. According to Polly Welts Kaufman in the introduction to her 1994 edited collection of Megquier's letters, Thomas had been initially planning on going—apparently without his wife—to the Sandwich Islands to practice medicine; with the announcement of the gold discovery the destination changed and his wife was to accompany him. They left behind three children, aged seventeen, fifteen, and nine.[30]

The Megquiers journeyed twice together to California, first traveling in December 1848 and returning to Maine in early 1851. They then departed again in April 1852, staying until late 1853/early 1854. Megquier ventured west for a third voyage in September 1855, this time without her husband, who died shortly after she arrived; she then left California for the last time in mid-1856.[31] While in California, the Megquiers supported themselves and sent funds home via a variety of ventures. This included some physician work by Thomas, operating a store, and, especially for Megquier with the help of domestic laborers, washing, cooking, and cleaning for what amounted to an extended "family" of herself, her husband, business partners, and boarders. After her first few years in California, she writes less about this work and more about free time and managing the family's business interests—apparently a small piece of property in addition to their store—and various social engagements. Megquier addresses most of her letters to her eldest daughter, Angie, though some are written to a friend named J. Milton Benjamin, who was involved in caring for the children.[32] She often expresses pain at their separation and repeatedly stresses the goal of family economic independence that necessitates it.

As suggested above, the epistolary form operates in—and shows the instability between—multiple discursive registers, including the public, private, and official. It thus affords, via one text (or set of texts), the ability to further specify and trace the "various levels" of circulation of tropicalizing materials identified by Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman.[33] Recent work has considered the development, function, and materiality of letters in the antebellum era, and in so doing,

has opened questions of how the form is neither fully private nor public. As William Merrill Decker notes, despite the undeniably interpersonal relationship of epistolary writing, we should study letters as intertextual and multi-authorial: "What we identify as a private life is a conventionalized and hence public construction."[34] Furthermore, the practices of reprinting and circulation extend such documents well beyond the interpersonal. For one, the audience would go well beyond the addressee, who would often share the letters more broadly with family, friends, etc.[35] Megquier's letters specifically acknowledge that her daughter Angie will do exactly that. In addition, isthmiana letters—including at least one of Megquier's—could reach a public audience in that they were part of what was recognized as a novel event and, as such, they were at times reprinted in local papers or other periodicals.[36]

Yet the letter form is still dependent upon the writing of one person successfully reaching the eyes of another, and letters take on an additional significance in this way in constructing ideas of space and temporality. The content of individual letters is inseparable from the materiality and mechanisms of the form itself; words and paper are inherently vulnerable and dependent upon structures and technologies necessary for production and delivery. As Decker notes, without assurance of when and whether a recipient will in fact receive a letter, and what the personal circumstances of both letter writer and recipient will be at that time, the entire process is marked by a "conditionality of the exchange."[37] Such instability contributes to the ephemeral and threatened sense of letter-writing, which can be intensified in specific places, but also then intensifies perceptions of those very spaces. In other words, delays and other threats to the life of a letter can shape the way that the location of a letter's writing and its route are imagined.

Megquier's letters emanate from, are conditioned by, and construct a geography which provides exactly the kind of barrier to and uncertainty within interpersonal connection that Decker describes. It is this notion of an obstructing space and alternate temporality, separating one from the familiar and threatening the stability and success of the letter form, that marks much of the isthmiana texts. For instance, upon their initial landing in Chagres after the journey from New York, Megquier wrote her daughter expressing sorrow at their separation: "We are having a great time getting out our baggage, first one scolding then another, there is so [much] confusion I dont [*sic*] know what I am about, every one that passes says give my love to her, I want to see you and the boys very much. I dont dare think of the distance between us" (13). Noting the tensions ("scolding") between U.S. travelers and local workers that many accounts offer, she also implies that writing a letter home unites the travelers and points to her letter as essentially a public and multi-authored text, as "every one that passes" and presumably sees her writing offers a personal expression to a daughter they cannot all know. In addition, such a condition of writing implies that Megquier is taking advantage of a lull in their progress, or what Schriber refers to in her analysis of U.S. women's travel writing from 1830 to 1920 as an "erratic continuity of women's letter writing, begun at a stolen moment, then set aside, then

taken up at another stolen moment later that day or the next."[38] For Schriber, this "'literature of stolen moments' mimics the rhythms of the traveler, snatching moments here and there to keep diaries or write letters home."[39] In the case of Megquier and epistolary isthmiana, the material conditions of travel amplify such an erratic rhythm, as do textual choices drawing upon stock formulations of Latin American "tropical" space.

The difficulties of the passage and the delay that Megquier experiences upon arrival in Chagres are one way in which letters depict isthmian space as a barrier and threat to her temporal order. On another level, Megquier also highlights the difficulty she has with the geographic separation from her children; for instance, as with the March 1849 letter quoted above, she tells her daughter that she fears thinking about the "distance between us" (13). As Brian Roberts has suggested in his analysis of mostly male-authored writings of Gold Rush emigrants, such emotional expressions help to maintain personal connections but they also establish the suffering of the traveler, thereby justifying/mitigating their decision to depart in the first place.[40] Megquier makes such an emotional appeal prior to crossing Panama, but the gesture's intensity magnifies once she crosses the isthmus. From the city of Panama in March 1849 she writes that the captain of the ship that brought them to Chagres from New York, who had also accompanied them across the isthmus, will be leaving them to return to the Atlantic side. And this, she writes to her daughter, "severs the last link between this and the states for the present" (17). Although the referent for "this" is not fully clear, whether the city of Panama or the group of travelers, the captain's departure represents a final opportunity to send mail and it suggests the interruption of a meaningful tie to the national home. This sense of an ultimate geospatial barrier has apparently even intimidated a number of travelers; Megquier then notes that while many have made it across the dreaded isthmus, once presented with the prospect of the captain imminently departing, they decide to accompany him back and give up their plans of getting to California (20).

Megquier has thus represented herself and other travelers as essentially isolated now, for they have been left by the last remaining representative of the Atlantic branch of an incipient but growing U.S.–dominated transportation and communication network across the Americas—which, in 1849, included the steamship networks in the Atlantic and Pacific supported by government mail subsidies and several USAmerican–run hotels in Chagres and Panama and other locales along the way. Megquier's letters reflect the fact that while it took less than two weeks to get from New York to Chagres, getting through and ultimately off of the isthmus took five times that long. While such a sense of distance and isolation is endemic to much travel writing, for isthmiana it is a distinct feature that offers a sense of uniquely problematic geography: a dangerous crossing that discursively becomes a gauntlet—of delays, unpredictability, and threats of geography, disease, climate, and population—to run. Such barriers are further exacerbated with the heightened sense that every passing moment brought

countless other travelers (through various routes) closer to California and to the wealth that the emigrants imagined for themselves.

For Megquier and others, this also meant that their own isthmian delays were punctuated by the fact that the postal carrier could pass the emigrants on the way to deliver letters to California—where the emigrants were supposed to have already arrived. More than two months after arrival in Panama, for instance, she writes approvingly that "the postmaster got leave to open the California mail," (32) thereby presumably appeasing the emigrants stuck on the isthmus while messages from home overtook them. Given the intense scramble for limited spots on steamers on the Pacific, some emigrants were in the position of having to wait for space on future ships while the mail went on ahead.[41] In this way, the epistolary sentiments and their material signifiers carried on in their own routes and tempo, independent of—and sometimes bypassing—the actual people to whom they were addressed. We might add such a scene to others demonstrating Panama as a spot of both anxious hurry of eager emigrants, painful delay brought by the failure of transportation networks to keep up with demand, and a Latin American locale positioned as a time-out-of-time marked by an atemporal juxtaposition of written sentiments from loved ones moving at a different pace and threatening to achieve what the actual travelers could not.

The isthmian letter thus exacerbates a perceived separation, and this is intensified further through a contrast of efficient USAmerican modernity and disorderly "tropical" timelessness. *Tropicalizing* discourse places such space as frozen outside of modern time.[42] For instance, Megquier writes of the view upon approaching Chagres that "in front of us rises *one of those old castles* that we read of, it is built of dark gray stone with its walls and towers looking very much as I had anticipated, there are *wrecks of vessels lying around*" (12, emphasis added). Twice within this short passage she makes clear that already-circulating accounts have prepared her for what she now tries to describe, and the scene is marked by ancient and apparently untouched structures in states of neglect.[43] Megquier's letters from Panama further such observations, with references to ruined yet "splendid cathedrals . . . all tumbling to decay" (16), one of which she notes as being attended by the "good folks of olden time" (31). If these examples all directly construct her tropical location through crumbling if persistent signs of past Spanish colonial dominance, Megquier also draws again on established discourses about the relation between climate, culture, and temporality and adds to depictions of Panama as a space inherently separate from modernity and the United States.[44] By the end of her second month on the isthmus, for instance, she notes that "the climate is such, that I cannot keep the day of the week" (28).

It is this idea of the isthmus as dividing line and as atemporal barrier that establishes one key ambiguity this essay is identifying. Such a construction implicitly calls for and demands the rectification of such an obstacle to USAmerican spatial and temporal progress; such a correction was already underway and is apparent in many of the accounts that mention—and whose travel is enabled by—the Panama Railroad project. This endeavor attempted to bring the space

into the fold of a USAmerican temporal pace and destroy the signs of an alternate spatiotemporal condition vexing the U.S. travelers: the slow, unpredictable movement across the isthmus in which the forms of transport—canoe ride, mule ride, and even being delivered from shore to ship on the backs or in the arms of local workers—had rendered the authoritative emigrant dependent upon the pacing, planning, and pricing of others.

The Hemispheric Nexus

As argued above, a resistant and problematic spatiotemporality locates the isthmus as inherently separate from U.S. modernity. But it also creates an understanding of the space as only making sense *within* the order of U.S. temporal imperatives; the letters and narratives of isthmiana inscribe Panama as only having meaning within a fixed hemispheric order that starts and ends at California or New York. Similar descriptions of the two geographies—one recently acquired through war but not yet fully incorporated (California), the other emerging as a focus of attention for the nation (Panama)—establish linkages that render both "foreign" but set the groundwork for embracing each, in different ways, into the fold of U.S. empire. For Megquier, such a process depends upon the tensions of "domestic" practices and assumptions expressed through her attention to order—and an ironic appreciation of the chaotic. Megquier writes of each "American" space from within the lens of household economy, and finds, at least at first, both locales lacking in all signs and resources necessary to domestic economy, especially from within a framework of racialized labor. Additionally, her imposition of an authoritative sense of order grafted onto "exotic" scenes frame the predominant narrative arc of her successive letters: her eventual separation from her husband and ultimate challenge to patriarchal authority. A Panama-California nexus is thus a location and process of individual change and empowerment.

Megquier's letters reveal a sense of lack primarily through an attention to the absence of anything domestically comfortable or useful to her. For example, in her second letter from Panama, Megquier explains that "I have seen many kinds [of fruit] but none that I liked, excepting oranges, and pineapples, but I have not seen any good bread, milk, no butter, cheese, pies, nor cake" (18). Although she notes a few staple commodities that are available, such as bread and milk, Megquier also focuses on missing items associated with the domestic economy of baking treats and desserts. Part of this is an implied critique of the lack of industry of the people, who apparently do not perform the necessary labor to both produce marketable dairy products and make available anything more than basic foodstuffs. Several months later in California, she makes similar observations. Likely in response to previous conversations about sending for the children, Megquier tells her daughter Angie, "There is nothing pleasant or comfortable now here, you would not enjoy it if here" (40). In a letter at the same time to the family friend Milton, she notes the difficulty of finding and acquiring necessary domestic items: "When we arrived the first of June there was but very few store-

houses, all kinds of provisions were lying in every direction in the streets, carts running over bags of flour, and rice, and hard bread, pork selling at six dollars per barrel, now flour is selling at forty dollars per barrel, pork at sixty five" (42). Inflationary pressures coupled with a chaotic near-breakdown of proper channels for acquiring goods, as symbolized with their scattered condition in the streets, suggests a different form but underlying similar chaos and lack of order as that found on the isthmus.

Equally central to domestic economy is labor, and for Megquier and other migrants, isthmiana placed what they encountered locally within a framework of racialized labor projected from Maine to the isthmus to California. Megquier interprets social, economic, and racial relations based on U.S. cultural taxonomies; she describes working peoples of color providing services to the travelers as "natives" or "negroes" who are distinct from the well-dressed "Spanish" families she observes. The former are generally "cleanly," a "simple inoffensive people" (28), but they are also "in complete subjection" to the "Spanish" and, as such, are "but very little above the brutes" in the labor they endure (17–18). As McGuinness has shown, Megquier and other migrants would have had varying and incomplete understandings of the complex and changing relations of isthmian society, marked by geographical, classed, and cultural/racial divisions. A limited number of elite "white" families—including merchants, landowners, clergy, and government officials—lived in the fortified sections of Panama City, where they were largely separate from and resented the growing economic independence of the peoples of color who sold provisions and carried travelers and luggage in canoes, via mule, and on their own backs. Few, if any, of these laborers would have technically been slaves; during the limited time between the discovery of gold in California and Panama's abolition of slavery in 1852, the luggage handlers, canoemen, muleteers, sellers of food and drink, prostitutes, and other workers were generally independent wage-laborers or those employing them.[45] McGuinness's research also establishes that in the transit zone, emigrants would have encountered few indigenous peoples, instead mostly interacting with the "gente de color" of at least partial African ancestry.[46]

One important example from her letters suggests how Megquier forms a conception of isthmian social relations within a hemispheric connection of domestically situated racialized labor. She writes to her daughter Angie after several weeks' delay in Panama City, "I was walking out the other day and saw a beautiful child, she put out her hand, I asked her Mother to give her to me, she said I could have her for one hundred dollars, if I had been on my return with as much money as those that are returning, I should have taken her, it is the only thing I have seen in Panama that I wanted, you could not help loving her, they seem to be very pleasant in disposition and some are quite good looking but most of them are most intolerably ugly" (25). Such a passage presents interpretive difficulties. Most notably, Megquier's letters have given no indication of an ability to speak any language but English; what she takes as a possible monetary transaction might have represented something else entirely—for instance, the

"mother" might very well have been ironically commenting upon Gold Rush emigrants' proclivity to assume that everything has a price. We might speculate, however, that such a scene makes sense to Megquier in several ways that rely on an understanding of several intersecting discourses of race, "civilization," and labor. Megquier is presumably not referring to members of an elite family of Panama City, whose economic and social positions Megquier would classify as "white" by clothing, skin hue, and with regard to her notions of beauty. More likely is that such a mother and child are "gente de color," whom Megquier and many others from the U.S. would classify as "negro" or "native." The child's exceptional beauty contrasts with what Megquier sees as the ugliness of most of the "native" population. Such a welcome aberration can also be seen as contributing to the discourse of rescue, in which the modern "civilized" traveler or missionary seeks to rescue the innocent child from conditions of misery and poverty. Indeed, since it is the child herself who reaches out first, and the mother that purportedly agrees to the transaction, Megquier positions herself as reacting to an entreaty for assistance and rescue. As this passage and the language of the Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty suggest, the space and people are clearly undesirable but requesting intervention.

The scene also makes sense within Megquier's understanding of the structures of domestic economy. In an earlier letter from Chagres, Megquier had written more clearly about how such a child would have been incorporated into the family, telling Angie that "[W]e have a fine lot of provisions and if we have to wait I shall go to housekeeping. I should like a girl about your size to help me" (12). The attempt to buy the little girl—as one would buy a doll, or, perhaps more aptly, a slave—thus may appeal to Megquier from the standpoint of the "domestic" work she will be doing in California. In noting that the girl "is the only thing" she has seen in Panama "that I wanted," Megquier's observations register people, society, and economy within a naturalized and hemispheric system of commodified and racialized labor. Once in California, Megquier describes the arduous work of keeping a succession of boarding and rooming houses and the continuing difficulty finding and retaining compliant and effective workers. In one letter from San Francisco, written approximately five months after their arrival, she states that "I am in hopes to be able to write more when I get a negro to do my work" (47). In her next letter, dated November 30, 1849, she laments that "I have a black man here, who pretends to be a cook but he dont know as much as a jackass" (47). Similarly, in April 1850 she regrets the imminent departure of "an Irish woman" that she employs (56), and further writes in late 1852 that "We have now a Chinese boy to scour the knives, if he should be contented we shall take him home" (100). Such examples correspond with what scholars such as Susan Lee Johnson have identified as a deeply developing racialized economic and social order in Gold Rush California.[47] These examples in Megquier's letters indicate the racialization of labor in the domestic economy within the overall narrative established by her letters as plotting a route of hemispheric travel and residence. With nothing desirable on the isthmus except a small "native" girl who

can be bought and sold and put to use in a domestic economy, such a perception is inseparable from the frameworks determining both Megquier's life in Maine and what she anticipates it to be in California.

If Megquier's letters link the isthmus and California through domesticity and racialized labor, they also recognize these locations, and Megquier's acts of writing about them, as sites of gendered resistance and empowerment. Her letters depend upon the prerogative of transcribing order into the scenes observed so as to render them intelligible to those at home. They also assert a sense of pleasure in such juxtapositions that develops alongside a growing challenge to gendered social relations. In considering the trope of the "picturesque" in travel writing, scholars have pointed to how it grants authority to the writer, who presents a frozen and extracted picture that separates the locale or scene from its everyday and longer-term contexts that give it meaning on its own terms; it is instead up to the observer to inscribe, describe, and appreciate.[48] Especially in isthmiana, this picturesque value especially depends upon a writer who is necessarily and rapidly *passing through*, not actually belonging to the landscape or social world being depicted. Meaning and interpretation occur within a state of temporary presence as the writer moves quickly from location to location, scene to scene.

Megquier's letters reflect precisely this authority in isthmian and Californian spaces, as she often presents what she describes as delightfully absurd scenes, imparting an aesthetic frame to what overtly would be foreign and unappealing. Her pleasure, though, is supported by an ostensible and explicit disapproval—genuine or feigned, or both—of the underlying conditions of disorder. For example, Megquier offers an apparently good-humored critique of their isthmian accommodations, which rests upon a confusion of usual order: "[T]he buildings are all of stone, and brick mixed which are falling out of the walls leaving holes for the cats, dogs, rats which are trooping though our room every night . . . not stopping to make our acquaintance" (19). Similarly, in the back yard of most houses, "you will see a monkey, horse, dog, pigs, hens, and turkey buzzards, all eating out of one dish" (19). Her letters repeat such scenes in California. For example, she describes the scene of her cooking area to her daughter Angie:

> [I]n one corner I have a chest set up on end with shelves then a barrel of sugar then the door that opens into the sitting, dining, sleeping room all in one then comes a champagne box sitting on a half barrell for a rolling board then another box for the candlestick, a large shelf come next under which is a barrell of pork sack of flour a bag potatoes then the coffee mill a long board on a couple of half barrells, set my iron ware underneath the water pails and wash basin on the top, I stand there and wash my dishes, the old drake stands and looks at me and wags his tail. (46)

As in other examples, her prose paints a picture of a chaotic scene, this time

with domestic items strewn together out of necessity. With a wry gesture typical of much of her writing, Megquier notes the oddly placed fowl keeping an eye on her in her own kitchen. That important location of domestic economy, like the confused backyard in Panama in which multiple species share a dish, itself contains notable but unacceptable juxtapositions in the placement of dishes, supplies, and food. Such representative juxtapositions collapse any key differences between the two hemispheric locales, as Megquier interprets each location using similar assumptions and values regarding domestic order.

On her isthmian travels, such an appreciation crescendos on Megquier's journey via canoe on the Chagres River. This part of the crossing was accomplished with the labor of local boatmen and brought travelers through scenery dense with foliage and wildlife. Megquier's text here gains a momentum of appreciation even as she asserts the impossibility of representation: "Would to God I could describe the scene. The birds singing monkeys screeching the Americans laughing and joking the natives grunting as they pushed us along through the rapids was enough to drive one mad with delight" (29–30). Clearly not a scene of picturesque enjoyment for the workers, who are performing the difficult labor required to transport the emigrants against the current of the river, the episode exemplifies her overall framing of her experience in Panama by lending order and value to a scene that *she* identifies as marked by confusion and disorder. Megquier's stream-of-consciousness prose, with sentences and clauses stacked together, reinforces the idea of movement and transience, itself shaped by the epistolary form, thus suggesting the temporary, the abbreviated, the quick view of the traveler.

Such juxtapositions and chaos, however, also open up into Megquier's long-developing dissatisfaction with her husband's expectations of her, especially with regard to labor, and the sense of a lack of input commensurate with her centrality to every aspect of both family and business life. By the time of her letters from California, she challenges that power dynamic more and more directly. For instance, after she has been in California for roughly five months, she writes to her daughter that "I should like very much to have you here but your Father thinks it is no place for you. I suppose he is afraid you will be led astray, he has his hands full to keep me straight" (45). Without specifying further, Megquier hints that California has opened new opportunities for her on a personal level. By August of 1850, even her letters directly to her children are no longer as focused on the immediate longing to return: "Your father and myself think of going up the river and perhaps to the mines as I do not like to go home without seeing more of Cal" (71). Her letter thus couples the desire to further explore this location with a retreat from the passive voice. Then, roughly halfway into their second stay in California (from April 1852 to May 1854), Megquier has grown somewhat loath to return to her previous life in Maine; referring to a letter from friends, she notes that "I am right glad to hear they are enjoying themselves so much but I have seen so much of things a little more exciting I fear I shall never feel perfectly satisfied with their quiet ways again. Here you can step out of your

house and see the whole world spread out before you in every shape and form. Your ears are filled with the most delightful music, your eyes are dazzeled with every thing that is beautiful, the streets are crowded the whole city are in the street" (120–121). With a vision that is now more capacious and clearly linked to the sense of possibility manifested in the social geography of San Francisco, Megquier now clearly finds the visual stimulations of a juxtaposed and reformed order to be not just appealing but superior and related to a clearly assertive and expressive individual authority, separate from her husband. Her observations reflect a vastly changed San Francisco from the years 1849 to 1856,[49] and also implicitly reaffirm the larger progress narrative of "civilization"—and U.S. society—expanding hemispherically.

By 1855, when Megquier is in California for the third time, she no longer expresses a sense of deference regarding her husband, who has stayed behind in Maine due to illness: "[I]f he should be taken away it will only be what I have wished that might come upon myself, rather than live with one who was ever wishing me to sacrifice my health to his gratification. I endured it, I thought as long as I could, I know what the world will think of me" (144).[50] In this sense, we might see her letters' bringing order and sense to the disorderly hemispheric scenes as one way to anticipate and manage such possible judgment.[51] In other words, the female-authored travel writing across Panama and into California presents both the implicit dangers—to personal morality and family order—as it manages them textually through a clear, strong descriptive and meaning-making voice.

"Their Last Sigh in a Strange Land": Mrs. D. B. Bates and Hemispheric Suffering

If, as I have been arguing, the epistolary form and conditions of travel enabled the construction of isthmian and Californian spaces as foreign to *and* a part of U.S. systems of meaning, I turn now to another form within the broader representative mode of isthmiana. "Mrs. D. B. Bates's" *Incidents on Land and Water, or Four Years on the Pacific Coast. Being a Narrative of the Burning of the Ships* Nonantum*,* Humayoon *and* Fanchon*, Together with Many Startling and Interesting Adventures on Sea and Land* (1857) represents a variety of barriers to her escape from captivity even as it also helps re-establish, under a larger rubric of progress, the "proper" gendered orders that Bates found upended in California—both on a social level and a very personal one. Although the title alludes to popular accounts such as John Lloyd Stephens's *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1841), the text more accurately resembles a combination of captivity narrative, sensational sea narrative, and morality tale, in which Bates starts on a worthy voyage but then battles to maintain her moral standing as she struggles to make it home. Bates's captivity is one structured both in the relationship with her husband and in the ways that Panama and California are both depicted as threats—geographical, social, and moral—that will

be endured and overcome.

The text relates that after her husband's ship the *Nonantum* burned and sank off of the English colonial outpost at the Falkland Islands in late 1850, the Bateses suffered a harrowing round-the-horn passage, two additional ships destroyed by fire, a potential mutiny, shipwreck in Peru, and Bates suffering especially in Panama City due to an illness that prevented her from crossing eastward over the isthmus in order to return home. They then spent approximately three years in Gold Rush–era California. After engaging in a variety of traditionally domestic occupations, Bates departed and traveled via an isthmian passage in 1854, which she made without her husband; the text offers hints of their separation due to his neglect of her and his succumbing to what she depicts as the "immoral" influences of California.[52]

A consideration of the captivity narrative is important because Bates's account operates within and against multiple generic imperatives that establish the kind of representational ambivalence being traced in this essay. Such imperatives map the interaction between differing discourses of domesticity, labor, and expansionism that contribute to the multi-faceted formulation of isthmian space as both within and without U.S. reach. While the genre as a whole—"resurrected" in the period from roughly 1820 to 1860[53]—contains many sub-groupings influenced largely by gender, race, and region, texts telling of white women's captivity among Native Americans often feature a virtuous member of a community or family torn away, undergoing trials and tests of body and character, and returning home but needing to account for the time of temptation and re-establish moral authority for reintegration into the original community.[54] Bates's entire narrative is structured as a preemptive answer to questions about surviving in the "savage" society found in both California and on the isthmus. Repeatedly, she answers the question of whether she had in fact "gone native" which, in this case, would have meant giving in to the temptations associated even prior to the Gold Rush with the morals and behaviors of people in "Spanish" geographies and, in particular, in "tropical" ones.

Bates prefaces her captivity by establishing her obedience and piety through assertions of a strong and lasting family bond and her own blamelessness in breaking it, and via a symbolic parallel with the mythology of USAmerican innocence. Although for generations "Not a link in [my] family circle had been severed," she would undergo precisely such a trial: "Early in life, I was united to one whose home was on the deep" (11–12). Using the passive voice, as Megquier frequently does, to characterize the nature of her relationships prior to the journey, establishes Bates as the dutiful female who will ultimately sacrifice the ties of loved ones and home for an unassailable reason: obedience, first (perhaps) to parental wishes and then to husband. Her framework thus reinforces key values of domesticity found in submissiveness, purity, and piety, for her separation and travails, she notes, "elevate the mind and centre the soul's best affections upon pure and holy objects" (14). Moreover, as with the early Puritan captivity narrative, she draws upon the spiritual autobiography and the jeremiad. Bates

establishes that she has safely passed the tests to morals that she found in her travels, and, as discussed below, her text serves as a warning to a society that has supposedly slipped from its rightful moral path.[55] Further connecting her own piety to the Puritan mission, she writes that "[N]ot many miles distant from that ancient and time-honored bay whose waters years ago kissed the prow of the 'May Flower' as she approached a sterile and inhospitable shore, is situated the home of my childhood" (11). Such an appeal links her own undertaking to the divinely backed Puritan mission, whose commitment enabled successive generations to call such a putatively sterile and wild locale "home" and begin the long process of westward movement to "civilize" the continent. In that sense, her text maps isthmian and Pacific Coast space within an established progressive narrative.

For writers of isthmiana, a hemispheric isthmian highway can be essential to that progress, but for Bates especially, the isthmus can also be a central obstacle to the goal of returning to home and family, the generic imperative of her text. She thus contributes to a larger cultural formation of Panama as geographical and moral barrier—especially to domesticity and family. One way she does so is by connecting Panama and California with threats to health and family from an intrinsically miasmatic atmosphere, a key discourse of *tropicalization*. For example, in her first account of Panama, Bates and her husband avoid illness at first, via a week-long stay at the island of Taboga outside of Panama's bay that she represents as "an oasis." However, once even approaching Panama City itself—indeed, being aboard a ship simply anchored in the city's bay—Bates is "suddenly and severely attacked with what was conceded to be, by all, Panama fever of the most malignant kind" (84). The health and relaxation found on the "beautiful and sequestered isle" of Taboga immediately gives way to a life-threatening assault from one of the menacing aspects connected with the isthmus. To further this point, one of the few actual spaces in Panama City that she describes is a graveyard for travelers. She notes, "What a shunned and desolate spot was that American burial-ground at Panama,—a mere necessary receptacle of lifeless flesh and crumbling bones,—not even a stone raised to mark the last resting-place of the many loved friends who had breathed their last sigh in a strange land, and by strangers been consigned to mother earth! . . . The whole place bears a deserted, forsaken aspect—untrodden by the feet of memory and love. It is within sight of the bay, whose waters, as they eternally dash against the shore, seem to be chanting a requiem for the departed" (87).

While Megquier found the scene of U.S. emigrants demonstrating their impatience and imperial ascendance by straddling the old Spanish guns at the bay of Panama worthy of notice and description, Bates's key image is a traveler's graveyard. She thus contributes to a common conception of the dangers of isthmian travel by locating her representation of Panama as being one of inherent (and eponymous) unhealthfulness, which leads to sickness, death, and the ultimate separation from loved ones and fellow USAmericans. To be sure, the isthmus carried its share of health risks. McGuinness, for instance, notes cholera outbreaks in Panama in 1848 and 1849 and the Panama Railroad Company's

especially difficult time attracting and keeping workers amid increasing deaths and debilitation due to "Panama Fever."[56] Such risks were a required part of isthmiana; as in the letters of Megquier, the isthmus's inherent foreignness is intensified through the narrative lament that thousands of future travelers will pass by but no loved ones or even strangers from the U.S. will be able to recognize or remember those buried in unmarked graves. Her own implied near-death from the sudden attack of "Panama fever" fixes such illness to this geography, and in the logic of her captivity narrative, renders this isthmian space as threat and barrier to family, morality, and memory.

With an actual itinerary not in strict accord with the discourse of celebratory westward movement, Bates's text adds to the hemispheric nexus of isthmiana by reproducing in and around San Francisco and Marysville the scenes of sickness and death that she had described in Panama.[57] In so doing, Bates and other writers such as Megquier textually naturalize a linkage of these two spaces, one of which had already joined the Union politically and was in the process of being accepted culturally. Interspersing her own experiences with stories she relates about the dead, the dying, and those lost to immorality, Bates follows the theme established at the isthmus:

> What shocked me more than all else in California was, to see the poor, sick, and often penniless people, brought to the hotels (there were no hospitals in Marysville at that time) to die; and then, when the soul had taken its flight to the spirit-land, to see the hearse drive to the door, take the body, which had been deposited in a rough box without the usual apparelling for the grave, and start off to the place of interment alone! Not one solitary mourner to follow the remains, or drop the tear of affection at the grave of one who, perhaps, in some far-distant home, had many "loving friends, and true," who were anxiously waiting and watching for his return. (198–199)

Most appalling to Bates are such locales in which isolation from friends and family seems the norm.[58] Gold Rush emigrants—both on the isthmus and in California—have placed themselves in such positions that destroy these human connections and eliminate even the proper lasting memorialization of the dead. Such attention to death and separation pervades her stories of families and even of San Francisco Bay; not letting a romantic trope go underused, she twice repeats the language used regarding buried travelers in Panama, with waves "chanting a requiem" over graves (98, 281).

Bates's text complicates and reinforces such a geographic separation through another common element of the white woman's captivity narrative: personal temptations threatening to undermine one's moral status. Creating a *tropicalizing* captivity narrative, the threats Bates identifies are not Native Americans but immoral Latin Americans. Her story explains the origin of immorality in California

by both *linking* it to “tropical” space *and by separating* the two locales; in this way, the isthmus is both apart from and tied to the recently incorporated California. In the text’s penultimate chapter, she leaves the narrative of her own travels to reflect on morality in California, and relates stories of pure and upright young Anglo women arriving in California only to be brought, within a relatively short time, into the world of coquetry, vice, and prostitution. In a two-page section, she successively asks about the origins of such threats and then provides an answer: California struggles with vice because of its similarities to the tropics, because emigrants have traveled through the latter to get to the west coast, and because tropical denizens have also made the trip.[59]

Bates begins that section of the narrative with a standard discourse attributing difference to climate, noting “the effect of that balmy, blissful atmosphere upon the human passions. Their quick, impulsive natures, warm and generous hearts, overflowing with love and affection; the bewitching naiveté of manner so characteristic of the females has often proved a theme for the poet and historian” (316). Here, Bates is drawing upon well-established deterministic arguments that link supposedly “impulsive” and “passionate” natures, as well as childlike earnestness, to tropical climates. The women are especially notable for their “bewitching naiveté,” yet they are now no longer limited to the tropics: “California, although not situated within the tropics, many of its sunny vales possess all the characteristics of soil and climate, and afford to one all the delights pertaining to a residence in those genial climes, and, at the time to which I refer, many of those captivating females had found a home within its borders” (316–317). Interestingly, her sentences grammatically center on one subject or agent only to abandon it. She focuses at first on the *place*, as if to attribute a unique set of characteristics to the locale that might explain breakdowns in social morality. In so doing, Bates attributes California with the same qualities found in—while also noting that California is *not* part of—the “tropics.” The danger to emigrants is clear: the women are “captivating,” and whether recently with the large numbers of emigrants to California, or perhaps at an earlier time, before the U.S. invasion of Mexico, these women arrived in California to tempt Anglo USAmerican males.

The famed rampant and pervasive immoral behavior in San Francisco has thus been learned or adopted based on contact with “tropical” Others. Textual emphasis on the presence and influences of such impure women in California thus cements Bates’s own purity, explains the sources of apparent breakdown there, and provides a link to and contrast with the isthmian spaces from which these threats emanate. With California as a destination, the threats can be managed and brought under social control; “tropical” isthmian spaces, though, seem to resist such influence. Yet in Bates’s isthmiana, such a threatening space necessitates intervention to alleviate her hemispheric confinement. Further linking isthmian and Californian space, Bates’s hemispheric and *tropicalized* captivity narrative offers the possibility of some relief in both locales even before her escape home. This can only be achieved through the representatives of U.S. capital and the structures of order and development, and again offers a way for her narrative to

link and claim the spaces stretching from California to Panama in a hemispheric nexus. In the former locale, Bates expresses—among her repeated stories of the vices that have led to broken families—her unqualified support for the "vigilance committees."[60] For Bates, and for countless Gold Rush–era accounts and later historians, the committees were signs of the arrival of progressive justice, battling against the corruption and vice that existed in the spaces supposedly outside of the mechanisms of society.

Her appeal to vigilance in California against what is essentially a hemispheric threat encompasses both her interpersonal tensions with her husband and perceived larger threats to Anglo society. Perhaps mirroring the fact that once in California her account offers fewer and fewer inclusions of her husband, Bates's sufferings are clearly tied to his neglect. Overworking herself in running a hotel in Marysville, Bates is overcome with fever, as she had been in Panama. Bates then spends two months recuperating in their "little canvas shanty" (139) on property they own, located near a "second-class boarding-house," likely Bates's shorthand for a type of brothel (140). Describing the miseries endured during her illness, Bates also subtly critiques her husband's treatment of her: "When nights I would be left alone for hours together, I suffered inconceivably from fright. When my husband would go out, he would lock the door upon the outside; for I was too feeble to rise from the bed without assistance, and far too timid to remain alone with the doors unfastened" (140). Clearly linking her suffering to the inattention of her husband and his perceived moral dissipation, especially in the night hours and in the neighborhood of locations of vice, she also implies a literal captivity, locked in her dwelling and thus under the complete if indifferent control of her husband. Such imprisonment almost leads to disaster, for the next several pages tell of the societal and personal threats of the "guerillas and ladrones" of "all Spanish countries," and in particular the famous bandit "Joaquin," whom the citizens of Marysville attempt to capture (142–147).[61] While the men are pursuing him, a solitary, sickly, and trapped Bates sees a "Spanish" face in her window. Despite her screaming for him to "Vamos! vamos!," he "very leisurely reconnoitred the apartment, cast a look commingled of scorn and pity upon me, turned upon his heel, and disappeared" (147). The criminal elements of the "Spanish" geography, coupled with her own domestic discord and specifically the essential abandonment by her husband in a time of severe illness, solidifies Bates as the suffering, blameless captive amid a world of temptation and threat. Thus, this particular space in Bates's text represents both the assertion of personal morality and the breakdown of social morality—as located in 1851–1854 California—again underscoring the need, and triumph, of the forces of social order as seen to be embodied in the vigilance committees.

Textual appeals for vigilance in California had their material corollary in Panama via the U.S. military and capital in the form of the Panama Railroad. She welcomes the railroad—begun in 1851 and completed in 1855, with travelers taking advantage of new sections as they appeared—as a necessary corrective to the threats and obstacles posed by the isthmus. Describing her difficult return

crossing in 1854, she notes with triumph the appearance of the railroad, which had greatly reduced the distance traveled by mule: "Suddenly we heard the shrill whistle of a steam engine. Our lagging spirits revived. We toiled on, and reached the top of an eminence which overlooked the beautiful valley of Obispo; and there, far below us, we beheld a scene calculated to inspire the most despondent with renewed hope and courage. There was the terminus of the railroad; and on the track were twelve long cars, headed by an engine, which was puffing and blowing, and sending forth whistle after whistle, long, loud, and clear, its echoes awakening the hitherto unbroken solitude of the primeval forests of New Granada" (304). With a touch of regret at the loss of a romanticized and ahistorical spatiality now subsumed by progress, Bates nevertheless patriotically positions that progress as key to the development of the isthmus and the overcoming of threats to USAmericans.[62] She notes "the firing of canon and loud cheering" at their arrival at this outpost, where "Several hundred United States troops" were waiting, on their way to California, in a scene punctuated by "Four or five large American flags . . . floating upon the breeze from the roofs of large temporary hotels" (305). Having just struggled their way through the last remaining section of the threatening tropics, Bates and company can now celebrate the necessary and natural arrival of U.S. industry and might; her narrative thus transitions from representations of the isthmus as an undesirable and threatening space to the framing of a hemispheric geography requiring, and receiving, the benefits of U.S. progress.

Such progress connecting hemispheric spaces depends for Bates on the challenges to and then reconsolidation of the proper gendered and domestic orders. For instance, her crossing of the difficult eighteen miles on muleback, unaccompanied by a husband left in California, marks a new degree of agency and independence. She proudly notes that in Panama City she has made her own bargain for a better mule than most travelers acquire (292), and on the path itself, she and her mule even find themselves at one point leading their party (302). Yet such demonstrations of independence suitable in the interior must give way to a notion of gendered order of feminine frailty upon arrival at the railroad terminus, a site of civilization and progress. For example, Bates writes that the sore women are lifted bodily from their saddles after the long journey, with one fainting. After dismounting and then sitting in the mud for some time, Bates herself attempts to walk but cannot: "While I was thus staggering about in the vain endeavor to reach a hotel, a gentleman came along, picked me up, and carried me to the desired haven" (306). Once Bates has been reinserted into the economy of gendered order and safely on board the train, the traces of her physical exertion and independence during the crossing itself essentially disappear, with Bates describing her arrival at Aspinwall (Colón), where she collapses from exhaustion. She further underscores her frailty by describing herself as not fully waking until her Atlantic steamship has departed and her captivity away from family and proper interpersonal order is nearly over. Thus, while Panama and California have posed a series of threats for Bates, it is finally when the

advancement of railroad and the signs of U.S. society have prevailed on the isthmus that she can fully return to a desired and rightful order.

Embracing a U.S. hemispheric presence that might alleviate threats to morality and gender, Bates's text ends with a key gesture of the captivity narrative: combating suspicions about her own moral standing and negotiating a readmission into her home society. The nearing approach to New York offers the necessary coda to her hemispheric morality tale, and it does so by proactively managing any possible imputations against her character after her long residence in and travels through dangerous locales without the proper male accompaniment. Even well before her departure home, her text muses on the possible gossip regarding the "young wife" who is "neglected" by her husband amid the temptations in California: "[W]hen the wife's cup of misery is full to overflowing, and she returns to the home of her youth, expecting to receive the sympathy she so justly deserves, . . . how poignant to her sensitive and lacerated feelings are the baneful, whispered slanders which are borne to her ears!" (203–204). Despite making this appeal, her actual return is marked by implied concern of precisely such "slanders." Describing her arrival in New York and subsequent return to Massachusetts, she writes, "The next day, I was too sick to start for home, completely prostrated by excitement, I suppose. The next day, I left New York. The following morning, I neared my native town. The station was reached; I left the cars. I had purposely kept my arrival secret, the better to take them by surprise" (314). In a narrative entirely structured by appeals to the centrality of family life, she reveals a hesitance that might relate to feared stigma of returning alone, of having been in California and Panama, lands of vice, and traveling through the hemisphere as an unaccompanied woman. Her delay in New York, which she projects as being due to excessive excitement at the return, and her decision to not tell any friends and family of her impending return, suggest an awareness of and concern about judgment from members of Bates's home community, a suspicion that the returning captive might have indeed "gone native" on the wrong side of the isthmus.

Conclusion: American Movement

The complexities of the spatial representation of Panama in isthmiana demands a consideration of the ways that textual, formal, and ideological constructions in the colonial context reach beyond the binaries of "home" and "abroad," or "self" and "other." The works of Megquier and Bates can be useful in doing precisely this, but they do so in complex and often contradictory ways related to genre and the discourses of the "tropics" as they establish ambivalent U.S. claims to American spaces. For Megquier, the "home" of Maine and children and friends left behind remains central to her epistolary narrative. Yet California, a space on the far side of the isthmian barrier, becomes increasingly familiar and comfortable, threatening to displace the "home" site as Megquier clearly considers remaining. Panama itself, for Megquier, is its own space of a type of

freedom, yet it is best apprehended within the limiting U.S. frameworks of gender, labor, and race. For Bates, California and Panama are similarly tied together, posing multiple threats and barriers within a particular formal framework of the captivity narrative.

Historian Aims McGuinness has shown that for New Granadans, the isthmus at Panama in the 1850s was a site of complex interactions and battles for authority and control. He writes that one New Granadan statesman and writer, Justo Arosemena, celebrated the advent of an "empire of movement" that would "promote progress and greater unity among members of the human species."[63] Yet Arosemena noted, and feared, the influence of the United States in its efforts to control such spaces as Panama, so crucial to such a progressive sense of movement. And as the texts analyzed here suggest, isthmiana rests upon the movement of USAmericans across, on the one hand, undesired space; Panama is less a geography with its own intrinsic value and primarily a space to traverse as quickly as possible, whether, as for Megquier, on the road to anxious opportunity in California, or for Bates, on the return to a vaguely defined but central notion of "home." Yet this movement is central to the practices of and especially the discourses of expansionism, themselves never separate from other processes and assumptions such as those regarding domesticity, labor, and race. In the antebellum period, and focused in this isthmian locale, movement becomes coded and claimed in both overt and formal ways; the stasis of the geography and temporality of Panama contrasts and enables a possessive sense of the progressive mobility of USAmericans.

Notes

1. I am immensely grateful to Hellen Lee and Kelly Wright for their insightful questions, patient readings, and thoughtful comments on many drafts of this article. I also thank Shelley Streeby, Nicole Tonkovich, Kelcey Parker, and Gabriela Nuñez for their guidance on earlier versions. Finally, I appreciatively acknowledge the specific and remarkably helpful comments from the anonymous readers at the journal.

Mary Jane Megquier, *Apron Full of Gold: The Letters of Mary Jane Megquier from San Francisco 1849–1856,* Polly Welts Kaufman, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 31; epigraph quotation from Kaufman 10 and 12. Further references to Megquier's letters will be cited in the body of the essay and page numbers will refer to the Kaufman edition, which expands and reworks a 1949 collection edited by Robert Glass Cleland. Kaufman's edition also leaves sentence-level errors, nonstandard spelling, etc. intact. All basic biographical information that follows on the Megquiers will be cited from Kaufman's introduction and footnotes.

2. While the term is more awkward than the commonly accepted "American," I use "US-American" to recognize that many Americas and Americans exist separate from the United States. Similarly, I use "U.S. American hemisphere" when referring to the contemporaneous metonymic claims to U.S. purview over the Americas. See Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790–1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 207n4.

3. The full title of her text is *Incidents on Land and Water, or Four Years on the Pacific Coast. Being a Narrative of the Burning of the Ships* Nonantum, Humayoon *and* Fanchon*, Together With Many Startling and Interesting Adventures on Sea and Land*. Quotations will be cited in the body of the essay and are taken from a reprint of what the title page identifies as the 11th edition, "published for the author" in Boston, 1861. In this essay, I refer to Bates the way her text lists her, as "Mrs. D. B. Bates," and not Dolly Bryant Bates, her actual name, because my analysis is limited to a study of her text, which constructs her as an author within this marital nomenclature. Nina Baym provides a brief biographical sketch of Bates in *Women Writers of the American West, 1833–1927* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 268.

4. Bates, *Incidents*, 86.

5. Three scholars have recently paid particular attention to U.S. perspectives of Panama and isthmian space at this time. Aims McGuinness's excellent *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008) offers the most thorough analysis of the interaction of U.S. travelers, government, and capital with local and regional peoples and officials in Panama. He especially considers the complex issue of sovereignty and the many groups struggling for economic and cultural power, as he reads the Gold Rush as "an event in Panamanian history," not the other way around (186). He offers some consideration of U.S. travelers' accounts, but the scope of his analysis does not include a focus on questions of gender and genre. Amy S. Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) provides valuable consideration of the interrelation of Manifest Destiny and gender in many accounts of U.S. travelers, especially by paying close attention to the common textual themes and strategies of what she refers to as "booster narratives" that call for and justify U.S. expansionism. Her analysis thus provides insight into whether and how a given text *overtly* supports such U.S. influence, and this leads to the argument that "In general, the middle-class American women who left records of their travels through Central America on the way to California . . . did not share the same expansionist vision of Latin America as did male shipmates" (204). This essay accords with her conclusion, but it also then asks how we might think about not just the overt pronouncements of opinion in these accounts but also the deeper discursive and formal aspects that importantly contribute to the cultural constructions of American spaces. Finally, Brian Roberts's *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), a compelling study of the importance of Gold Rush–era travel, texts, and experiences in middle-class cultural formation, includes a chapter on constructions of Latin American spaces, though his main focus is on male-authored accounts. Roberts productively analyzes his texts not as unmediated descriptions of thoughts and experiences; considering primary accounts *as* texts rather than as direct evidence of historical experience allows for formal analysis extending beyond whether or not, and how, a given writer is directly and consciously supportive or critical of hegemonic practices and beliefs.

For approaches to the relationship between different forms of literature and antebellum expansionism, but not necessarily including a focus on isthmian space, this essay draws especially on Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), and John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

6. I take this word from Theodore Winthrop's *The Canoe and the Saddle, Adventures Among the Northwestern Rivers and Forests, and Isthmiana* (1862), an account of his crossing at Panama in 1852 and subsequent time in the Washington Territory. For Winthrop, "isthmiana" refers more generally to his observations and sketches related to his Panama crossing.

7. This essay builds on a growing body of scholarship on U.S. representations of the Americas and *tropicalization*, including Fredrick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds., *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1997); Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*; Bruce A. Harvey, *American Geographics: U.S. National Narratives and the Representation of the Non-European World, 1830–1865* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001); and Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, eds., *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

8. The overland journey was not the cause of this delay; instead, more people were landing at Chagres and making the land crossing than could be accommodated on the initial steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. By the time emigrants had crossed via foot and mule and reached the city of Panama, they often found hundreds of people waiting impatiently for the next steamer and hoping for a passage on it. See McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 39.

9. I make no claims as to numbers of copies printed and circulating, but title pages claimed at least eleven printings in Boston from 1857 to 1861, published either by "J. French," "E. O. Libby," or "for the author," though none of the differing editions seem to have changed in any significant way. Periodical readers might have already been familiar with the first part of her story; several New England newspapers had printed a letter from Bates when stranded temporarily in Peru in 1851, after the destruction of the *Fanchon*. This letter had been published in the *Boston Journal* and reprinted in a variety of sources in Boston and Philadelphia; see "Destruction of Three Coal-Laden Vessels by Fire—Wonderful Escape of the Passengers and Crews," *Littell's Living Age*, May 17, 1851, 331; "Wonderful Escape," *The Youth's Companion*, May 1, 1851, 2; and "Destruction of Three Coal-Laden Vessels by Fire—Wonderful Escape of the Passengers and Crews," *Friends' Weekly Intelligencer*, May 24, 1851, 70.

10. In the eighteenth century, Nueva Granada was an administrative viceroyalty in the Spanish empire. After independence and later the dissolution of Bolívar's Gran Colombia, which from 1821 to 1830 had included the territories of what are present-day Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia,

and Panama, the Republic of Nueva Granada, centered in Bogotá, emerged out of the latter two. Panama did not exist as a separate nation until 1903, when it broke from Colombia with the direct military support of the United States.

11. While this analysis considers such expressions of expansionistic claims of the nation, it also takes seriously what Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, among others, have argued in recent American Studies work: that we must "abandon a simple binary that pits the United States as a fully formed, homogeneous entity against the myriad peoples and nations of the rest of the hemisphere"; see Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, eds., *Hemispheric American Studies* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 7.

12. Focusing on asymmetrical power in terms of cultural appropriation and "violation," James Buzard suggests in his analysis of travel writings that the very act of travel writing is a form of appropriation, an exertion of control. He asks, "How can one *appropriate*, without helping to transform the culture from which one appropriates into something that seems *designed* for tourists' piecemeal appropriation of it—an aggregate of commodities instead of an interrelational whole?" See Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to 'Culture' 1800–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 216. See also Mary Louise Pratt's paradigm of the "contact zone" in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

13. David Spurr notes the "incoherence of colonial discourse," and draws on Foucault to state that "Discourse may be understood here as a series of discontinuous segments that combine in various ways in the service of power. But power should no more be conceived as a monolithic structure than discourse." See *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 11–12. William W. Stowe writes that nineteenth-century U.S. travel writing "combin[es] disparate voices and modes of discourse without necessarily generating tension among them or forging them into a 'higher unity.'" See *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107.

14. Glenda Riley offers a consideration of women's experiences in Gold Rush migration via Panama. See "Women on the Panama Trail to California, 1849–1869," *The Pacific Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (Nov. 1986): 531–548. Regarding U.S. antebellum westward expansion, see Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) and Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1990). While many scholarly accounts have focused on white middle-class women, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo's edited collection *Women at Sea: Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) focuses on a wider variety of female voices traveling in the Caribbean "margins" of colonial empire.

15. Scholars such as Sara Mills have focused on the complex relationship between discourses of femininity and imperialism; women's subordinate status in patriarchal cultures mediates their participation in the assumptions and practices of expansion. According to Mills, women travel writers "cannot be said to speak from outside colonial discourse, but their relation to the dominant discourse is problematic because of its conflict with the discourses of 'femininity,' which were operating on them in equal, and sometimes stronger, measure. Because of these discursive pressures, their work exhibits contradictory elements which may act as a critique of some of the components of other colonial writings." See *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 63. See also Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women's Writing: Women's Narratives and the Rhetoric of Westward Expansion* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996).

Mary Suzanne Schriber writes that one romanticized way of reading women's accounts sees travel as offering new freedoms and an "exhilarating sense of liberation," yet she also rightly problematizes this by considering travel as "a disciplinary agent" that "reinforces the difference between and thus the production of domesticity as well as its opposite." *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830–1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 37–39. Greenberg suggests in *Manifest Manhood* (229) that "Central American travel held the potential of transforming gender norms at home" through opportunities for women to watch and reflect upon gendered labor in Latin America, to challenge themselves physically, and to temporarily adopt alternate forms of dress and behavior. Roberts in *American Alchemy* (70) also complicates how we might reconsider the participation of women in the westward expansion of the Gold Rush by re-defining "the frontier" as a "dialogic" process that challenges a model of seeing domestic and foreign, home and frontier, as separate and includes women who stayed behind to raise families and, equally important, to run family businesses.

16. Expansionist constructions are produced within a larger complex of "domestic" discourses and practices. See Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire*, 24 and 4. Lisa Lowe's work on travel narratives also problematizes such binaries; see *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991) especially chapter 2, "Travel Narratives and Orientalism: Montagu and Montesquieu." See also Roberts and his consideration in *American Alchemy* of Gold Rush narratives in their relation to northeastern class and gender formations. Also see Susan Lee

Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: Norton, 2000), and Streeby, *American Sensations*.

17. Drawing upon anthropologist Victor Turner's analysis of travel as ritual, Stowe identifies in nineteenth-century USAmerican travel accounts from Europe a "change in the participant's experience of time, a sense that he or she has moved from an ordinary to a sacred dimension"; see *Going Abroad*, 21. Stowe's examples include noted writers Bayard Taylor and Margaret Fuller, and thus focus more on writers who were self-consciously "writers," producing texts for public consumption and with financial considerations. Such a sense is further established in the epistolary form of travel writing; as Schriber notes, and as will be discussed further, letter-writing for the traveler can be conditioned by an erratic and inconsistent rhythm. See *Writing Home*, 177.

18. In *The Beaten Track* (especially 18–79), Buzard analyzes the emergence of a cultural distinction between precisely those two ideas of the "tourist" and the "traveler." Additionally, in her archival analysis of letters and journals of women travelers in North America from 1700 to 1830, Susan Clair Imbarrato raises a largely similar question and seeks to differentiate between earlier forms of "travel literature" marked by immediate responses, a non-established itinerary, hurry, and fragmentation, and "travel writing," the observations of tourists following prescribed routes and stylized collection of scenes revisited and revised; see *Traveling Women: Narrative Visions of Early America* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 31–32.

19. The study of *tropicalization* expands and adapts the insights of Edward Said's concept of orientalism in the sense of a larger body of cultural representations and knowledge formation that constructs and then describes a fairly monolithic constellation of peoples marked linguistically, geographically, racially, and temporally. It also builds upon work done by Pratt, who focuses especially on the early nineteenth-century writings of Alexander von Humboldt and his participation in the construction of "América"; see *Imperial Eyes*, 111–143.

20. Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, *Tropicalizations*, 8.

21. See, for example, Stephen Benz, "Through the Tropical Looking Glass: The Motif of Resistance in U.S. Literature on Central America," in Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, eds., *Tropicalizations*, 51–66; Harvey's readings of John L. Stephens and Ephraim Squier in *American Geographics* (157); and Roberts's identifying a "complex matrix of revulsion and desire" in forty-niner accounts in *American Alchemy* (141).

22. Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005). She points out that James Polk revived Monroe's arguments in 1845 regarding the rising tensions with Great Britain over the Oregon Territory (14); the phrase "Monroe Doctrine" did not appear until 1853 (26–27).

23. The region had played a central role in the shipping of New World wealth forcibly extracted by Spain. In the 1780s, isthmian canal projects caught the attention of such U.S. leaders as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Humboldt's *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811) suggested nine possible sites for land/waterway routes across the Americas—including three in what became New Granada; see Gerstle Mack, *The Land Divided: The History of the Panama Canal and Other Isthmian Canal Projects* (New York: Octagon, 1974), 99–101, 113–119. In the immediate antebellum era, Panama, as with other possible sites for a trans-isthmian canal or railroad such as Nicaragua, Honduras, and Tehuantepec, gained much attention from the U.S. and Great Britain. Both had, for instance, established subsidized steamship mail service to Panama by the end of the U.S. war with Mexico; see Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 17–18.

24. John H. Kemble, *The Panama Route 1848–1869* (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 254. Railroad officials and U.S. emigrants often referred to Colón as Aspinwall; see McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 73–74.

25. John Lindsay-Poland, *Emperors in the Jungle: The Hidden History of the U.S. in Panama* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 14. The Panama Railroad Company spent at least $8 million through 1859; Mack, *Land Divided*, 154–155 and Joseph L. Schott, *Rails Across Panama: The Story of the Building of the Panama Railroad 1849–1855* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 201–202. See also Kemble, *Panama Route*, 1–30, 166–199. Officers of the company also included John L. Stephens. Stephens had surveyed a possible route in 1848, and the company broke ground in early 1850; see McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 29–31 and 54.

26. No other ratified U.S. agreements with nations in the Americas had gone beyond "general reciprocity" regarding tariffs and trade; for more on the treaty, see Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, 18–23.

27. As McGuinness shows in *Path of Empire* (84–122), sovereignty on the isthmus was a complex and shifting matter influenced by a variety of factors: regional wishes of some Panamanian elites to be independent from New Granada; political conflict within Panama between liberals and conservatives, often drawn along lines of class and race; the inability of local authorities to maintain an authoritative presence since the treaty eliminated their ability to collect revenues on traffic across the isthmus; and the exertions of U.S. capital in the form of the Panama Railroad Company, which had gained the rights to land across Panama and in many ways exercised its own autonomy over the transit zone. For information on the agreement between the company and New Granada, see

Mack, *Land Divided*, 149–160 and Alex Perez-Venero, *Before the Five Frontiers: Panama from 1821–1903* (New York: AMS, 1978), 64–66.

McGuinness also notes that the main benefit for New Granada would have been that the treaty could serve as a "buffer" against Great Britain's claims in the region (31). And in a context featuring many enactments of U.S. territorial and commercial desires, such as aggression in Mexico and the recent annexation of Texas, diplomatic confrontation with Britain over Nicaragua and Oregon, filibuster and official attempts to acquire Cuba, and public debates over the desirability of annexing the Yucatán, New Granadan fears of similar U.S. actions in the isthmus would not have been completely unwarranted. On U.S. interest in the Yucatán, see David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 173–212. On filibusters, see Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). See also chapter 1 of Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood*, "The 'New Frontier' as Safety Valve: The Political and Social Context of Manifest Destiny, 1800–1860," for an excellent overview of the variety of U.S. expansionistic actions in the era.

28. As Conniff points out in *Panama and the United States* (20), the treaty was a remarkable agreement in the sense that it was the *only* treaty of alliance the U.S. ratified during the century and because U.S. leaders subsequently used it to interpret the actions of other powers in the region as threats to its own security. Mack notes the special significance of the treaty in that the U.S. would claim the right not just to intervene against foreign powers but to do so as a result of *local* turmoil, which it did as early as September, 1856; see *Land Divided*, 162–163 (also cited in Conniff, 38–39). The U.S. would invoke the treaty and other justifications to land military forces in Panama at least thirteen times from 1856–1903; see Conniff, 34 and cited in McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 190. Perez-Venero in *Before the Five Frontiers* (56) asserts an eventual 57 such interventions. The U.S.'s actions during Panama's independence movement in 1903 "did the reverse" of what the treaty had called for, as the U.S. used its navy to *prevent* Colombian forces from reaching its province of Panama to put down the uprising and maintain Colombian sovereignty; see Lindsay-Poland, *Emperors*, 25.

As an example of the importance of international public opinion, Manuel María Mallarino wrote to his own government that "[A]ssuredly nothing would so brilliantly vindicate [the U.S.] . . . than the fact that they, after having been branded as the oppressors and future conquerors of the Spanish-American republics, should present themselves as the most zealous protectors of the territorial integrity of those very same republics, in whose preservation they would appear taking [sic] an open and direct interest." Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 152.

29. U.S. government agent Amos Corwine invoked the treaty to suggest precisely such a challenge in 1856, for example, when a disagreement between an Anglo USAmerican traveler and a Panamanian selling fruit expanded into a deadly conflict between locals and emigrants; see McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 155.

30. Kaufman, *Apron Full of Gold*, xvi and 2n3.

31. For both their second trip and Megquier's third journey, they used the isthmian crossing at Nicaragua rather than Panama.

32. Kaufman, *Apron Full of Gold*, 1n1.

33. This includes personal letters written by people not defined as participants in the public literary culture of New England. Recent work often focuses on the letters of established and public authors or others closely connected to them, such as, for instance, Edward Bliss Emerson, Charles Chauncy Emerson, and Sophia Amelia Peabody. See Ivonne M. Garcia, "Anticipating Colonialism: U.S. Letters on Puerto Rico and Cuba, 1831–1835," in *Letters and Cultural Transformations in the United States, 1760–1860*, ed. Theresa Strouth Gaul and Sharon M. Harris (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009): 57–76.

34. William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6–8.

35. Imbarrato, *Traveling Women*, 27.

36. Parts of one of Megquier's letters from Panama was reprinted at the time in the Norway (Maine) *Advertiser*; see Kaufman, *Apron* 21–24.

37. Decker, *Epistolary Practices*, 42.

38. Schriber, *Writing Home*, 177.

39. *Ibid*.

40. Roberts, *American Alchemy*, 159–168.

41. David M. Henkin states that between 1849 and 1851 especially, "Postal service between California and the eastern states was slow and relatively infrequent," although legislation in 1845 and 1851 made sending letters through the U.S. mail much more affordable and widespread. See *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 124 and 22.

42. Among others, Fredrick Pike has shown that U.S. accounts of the Americas developed standard descriptions of Latin American space in which "Latin Americans . . . lived in utter disregard of civilized man's concept of time." See Pike, *The United States and Latin America*, 72.

43. As many scholars have noted, travel writing is always shaped by the expectations established from previous writing, whether guidebooks or other travel accounts. See, for example, Stowe, *Going Abroad*, 17.

44 Much scholarship has considered the development of thinking that traces causative connections between climate, culture, and race; for the U.S. context, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

45. McGuinness, *Path of Empire* 23, 36, and 87.

46. *Ibid*., 22–25.

47. On the complex dynamics of racialized labor in early Gold Rush–era California, see Johnson, *Roaring Camp*, and specifically 69–70 and 189–190 on black slavery. Levy notes in *They Saw the Elephant* that southern slaveholders took their slaves to California, even though slavery was not permitted as part of the admission of California into the Union in September 1850. She states that "the state tacitly permitted slavery by employing an 'in transit' principle which held that slave owners could retain slave property if they were 'in transit' through a free state" (214). See also Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000) and Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977). On the broader antebellum conceptions of "free" labor, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

48. As Buzard writes in *The Beaten Track* (188), "What picturesque seeing yielded was not only a scene that 'looked like' a painting, but a *scene*, balanced and complete; but the *whole* required some distinct slant of vision and some measure of strategic omission. . . . Places were represented as (primarily pictorial) artefacts of cultural worth by virtue of their wholeness and harmony, qualities which the traveler could demonstratively appreciate."

49. See Roger W. Lotchin, *San Francisco 1846–1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

50. Kaufman's introduction to *Apron Full of Gold* includes this quotation, but Kaufman states that "It is not clear what happened to estrange Mary Jane from Thomas Megquier" (xix).

51. Schriber points in *Writing Home* (101) to another example of the necessity of women travelers—within an era shaped by a cult of domesticity—to manage and limit criticism for leaving family and/or children behind.

52. For example, describing a warm reunion with her brother in Marysville, Bates notes his shock at her visibly deteriorating condition, which is not just due to physical illness. She writes, "Sickness and trouble—yes, *such* trouble as rankles deepest in the heart of a wife, compared with which, death would have been joy—was fast doing its work" (149).

53. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 444. See also Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 9–10.

54. See Alden T. Vaughn and Edward W. Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity: Puritan Captivity Narratives as Literature and History," in *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676–1724* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1981), 14, and Gordon M. Sayre's introduction to his edited collection, *American Captivity Narratives* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

55. Vaughan and Clark in *Puritans Among the Indians* (4–8) locate several forms influencing the Puritan captivity narrative, including the spiritual autobiography, the sermon, and jeremiad.

56. See McGuiness, *Path of Empire*, 47 and 65.

57. Roberts's *American Alchemy* (163–167) sees the "dying forty-niner" as a literary vehicle that allows male authors to both romanticize and sentimentalize their suffering in part out of recognition of their wives' and children's suffering back home.

58. Ronald J. Zboray, in *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), emphasizes the factors "atomizing" families and contributing in literature and letters to the "overwhelming popularity of the broken family theme seen everywhere from sentimental novels to the blackface minstrel stage" (111).

59. In *American Sensations* (227–235) Streeby shows how Civil War–era dime novels written by white women similarly depicted "borderland" spaces such as California. In particular, Streeby analyzes how these texts presented and resolved anxieties regarding class hierarchy, threats to white privilege, "savagery," and the breakdown of morality. Additionally, Roberts notes in *American Alchemy* (121–122) that forty-niners attributed "dark deeds" in California to the "dark people of the rush, with Mexican bandits, Chilean gamblers, and Latina prostitutes." Further, he identifies their observations from the Panama crossing as a "complex matrix of revulsion and desire" that would help "frame forty-niner contacts with Latinos in California" (141). Roberts thus situates Gold Rush texts in their larger hemispheric frame. Greenberg surveys the writings of several male travelers in Panama who attended closely to the supposed signs of "lax morality" among women there; see *Manifest Manhood*, 117.

60. In San Francisco in particular, such groups prominently formed in 1851—the year of Bates's arrival—and 1856, the year before her narrative was published. According to Robert M. Senkewicz, both were directed largely by the merchant and trader class, seeking scapegoats for various problems associated with economic slowdowns and glutted markets; see Senkewicz, *Vigilantes in Gold Rush San Francisco* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1985), especially chapter 3, "The Scapegoats." For an analysis of the roles of women and gender in the 1856 conflicts, see Michelle E. Jolly, "The Price of Vigilance: Gender, Politics, and the Press in Early San Francisco," *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 4 (Nov. 2004): 541–579.

61. Many published accounts began appearing in the 1850s that focused on the notorious Joaquín Murrieta; the kernel of most of these stories stated that Murrieta, a Mexican-born Gold Rush emigrant, out of anger and revenge for assaults against him and his wife, led a bandit gang that plundered people in the diggings and surrounding areas. As Johnson has noted in *Roaring Camp* (38), the name "Joaquín" had somehow "stuck in Anglo memories," with reports of at least five prominent bandits with this same first name. For more on the many stories told about Joaquín Murrieta, see Streeby, *American Sensations*, 251–290 and "Joaquín Murrieta and the American 1848," in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 166–196.

62. Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 107–122.

63. McGuinness, *Path of Empire*, 159.