

The Ideology of Landscape and Character:  
Understanding the American Attachment to Sprawl

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## Abstract

The consequences of urban sprawl in the United States have in recent years become increasingly apparent. Sprawl contributes significantly to the emptying of central cities, destruction of natural areas and farmland, pollution resulting from automobile dependence, and has negative effects on human health. Attempts to mitigate these consequences through more compact, mixed-use development techniques, sustainable, efficient public transit, and environmental regulations are often met with passionate resistance from people declaring a threat to their American rights and way of life. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the tightly held attachment to sprawl in America by tracing the history of sociocultural and political thought relating to the physical landscape and its implications for American values, character, and identity.

Using a number of historical documents, including the works of important American authors, politicians, and planners, Congressional speeches and debates, legal documents, and literary texts, I present an American landscape ideology in which the fundamental identity, character, and values of the American people are deeply entrenched in the physical landscape and the way in which it is developed. This ideology was formulated in the earliest days of the nation and, because it is subversive and implicit in nature, was able to mutate and evolve throughout history to influence the overall development of the landscape. I use three important historical moments to illustrate the ideology's influence on decision-making: the post-Revolutionary War America of the late 1700's, the era of the Homestead Act of 1862, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban boom. These moments were pivotal in deciding the course of development of the nation's landscape and demonstrate the ideology's implicit functionality in influencing these moments. Today, the American landscape ideology manifests in the country's demonstrated preference for sprawl, even when faced with its detrimental consequences. Understanding the fundamental aspects of the ideology and how it has functioned in the past is essential in identifying and addressing the underlying factors influencing the American attachment to sprawl today.

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## Introduction

*Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself;  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)  
-Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup>*

Individuals variously define themselves on a number of criteria, the sum of which ultimately creates an individual's identity or character. Each person, as Whitman writes, contains multitudes. These multitudes may at times be consistent and may at times be contradictory; one may choose to emphasize or conceal pieces of his or her identity at a particular time or in a particular circumstance based on what he or she deems as most important or relevant. As the conversation turns political at a dinner party during an election cycle, an individual may define herself as a Democrat, an identifier which carries with it a certain ideology or set of beliefs. This individual may at the same time conceal the fact that she was born and raised in the dominantly conservative state of Mississippi by small-business owning parents, an identifier which she in other circumstances proudly proclaims, but in this situation may appear contradictory to her identity as a Democrat. The same person may also carry the identity of a vegetarian, a seasoned fisher, a wife, an animal-lover, a feminist, and an avid supporter of the war; all criteria that, although contradictory in some senses, contribute to her overall character as a human being. While a given identifier may be most relevant to emphasize in a certain situation, it would be inappropriate to define a person's entire character on a single identifier. We are multitudes.

The identifiers above are all ones that, in general, are outwardly recognized, govern one's behavior and actions and, in turn, the ideologies each identifier carries with it are similarly recognized. If an individual identifies as a vegetarian, it is reasonable to deduct that this person believes in animal rights and/or the health benefits of a plant-based diet, and to some extent this

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass*, eds. Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price.

person believes that this ideology is in some sense “correct.” This is not to say that to hold an ideology is to tout it as a universal truth, but to choose to live one’s life according to the beliefs held in an ideology does tend to imply that this person holds them to be personally true, and potentially superior to other beliefs or lifestyles. If it is true that each individual carries with them a multitude of identifiers that are outwardly recognized, can it also be true that each person also holds more subconscious ideologies that influence beliefs and behaviors without being explicitly acknowledged?

Cultural norms are sets of expectations that individuals must follow in order to function more or less “properly” in society. These norms create informal rules that govern the behavior of the members of a particular group and function to create a sense of belonging. The appropriate way to dress, the acceptable amount to tip at a restaurant, and the polite way to greet an acquaintance are all cultural norms that vary amongst different groups of people (usually on the scale of countries or regions). Again, these norms are not generally recognized explicitly, but are implicitly expected. Aside from creating a sense of belonging, however, people do not identify themselves based on cultural norms. One does not often hear someone proclaim that they are “a person who wears a suit to an interview,” or “someone who tips 15%.” The question remains, therefore, whether an ideology—something that usually functions outwardly to define identity, beliefs, and values—can function like a social norm, in that it implicitly or subconsciously governs choices or behaviors. My proposition is that it is indeed possible, and that, in fact, there has been an implicit ideology functioning in America since the founding of the nation that has played a major role in determining the development of the landscape.

Take a moment to consider the word suburb; note the first image that comes to mind, reflect on the values that this word conjures. Likely the image includes some version of a single-

family home, surrounded by a green lawn, and a car parked in the driveway. Perhaps children are playing in the yard, or riding bikes down the sidewalk. What values come to mind? Maybe some kind of family values associated with morality and wholesomeness, or maybe the association is with some version of the “American Dream;” hard work, pride, and social standing. The open, green space may bring up feelings of cleanliness, purity, or health. Perhaps the values and images conjured in your mind come from personal experience—your childhood home or neighborhood, your parents, your family’s values—or maybe they emerge from an aspiration—your ideal home, your future, or a photo from *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine. Now consider the word city; again, take note of the images and values that emerge. Perhaps you grew up in a city, or aspire to live in one; in that case, the city may conjure the same type of nostalgia or idealism that the suburb did for others. However, it is doubtful that the same types of wholesomeness, morality, purity, and familial values come to mind. The image may be of tall buildings, crowded streets and subways, and overwhelming filth and concrete.

The automatic association of images and values with the words city and suburb do not represent reality, at least not entirely. According to Bruce Katz of the Center on Metropolitan Policy at the Brookings Institute, “The city has always been perceived as dirty and unhealthy, bureaucratic and antiquated, home to people and concepts that were not quite American,” and Anthony Flint expands, “Surrounded by green grass or with woods lining the backyard, the suburban setting somehow seems kinder to nature than the big, bad, built-up city.”<sup>2 3</sup> Reality tells a different story. Due to the extensive driving necessitated by sprawling suburbs, suburban dwellers are on average six pounds heavier than inhabitants of the city, not to mention that

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Flint, *This Land: The Battle Over Sprawl and the Future of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

automobiles contribute significantly to pollution and that commuters endure high levels of stress from sitting in hours of traffic. The impervious surfaces built into suburbia (rooftops, driveways, parking lots, roads) increase the amount of toxic water runoff that seeps into the ground and feeds aquifers. As suburbs sprawl into open spaces, they threaten wild lands, historic sites, and farmland while creating an immensity of unaffordable “placeless space.”<sup>4</sup> The American populous is, on the whole, not delusional or tragically uninformed, and therefore the detrimental effects that suburbia has on both human and environmental health must, on some level, be understood and recognized. And yet, the notion that suburbia is somehow inherently more moral and conducive to health and family values remains. Although critiques of suburbia and its negative effects have become more popular in recent years, rarely has anyone stopped to consider the origin of these associations or *why* the American people hold these beliefs.

I propose an answer to this question in what I shall from this point forward refer to as the American landscape ideology. The ideology, formulated in the early days of the American republic, closely ties American character, values, and identity to the physical landscape and the way in which it is developed. At the time of the ideology’s formulation, the country was newly independent, a pivotal time in which its citizens were struggling to define what it meant to be an American. The landscape of the country, which was at the time seemingly limitless in both space and resources, contrasted sharply with the feudal system in Europe, in which land represented oppression rather than opportunity. Early American settlers seized upon the physical landscape as a means through which to express the new American character and identity. Though the ideology was founded on a somewhat literal, logical basis in which physical labor on the land was thought to produce an ideal American character through hard work, personal investment in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 52-57.



the land, and lack of idle time, it quickly became transformed, interpreted, and mutated so that it began to function outside of literal application.

The American landscape ideology, like the ideologies discussed above, represents values that have come to define an identity. The values held in this ideology are those that are commonly thought of as distinctly “American:” freedom, independence, morality and virtue, industriousness, and mobility. Because the ideology was formulated fundamentally based on, and expressed through, the landscape of America in its early days, it rests on certain assumptions that appeared to be true at the time. These assumptions were that the American landscape is bountiful and virtually limitless, that unimproved or uncultivated land does not hold inherent value, and that one who cultivates the land is morally superior to someone employed in manufacturing or industry. These important American values became closely intertwined with assumptions about the development of the physical landscape, and therefore the American character and identity were invested deeply in the soil. It became seemingly impossible to separate one’s inherent character from the character decided by his or her mode of living on the land. From where we stand today, these assumptions may appear to be naïve and misguided; however, despite the landscape’s drastic changes throughout the past few centuries, these basic assumptions and their associated values have largely continued to govern America’s landscape development preferences.

The ideology is unique because it has never been explicitly recognized, and therefore individuals do not choose whether or not to identify themselves with it. Rather, similar to a cultural norm, it exists implicitly as a broad identifier of Americans as a whole and governs choices and behaviors without anyone asking why. When the majority of a population is privy to a certain ideology, it produces tangible results. For example, when the country dominantly

identifies as Democrat, the laws and policies that govern action in the U.S. reflect the Democratic ideology. Similarly, when a particular ideology falls out of favor, the people may in a sense rebel against it, in this example by voting against the Democratic nominee or opposing the Party's policies. The American landscape ideology has certainly produced tangible results. I argue that the dominance of sprawling suburbs in America, despite its inefficiencies and inconveniences, is a direct result of the subversive ideology that has been preserved through a series of conscious decisions made throughout the past two centuries. The landscape of America looks virtually nothing like it did when the ideology was formulated—open, unpopulated land is no longer abundant and the landscape is not dominated by agriculture—and yet, the ideology has survived. Because it functions implicitly, there exists no entity or power to rebel against, and because the ideology encapsulates tightly held American identity and values, the ideology is particularly emotional and perhaps even dangerous. The sprawling suburbs that have manifested as an expression of this ideology are inefficient and create detrimental consequences for human and environmental health, but because the American landscape ideology is still being held as a kind of unquestioned cultural norm and important representation of American character and identity, it is incredibly hard to “rebel” against this form of development, and attempts to remedy its effects are met with sharp opposition and resistance.

I became interested in this topic when, in my studies of urban sprawl, it became apparent that there is some seemingly unidentifiable force driving sprawl and passionately resisting attempts to implement more compact and efficient modes of development. The notion that Americans have some fundamental right to sprawl and that this right is effectively functioning to block efforts to develop the landscape in a more pragmatic, sustainable way, struck me as incredibly important to understanding sprawl and yet largely unexplained. I sought to understand

why Americans are so strongly and emotionally attached to sprawl, even when faced with its detrimental consequences and presented with modes of development that frankly make much more sense.

Inspired by Leo Marx's attempt to trace the pastoral myth and its cultural implications in America in his novel *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, I chose to approach my question using historical analysis. In this thesis, I analyze three important historical moments in order to understand the formulation, subsequent mutations, and tangible consequences of the American landscape ideology. I begin in the late 1700's with Thomas Jefferson's formulation of his yeoman farmer ideal, which largely created the basis upon which the ideology was formed, and explore the writings of his contemporary authors and political figures to understand the ideas and perceptions instrumental in forming the ideology. The second chapter focuses on the debates over land distribution that culminated in the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, which played a large role in determining the development of the Western landscape of the United States. The language used by political figures in these debates, as well as the Act itself, makes abundantly clear the continuing force of the American landscape ideology and its tangible, legal effects. Chapter two also includes analysis of cultural literary documents in order to illuminate the effects of the ideology in the minds of the American people, separate from the realm of political persuasion. The final chapter analyzes the ideology's role in promoting and encouraging the dominance of suburban development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I analyze the influence of the Supreme Court, the U.S. government, important planners, and cultural sources on the widespread and overwhelming popularity of suburbia.

My intention is not to attach notions of good or bad, right or wrong to this ideology, but rather I attempt to use history to understand the present issue of urban sprawl and the widespread

resistance to alternative, more efficient modes of development. My hope is that understanding how the ideology works and the tangible effects it has had in the past will lend perspective to planners, policy-makers, and architects who are currently tasked with creating more sustainable developments that are acceptable to the American people. Perhaps if these alternatives can be framed in a way that fits the ideological framework, they will be more widely acceptable. At the very least, acknowledging this ideology may make it easier to rebel against the otherwise subversive force.

### **Understanding Ideology and Discourse**

The American landscape ideology functions on the complex interplay between the concepts of ideology and discourse. Perhaps the singular agreement in the field of study dedicated to understanding the terms “ideology” and “discourse” is that it is nearly impossible to define or clearly delineate the two. I did not spend a substantial amount of time studying the complexities of the term “ideology” before deeming my theory one, and therefore the term was loosely defined in my mind as something like “a mode of thought or system of conceptualizing abstract ideas and values” as I sorted through historical documents and began to form this thesis. While it likely would have been useful to have a firmer grasp on the intricacies of the theory of ideology in formulating my own theories, I would undoubtedly have attempted to fit my own ideas neatly into an established theoretical model, and thus severely limited the ability for my own ideas to grow organically and authentically. It is in this method of working backward that I am able to situate my theories uniquely in the field of thought and add to the established understanding of ideology, discourse, and the interplay between the two.

The study of ideological theory is strongly rooted in the analysis of the theories of the German philosopher Karl Marx. Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, in their analysis of the

intersection of ideology and discourse note that, while “ideology” was not invented by Marx, “it has in contemporary usage become closely associated with the Marxist tradition and takes its place within what we suggest is the broad problematic of modern western Marxism.”<sup>5</sup> Marxism is an incredibly complex ideology and has been analyzed and interpreted by myriad academics and philosophers. It is not my intention to add to these interpretations, but rather to use and argue with Marx’s conception of ideology in order to situate my own theory of this American landscape ideology. “In its simplest and most pervasive form,” Purvis and Hunt assert, an ideology “presents the existing social relations as both natural and inevitable; particular interests come to be disassociated from their specific location and come to appear as universal and neutral.”<sup>6</sup> To simplify, ideologies function to create behaviors or modes of thought that are untraceable to their original conception; they normalize and institutionalize certain thoughts and beliefs about how to function properly in society to the point that people rarely question why, much like a cultural norm, but with deeper implications. In this sense, the American landscape ideology has functioned to establish a connection between the American character and the mode of living on and developing the physical landscape, and the effect is an unquestioned belief about the proper, moral, American way of relating to the landscape. In the long-term, this ideology has created detrimental environmental effects in the form of urban sprawl and an unrelenting resistance to considering alternative, more compact or city-like ways of life.

Fundamental to the Marxist conception of ideology, as well as to those of most academics in the field of study, is the notion of a dominant power’s role in normalizing an ideology. Terry Eagleton in his analysis of ideology writes, “Perhaps the most common answer is

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<sup>5</sup> Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...” *Wiley, The London School of Economics and Political Science* 44, no. 3 (1993): 474, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/591813>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

to claim that ideology has to do with *legitimizing* the power of a dominant social group or class.”<sup>7</sup> Eagleton determines that a dominant power may legitimate itself in several ways, including promoting favorable beliefs and values, portraying these beliefs as natural and inevitable, criticizing challenging ideas, excluding rival forms of thought “perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic,” and concealing social realities in convenient ways.<sup>8</sup> This aspect I found initially contrary to my own conception of the American landscape ideology. For the ideology to survive from the earliest days of the American republic to present day, which I argue it does, it must have been legitimated and normalized by some dominant power. Forces of power will certainly become apparent in this essay, through the passage of legislation, court decisions, and intentional government policies that enforced and perpetuated the ideology, however it is difficult to point to a single domineering force. To say that Thomas Jefferson had some strategic aim to control the American mind for centuries in his formulation of his yeoman ideal would be absurd, and yet to say the U.S. government acted as the source of this power would be at once too broad and too confining of the ideological impulse. Additionally, it cannot be said that the ideology was enforced and normalized by some dominant class of Americans, because although the ideology functioned in an increasingly exclusive manner as it evolved through time, its origin relied on the idea of creating opportunity for the most disadvantaged classes.

To resolve this conflict, one must reflect back on the fundamental concept of an ideology’s ability to normalize and legitimate behaviors and thought patterns to the point that its original source is unrecognizable or arguably unimportant. The American landscape ideology does not and cannot rely on some singular or identifiable dominant force. To attribute the ideology to one singular moment or decision in history would be to improperly characterize it as

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<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

some empirical representation rather than what Eagleton calls “lived relations.” It follows, therefore, “that ideology cannot be substantially transformed by offering individuals true descriptions in place of false ones—that it is not in this sense simply a *mistake*.”<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jefferson did not survey the American landscape and determine objectively that maintaining a nation of small yeoman farmers would be the most pragmatic and fruitful path forward. Abraham Lincoln did not pass the Homestead Act in 1862 on the basis of some grand economic scheme. The Supreme Court did not in 1926 decide that the most efficient use of the landscape would be in the development of sprawling single-family homes. These figures were not acting on some mistake or miscalculation; they were operating on an ideology that time and time again proved to overrule any logic or pragmatic decision-making. *That* is the dominant power. This powerful force is arguably more influential and potentially dangerous than an oppressive government or dictator for the sole reason that there is no fundamental mistake that can be pointed to, or tangible power to rebel against, in order to change the increasingly detrimental behavior of the U.S. citizenry. To challenge this ideology is rather to challenge what citizens hold to be their very identity as Americans and the immensely important values carried with it.

While the strength of the ideology lies in its subversive force, it is important to distinguish this concept from the idea of “false consciousness,” which is often contended with in understanding ideological theories. Eagleton explains,

The idea of false consciousness can be taken as implying the possibility of some unequivocally correct way of viewing the world...the belief that a minority of theorists monopolize a scientifically grounded knowledge of how society is, while the rest of us blunder around in some fog of false consciousness, does not particularly endear itself to the democratic sensibility.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 11.

I certainly do not intend to attempt to assert that I hold the key to understanding some fundamental truth, nor do I believe that there is some singular correct worldview or understanding of the interworking of society. Although I have asserted that this American landscape ideology was not founded on any empirically based decision-making, I also do not mean to discount the entirety of the ideology as foundationless. As Eagleton aptly expresses, “There is no such thing as a presuppositionless thought, and to this extent all of our thinking might be said to be ideological.”<sup>11</sup> Society unquestionably functions on countless ideas and beliefs that could be said to be “ideological.” This is not to say that we are all functioning on some baseless foundation of lies, Eagleton continues, “it is certainly hard to credit that whole masses of human beings would hold over some extensive historical period ideas and beliefs that were simply nonsensical.”<sup>12</sup> Humans must be assumed to be at least somewhat rational beings, and therefore for an ideology to function and persist, it must have some basis of truth. Eagleton writes,

Simply on account of the pervasiveness and durability of such doctrines, we can generally assume they encode in however mystified a way, genuine needs and desires... Successful ideologies must be more than imposed illusions, and for all their inconsistencies must communicate to their subjects a version of social reality which is real and recognizable enough not to be simply rejected out of hand.<sup>13 14</sup>

It follows that, despite the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the American landscape ideology—especially as it became mutated far past its original conception—it must fundamentally hold some aspects of truth for its subjects that fulfill an essential need. It will become apparent in the early chapters of this essay that the original formulation of the ideology was indeed based on basic truths about property and the investment of labor in the land, though

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 15.



these truths quickly became transformed to hold purely metaphoric, ideological power. This ideology was originally formulated at a unique time in which the people of this new republic felt the most basic need and desire to establish for themselves the fundamental values and identity of an American. Although the idea that one's relationship to the physical landscape would in some way determine their character as a human being may appear now to be a mystical idea, the power of the ideology in influencing decision making should not be underestimated, and its tangible force will be proven at length in the following chapters.

The most revealing way to trace this elusive ideology throughout history is in analyzing the language used to discuss the landscape and the human-landscape relationship in order to unearth the fundamental ideological values being expressed. Purvis and Hunt define "discourse" as referring to "the individual social networks of communication through the medium of language or non-verbal sign-systems...[and] provides a vehicle for thought, communication and action."<sup>15</sup> The advantage of analyzing the role of language in discourse and ideology is that "it exhibits both persistence over time and widespread diversity and thus exemplifies both the generality and specificity that characterizes the distinctively social aspect of the species."<sup>16</sup> This is what makes the analysis of language and discourse so fruitful in understanding the ideology's functionality in governing behaviors and decision-making. Close analysis of the language and metaphors used at various historical moments reveal the continuance through history of underlying values and associations that are so fundamental to the American landscape ideology, which has in itself not been explicitly acknowledged. "Ideology is less a matter of the inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement," Eagleton states, "than a question of who is saying

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<sup>15</sup> Purvis and Hunt, "Discourse, Ideology," 485.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 484.

what to whom for what purposes.”<sup>17</sup> When the Supreme Court in 1926 proclaimed that apartment buildings would act as a “parasite” upon districts made up of detached single-family homes, it certainly did not intend to be read literally, but rather used this language to justify maintaining the landscape in a way that fit comfortably with the landscape ideology.

The American landscape ideology therefore relies on discourse for its very existence. This otherwise unacknowledged, subversive ideology could not possibly continue without the expression of values shrouded in ideological language. Louis Althusser, whose “interventions established new standards of theoretical rigour and sophistication” in western Marxism,<sup>18</sup> expresses with exceptional clarity this intersection of ideology and discourse; Eagleton paraphrases, “‘Ideology expresses a will, a hope, or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality,’ it is fundamentally a matter of fearing and denouncing, reverencing and reviling, all of which then sometimes gets coded into a discourse which looks as though it is describing the way things are.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the most essential aspect of the American landscape ideology is this idea that it does not, nor does it ever claim to, describe reality. Rather it employs this coded discourse to represent the unshakable values and allow them to influence the development of the landscape still today.

### **Chapter I: The Foundation and Early Mutations of the Ideology: 1690-1800**

“Can there be any doubt,” Leo Marx questions, “that the prevailing American ideology of space has done more to shape the national terrain than the ideas and practices of our most gifted architects, landscape architects, and planners?” Despite the laudable and cherished work accomplished by figures, such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright,

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<sup>17</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Purvis and Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology,” 481.

<sup>19</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 19.

and Lewis Mumford, “so far as the scope of their influence on the transformation of the American terrain is concerned, all their efforts put together hardly begin to compare with the results of the countless uncoordinated individual, corporate, and governmental decisions made in accordance with the reigning ideology of space.”<sup>20</sup> As Marx points out, the physical terrain of America has for centuries been so deeply entrenched in ideology that it is nearly impossible to discuss the landscape in purely physical terms. What then, is this “reigning ideology of space” that has done more to influence the development of the American landscape than the work of some of the most widely known architects and planners?

In the United States, the land was never just land. It was never just soil upon which resources may grow or humans may build. Instead, it has always acted as a blank canvas upon which Americans painted an ideal—a “United States” whose very character, identity, and values are instilled in the land. The result was the formation of an ideology in which the physical landscape is intimately intertwined with notions of identity and character, the American landscape ideology. To call this an ideology of space, however, would be misleading. Space is empty, unmarked and undefined by the people. The American landscape ideology is rather an ideology of place; a landscape that is claimed, defined, and in turn used to define the American character as a moral, industrious, independent, and free body of people.

This chapter is mainly concerned with understanding the unique situation in which the American ideology of place came into being, identifying its key components and inherent contradictions, and exploring its earliest mutations in order to help explain how it has endured, in different forms, in the American mind for centuries. This thesis refers to America as it came into

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<sup>20</sup> Leo Marx, “The American Ideology of Space,” in *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 26.

being in the late 1700's with independence from Great Britain. I recognize the important and complex issues regarding the previously established Native American people and the role these issues play in the development of the landscape; however, given the limitations of time and space, such issues will not be discussed in this thesis.

### **Section I: John Locke and the Theory of Property**

According to Leo Marx, John Locke was the philosopher “who probably had the greatest influence on the generation that founded the American Republic.”<sup>21</sup> Locke’s chapter titled “Of Property” in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690) provided the basic theories about land and property upon which early American writers formed the landscape ideology.<sup>22</sup> In his *Second Treatise*, Locke famously establishes the idea that when an individual invests his labor into the land, the land and resources are removed from the common and become his property. Locke writes, “Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property,” and further, “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use as the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common.”<sup>23 24</sup> Men are thus naturally limited, according to Locke, by the land or resources of which they “can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils...Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.”<sup>25</sup> Locke situates his theory on property in the idea that

God gave the world to men in common, but since He gave it them for their benefit and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed He meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>22</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. Richard H. Cox (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 20.

industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it); not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.<sup>26</sup>

Locke's theory on property creates the basic foundation of the American landscape ideology, and one can immediately see the way in which his theory incorporates elements of rationality and logic as well as less logical implications for an individual's values and character. The idea that mixing one's labor with the land allows him to establish a title to it is entirely rational; if a man transforms raw timber into a hut to live in, it makes sense that he should be able to claim the hut as his own. However, the implications reach farther than a simple property claim. With his assertion that God intended the "industrious and rational" men to improve the land (not the "quarrelsome and contentious") in order to reap the greatest possible benefit, Locke introduces a layer of superiority of human character to the basic notion of "improving the land." The association between man's physical relationship with the land and his character as a human being will prove to be perhaps the most important and lasting component of the ideology.

Equally important is the way in which this notion of "improving" the land acts and morphs in the cultural imagination along with the ideology. The idea is present in each historical moment discussed in this essay, but it is never explicitly defined; rather, it seems to become implicitly uniform in the American mind by the force of the widely held landscape ideology. In the homestead era, "improving" the land becomes synonymous with farming a 160-acre plot, while in the suburban era the land is improved when sprawling single-family homes are built upon it. Whether these methods of developing the landscape truly "improve" the land in a rational sense is less important than the demonstration of the strength of the ideology's implications for actual human thought and behavior. This idea will become clearer throughout this essay with more detailed exploration.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 21.

The effect of Locke's theory on property was not just to create implications for the human character, but also to present undeveloped land as lacking inherent value. "It is labour indeed that puts the difference of value on everything," Locke writes, which leads him to characterize America as "rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life," because the country had yet to "improve" its fruitful soil, granted so liberally by Nature.<sup>27</sup> Not only is unimproved land lacking in value, but Locke also asserts that "land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage, or planting, is called, as indeed it is, waste."<sup>28</sup> To leave any part of America's seemingly abundant landscape untouched by human improvement, according to Locke, would be to waste God's gift. From Locke's 17<sup>th</sup> century perspective, America certainly would have appeared to be a virtually limitless expanse of land. This perception of the land is clear in Locke's theory; he writes, "No man's labour could subdue or appropriate all, nor could his enjoyment consume more than a small part."<sup>29</sup> Locke's conception of the boundless American landscape would, of course, prove to be naïve and misguided. Despite its inaccuracy, however, this idea was quite influential in the formulation of the American landscape ideology; today, it is apparent that the American conception of the "right to sprawl" hinges on this assumption that the landscape is abundant and limitless.

To early settlers of America, the expansive, relatively unoccupied landscape contrasted dramatically with that of Europe, which was tied up in the oppressive and hierarchical feudal system. The physical landscape of America, the most distinctive aspect of this new country, quickly became closely associated with the creation of the new, morally superior kind of person. The American landscape was vast and held seemingly unlimited resources; it was wild and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 22.

untamed, which incited both fear and excitement in the new settlers. The people who would tame and improve this landscape would necessarily be industrious and brave; they would be independent, at the mercy of nothing but their own character and industry. Americans would come to define their very identity and distinctly American values based on the opportunity to civilize this new landscape. Locke's theory on property, coupled with this unique moment in history, created the close interplay between the physical environment and national character that would lead to the formulation of the American landscape ideology. Ideological thought is quite clearly at the forefront of the minds of some of the earliest American writers and political figures as they wrote foundational documents that would solidify this ideology in the American mind.

## **Section II: Thomas Jefferson and The Yeoman Farmer Ideal**

The desire to achieve a perfect balance between man and nature is widely regarded as the pastoral myth or pastoral ideal, and, according to Marx, "the New World provided the first actual, large-scale opportunity to realize the ancient dream of achieving genuine harmony between humankind and nature."<sup>30</sup> Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal demonstrates an attempt to merge the ancient pastoral myth and the new American nation. According to Jefferson's ideal, America would remain a nation of small, self-subsistent yeoman farmers, which, according to the pastoral myth, would achieve a perfect balance between man and nature. The land would be subdued and cultivated, but would not be dominated or altered too far from its natural state.

Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal is unarguably pastoral, but his ideal also functions outside the pastoral myth to achieve much more than to simply confirm the application of an ancient myth to the new American landscape. Jefferson's ideal nation of yeoman farmers went

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<sup>30</sup> Marx, "The American Ideology of Space," 8.

beyond the pastoral myth to establish the basis of an American landscape ideology in which one's relationship with the physical land plays a key role in forming identity and character. Most importantly, Jefferson's ideal took the notion of the pastoral out of the realm of the myth and created real, tangible applications for the American people.

In his Query XIX of *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Jefferson contends that America is distinctly different from Europe, both in its principles and in the state of its physical landscape, which he wraps closely together.

The political economists of Europe have established it as a principle that every state should endeavour to manufacture for itself: and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstances which should often produce a difference of result... In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman.<sup>31</sup>

The physical landscape, Jefferson argues, is fundamentally different from that of Europe, namely in its immensity, and therefore lends itself to farming rather than manufacturing. Jefferson asserts that manufacturing in an industry that is "resorted to of necessity not of choice," a necessity that America does not face because of its possession of vast, open lands. Jefferson explicitly rejects economic growth as a measure of the country's success in favor of the values and nobility associated with the development of a landscape of small-scale agriculture; he writes, "The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government."<sup>32</sup> Jefferson thus rejects the European model for America's development and, although not explicitly stated, seems to imply the superiority of the American landscape. While Europe must resort to manufacturing to support its population, America's

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes On The State Of Virginia* (Indiana: Infomotions Inc., 2001), accessed June 15, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



abundant landscape provides its population the ability to choose the more virtuous profession of farming.

Jefferson firmly establishes the values and virtue associated with a landscape of noble farmers. “Those who labour in the earth,” Jefferson states, “are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breast he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”<sup>33</sup> Jefferson is clearly drawing on Locke’s idea in his *Second Treatise* that God himself ordered man to subdue the earth and builds on the moral implications of improving the earth. Further, Jefferson writes, “Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example.”<sup>34</sup> Jefferson’s implication seems to be that the physical act of cultivating the land, which requires hard work, industrious character, and an investment in the soil, prevents the corruption of morals. Farmers are able to look “to their own soil and industry” whereas manufacturers must depend on the “casualties and caprice of customers,” a much less reliable and more easily corrupted arrangement. Jefferson goes on to explain how a nation of farmers will create a country in which the good and moral outweigh the corrupt; “generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption.”<sup>35</sup> According to his logic, the “degree of corruption” in America would be small to nonexistent if its citizens were dominantly employed in agriculture.

In his study of nineteenth-century American culture, *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx argues that in Jefferson’s “happy classless state...the physical attributes of the land are less

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

important than its metaphoric powers. What finally matters most is its function *as a landscape*—an image in the mind that represents aesthetic, moral, political, and even religious values.”<sup>36</sup>

Jefferson is not concerned with agriculture for its own sake, Marx continues, but “rather small-scale yeoman farming as the economic basis for what may be called a desirable general culture. It is the ‘happiness,’ ‘manners and spirit’ of the people—the overall quality of life—that rules out manufactures.”<sup>37</sup> This idea is incredibly important to understanding Jefferson’s ideal as the foundational basis for the American landscape ideology. Jefferson does not mean to promote agrarian interests for their own sake, but rather uses the yeoman farmer ideal to connect moral American character and fundamental values with a certain mode of improving the land. The landscape was never simply a landscape, but rather an entity into which American character, values, and identity were instilled.

Shortly after the first printing of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson refers to his ideal American landscape as “theory only;” he wrote, “Were I to indulge my one theory, I should wish them to practice neither commerce nor navigation...and all our citizens would be husbandmen...But this is theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow” (qtd. in L. Marx, 141). Jefferson’s recognition of the conflict between his ideal state and the economic reality that was already taking hold in America reveals an important aspect of this ideology: its inherent contradiction between idealism and pragmatic, economic reality. The noble, morally superior and virtuous American identity is rooted in the way in which the landscape is physically developed, which in this moment would have been a nation of small farmers. At the same time, however, Jefferson himself realized that this ideal would never be

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<sup>36</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 134. (Nook eReader).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

able to withstand the economic forces that would destroy the very landscape upon which his ideal is based. The result is an American identity wrapped up in an unattainable ideology coexisting with a concurrent economic reality. From where we stand today, it may seem that economic forces have dominated the ideological component of the dichotomy in which we exist; however, the tangible reality of the ideology is not necessarily important. What is most important is to understand how Americans have held on to and manipulated the ideology for centuries, which has variously functioned to justify and create a range of contradictory beliefs, decisions, and landscape development.

### **Section III: Early Applications of the Ideology**

Jefferson's assertion that his ideas were "theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow" does not seem to have deterred his theories from taking hold on the American mind. J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, a French-American writer and contemporary of Jefferson, published his *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782. In his third chapter, titled "What is an American?," Crevecoeur discusses what he believes it is to be an American and closely echoes the ideas of both Locke and Jefferson. His descriptions of the abundant landscape of America and the opportunity it holds for a better life, the environmentally determined character of American inhabitants, and the virtue of cultivation demonstrate a clear embodiment of Jefferson's ideal at work in forming the American landscape ideology.

The feeling of optimism and excitement associated with the abundant landscape is palpable in Letter III of Crevecoeur's *Letters*; he writes, "Who can tell how far it extends? Who can tell the millions of men whom it will feed and contain? For no European foot has yet

travelled half the extent of this mighty continent!”<sup>38</sup> Compared to the crowded, dirty, oppressive cities of Europe, this land presented an opportunity for a life in which hard work and the pursuit of self-interest would lead to happiness and rewards. Crèvecoeur includes a brief but clear acknowledgement of the continuity and connection to the European homeland. “What then is the American, this new man?” Crèvecoeur questions, “He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country.”<sup>39</sup>

This recognition is important because it signals an acknowledgement of the tension between the American and European identities and thus demonstrates the struggle to determine what it is to be American, an identifier that could not be fully claimed until the end of the Revolutionary War. In the introduction to his third letter Crèvecoeur writes, “They brought along with them their national genius, to which they principally owe what liberty they enjoy, and what substance they possess. Here he sees the industry of his native country displayed in a new manner, and traces in their works the embryos of all the arts, sciences, and ingenuity which flourish in Europe.”

Crèvecoeur acknowledges that the people of this new nation would carry with them their “national genius” and industry, but the American landscape would allow them to be “displayed in a new manner,” a more rewarding manner. Americans would be “a people of cultivators,” and in this new nation there would be “no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury.”<sup>40</sup> To be an American would be to have the opportunity to cultivate the land and reap the rewards, in contrast to Europe where one could toil endlessly and receive very little in return. By defining the differences between life in America and in Europe largely based on the different physical landscapes,

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<sup>38</sup> J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, “Letter III” in *Letters from an American Farmer* eds. Michael H.R. Owens and Tuomi J. Forrest (University of Virginia, 1995), sec. 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 54.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 49.

Crevecoeur not only blurs the line between physical landscape and personal character, but he also perpetuates the establishment of American identity deeply rooted in the land.

Crevecoeur's writing clearly reiterates Locke's belief that undeveloped land holds little inherent value. According to Marx's analysis, Crevecoeur does not believe that nature is "sweet and pure," instead, "He admires improved nature, a landscape that is made a thing, a fusion of work and spontaneous process. 'This formerly rude soil' [Crevecoeur] explains, 'has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return it has established all our rights.'" (qtd. in L. Marx, 117). Marx aptly points out that the lack of established institutions in America at the time made "the relation between mankind and the physical environment... more than usually decisive," he continues, "Geography pushes men into farming, which is of course the noblest vocation. But the land is significant not only for the material and political benefits it confers; at bottom it determines everything about the new kind of man being formed in the New World."<sup>41</sup> Logically, farming meant "the chance for a simple man, who does actual work, to labor on his own property in his own behalf. It [gave] him a hope for the leisure and economic sufficiency formerly—which is to say, in Europe—reserved for another class."<sup>42</sup> Ideologically, however, the morality and Americanness associated with cultivating the land became much more complexly intertwined, leading to associations that far surpassed logic.

Identifying contradictions in Crevecoeur's writing is useful for understanding the unclear line between reality and the ideology. "In Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative mould, and refreshing showers; they withered, and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war;" Crevecoeur writes, "but now by the power of transplantation, like all other

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<sup>41</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 116.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

plants they have taken root and flourished!”<sup>43</sup> Merely by being “transplanted” from Europe onto American soil, men are, Crèvecoeur believes, bound to flourish, suggesting a kind of environmental determinism. However, the idea becomes complicated when Crèvecoeur writes, “Men are like plants; the goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment.”<sup>44</sup> Initially, he seems to suggest that the character of Americans is derived somewhat literally from their environment—the soil, the air, and the climate—but as he continues, he suggests that men are also a product of their government, religion, and employment. Crèvecoeur further complicates his assertion when he writes, “It is not every emigrant who succeeds; no, it is only the sober, the honest, and industrious...”<sup>45</sup> If people were a product of their physical environment, therefore making Americans naturally—by means of the literal soil—more noble, pure, and moral than their European counterparts, it would seem to follow that the sober, honest, and industrious characteristics would not be necessary for men’s success in America.

These contradictions in Crèvecoeur’s writing are not fundamentally problematic; it is not difficult to understand the ideas that he intends to convey about life in this new country—the land is boundless and opportunities are plentiful if you are willing to work for it. However, identifying the ways in which Crèvecoeur fails to establish a clear line between men’s inherent character and the character they derive from the physical landscape is important in illustrating the uniquely subversive force of the American landscape ideology. The ideology, founded

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<sup>43</sup> Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, sec. 52-53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

largely on idealistic and unrealistic associations of human character and the relationship with the physical environment, will inevitably run into contradictions when faced with the forces of reality. The ability of the ideology to morph and survive in the American mind despite its inherent contradictions is testament to its strength in acting as an undercutting current. The strong urge in the late 1700's to define a new, distinct American identity and the drastic difference between the physical landscape of Europe and America created a situation in which the physical land and more abstract notions of identity, character, and values became closely connected. Rooted in Lockean theories on land and property, Jefferson and Crèvecoeur's writings represent some of the earliest examples of the complex American landscape ideology and suggest how the ideology influenced thoughts about the landscape and its development.

As mentioned above, one of the most important aspects of this ideology is the way in which it can and has been manipulated to exist with the evolving reality of the nation. Americans have been able to modify the ideology, enabling it to survive through the dramatic changes to the physical environment since the late 1700's, when the ideology first came into being. The nation's landscape certainly did not remain full of small yeoman farmers, and Jefferson himself acknowledged that the American people already had "a decided taste for navigation and commerce." It did not take long for the ideology to change so as to accommodate economic interests that would undoubtedly change the composition of the landscape, and, by implication, the character of the people. Preserving the ideology in a mutated form meant preserving the precious American values rooted in the physical land in the face of potentially threatening and contradictory changes to the landscape. The writings of Tench Coxe, a contemporary of Jefferson and Crèvecoeur and early advocate of manufacturing in the United States, are

illustrative of an early manipulation of the ideology to accommodate landscape changes that would be in opposition to the ideological landscape.

Tench Coxe is not often remembered as a major or influential character in American history, if he is remembered at all. Marx postulates that this is because he is a relatively “unattractive figure,” having been accused of collaboration with the enemy after the Revolutionary War and characterized by John Quincy Adams as a “wily, winding, subtle, and insidious character,” and thus he may be anything but an American hero.<sup>46</sup> He is quite important, however, in understanding the way in which the American landscape ideology began to be manipulated and adapted to allow for economic interests, manufacturing, and eventual industrialization to be accepted in America. In 1787, Coxe gave two speeches, “An Enquiry into the principles, on which a commercial system for the United States of America should be founded...[and] some political observations connected with the subject,” and “An Address to an Assembly of the Friends of American Manufactures” (the inaugural address at the organizing meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts). Together, these speeches demonstrate how Coxe was “intelligent enough not to conceive of American power as emerging from technology per se, but rather from the peculiar affinities between the machine and the New World setting in its entirety: geographic, political, social, and, in our sense of the word, cultural.”<sup>47</sup> Coxe’s methodical fitting of his economic argument within the Jeffersonian foundation of the American ideology of land and character, demonstrates the important and prominent role of the ideology, as well as the ease in which it may be manipulated to accommodate changing interests.

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<sup>46</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 157.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.



A contemporary of figures like Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, who were actively espousing the moral superiority and Americanness associated with agriculture and yeomanry, Coxe makes clear in his speeches that agricultural interests must remain the most important consideration for the nation. Coxe acknowledges the value of agriculture and the importance of farmers in the American landscape, “the number of people employed in agriculture, is at least nine parts in ten of the inhabitants of America—[and] therefore the planters and farmers do form the body of the militia, the bulwark of the nation—that the value of property, occupied by agriculture, is manifold greater than that of the property employed in every other way”<sup>48</sup> He reiterates this idea in his inaugural address, “in taking measures to promote the objects of this Society, nothing should be attempted, which may injure our agricultural interests, they being undoubtedly the most important.”<sup>49</sup> However, he follows this point cleverly with the assertion that, just as the American landscape lends itself to agriculture, technology and manufacturing also emanate from the particular landscape features and resources of America. In fact, he presents them as necessary to allow the country to reach its full power and potential, thus presenting “his program of economic development as a part of a grand topographical design,” or in other words, an integral part of the landscape ideology.<sup>50</sup>

“Providence has bestowed upon the United States of America means of happiness, as great and numerous, as are enjoyed by any country in the world,” Coxe states in his Address, striking an initially Lockean tone, “A soil fruitful and diversified—a healthy climate—mighty

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<sup>48</sup> Tench Coxe, “An Enquiry into the principles, on which a commercial system for the United States of America should be founded...[and] some political observations connected with the subject” (speech, read before the Society for Political Enquiries convened at the house of his excellency Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, PA, May 11, 1787), 8.

<sup>49</sup> Tench Coxe. “An address to an assembly of the friends of American manufactures, convened for the purpose of establishing a society for the encouragement of manufactures and the useful arts” (speech, read in the University of Pennsylvania, PA, August 9, 1787), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 164.

rivers and adjacent seas abounding with fish are the great advantages for which we are indebted to a beneficent creator. Agriculture, manufactures and commerce, naturally arising from these sources, afford to our industrious citizens certain subsistence and innumerable opportunities of acquiring wealth.”<sup>51</sup> In Jefferson’s ideal vision for the American landscape—the ideal upon which the landscape ideology is strongly based—Americans would not desire or seek accumulation of wealth, as Europeans did. Instead, they would be satisfied with the self-sufficiency flowing from their hard work. By contrast, Coxe seamlessly weaves “manufactures and commerce” and “opportunities of acquiring wealth” into a sentence that could have otherwise been plucked from Jefferson’s own writing. Thus, Coxe is able to quietly blend a different kind of economic consideration into the established ideology without making it appear to be a priority. The dichotomy here is clear: while early Americans clung to the ideology in which they invested their very identity and therefore desired to maintain Jefferson’s ideal landscape, at the same time, they could not wholly reject the emerging commercial economic reality. The seamless merger of these two components made Coxe’s advocacy especially attractive.

By framing manufacturing and commerce as necessary components in advancing agricultural interests and allowing America to reach its full superior power and potential, Coxe expands the ambit of the American ideology of land and character. Coxe asserts, “Unless business of this kind is carried on, certain great *natural powers* of the country will remain inactive and useless.”<sup>52</sup> Without manufacturing, Coxe argues, the power and greatness naturally arising from the land will go to waste, an assertion that would have certainly struck some level of fear into the hearts of the new Americans who took great pride in their uniquely abundant

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<sup>51</sup> Coxe, “An address to an assembly,” 4.

<sup>52</sup> Coxe, “An enquiry into the principles,” 20-21.

landscape. If the landscape could not reach its full potential, perhaps the American people could not reach their full potential, given their character was so closely tied to the landscape. Coxe illustrates his claim by citing a specific example:

The clear air and powerful sun of America is another advantage our manufacturers enjoy. When the linen and cotton branches shall become considerable, a great saving of time and money will be made by the climate, and where bleaching is effected principally by the sun and water, the quality of the cloth is known to be more excellent. The European process by drugs and machines impairs the strength.<sup>53</sup>

Coxe uses this example to assert that, while the American physical environment may inherently make the country and its people great, the Nation can only truly demonstrate its departure from and superiority to Europe with the help of manufacturing and commerce. In Coxe's words, "the United States of America cannot make a proper use of the natural advantages of the country, nor promote her agriculture and other lesser interests without manufactures."<sup>54</sup> By framing his promotion of manufacturing and commerce in the United States as a way to promote agriculture and reap the most benefit from the country's unique landscape, Coxe is able to enlarge the ideology to include his economic agenda.

It is illuminating in understanding the ideology to examine the ways in which Coxe uses very similar language and ideas as Crèvecoeur and Jefferson to fit manufacturing into the American ideal landscape. Just as Locke, Jefferson, and Crèvecoeur wrote in admiration of an improved, cultivated nature, Coxe states,

Under all the disadvantages which have attended manufactures and the useful arts, it must afford the most comfortable reflection to every patriotic mind to observe their progress in the United States and particularly in Pennsylvania. For a long time after our forefathers fought an establishment in this place, then a dreary wilderness, everything necessary for their simple wants was the work of European hands. How great—how happy is the change.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>55</sup> Coxe, "An address to an assembly," 18.

How happy and patriotic it is, Coxe says, to see the American landscape transformed by its own citizens' hands from a "dreary wilderness" to one of productive agriculture, and, now, through manufacturing, Coxe asserts the nation has the ability to produce everything on home soil. On one hand, the idea of products made entirely in America works perfectly with the ideology; these products would naturally be superior because they are manufactured with American resources, growing from American soil. However, the idea also directly contradicts Jefferson's ideal in which, "The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government."<sup>56</sup> According to Jefferson, rejecting domestic manufacturing and the economic benefits was necessary in order to preserve his ideal American landscape, so while Coxe does not entirely contradict the ideology, he significantly alters the fundamental ideal upon which it was founded.

Coxe is careful not to associate manufacturing and commerce with cities, instead reiterating a similar distaste for and rejection of them as Jefferson and Crèvecoeur express in their writing. Coxe says, "Our farmers, to their great honor and advantage, have been long in the excellent economical practice of domestic manufactures for their own use, at least in many parts of the union. It is chiefly in the towns that this madness for foreign finery rages and destroys."<sup>57</sup> By associating "foreign finery" and its destruction of character with the towns and associating manufacturing with *American* (and thus inherently good and moral) goods, Coxe effectively dissociates manufacturing from cities and their inherent immorality, thus blending economic interests into the ideology without directly contradicting its ideals. Coxe's statement that "the rural life promotes health and morality by its active nature, and by keeping our people from the

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<sup>56</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIX.

<sup>57</sup> Coxe, "An address to an assembly," 24-25.

luxuries and vices of the towns. In short, agriculture appears to be the spring of our commerce, and the parent of our manufactures,”<sup>58</sup> communicates that rural, agricultural life is of course the most virtuous American lifestyle, but commerce and manufactures are born naturally from agriculture and thus *must* also be morally and distinctly American.

Coxe bolsters his argument for manufactures by pointing to specific physical features and places in the U.S. that are best suited to commerce and manufacturing. “The extensive coasts, the immense bays and numerous rivers of the United States,” for example, Coxe claims are advantageous and well suited for domestic commerce.<sup>59</sup> South Carolina, Coxe reasons, “must manufacture to an evident loss, while the advancement of that business in Massachusetts will give the means of subsistence to many, whose occupations have been rendered unprofitable by the consequences of the revolution.”<sup>60</sup> By highlighting specific physical features and sections of land in the U.S. that are best suited to commerce and manufacturing, his argument appears less threatening to agriculture and more simply pragmatic.

In his *Letters*, Crèvecoeur spends a substantial amount of time emphasizing America’s role as an asylum for discontented Europeans. As long as these immigrants possessed industrious character, Crèvecoeur asserts, they could succeed and have a happy, rewarding life on American soil. Coxe manipulates this idea a bit, theorizing that some immigrants will be better suited to manufacturing because they will already possess the necessary skills, and thus it is America’s duty as a superior and moral nation to provide work for them. Coxe explains that because many immigrants from Europe will “chuse to continue at their trades,” the U.S. should be careful “not to force manufactures in those states, where the people are fewer, tillage much more profitable,

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<sup>58</sup> Coxe, “An enquiry into the principles,” 9.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

and provisions dearer than in several others, we shall give agriculture its full scope in the former, and leave all the benefits of manufacturing (so far as they are within our reach) to the latter.”<sup>61</sup>

Again, Coxe is careful to make clear that agriculture and the noble American farmers shall not be negatively affected or dominated by manufacturing and, as always, agriculture is the most important consideration. He simply emphasizes that it makes the most sense and is best for the nation to accommodate European immigrants by allowing them to continue the trades in which they are already skilled. In his Address, Coxe repeats a similar idea,

Extreme poverty and idleness in the citizens of a free government will ever produce vicious habits and disobedience to the laws, and must render the people fit instruments for the dangerous purposes of ambitious men. In this light the employment of our poor in manufactures, who cannot find other honest means of a subsistence, is of the utmost consequence. A man oppressed by industry, filling the mind with honest thoughts, and requiring the time for better purposes, do not leave leisure for meditating or executing mischief.<sup>62</sup>

According to Coxe’s logic, if men are ill suited to agricultural work and are not employed by manufactures, they will live in “extreme poverty and idleness,” which inevitably leads to “vicious habits and disobedience to the laws.” This logic is the exact same as that used by Jefferson and Crèvecoeur in their promotion of farming as the most noble and virtuous employment. By using the same reasoning for manufacturing, Coxe is able to blend manufacturing into the moral landscape of the United States.

The effect of Coxe’s blending is to tie the same type of character to industrial labor as is tied to agricultural labor, consequently emptying the yeoman farmer ideal of its distinctive claim. Coxe does not attempt to alter the ideology fundamentally—he does not assert that industrial labor is somehow morally superior to farming, or make any radically different claims of the sort—but instead his slight manipulation removes any tangible logic from the ideology. In

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>62</sup> Coxe, “An address to an assembly,” 23.

Thomas Jefferson's initial conception, the physical cultivation of the land would require long, hard labor that would reasonably form a good, independent character and prevent idleness that could lead to corruption of morals. Coxe's application of the ideology to include manufacturing through reasoning that labor in itself would lead to good character removes the fundamental basic logic of the ideology. This is not to say that Coxe's reasoning does not make logical sense, certainly any sort of labor (especially when compared to poverty and idleness) would be a positive influence on character. Rather, because the ideology was founded on a very specific ideal—the yeoman farmer—any manipulation acts to remove its most fundamental basis.

Coxe uses careful manipulation of language to seamlessly and naturally fit his economic interests into the dominant ideology. By largely repeating the ideals of Locke, Jefferson, and Crèvecoeur, with slight but significant tweaks, Coxe sets into motion the mutation of the American landscape ideology. Although Coxe appears to be consciously using the dominant ideology to promote his agenda, it is reasonable to assume that the same careful manipulations were occurring in the minds of average Americans to adapt the strongly rooted ideology to the changing reality of the nation's landscape. Because American identity, character, and values had been planted so deeply in the physical landscape to create the ideology, it was indeed absolutely necessary to be able to adapt the ideology to reality, or else risk losing American identity altogether.

American ideologies change and evolve all the time; as the nation inevitably progresses, ideologies must adapt to meet and interpret the changing circumstances based on their core values. The Democratic and Republican Parties today certainly do not espouse the exact same doctrine that they did 50 years ago, but the way each party deals with certain issues depends on those fundamental values that must remain relatively stable in order to maintain the integrity of

the ideology. In the same way, the American landscape ideology evolved to meet the changing circumstances of the nation, though in a more implicit fashion and largely demonstrated by language and discourse. As America moved forward to establish and demonstrate its core values and identity in the years following the Revolutionary War, the ideology's role in intertwining American character and the physical landscape was instrumental in determining the course of the development and distribution of the terrain.

### **Chapter Two: The Era of the Homestead Act: 1800-1913**

Ideologies cannot reasonably be evaluated based on some notion of “truth.” To discount an ideology based on whether it is fundamentally true or false is problematic, for one, because this implies that there exists some universal consensus on what is true and false. More importantly, focusing on an ideology's truth content ignores the most unique and important aspect of an ideology—its ability to hold continuing influence, not because of its tangible truth, but because of its ability to *appear* to be true. An ideology dies, not when it is somehow proven to be “false,” but rather when it fails to hold sway, when people stop believing in it. Given that the social, political, economic, and environmental circumstances of the U.S. have always been in a state of flux, for an ideology to continue to thrive here, it has to be adaptable.<sup>63</sup>

The American landscape ideology, initially conceived in the earliest days of our nation, rooted so strongly and intertwined so closely the ideal American character, values, and identity with the physical landscape was indeed capable of evolution and adaptation. Consequently, it has, over the course of American history, continued to play an influential role in the overall development of the landscape. The influence of this ideology, originating in Lockean theories of land and property, developed in greater detail by Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, and expanded by

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<sup>63</sup> Language contribution from Gregg Crane.



Tench Coxe, can be seen in another significant historical moment for our nation—the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862. The following discussion analyzes the American landscape ideology’s role in the decades of tenuous debates over land distribution leading to the Homestead Act, the stipulations and language of the Act itself, as well as its cultural applications. This discussion will highlight the ideology’s continuing influence and evolution, as well as demonstrate the way the ideology has influenced major decision-making in the development of the landscape.

### **Section I: Debates Over Distribution of Western Lands and Homesteading Legislation**

Given the decades of high-tension national debate over the Homestead Act and its many implications for the future of the United States, President Abraham Lincoln’s signing of the Act on May 20, 1862, attracted surprisingly little attention. By 1862, the news was dominated by “dispatches from the battlefields of the eastern and western theatres of war” and “many Republicans in Congress quickly moved on to other pressing business and spent no time gloating over the victory.”<sup>64</sup> The lack of attention paid to the signing of the Homestead Act should not, however, diminish its immense importance. The U.S. Department of the Interior reports that during the 123 years of the Act’s existence, “homesteaders made two million claims and acquired 270 million acres of land...[which] equals the settlement of about ten per cent of the total land area of the United States” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 224).<sup>65</sup> The Act shaped the settlement of the west for more than a century after its passage, and the preceding decades of debates over

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<sup>64</sup> Benjamin Todd Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men’: A Political History of the Homestead Act, 1774--1863” (PhD diss., The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 2012), 221.

<sup>65</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, “Homesteads,” booklet published 1962.

land distribution and settlement also brought to a head the critical debate over the future of slavery in the U.S. and played no small role in sparking the Civil War.<sup>66</sup>

While the practical effects of the Homestead Act for the landscape's physical development are quite important and far-reaching, the ideological implications also deserve attention. The debates surrounding the idea of homestead legislation, the Act itself, as well as cultural documents from the homestead era demonstrate the continuing strength of the American landscape ideology. The debates over the proper distribution and development of Western lands leading up to the Homestead Act were complex and multifaceted, changing and adapting as the nation grew. For the purpose of this paper, however, the many different conflicts and parties involved in the debates are less important than the examination of the ways in which the ideology influenced how Americans viewed the land and their relation to it.<sup>67</sup> It becomes clear that, because of the ideology's influence, these debates were less about the actual physical land of the West than the values the land would come to represent. The Homestead Act and the values expressed in the conversations surrounding it established the Western landscape as the canvas upon which American values and identity would be painted, further entrenching this American landscape ideology.

The United States' victory in the Revolutionary War left the new country with substantial tracts of land, territories that would later become the states that are known today as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota, Alabama, and Mississippi.<sup>68</sup> According to Arrington's political history of the Homestead Act, a 1780 Congressional resolution "stated that any unappropriated lands ceded by the states would be formed into new

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<sup>66</sup> Arrington, "Free Homes for Free Men," 8.

<sup>67</sup> For a more detailed and thorough political history of the Homestead Act, see B.T. Arrington's full dissertation.

<sup>68</sup> Arrington, "Free Homes for Free Men," 21.

states eventually intended to join the Union,” and “the same resolution stated that Congress would regulate granting and selling of these lands.”<sup>69</sup> The leading political figures of this newly independent country were therefore uniquely tasked with promoting a distinctly American identity and national pride, while at the same time deciding what to do with a vast amount of territory. It is not difficult to see how the two became so closely intertwined. Arrington articulates the initial conflict: “While many took inspiration from Thomas Jefferson and called for the government to provide small tracts of land to settlers for free, others remained convinced that sales of public lands should be used to grow the national treasury.”<sup>70</sup> This conflict echoes the previously discussed contradicting dichotomy between Jefferson’s vision for the ideal American landscape of small yeoman farmers, which expressly rejected economic interests, and other economic priorities already being promoted by contemporaries such as Tench Coxe and Alexander Hamilton.

In 1789, the first Federal Congress under the new United States Constitution was immediately faced with conflict over how to handle the newly acquired public domain in the West. Representative Thomas Scott articulated clear Jeffersonian ideals in his critique of the uncompleted land surveys mandated by Jefferson’s ordinance of 1785. Scott stated, “There are a great number of people on the ground, who are willing to acquire by purchase a right to the soil they are seated upon...Allured by its fertility, the agreeableness of the climate, and the prospect of future ease to themselves and their families, they would not seek a change” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 46).<sup>71</sup> Scott’s sentiments reflect an admiration of America’s uniquely agreeable climate and fertile soil, as well as a belief in the opportunity for self-sufficiency, independence,

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men,” iii.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Scott, speaking on May 28, 1789, 1<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Annals of Congress*, 427-429.

and a better life held in the landscape, echoing Jeffersonian and Crevecoeurian thought. Such comment reveals that the Western landscape was, from the outset, not being viewed solely as a physical entity to be distributed, and decisions were certainly not being made on purely logical or pragmatic reasoning. Rather, the ideological influence tied tightly together the way the land was developed and the values it would come to represent.

By the 1820's, disagreements over land policies and distribution created pronounced factionalism and sectionalism in Congress.<sup>72</sup> At this time, Henry Clay and the Whigs encouraged an "American System of internal improvements...which sought to build up manufacturing interests and create a home market for the agricultural products of the South and the burgeoning West."<sup>73</sup> This system received support from figures like Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, who "viewed the public domain as a great national resource from which profits should flow for the benefit and education of Americans."<sup>74</sup> In his First Annual Message to Congress as president in 1825, Adams stated, "The purchasers of public lands are among the most useful of our fellow citizens...The tide of wealth with which they replenish the common Treasury may be made to reflow in unending streams of improvement from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean" (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 83).<sup>75</sup> These more pragmatic arguments resemble those made by Tench Coxe decades earlier. Just as Coxe does, Adams weaves economic interests into the idea of the unique power and abundance of the landscape; "the unending streams of improvement" must be taken advantage of in order to advance the power of the country accordingly. And further, "the purchasers of the public lands" are framed as "the most useful" fellow citizens, not only because

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<sup>72</sup> Arrington, "Free Homes for Free Men," 82.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>75</sup> "John Quincy Adams: First Annual Message, December 6, 1825," *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29467>.

they will aid in replenishing the Treasury, but also because they will be the noble cultivators of the Jeffersonian ideal.

While figures like Clay and Adams fought for economic interests shrouded in ideological language, quite a few figures took a more strictly Jeffersonian approach and argued against selling the land for economic profit. These arguments, rejecting a view of the land as a source of revenue, are a clear demonstration of the influence of the ideology and its close ties with American values and character. In 1828, the *Mechanics Free Press* called on Congress to make the public domain available to the people of America “by right of a title of occupancy only,” the article read, “The present state of affairs must lead to the wealth of a few...All men have a natural right to the soil, else they will be deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 87).<sup>76</sup> This quote reflects the Lockean theory of man’s “natural right to the soil” and ties it firmly to the fundamental rights laid out in the United States Declaration of Independence, the founding document of the country and expression of distinctly American values. Such values are reiterated in an 1840 speech by William Henry Harrison, who “portrayed himself as a hearty frontiersman” in his campaign against President Martin Van Buren.<sup>77</sup> Harrison, referring to his Land Bill of 1800 that reduced the minimum amount of land that could be purchased by settlers, claimed the Bill had “for its object to snatch from the grasp of speculation all glorious country which now teems with harvests under the hands of honest, industrious, and virtuous husbandmen” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 99).<sup>78</sup> Harrison’s use of distinctly Jeffersonian language is clearly rooted in the ideology and suggests its continuing force and development. In his 1832 Annual Message to Congress, Andrew Jackson employed a similar

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<sup>76</sup> *The Mechanics’ Free Press*, October 28, 1828.

<sup>77</sup> Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men,” 99.

<sup>78</sup> William Henry Harrison, quoted in *The Log Cabin* (Whig newspaper), September 26, 1840.

strategy to promote the ideal landscape, he wrote, “The wealth and strength of a country are its population, and the best part of that population are the cultivators of the soil. Independent farmers are everywhere the basis of society and the true friends of liberty” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 94).<sup>79</sup> Jackson’s promotion of the yeoman farmer ideal as the means for creating a strong nation and his subsequent rejection of viewing the land as an internal source of revenue is a clear demonstration of the way in which the character of the nation and its people was tied tightly together with the development of the physical landscape.

According to Arrington, by 1830, approximately one-third of Americans were living in the West, and their priorities played an increasingly important role in shaping the nation’s agenda. Arrington writes,

The region’s population and influence were growing, and its residents’ opinions about land distribution and agrarianism could no longer be ignored or denigrated by the politicians of the East. In the words of historian Frederick Jackson Turner, Jackson’s 1828 electoral victory and the rise of the new Democrats ‘meant that an agricultural society, strongest in the regions of rural isolation...had triumphed for the moment over the conservative, industrial, commercial, and manufacturing society of the New England type (88).<sup>80</sup>

While it is certainly true that as more Americans moved west their political preferences became increasingly difficult to ignore, it is problematic to characterize this moment as a temporary triumph of agriculture over the “conservative, industrial, commercial, and manufacturing society.” The debates over Western land distribution, eventually culminating in the triumph of the Homestead Act, cannot be viewed in isolation from the ideology and therefore the situation cannot be boiled down to agriculture vs. industry. In fact, to characterize the priorities of Western settlers as simply agrarian does not capture the more complex role of the ideology at

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<sup>79</sup> “Andrew Jackson: Fourth Annual Message to Congress, December 4, 1832,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29474&st=&st1=>

<sup>80</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The United States, 1830-1850: The Nation and Its Sections* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 30.

play beneath the surface. To preserve agricultural interests in the West would be to preserve the landscape that most closely reflected the American landscape ideology, and it is clear that the ideology was subversively present in the American mind. As a singular snapshot of this moment in history, it would appear that Americans valued agricultural interests more strongly than industry, but the landscape did not remain dominantly agrarian in the years following the Homestead Act. Therefore, in understanding the Homestead Act as a demonstration of the continuing force of the ideology, it is important to look at arguments both for and against the passage of homestead legislation. The two sides may have been expressing staunchly different views on the distribution of the public domain, the growth of the U.S. economy, and the expansion of slavery, but the most revealing insight is found in the fact that both the supporters and opponents of homestead legislation expressed the same fundamental ideology.

I mean to assert that, for the ideology to hold, the nation's landscape does not need to remain entirely agrarian. While the passage of the Homestead Act may signal a temporary triumph for agrarian priorities, it is not just a temporary triumph for the ideology. It is important to remember that inherent in the ideology is the dichotomy between idealism and economic reality. Similarly, in the era of the Homestead Act, there were Americans fighting for agrarian interests, which would preserve a landscape that is more similar to Jefferson's initial conception of the yeoman ideal, but there were also Americans fighting for economic interests, which would necessitate an increase in industrial development on the landscape, a type of development that is, on the surface, opposed to the ideological landscape. As demonstrated by Tench Coxe, however, to argue for manufacturing did not necessarily mean arguing against the fundamentals of the ideology. Rather, by transforming the ideology into a more metaphorical framework, it could be used to argue both for and against economic interests. The tangible effects of this ideological

dichotomy will be demonstrated in the way the landscape is developed in strictly separate spheres—one of natural idealism (farmland, spacious homesteads on the bountiful West) and one of economic pragmatism (crowded, immoral, filthy cities).

William Henry Harrison's victory in the 1840 presidential election appeared to signal a decisive step toward homestead legislation that would benefit inhabitants of the Western U.S. According to Arrington, however, John C. Calhoun "presciently foresaw that the election of 1840 was not even close to the end of the rancorous debates over distribution of public land."<sup>81</sup> In 1841, Calhoun told the Senate "I regard the question of public lands, next to that of the currency, the most dangerous and difficult of all which demand the attention of the country and government at this important junction of our affairs" (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 102).<sup>82</sup> Some feared that homestead legislation would deplete the factories in the East of their labor sources as people abandoned manufacturing for the opportunities promised in the West. In response, Andrew Johnson rebuked that to oppose homesteading on those grounds would be to tell the American people, "Do not go away; stay here in your poverty; do not go and settle upon the new, rich, fertile lands of the West, but stay here, linger, wither, and die in your poverty" (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 117).<sup>83</sup> In other words, to deny homestead legislation would be to deny the American people of the very opportunities and values upon which their identity was based, which were strongly tied to the landscape. Horace Greeley espoused a similar sentiment in his *Weekly Tribune*, writing in one 1852 article, "Unappropriated, unimproved Public Land, is by the law of Nature and of Social Right the portion of those who, claiming no other portion of Man's

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<sup>81</sup> Arrington, "Free Homes for Free Men," 102.

<sup>82</sup> "Speech of John C. Calhoun, January 12, 1841," in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun: Volume XV, 1839-1841*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1983), 423.

<sup>83</sup> Josiah Sutherland, speaking on April 29, 1852, 32<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Globe Appendix*, 426.



heritage, are willing to improve and cultivate” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 148).<sup>84</sup> Greeley’s language echoes quite closely Locke’s theory about man’s God-given right to the soil, and both Greeley and Johnson’s thoughts are undoubtedly influenced by the ideology’s valuation of independence and freedom to cultivate the soil to enhance one’s own life.

Perhaps the most important conflict tied to the homesteading question was the future of slavery in America. Southern slaveholders saw homestead legislation as a threat to slavery’s westward expansion because, “Plantation agriculture simply could not thrive on the 160-acre farms envisioned by the homestead bill.”<sup>85</sup> Northerners, on the other hand, viewed homestead legislation as an opportunity to block slavery’s expansion. In an 1860 speech, Senator James Mason pointed out that the North’s aim in allowing homesteading in the West was “planting a population there from the free States, and excluding the slave population” (qtd. in B.T. Arrington 154).<sup>86</sup> Mason echoes Crevecoeurian language in his use of the word “planting” in reference to the settlement of a population in the West; Crevecoeur wrote in his *Letters*, “now by the power of transplantation, like all other plants they have taken root and flourished!”<sup>87</sup> While slavery allowed for large-scale plantation agriculture to thrive in the United States, it is important to remember that, although the ideology was originally based on the yeoman farmer ideal, it did not promote agriculture for its own sake. The “Southern” brand of agriculture relied on forcing others to do the hard labor, which fundamentally contradicted the value of industriousness held in the ideology, and therefore the sacrifice of agriculture in the name of abolishing slavery and preserving the ideology makes sense.

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<sup>84</sup> Horace Greeley, *Weekly Tribune* (New York, NY), July 31, 1852.

<sup>85</sup> Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men,” 154.

<sup>86</sup> James Mason, speaking on April 1, 1860, 36<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Globe*, 1,635.

<sup>87</sup> Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, Sec. 52-53.

By 1850, Arrington writes, “the South had become openly hostile to the image of the yeoman farmer promoted by homestead advocates because that image was being used to combat the spread of slavery. The brave, bold yeoman on a small farm in a western territory like Kansas or Nebraska would not be a practitioner of slave-driven plantation agriculture and was therefore an enemy to the politicians of the South.”<sup>88</sup> <sup>89</sup> The South’s hostility to this ideological figure ironically attests to the strength of the ideology and its influence on the way Americans viewed the physical landscape. The yeoman farmer had been idealized by Jefferson as a symbol of the proper, moral, American way in which to use and develop the landscape and, in a way, became a representation of the ideal American character. The South’s hostility to this image, therefore, demonstrates how closely connected the physical landscape was with the American identity and values. The question over the future of slavery, an issue that would decide the values that the country would represent, became closely tied up in the question over how to distribute Western lands. Had American values not been so intertwined with the landscape, perhaps the debates leading to the Homestead Act would not have played such a significant role in escalating tensions that would eventually lead to the Civil War.

It is not difficult to understand how, in the eyes of its supporters, homesteading appeared to offer an opportunity to live like the idealized yeoman farmer and to preserve the ideological landscape. Particularly illuminating, however, is how opponents of homestead legislation manipulated the same fundamental ideology in their arguments against it. In 1850, the Senate Public Lands Committee described the homestead bill as an “unfair tax on those who could not move west and take free land and an unwarranted help for the undeserving” (qtd. in B.T.

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<sup>88</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 165.

<sup>89</sup> Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men,” 155.

Arrington 168).<sup>90</sup> Arrington explains, “Many considered free gifts of land...to the poor to be damaging to the ‘national morale.’ Others worried that homesteading would create a thriftless population that expected the government to provide them everything they needed to thrive on their free farms.”<sup>91</sup> In 1854, the Agricultural Society of New Castle County, Delaware expressed a similar idea:

A system of pensions or donations of revenue or property by the government to individuals is opposed to the character of our institutions, unknown in our past prosperous history, dangerous as a precedent, wrong in principal, and practically uncalled for in a land where none but the slothful need want, where labor is well rewarded and persevering industry never fails to secure a comfortable home...The principle of giving the public lands to the landless is demoralizing in its tendency, as doing away the inducement to economy and industry, and likely lead to habits anything but promotive of the public good.<sup>92</sup>

The sentiments expressed by homestead opponents reflect a fear of enabling a nation of lazy, dependent, and entitled citizens, which they argue is wholeheartedly un-American. Both sides of the homestead argument want to claim to be fighting for this ideal American character— a character that is hardworking, independent, and self-sufficient. The American landscape ideology is undoubtedly present in the minds of both supporters and opponents of homesteading, but both sides were able to manipulate the ideology to fit their agenda. Tench Coxe had done the same thing years before, attesting to the connection of its continuing power and its mutability.

President James Buchanan’s message accompanying his veto of the Homestead Act in 1860 is a particularly interesting document, in part, because its language closely resembles that used in favor of the Act, further demonstrating the clever manipulations of the ideology. A few months before Buchanan’s veto of the Homestead Act, Galusha A. Grow made a speech to the

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<sup>90</sup> George M. Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1917), 142-43.

<sup>91</sup> Arrington, “Free Homes for Free Men,” 169.

<sup>92</sup> U.S. Congress, *Journal of the Senate of the United States*, 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., April 6 1854.

House in support of the Act, and Samuel Pomeroy expresses many of the same sentiments in his speech to the U.S. Senate two years later. Comparing the language of these three documents makes abundantly clear how the same fundamental landscape ideology was manipulated in order to fit the arguments on each side of the conflict, as well as how central the land was in the broader discussion of American values and identity.

“The people of the United States have advanced with steady but rapid strides to their present condition of power and prosperity,” Buchanan proudly states in his veto message,

They have been guided in their progress by the fixed principle of protecting the equal rights of all, whether they be rich or poor. No agrarian sentiment has ever prevailed among them. The honest poor man, by frugality and industry, can in any part of our country acquire a competence for himself and his family, and in doing this he feels that he eats the bread of independence. This bill...will go far to demoralize the people and repress this noble spirit of independence. It may introduce among us those pernicious social theories which have proved so disastrous in other countries.<sup>93</sup>

Here, Buchanan rejects Homestead legislation on the grounds that the “power and prosperity” the county had thus far achieved was acquired on the founding values of independence, equality, frugality, and industry, not on the promotion of a strictly agrarian landscape. It appears that Buchanan rejects any sort of “pernicious social theory” that would undercut these values by creating a kind of “equality of outcomes” system, deeming it fundamentally contradictory to American values. Even though Buchanan is rejecting homestead legislation that would effectively set up a nation in the image of the Jeffersonian ideal, he is in no way rejecting Jeffersonian ideology, but rather manipulating its values to fit his political aims. “To call Jefferson an agrarian is to imply that his argument rests, at bottom upon a commitment to an agricultural economy,” Marx writes, “He is devoted to agriculture largely as a means of

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<sup>93</sup> “James Buchanan: Veto Message, June 22, 1860,” *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=68441>.

preserving rural manners, that is, ‘rural virtue.’”<sup>94</sup> To conform to Jefferson’s ideology, therefore, does not mean the nation must conform to an agricultural landscape, but rather the values embedded in the ideology can be manipulated and expressed in different ways. In his statement, Buchanan supports all of the values that are entrenched in Jefferson’s ideal landscape and seems to misunderstand how closely these values are tied to the popular imagination. The actual, material connection between agricultural labor and good character, which was drawn from Locke’s literal suggestion that to establish property an individual must mix his labor with unimproved land, in this sense becomes metaphorical.

Buchanan’s choice of language when he states, “The honest poor man, by frugality and industry, can in any part of our country acquire a competence for himself and his family, and in doing this he feels that he eats the bread of independence,” is echoed in the speeches of both Galusha Grow and Samuel Pomeroy, supporters of homestead legislation.<sup>95</sup> In his speech, Grow quotes from Genesis 3:19, which implies it is man’s duty to cultivate the land in the name of subsistence and survival: “Since the hour of the primal curse, ‘in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,’ man has been forced to the cultivation of the soil to subsistence for himself and the means of promoting the welfare of the race.” Grow strikes a more Lockean chord when he questions,

Why should governments wrest from him the right to apply his labor to such unoccupied portion of the earth’s surface...any more than to permit him to breathe the air, enjoy the sunlight, or quaff from the rills and rivers of the earth? For if a man has a right on earth, he has right to land enough to rear a habitation on. If he has a right to live, he has right to the free use of whatever nature has provided for his subsistence—air to breathe, water to drink and land enough to cultivate for his subsistence; for these are the necessary and

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<sup>94</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 133.

<sup>95</sup> “James Buchanan: Veto Message, June 22, 1860.”

indispensible means for the enjoyment of his inalienable rights of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’<sup>96</sup>

In the same vein, Pomeroy states in his speech to the Senate, “I believe it should not be the policy of the government to derive a revenue from a sale of the land, any more than from a sale of the air or sunshine. These natural elements and auxiliaries of human life are God’s great gift to man... The great command was, when our earth came fresh, green, and beautiful from a divine hand, to take it, to people and subdue it.” Later, Pomeroy also refers to the Genesis quote when he states, “The pioneer struggling amidst many discouragements on the frontier prairies of the West, comes nearer obeying the divine injunction to ‘gain his bread by the sweat of his brow’ than any other man...”<sup>97</sup> While Buchanan, Grow, and Pomeroy all use similar Biblical language to convey the same American values of industrious character, hard work, right to land, and subsistence, Buchanan’s aim is to reject the very legislation of which Grow and Pomeroy are in favor. In place of the worry Buchanan expresses that the Homestead Act would undercut Americans’ spirit of independence, Grow and Pomeroy demonstrate the idea that to deprive men of the Act would be to deprive them of their right to the cultivation of the land, which is as natural to the American as the right to the air and to the sunshine.

In his veto message, Buchanan asserts that the Homestead legislation “lays an ax at the root of our present admirable land system. The public land is an inheritance of vast value to us and to our descendants. It is a resource to which we can resort in the hour of difficulty and danger.”<sup>98</sup> Buchanan draws attention to the importance of the vast lands to the country’s security and evokes fear that the Homestead legislation would carve up and distribute the land so that the

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<sup>96</sup> Galusha A. Grow (1860). *Free homes for free men. Speech of Hon. G. A. Grow, of Pennsylvania, in the House of Representatives, February 29, 1860.* [Detroit]: Printed at the Detroit Tribune office.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Pomeroy, speaking in 1862, 37<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Globe*, 1938-1940.

<sup>98</sup> “James Buchanan: Veto Message, June 22, 1860.”

country would no longer possess this valuable resource. Although it is unclear exactly which “admirable land system” Buchanan is referring to, he attributes to it great American value and security. Buchanan’s choice of language when he states the Homestead Act “lays an ax at the root of our present admirable land system” echoes the plant metaphor we have seen used by earlier writers on the subject, particularly Crèvecoeur. The use of the metaphor, which implies that American values are a product of the physical landscape, and that they grow from the distinctly American soil, is important in demonstrating the close association of the physical landscape and the ideological world it represents. Buchanan likens the passage of homestead legislation to the chopping down of a tree, a tree that represents fundamental American values invested in the land system. Buchanan’s use of language makes clear the strength of the American landscape ideology in this moment and the way it made it nearly impossible for these figures to view land distribution in purely pragmatic or logical terms.

Instead of expressing a fear of the loss of the landscape as a valuable resource or source of security, Grow and Pomeroy manipulate the ideology and frame the Homestead Act as a way to prevent land monopoly and spread American values through encouragement of cultivation. In Grow’s speech to the House, he states that the Homestead Act “supports a policy that would provide small quantities of land to the actual cultivator, at the least possible cost, and thus prevent the evils of a system of land monopoly—one of the direst, deadliest curses that ever paralyzed the energies of a nation or palsied the arm of industry.” He continues that the injustice and inequality present in Europe are “some of the fruits of land monopoly in the Old World;” and questions, “shall we permit its seeds to vegetate in the virgin soil of the New?”<sup>99</sup> Grow’s severe language in describing the European land system—evil, dire, deadly—functions to

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<sup>99</sup> Speech of Galusha A. Grow. February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1860.

portray the American land system as superior to that of Europe and demonstrate the deeply rooted American values invested in the system of land distribution. He also employs the plant metaphor in questioning whether America should allow the evil seeds of land monopoly to “vegetate in the virgin soil of the New [World],” again, with the effect of expressing a closely intertwined system of American values and character identification with the physical landscape.

By 1862, when Samuel Pomeroy gave his speech to the Senate in favor of the Homestead Act, the passage of the legislation was firmly tied to question of slavery’s future in America; if the legislation passed, it would severely limit slavery’s ability to spread West and would send a clear message about America’s priorities. The question of land distribution was therefore deeply entrenched in the representation of America’s values and character, which, as a country not yet 100 years old, were still in the early years of formation. Pomeroy states, “Sir, freedom was secured in Kansas by being planted in the soil, set to growing upon each quarter section of land that we were able to hold, and made permanent as the homesteads that were secured,” and continues, “the enterprising pioneer is planting the institutions of freedom deep beneath the hearthstone of his cabin.”<sup>100</sup> Pomeroy’s powerful assertion reflects a firm tie between American values and the physical landscape, and is cleverly manipulated to include the question of slavery. Freedom is most powerfully and ineffaceably established, Pomeroy asserts, not by a law or ordinance, but by being planted in the soil from which American values and identity will grow and flourish. Pomeroy’s statement clearly echoes the ideals established by Jefferson, that the cultivation of the land is the most noble and moral way to develop the American landscape, but formalizes the idea into “quarter sections of land,” which would be established as 160-acre plots by the Homestead Act. The desire to develop the land in a way that promotes American values

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<sup>100</sup> Speech of Samuel Pomeroy, 1862.



and identity and adheres to the ideology is crucially expressed in Pomeroy's comments. The "enterprising pioneers" must be rewarded, Pomeroy asserts, because they have "conquered an empire and subdued it to civilization," they have created from the savage wilderness a "fruitful field," and thus cleared the way for this American landscape ideology to be spread.

Buchanan echoes the praise of Western settlers in his veto message when he states, "The first settlers of a new country are its most meritorious class. They brave the dangers of the most savage warfare, suffer the privations of frontier life, and with the hand of toil bring the wilderness into cultivation."<sup>101</sup> Buchanan's praise is followed by an assertion of his belief in the injustice of the Homestead Act because it would provide cheap land to those who did not brave and subdue the wilderness, and because it would detract from the special land warrants provided to American soldiers.<sup>102</sup> The idea here is that the pioneers who sacrificed themselves to conquer the wild, savage lands of the West—the country's "most meritorious class"—as well as the actual soldiers who fought for their country in the Revolutionary War, would not be given the rewards they deserve under the Homestead Act. Grow adopts almost exactly the same language in his encouragement of the Act, thus using the ideology to promote a radically different goal; he says,

There are soldiers of peace as well as of war... They fall leading the van of civilization along untrodden paths, and are buried in the dust of advancing columns... The achievements of your pioneer army, from the day they first drove back the Indian tribes from the Atlantic sea-board to the present hour, have been the achievements of science and civilization over the elements, the wilderness, and the savage... none is more deserving than the pioneer who expels the savage and the wild beast and opens the wilderness a home for science and a pathway for civilization.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "James Buchanan: Veto Message, June 22, 1860."

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Speech of Galusha A. Grow. February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1860.

The figures express the same ideal of the brave pioneers conquering the savage Wild West to clear the way for the cultivation of American values and civilization, creating a mutation of the yeoman figure itself. No longer was the ideal American character simply an industrious farmer, but now he was also a brave soldier, taming the Western frontier. The evolution of this ideological figure attests to its continuing importance in the minds of Americans and its ability to influence these importance debates over the future of the American landscape.

The speeches of Grow and Pomeroy are littered with distinctly Jeffersonian language to promote the cultivation of the land, and thus the Homestead Act, as the means to strengthen and ensure the morality of the nation. “For purifying the sentiments, elevating the thoughts, and developing the noblest impulses of man’s nature,” Grow states, “the influences of the rural fireside and an agricultural life are the noblest and the best.”<sup>104</sup> Maintaining a viable and thriving agrarian landscape both nurtures the moral, noble character of the American and bolsters the strength and wealth of the nation. Grow states, “the real wealth of a country consists not in the sums of money paid to its treasury, but in its flock herds, and cultivated fields. Nor does its real strength consist in fleets and armies, but in the bones and sinews of an independent yeomanry and the comfort of its laboring classes.”<sup>105</sup> With almost identical language, Pomeroy expresses to the Senate,

The wealth of a nation does not consist in the money paid into its treasury, exacted, as it often is, from the half-paid toiling of millions, nor in an endless unoccupied public domain, running to waste with wild men and buffaloes. But wealth consists and flocks and herds, cultivated fields, in well-paid labor, and well-directed energy...Real strength consists in the hearts, the bones, the sinews of an independent, loyal, free yeomanry.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Speech of Samuel Pomeroy, 1862.

Pomeroy continues that a man situated with land to cultivate and on which to sustain himself and his family, “will develop the character of a patriot, a philanthropist, and under the divine culture, a Christian...if you deprive him of self-support, he will be unable to support the institutions of the country.”<sup>107</sup> The leaders in the homestead debates effectively redefine the meaning of wealth to include the moral character of the country. If America is to be strong and wealthy, they postulate, the money in the treasury is of much less importance than the nobility of their citizens.

Of course, these ideological assertions do not quite reflect reality. The United States won its independence by means of literal warfare, and would go on to demonstrate its strength on an international stage, not with its noble farmer class, but with investments in military power. The country would come to be one of the wealthiest nations in the world, not in moral character, but through the industrial advancements and economic interests these men are here rejecting as unimportant. The American landscape ideology, however, is less important in its literal expression than in the influence, both consciously and sub- or half consciously, it has as a concurrent force with the more pragmatic, economic, and tangible concerns of the country. The role of the ideology is not unclear in the decades of important debate leading up to the Homestead Act, and its passage in 1862 decided the image in which the vast Western lands would be developed.

## **Section II: Analysis of the Homestead Act of 1862**

The decades of passionate debates over the proper method of land distribution in the West in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are particularly revealing of the hold and influence American landscape ideology on the minds of important American figures. The language of both sides of the debate is demonstrates the strong associations between the way the land was

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

developed and its implications for American character, the strength of the nation, and the promotion of distinctly American values of independence, freedom, and self-sufficiency. These debates make quite clear that the conflict was not simply over the landscape itself, but over the much greater character of the new nation, as expressed through the canvas of the land. The culmination of these debates came in 1862 with President Lincoln's passage of the Homestead Act. Although the actual Act is not filled with the colorful language of the homesteading debates, the provisions of this legal document do reflect the same ideology at work. The stipulations of the Homestead Act demonstrate a clear intention to promote a landscape that remained close to that of Jefferson's ideal nation of yeoman farmers.

The Act begins with a series of qualifications one must meet in order to be eligible to receive the benefits of the Homestead Act; these qualifications are noticeably inclusive and not difficult to meet. The qualifications are as follows: one must be the head of the family *or* have reached at least 21 years of age, *and* one must be a citizen of the United States *or* have filed a declaration of intention to become a citizen, *and* one must have “never borne arms against the United States Government or given aid and comfort to its enemies” (*Homestead Act* at sec. 2)<sup>108</sup> Notable in this first series of qualifications is that it is inclusive of both men and women, as well as of those who may have not been born in the United States. This is especially reminiscent of Crèvecoeur's *Letters*, in which there is a clear acceptance of immigrants—given they possess industrious character—and the belief that the American soil would naturally grow moral citizens with superior value; he writes, “There is room for every body in America; has he any particular talent, or industry? He exerts it in order to procure a livelihood, and it succeeds.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *The Homestead Act of 1862*, Public Law 37-64, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 12 (1862): 392.

<sup>109</sup> Crèvecoeur, *Letters from and American Farmer*, sec. 75.

America has long been known as the “melting pot,” welcoming immigrants with open arms with the promise of opportunity and a chance at success. The Statue of Liberty’s inscription, welcoming immigrants to the Eastern shores of the U.S., reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”<sup>110</sup> Just how welcoming and inclusive the nation has actually been is certainly questionable, but it is interesting to note how closely this idea of inclusivity and acceptance was tied to the idea of the determinism of the American soil, theorized to have regenerating qualities. Of course, no one was under the impression that the physical soil had magical transformative powers, but it did hold immense ideological implications, reflected in America’s claim to be the land of opportunity. In the Homestead Act, nearly everyone with loyalty to the United States—women and immigrants included—is given a chance to take advantage of its benefits. Again, to say that women and immigrants have actually been treated equally in the U.S. is another story entirely, but as we have seen before, the ideology does not always align with reality.

Section six of the Homestead Act contains additional qualifications that are not listed in the initial set. The Act provides a special exception for U.S. soldiers, stating that any person who has served in the U.S. army or navy during an actual war shall receive the benefits of the Act, regardless of his age. Section six of the Act also states, “nothing contained in this act shall be so construed to impair or interfere in any manner whatever with existing preemption rights...[and] all persons who may have filed their applications for a preemption right prior to the passage of this act, shall be entitled to all privileges of this act.” These particular details can reasonably be read as a response to the worries of those in opposition to the Act, who argued that servicemen

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<sup>110</sup> Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” in *Selected Poems and Other Writings*, ed. Gregory Eiselein (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), 233.

would be deprived of special land rewards under homestead legislation, and that it would disadvantage or not properly reward the first westward pioneers. By providing special provisions for U.S. soldiers and the initial pioneers of the West—the “soldiers of peace”—the Homestead Act adds an additional layer of patriotism and national pride to the ideology. Combined with the initial list of qualifications, these sections further demonstrate the inclusivity of the Act and reflect its intention to provide easily accessible land and cultivate a nation reflective of the values of the American landscape ideology.

Although the Homestead Act made Western lands easily accessible to the majority of the nation’s population, it by no means set its beneficiaries up for booming economic success or land accumulation. A plot of 160 acres was by no means a huge amount of land to farm, and the Act specifically states that “no individual shall be permitted to acquire title to more than one quarter section under the provisions of this act,” eliminating the possibility of accumulating mass amounts of land under the Act (*Homestead Act* at sec. 6). The intention of the Act, therefore, was not to enable immense economic success, but rather simply provide the chance to cultivate land and make a noble, rewarding life for oneself. By 1862, America was already well on its way to an industrial and capitalistic economy, yet the provisions of the Act almost exactly echo Thomas Jefferson’s disregard for commercial and economic expansion in his ideal nation. Given the increasingly stark contrast between the Jeffersonian ideal and the industrial economic reality, the Homestead Act’s passage attests to the power of ideology’s continuing influence. The Act may have made Western lands nearly free and widely accessible for most Americans, but the beneficiaries would have necessarily been prepared to live a life of hard work and self-sufficiency—a life not far from that of Jefferson’s idealized yeoman farmers.

The Homestead Act clearly emphasizes the importance of the actual settlement and cultivation of the land acquired under the Act, which would be necessary to fulfill the ideal and cultivate a nation of noble Americans. Section two of the Act states, “entry is made for the purpose of actual settlement and cultivation, and not either directly or indirectly for the use or benefit of any other person or persons whomsoever,” and in Section 4, “no lands acquired under the provisions of this act shall in any event become liable to the satisfaction of any debt or debts contracted prior to the issuing of the patent therefor.” These components make it impossible to acquire lands for virtually anything other than settlement and cultivation. The Act also includes stipulations for a process which homesteaders called “proving up,” in which a certificate or patent to the land would not be given until five years after the initial entry of the land, at which time he or she must “prove by two credible witnesses that he, she, or they have resided upon or cultivated the same for the term of five years immediately succeeding the time of filing the affidavit aforesaid, and shall make affidavit that no part of said land has been alienated, and that he has borne true allegiance to the Government of the United States” (*Homestead Act* at sec. 2). This process of “proving up” forced homesteaders to remain on the land for at least five years and prove that they had settled and improved the land in some way, otherwise the land would be returned to the government. The emphasis on the actual settlement and cultivation of the land in the Act was partly in response to the fears of speculation in the West, but it also mirrors Jefferson’s vision of a nation of small, self-sufficient and moral yeoman farmers in its requirement of physical labor and cultivation of the land. Just as, according to Locke’s theory, one could claim title to land once he had mixed with it his labor, the Homestead Act requires a similar “improvement” of the land before an individual could claim it to be his property. Again, the Act does not explicitly define what “improvement” means—it does not require a certain

amount of acreage to be cultivated, nor does it necessarily require cultivation—but this notion of improvement came to be uniformly defined in the American mind in the era of the Homestead Act.

The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 solidified and perpetuated the values entrenched in the landscape and ensured the ideology would live on. President Lincoln certainly did not decide to pass the Act based on some explicit ideological notion, but the discourse in the debates leading up to the Act's passage makes clear that the ideology played an influential role. The Act itself emphasizes, in more straightforward language, the values of self-sufficiency, patriotism, independence, and improvement of the land that are essential to the ideology. In the Homestead era, Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal expanded to portray brave western pioneers and became legitimized by the passage of a legally binding Act, which explicitly laid out the stipulations and qualifications for achieving this ideal. Although the ideal expanded, it did not change dramatically from Jefferson's more basic formulation; the Act maintained agrarian interests on a relatively small scale. Perhaps more important to note is that much more was being decided than just how the Western landscape would be distributed and developed—the passionate debates and the passage of the Act itself demonstrate how instrumental the physical landscape was in determining the character and identity of the American people.

### **Section III: Cultural Applications of the Ideology**

Understanding how the ideology functioned to influence political thought and language is important because, in a literal sense, the thoughts and beliefs of these figures have direct influence on the decisions made and legislation passed to determine the development of the landscape. Additionally, it can be assumed that these figures used carefully calculated language to play on the sentiments of fellow politicians and on the American citizenry. Consequently, their



language reflects the dominant mode of thought across the country. In order to deepen understanding of the ideology and to demonstrate that ideological language is not merely a political persuasion tool, it is similarly important to examine cultural documents. In the following section, I will analyze two literary documents from the era of the Homestead Act in order to demonstrate the American landscape ideology and its influence on American thoughts and decisions regarding the physical landscape.

In 1785, when Jefferson formulated what would come to be the foundation of the prevailing ideology, he acknowledged the existence of two worlds in America: the world of idealism invested in the soil, and the world of industrial expansion rooted in the economic reality of the country. While the ideological component had a tight hold on the American mind in evaluating values and identity, the push for creating a powerful, economically sound industrialized nation was strong and undeniable. The contrast between these two worlds is quite apparent in two literary pieces from the era of Homestead Act America. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* (1909-1913) is the quintessential embodiment of the American landscape ideal; Stewart's letters express hard work, virtue, and an appreciation for the rewarding life reaped from the soil. Rebecca Harding Davis's realist novella, *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861) exposes the very different life of those living in the industrial world. Davis's work is not an actual account of her life, but rather a piece of realist fiction influenced by her observations and experiences. *Life in the Iron Mills* is widely regarded as a critique of industrialism and the resulting class inequality in the United States. For the purpose of this section, the function of this cultural document is not to point out the ills of industrialism, but rather to examine the dichotomy of reality and ideology in America and the influence of the ideological thought on beliefs about the physical landscape. The description of the environment,

the immorality and hopelessness, and the characterization of the people in the city of Davis's story are a dark contrast to the world in which Stewart lives, presenting industry and city life almost as a necessary evil of American society. The morally superior, happy, and rewarded homesteaders fulfill the Jeffersonian ideal, while the empty industrial workers toil in an economic system increasingly becoming the reality of the country.

Davis uses description of the filthy physical environment of the city in order to convey a feeling of entrapment, immorality, and hopelessness. "The sky sank down before dawn, muddy, flat, immovable," Davis writes, "The air is thick, clammy with the breath of crowded human beings. It stifles me... The idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke."<sup>111</sup> This description creates a palpable sense of the overwhelming weight of smoke. The smoke is not merely present, but it is the idiosyncrasy, or the distinctive characteristic of the environment. Although in a literal sense the smoke is an inevitable product of the industry, it functions here to communicate the captivity of the industrial environment. Davis further describes life in this environment,

I look on the slow stream of human life creeping past, night and morning, to the great mills. Masses of men, with dull, besotted faces bent to the ground, sharpened here and there by pain or cunning; skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal, laired by day in dens of drunkenness and infamy; breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot, vileness for soul and body.<sup>112</sup>

Not only are these masses of men covered in dirt and grime, but their faces are dulled, their bodies are bent to the ground in pain. Their hours outside the iron mills are spent in "dens of drunkenness and infamy." Davis elaborates, "thousands of dull lives like its own... vainly lived and lost: thousands of them, massed, vile, slimy lives, like those of the torpid lizards in yonder

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<sup>111</sup> Rebecca Harding Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills*, (Project Gutenberg, e-book #876), 2.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

stagnant water-butt.”<sup>113</sup> These thousands of lives, toiling away in dark, grimy iron mills never reap a reward for their labor, but rather their lives are “vainly lived and lost.”

The individual characterizations of the main figures in Davis’s story are similarly hopeless, worn down and weakened. One main character, Deborah, is described;

Her face was even more ghastly, her lips bluer, her eyes more watery. She wore a faded cotton gown and a slouching bonnet. When she walked, one could see that she was deformed, almost a hunchback...Miserable enough she looked, lying there on the ashes like a limp, dirty rag,-- yet not an unfitting figure to crown the scene of hopeless discomfort and veiled crime: more fitting, if one looked deeper into the heart of things, at her thwarted woman’s form, her colorless life, her waking stupor that smothered pain and hunger,-- even more fit to be a type of her class.<sup>114</sup>

Deborah’s character is physically deformed, compared to a limp, dirty rag, living a colorless life smothered in pain and hunger. She strikes the reader as almost less than human. Her physical description mirrors the conditions of her life, evoking the same kind of environmental determinism as expressed in the writings of Jefferson and Crèvecoeur. Deborah’s counterpart in the story, Hugh Wolfe, is characterized as similarly weak; “Physically, Nature had promised the man but little. He had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man, his muscles were thin, his nerves weak, his face (a meek, woman’s face) haggard, yellow with consumption.”<sup>115</sup> This character is not only sick, yellow with consumption, but has lost his masculinity, his strength and vigor. Later in the story, as Hugh listens to the conversation of men of a superior class visiting the iron mill, his character becomes even more animal-like; “At every sentence, Wolfe listened more and more like a dumb, hopeless animal, with a duller, more stolid look creeping over his face, glancing now and then at Mitchell, marking acutely every smallest sign of refinement, then

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 4-7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 8.

back to himself, seeing as in a mirror his filthy body, his more stained soul.”<sup>116</sup> The characters of Davis’s novel are devoid of any shred of hope; their environment and their employment in the iron mills has dulled them, deformed them, and taken not only their health, but also their very status as human beings.

Davis’s story, while overwhelmingly hopeless, does include sparing notes of hope. The fleeting senses of hope are captured through glimpses of the environment just outside the city, out of reach for these hopeless characters, located in the ideal natural landscape. “It knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight, quaint old gardens, dusky with soft, green foliage of apple-trees, and flushing crimson with roses,-- air, and fields, and mountains,”<sup>117</sup> Davis writes, personifying a “stagnant and slimy” river and creating a stark contrast between the two worlds. This distant landscape has an odor, not of smoke but of sunlight; it is dusky, not with grime but with soft, green foliage. Hugh, in a rare fit of hope and optimism, allows himself to imagine escaping to this natural world, untouched by the smoke, immorality, and hopelessness of the iron mills; “sometimes he forgot this defined hope in the frantic anguish to escape, only to escape,-- out of the wet, the pain, the ashes, somewhere, anywhere,-- only for one moment of free air on a hill-side, to lie down and let his sick soul throb itself out in the sunshine.”<sup>118</sup> The clean air and sunshine are not just sources of hope for Hugh, but they represent a dream of healing, a remedy for his soul, sickened by the life in the iron mills. In this fantasy of escape, Hugh finds color in nature with which to paint his hopeless life; Davis writes,

The fog had risen, and the town and river were steeped in its thick, gray damp; but overhead, the sun-touched smoke-clouds opened like a cleft ocean,-- shifting, rolling seas of crimson mist, waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet, inner depths unfathomable of glancing light. Wolfe’s artist-eye grew drunk with color. The gates of

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 17.

that other world! Fading, flashing before him now! What, in that world of Beauty, Content, and Right, were the petty laws, the mine and thine, of mill-owners and mill hands? A consciousness of power stirred within him. He stood up. A man,-- he thought, stretching out his hands,-- free to work, to live, to love! Free!<sup>119</sup>

Nowhere in this story is the dichotomy of idealism and reality more evident than in Hugh's fantasy. The city of iron mills, representing economic reality, is "steeped in its thick, gray damp," but just beyond this hopeless world is a heaven-like escape, representative of the American idealism associated with the natural landscape, and in a broader sense, of the American landscape ideology. Not only is this other world natural and beautiful, but it is morally superior—a land of "content and right"—and it is a land in which he would be "free to work, to live, to love." The contrast of these two worlds is clearly not limited to the physical. The natural landscape is symbolic of important American values—the right to rewarding labor, to freedom, and to a moral, virtuous life. The conclusion of Davis's story further expresses this dichotomy; it is at the same time tragic and hopeful. Hugh is jailed for a crime he did not commit and therefore doomed to be trapped forever in the life of hopelessness. He chooses to end his life rather than live one more day in this entrapment. Deborah, however, does manage to escape to a Quaker community outside the iron mills. More notable than the fact that she is saved by Quakers is that she is truly saved by her new environment. Davis writes, "There is no need to tire you with the long years of sunshine, and fresh air, and slow, patient Christ-love, needed to make healthy and hopeful this impure body and soul. There is a homely pine house, on one of these hills, whose windows overlooked broad, wooded slopes and clover-crimsoned meadows,--nched into the very place where the light is warmest, the air freest. It is the Friends' meeting-house."<sup>120</sup>

Deborah's impure soul is healed by the very sunshine and fresh air that Hugh is never able to

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 29.

access. She is healed by the world of the American ideal, the Jeffersonian vision—the antidote to the ills of the economic reality.

The hopeful, fully natural world that saves the fictional Deborah is the same world that saves the actual person, Elinore Pruitt Stewart, who escapes a hopeless life of meaningless and servile toil as a washerwoman in Denver to become a self-sufficient yeoman homesteader in Wyoming.<sup>121</sup> Nearly 50 years after the passage of the Homestead Act, Stewart writes about her own experiences on the expanded Western frontier in her *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*.<sup>122</sup> Stewart's first letter, titled "The Arrival at Burnt Fork" comes in April of 1909 at the beginning of her homesteading journey in Wyoming, and the final letter, titled "Success" comes in November of 1913. Through the four years of letters, readers experience the journey along with Stewart, and in many ways her experience appears to be the ideal embodiment of the Homestead Act and the values and character it was intended to promote. According to the publisher's note, after Stewart lost her husband in a railroad accident, she became the single mother of her two-year old daughter, Jerrine. Stewart had tried to support herself and her daughter as a maid and laundress in Denver, but came to Wyoming to seek a better life working for a Scottish cattleman, Mr. Stewart. As previously discussed, the Homestead Act did not promise an easy, comfortable, or economically successful life, and Stewart does not hesitate to detail the hardships and isolation, but ultimately the fulfillment she achieves outweighs her difficulties.

"If you only knew the hardships these poor men endure," Stewart writes in her third letter, "They go two together and sometimes it is months before they see another soul, and rarely ever a woman." She describes the unpopulated, barren landscape again in Letter IV, "the greater

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<sup>121</sup> Language contribution from Gregg Crane.

<sup>122</sup> Elinore Pruitt Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader, 1909-1913* (Blackmask Online, 2005).

part of the way, there isn't even the semblance of a road and it is merely a semblance anywhere," and further in Letter XIX, "It is sixty miles to town, although our nearest point to the railroad is but forty, so you see it was impossible to get to town to get anything." In the debates over homestead legislation, men like Galusha Grow and Samuel Pomeroy portrayed the Western settlers as brave pioneers, paving the way for the spread of American values; one certainly feels from Stewart's letters that she is the embodiment of this brave pioneer ideal. Somewhat nonchalantly, Stewart also includes terrifying anecdotes such as this: "It seems that persons who come from a lower altitude to this country frequently become bewildered, especially if in poor health, leave the train at any stop and wander off into the hills, sometimes dying before they are found" (Letter VIII), demonstrating the risk that came with moving West, and the frequency of failures.

Despite frequent hardships, the overwhelming tone of Stewart's letters is happy, hopeful, and satisfied. "This has been for me the busiest, happiest summer I can remember," Stewart writes in her third letter, "I have worked very hard, but it has been work that I really enjoy." The immense beauty and grandeur of the Western landscape appears to act as a natural remedy to all of her difficulties. In Letter IV she writes, "Everything, even the bareness was beautiful," and, "when you get among such grandeur you get to feel how little you are and how foolish is human endeavor, except that which reunites us with the mighty force called God." It seems that no matter how challenging an experience is for Stewart, she is reassured by the beauty of the natural landscape; in Letter XIX she writes, "The day was beautiful, and the views many times repaid us for any hardships we had suffered...I can never describe to you the weird beauty of a moonlight night among the pines when the snow is sparkling and gleaming, the deep silence unbroken even by the snapping of a twig." Particularly interesting are Stewart's descriptions of seemingly

unpleasant situations in which she finds unique comfort; in Letter IV she writes of pine needles making “as soft a carpet as the wealthiest could afford,” and in Letter XIX describes, “Our improvised beds were the most comfortable things.” Certainly a carpet of pine needles would not realistically compare to a carpet only the wealthiest could afford, and her improvised bed in the wilderness would pale in comparison to a real bed. It is impossible to know whether or not these natural features really did appear to be luxurious to Stewart in contrast to the accommodations of her former life in Denver, but what is particularly important here is the way Stewart effectively reevaluates and redefines the traditional meaning of wealth and comfort, just as Buchanan, Grow, and Pomeroy did in their perception of the country’s wealth and strength. Stewart’s language, in contrast, cannot be chalked up to political rhetoric, and therefore perhaps holds more water in illustrating the ideology’s effects on Americans’ thoughts and behavior relating to the land.

Nowhere does Stewart appear to be the embodiment of the ideal yeoman farmer, happy and fulfilled by subsistence and natural rewards, more than in Letter XVIII when she writes,

I want a great many thing I haven’t got, but I don’t want them enough to be discontented and not enjoy the many blessings that are mine. I have my home among the blue mountains, my healthy, well-formed children, my clean, honest, husband, my gentle milk cows, my garden which I make myself. I have loads and loads of flowers which I tend myself. There are lots of chicken, turkeys, and pigs which are my own special care. I have some slow old gentle horses and an old wagon. I can load up the kiddies and go where I please any time. I have the best, kindest neighbors and I have my dear absent friends.

The American landscape ideology instilled the values of self-sufficiency, freedom, and independence into the landscape, and here Stewart is reaping each of those values from the land. She even expresses a belief in the natural elements as remedies for society’s ills, a version of the environmental determinism expressed by both Jefferson and Crèvecoeur, and again in the homestead debates. Stewart writes to her friend in Letter XVI, “I am so afraid that you will get



an overdose of culture from your visit to the Hub and am sending you an antidote of our sage, sand, and sunshine,” and expresses the same idea in Letter XXII, “I am so glad whenever I can bring a little of this big, clean, beautiful outdoors into your apartment for you to enjoy...If only I could take them from whatever is worrying them and give them this bracing mountain air, glimpses of the scenery, a smell of the pines and the sage.” In these passages, Stewart expresses a negative view of “culture,” or city life, and presents the natural elements of her superior Western homestead as a remedy for the ills of the city—ideas that can be found directly in both Jefferson and Crèvecoeur’s writings and that are central to the ideology.

Stewart expresses this environmentally determined moral superiority and disregard for economic growth and selfishness several times in her letters. In Letter IV she writes, “I shot one of the rabbits, so I felt very like Leather-stocking because I had killed but one when I might have gotten two,” demonstrating her contentment with sufficiency and respect for nature with an overt allusion to James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers*. Stewart also recounts a story in the same letter in which she is surprised to find thirty head of sheep at her new home that “looked like they should have been sold ten years before” and asks Mr. Stewart if he ever sells his sheep, to which he responds “No’m. There was a feller come here once and wanted to buy some of my wethers, but I wouldn’t sell any because I didn’t need any money,” after which Stewart explains that he “went from animal to animal, caressing and talking to them, calling them each by name.” This respect for his sheep and disregard for monetary gain paints an image of Mr. Stewart as morally superior in his lifestyle, an idea Stewart expresses again in Letter XIV, in which she writes, “If you could only know how kind everyone is to me, you would know that even ill health has its compensations out here.” In the face of so many hardships, danger, and sickness, Stewart

paints the West in the image of the ideological landscape, the one that the Homestead Act was intended to preserve.

Stewart's direct comparison between the unfulfilling life in Denver and her new, happy, rewarding life in Wyoming illustrates the ideology at work in intertwining human character and the physical environment. In Letter IV she writes, "I kept thinking how superior I was since I dared to take such an outing when so many poor women down in Denver were bent on making their twenty cents per hour in order that they could spare a quarter to go to the 'show.' I went to sleep with a powerfully self-satisfied feeling." In Letter XX, Stewart discusses these feelings at length,

When I read of the hard times among the Denver poor, I feel like urging them every one to get out and file on land. I am very enthusiastic about women homesteading. It really requires less strength and labor to raise plenty to satisfy a large family than it does to go out to wash, with the added satisfaction of knowing that their job will not be lost to them if they care to keep it. Even if improving the place does go slowly; it is that much done to stay done. Whatever is raised is the homesteader's own, and there is no house-rent to pay...Any woman strong enough to go out by the day could have done every bit of the work...and it would have been so much more pleasant than to work so hard in the city and then be on starvation rations in the winter...To me, homesteading is the solution of all poverty's problems, but I realize that temperament has much to do with success in any undertaking, and persons afraid of coyotes and work and loneliness had better let ranching alone. At the same time, any woman who can stand her own company, can see the beauty of the sunset, loves growing things, and is willing to put in as much time at careful labor as she does over the washtub, will certainly succeed; will have independence, plenty to eat all the time, and a home of her own in the end.

If there was ever a spokesperson for the virtues of homesteading, and in a broader sense for the American landscape ideology, it would undoubtedly be Ms. Stewart. In this passage, she espouses each of the fundamental components of the ideology; hard work, self-sufficiency, independence, industrious character, resilience through hardships, and an ultimately much more rewarding life than any labor in the city could provide. It is certainly true that every person that tried his or her hand at hand at homesteading did not find the success and happiness that Stewart

did. As evidenced in her letters, homesteading was no easy feat, and the stipulations of the Homestead Act did not allow for booming economic success, or any success at all for that matter. Important to consider, however, is that the ideal was never promised to everyone, rather it was something to aspire to achieve. The figure of the idealized yeoman was so alluring, and the ideology so strong, masses of Americans moved west to try their hand at homesteading despite the promise of hard work and substantial risk.

It had never been a real option for the U.S. to remain entirely agrarian, especially not in the image of Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal. Examining the era of the Homestead Act is therefore not meant to demonstrate the role of the American landscape ideology in maintaining a dominantly agrarian nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but rather to demonstrate the ideology's ability to invest such important and determinant issues into the physical landscape. Further, the comparison between the preceding cultural documents is intended to highlight the dichotomy in the U.S. between the realm of ideological idealism and economic pragmatism. The passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, to some extent, reflects the nation's preference to maintain a landscape somewhat similar to the Jeffersonian ideal that would uphold the ideological values, but economic growth and industrialization did not come to a halt with the passage of the Act. Rather, the effect of the ideology was to maintain this growing industrial sphere as separate from the sphere of landscape idealism, as demonstrated in the natural world just out of Hugh's reach in Davis's novella, and in Stewart's direct comparison between her life in Denver and on her Wyoming homestead. The maintenance of separation between these two worlds becomes institutionalized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the landscape ideology morphed into the suburban ideal.

### Chapter Three: The American Landscape Ideology and Suburbia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Stewart was writing her letters, the agrarian lifestyle was still relatively prevalent. In 1900, 41 percent of the U.S workforce was employed in agriculture. By 1930, this number had declined to just 21.5 percent of the workforce, and by 1970 a mere 4 percent of the employed labor force worked in agriculture, as commerce and industry became the dominant forces in the U.S. economy.<sup>123</sup> This change is reflected in the shift from 160-acre homesteads to the tidy ranch home characteristic of 20<sup>th</sup> century suburbia. Although the nation's economic preferences shifted away from agriculture, the idealization of the yeoman figure living on a homestead did not necessarily disappear, but rather it remained in an ideological sense and morphed with the changing landscape of the United States. The 160-plot of cultivated land morphed into a suburban home surrounded by a green lawn and a tidy garden, and the yeoman figure evolved from a self-subsistent farmer to the father figure, or head of the household, who left the comfort and safety of his homestead each day to venture into the city to work, just as the brave pioneers had braved the wild west a century earlier. As the workforce became increasingly employed in commerce and industry, it certainly would have made more sense—from the perspective of efficiency and convenience—for Americans to increasingly move towards these economic centers, but city life did not fit comfortably with the landscape ideology. Instead, through a landmark Supreme Court case, federal government policies, and careful architectural planning, Americans were able to preserve the core values of the ideology in a landscape of sprawling suburbs.

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<sup>123</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and Farm Policy*, by Carolyn Dimitri, Anne Effland, and Neilson Conklin, EIB 3, (Washington, D.C., 2005)  
[http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/259572/eib3\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/259572/eib3_1_.pdf).

## Section I: *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*: The Supreme Court’s Institutionalization of Suburbia

The Supreme Court’s landmark decision in 1926 in *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty* solidified the constitutionality of zoning, effectively institutionalizing the low-density, single-use development patterns characteristic of suburbia. The Village of Euclid’s position just outside Cleveland, a city that was rapidly growing in 1926, put it at risk of industrial encroachment, leading the village to adopt its first comprehensive zoning code.<sup>124</sup> A local real estate company, Ambler Realty, owned a sixty-eight acre tract of land in Euclid, which the company claimed had been “held specifically for eventual development for industrial use,” and thus the limitations imposed by the zoning code, allowing mostly residential use, reduced its market value significantly.<sup>125</sup> The Supreme Court was tasked with deciding whether the reduction in market value resulting from the zoning code was “justified by the state’s inherent constitutional ‘police power,’” and, if it did not, whether it “constituted an unconstitutional deprivation of private property.”<sup>126</sup> The Supreme Court ultimately concluded that Euclid’s zoning ordinance “in its general scope and dominant features...is a valid exercise of authority,” and thus firmly established the constitutionality of zoning in the United States.<sup>127</sup>

As Wayne Batchis aptly points out, “the founding fathers understood political passions can run hot, especially when the subject matter is one’s own back yard,” and, “where politics crosses the subtle yet inviolate boundaries of constitutional authority, only the courts are graced with the institutional posture to enforce the founders’ vision.”<sup>128</sup> <sup>129</sup> In the case of *Euclid v.*

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<sup>124</sup> Wayne Batchis, “Enabling Urban Sprawl: Revisiting the Supreme Court’s Seminal Zoning Decision *Euclid v. Ambler* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law* 17, no. 3 (2010): 387.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

*Ambler Realty*, the Supreme Court seemed to acknowledge this weighty and contentious situation, several times finding it necessary to justify its authority to rule on this case and the necessity to adapt to modern changes in the landscape. “While the meaning of constitutional guarantees never varies,” the Court’s syllabus reads, “the scope of their application must expand or contract to meet the new and different conditions which are constantly coming within the field of their operation.”<sup>130</sup> (*All subsequent citations to this case are included parenthetically in the body of the essay*). One may understand this reasoning in the same way as the fundamentals of the American landscape ideology. While the idealized core of the ideology can remain relatively constant, the concrete instantiations of this ideal change to meet the new conditions of the American society and its relation to the physical environment. In a similar vein, the Court balances its sense of the fundamental aspirational meanings of the Constitution, which can implicitly draw upon the ideology of the yeoman farmer, with new illustrations of those basic principles, such as the suburban subdivision.<sup>131</sup>

The Court’s opinion, written by Justice Sutherland, explains the need for the Court to rule according to changing times; “Building zone laws are of modern origin...Until recent years, urban life was comparatively simple; but with the great increase and concentration of population, problems have developed, and constantly are developing, which require, and will continue to require, additional restrictions in respect of the use and occupation of private lands in urban communities” (*Euclid* at p. 387). The Court’s logic here seems entirely reasonable—as years pass and urban life becomes more populous and complex, it is necessary for the Court to adjust its interpretation of the Constitution’s fundamental values and strictures, such as the proscription

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>130</sup> *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926), 366.

<sup>131</sup> Language contribution from Gregg Crane.

against governmental taking of property without compensation. One of Batchis's main critiques of the Court ruling is that it "allow[ed] constitutional principles to be diluted on the basis of unsupported assumptions about land use planning that happened to be fashionable at the time."<sup>132</sup> It is not quite accurate to characterize the Court's actions to be diluting constitutional principles, as courts frequently adapt prior doctrine when faced with new facts and situations that lawmakers had not anticipated. Whether or not the Court's ruling is grounded in unsupported assumptions, it is perhaps more telling to examine how the decision may have been influenced by an enduring ideology. The ruling, in essence, functions not to create a radical change to land development, but rather to institutionalize a pattern of sprawling, single-family development that is comfortable to Americans and in line with the long established landscape ideology.

Supreme Court rulings establish the highest law of the land. *Euclid v. Ambler Realty*, a case which regards a small village's zoning code and in itself does not appear to be hugely important, might seem to be an odd case for the Supreme Court to take. The Court's decision to rule on this case, however, attests to the importance the Justices attribute to questions involving the use and development of the American landscape. Both in the case of the debates and eventual passage of the Homestead Act and in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*, at stake was not just the mode in which the land would be developed, but also national identity, wholesome living, and a morally superior way of life. The Court, through Justice Sutherland's written opinion, includes a weak and confusing defense of zoning as a whole. The Court's inability to find an unambiguous doctrinal defense for zoning in itself perhaps indicates that the Court was actually defending something much larger than mere precedent, an ideology. While the Court does not explicitly

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<sup>132</sup> Batchis, "Enabling Urban Sprawl," 397.

invoke or use the express terms of this ideology, its discussion of zoning implicitly reflects the components of the ideology.

The Court strikes an especially Jeffersonian chord and makes more clear the influence of the ideology when it indicates that economic potential is less important than moral and social land use values. Justice Sutherland's opinion first establishes the essential issue in the case: the diminished economic value of the land because of the zoning restrictions (*Euclid* at p. 385), and ultimately establishes that Ambler Realty faced no "infringement or denial of a specific right, or of a particular injury in process of actual execution" (*Euclid* at p. 396). The Court therefore concludes that, "it cannot be said that the landowner has suffered or is threatened with an injury which entitles him to challenge their constitutionality" (*Euclid* at p. 397). Essentially, the Court ruling says that because Ambler Realty is facing no direct injustice, but rather just the potential for decreased market value of the land (the word "speculation" is used later), it has no basis on which to rule the ordinance unconstitutional. Economic potential clearly plays a much less important role in the minds of the Supreme Court justices than the preservation of a certain kind of habitation on the land.

While on the surface the Supreme Court's ruling in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty* simply establishes the constitutionality of zoning, much of its language suggests that the ruling was less about mere questions of economic development of the physical environment and more about preserving a landscape/human resident relationship that reflects the kind of values originally associated with the yeoman farmer. It is important to remember that this case was fundamentally about the encroachment on one type of landscape—industrialized cities, which had long been associated with filth and immorality—on another type of landscape—the early suburbs, open land, and a more 'farm-like' landscape representing family morals, self-sufficiency, and



independence. The Court does not reject cities and industry entirely, but rather asserts that they have a proper place, which is separate from family residences; “A nuisance may be merely a right thing in the wrong place—like a pig in the parlor instead of the barnyard,” Justice Sutherland writes (*Euclid* at p. 389). The comparison is clear; the “pig” is the debasement associated with industry, which belongs in the “barnyard,” inferred to be the city.

Fundamentally, there is nothing wrong with a pig, as long as it stays in its proper place, which is certainly not in the parlor. This reasoning is evocative of Jefferson, who realistically recognized that his ideal landscape of yeoman farmers would never withstand the forces of commerce and industry entirely, but held to the values of his powerful idealization nonetheless. By 1926, America had become substantially industrialized, and the Court could not deny the place of industrial cities. Instead, it maintained a late evolution of Jefferson’s ideology by constitutionalizing zoning and institutionalizing suburban-style development—a new extension of the ideology.

Just as writers in both the Jeffersonian era and the Homestead era used plant metaphors to demonstrate what was believed to be “natural” growth and progression of the country, Justice Sutherland uses similar language in his opinion, thus demonstrating the continuing influence of this land-based ideology.

It is said that the Village of Euclid is a mere suburb of the city of Cleveland; that the industrial development of that city has now reached and in some degree extended into the village and, in the obvious course of things, will soon absorb the entire area for industrial enterprises; that the effect of the ordinance is to divert this *natural* development elsewhere, with the consequent loss of increased values to the owners of the lands within the village borders. But the village, though physically a suburb of Cleveland, is politically a separate municipality, with powers of its own and authority to govern itself as it sees fit within the limits of the *organic law of its creation* and the State and Federal Constitutions. Its governing authorities, presumably representing a majority of its inhabitants and voicing their will, have determined not that industrial development shall cease at its boundaries, but that the course of such development shall proceed within definitely fixed lines. If it be a proper exercise of the police power to relegate industrial

establishments to localities separated from residential sections, it is not easy to find a sufficient reason for denying the power because the effect of its exercise is to *divert an industrial flow from the course which it should follow, to the injury of the residential public if left alone, to another course where such injury will be obviated*" (emphasis added). (*Euclid* at p. 390-391).

This excerpt, though lengthy, is important in demonstrating the language Sutherland carefully chose to justify the Court's decision. Although the industrial city of Cleveland was on a *natural* expanding path, it is the Village of Euclid's authority via its *organic law* to act in accordance to its residents' will. This will not abate the development of industry, but rather divert the *industrial flow* to a more favorable course. This language parallels that use by Tench Coxe in his own early manipulation of the ideology, in which he determined that manufacturing had a proper, natural place in the physical American landscape.

The Court further bases its ruling in favor of zoning on the basis of Euclid's police power. Police power gives federal, state, and local governments the authority to make laws for the benefit of its people in defense of "the public health, safety, morals, or general welfare"—a phrase that is repeated numerous times throughout the Court's written decision. One effect of justifying zoning laws with the authority of police power is to weave together even more closely certain land uses and development with values and morality. The opinion reads, "The harmless may sometimes be brought within the regulation or prohibition in order to abate or destroy the harmful. The segregation of industries commercial pursuits and dwellings to particular districts in a city, when exercised reasonably, may bear a rational relation to the health, morals, and safety and general welfare of the community" (*Euclid* at 393). While some of the "harmful" dangers that the Court insists zoning districts will prevent—fires, traffic, and sanitary concerns—do seem to legitimize the use of police power, the others—preventing congestion, securing quiet residences, and expediting transportation—appear to fall more appropriately under the categories

of comfort and luxury. And further, there appears to be an automatic association between more dense development and the potential for disorder (“facilitate the suppression of disorder”), which demonstrates the continuance of the belief in a kind of environmental determinism—those who inhabit cities are assumed to pose a stronger threat of danger and disorder than suburban dwellers.

The associations made in the Court’s decision between city dwellers and danger and immorality are, in fact, not reserved for city dwellers. The “business districts” in question also include multi-family dwellings, namely apartment buildings. The lack of distinction between cities/industrial zones and more dense, multi-family dwellings was likely intentional, demonstrating a belief in the superior morality of the occupants of certain types of development—namely single-family homes. For example, the opinion writes, “Places of business are noisy; they are apt to be disturbing at night; some of them are malodorous; some are unsightly; some are apt to breed rats, mice, roaches, flies, ants, etc....” (*Euclid* at p. 394). While this characterization may be somewhat founded on the real filth that existed in many industrial U.S. cities, the Court does not make the distinction. The characterization is therefore applied to those who live in apartment buildings as well, which is to say that any form of residence other than detached, single-family dwellings automatically pose risk of immorality and danger.

Nowhere is this idea better demonstrated than in this excerpt, written by Sutherland near the end of the Court’s opinion,

With particular reference to apartment houses, it is pointed out that the development of detached house selections is greatly retarded by the coming of apartment houses, which has sometimes resulted in destroying the entire section for private house purposes; that, in such sections, very often the apartment house is a mere parasite, constructed in order to take advantage of the open spaces and attractive surroundings created by the residential character of the district. Moreover, the coming of one apartment house is followed by others, interfering by their height and bulk with the free circulation of air and monopolizing the rays of the sun which otherwise would fall upon the smaller homes,

and bringing, as their necessary accompaniments, the disturbing noises incident to increased traffic and business, and the occupation, by means of moving and parked automobiles, of larger portions of the streets, thus detracting from their safety and depriving children of the privilege of quiet and open spaces for play, enjoyed by those in more favored localities—until, finally, the residential character of the neighborhood and its desirability as a place of detached residences are utterly destroyed. (*Euclid* at 395)

Sutherland asserts that apartment buildings and their inhabitants somehow do not have the right to occupy open spaces and attractive surroundings, as do the inhabitants of single-family houses—they are not people, but parasites upon residential districts.

The ideology's influence on the Court's decision to take up the case and its ruling in favor of the constitutionality of zoning would seem plain. However, in this instance, the ideology is convoluted and manipulated in a way that contradicts some of its original ideas. The ideology, as established by Locke and Jefferson and the founding fathers of America, asserted that men have the God-given right to the land and its natural resources, so long as they take only what they need to survive. Jefferson and his contemporary writers used this idea to set up an ideal system of land use in direct contrast to the hierarchical and oppressive land monopoly in Europe. According to this ideology, as long as a man possessed industrious character, he could make an honest, substantial life for himself and his family on American soil. As discussed earlier, this ideology was incredibly influential in the debates over the proper distribution of Western lands, eventually culminating in the Homestead Act, which provided cheap land to an inclusive set of Americans. However, as demonstrated by Sutherland's written opinion and by the Court's ruling, by 1926 all men no longer had an equal right to the land and its resources—in this manipulation of the ideology, apartment dwellers did not have the same right to clean air, the rays of sunshine, and open spaces as single-family home dwellers. The environmental determinism that results from the ideology by intertwining human character and the physical environment no longer

asserted that American soil would inherently grow people of superior character, but was rather used as an exclusionary tool.

Although it is clear that some components of this American landscape ideology had a strong influence on the Court's ruling in *Euclid v. Ambler Realty*, it is equally apparent that by this point the ideology as a whole was largely unfounded and inapplicable. Instead of using the landscape as a way to promote the American values of equality, independence, and self-sufficiency, the Court institutionalized zoning to promote a pattern of land development that would largely exclude many Americans who were seen as inferior and immoral. The Court's inability to distinguish between the development of the physical land and the values encompassed in the ideology's ideal landscape led to automatic associations that contradict the original components of the ideology—equal opportunity to use the land to make a better life. In his critique of the Court's decision, Batchis writes, “the popularity of zoning laws, at the time of *Euclid*, has been widely attributed to the fact that they tend ‘to validate existing land use patterns by including them on a zoning map.’”<sup>133</sup> Indeed, in hindsight the Court's decision may be characterized as a kneejerk reaction, made in an effort to preserve a certain pattern of land development that sat comfortably with tightly held American values invested in the landscape. In its attempt to preserve this landscape, the Court manipulated the ideology to become exclusionary, blocking certain people from accessing the opportunity to free use of the land to make a better life.

Not only did the Supreme Court's ruling morph the ideology into a kind of exclusionary tool, but it also institutionalized inefficient, sprawling suburban development that maintained strictly separate spheres for commerce, industry, and dense city development and domestic, pure,

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<sup>133</sup> Batchis, “Enabling Urban Sprawl, 395. Batchis cites Juergensmeyer, *supra* note 48, at 23.

and moral family life. In this sense, it allowed the ideological dichotomy between economic reality and the idealized landscape to solidify and persist into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the country became increasingly industrialized in the early 1900's, the nation was at another pivotal point in deciding how to develop the landscape. The Court's decision in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*, undoubtedly influenced by the American landscape ideology, played no small role in deciding the course of development. This decision was followed by government policies that not only allowed, but also perpetuated, the ideological connection between American character and the spread out, homestead-like development.

## **Section II: U.S. Government Policies and the Perpetuation of the Ideology**

Suburbia, as it is known today—detached single-family homes set on sprawling plots of green lawn, separated by white fences or a row of perfectly-trimmed trees—has come to encapsulate the modern conception of the “American Dream.” Of course, the American Dream did not begin with suburbia, but rather centuries earlier with Thomas Jefferson's ideal nation of yeoman farmers. The Supreme Court's decision in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty* in 1926 did much more than establish the Constitutionality of zoning; the decision effectively demonstrated how strong the ideology remained in the minds of Americans, perpetuated the association of certain American values with certain patterns of land development, and set the stage for these ideals to take a new form with the subsequent decades of booming suburban development.

The course of the development of the American landscape has been a result of conscious decision-making. The Homestead Act of 1862 was a calculated decision on the part of politicians to preserve and extend the Jeffersonian approach to the landscape in the face of increasing population and the beginnings of industrialization. When increasing industry and growing urban centers threatened to make the yeoman farmer ideal and its values obsolete, the Court made a

controversial decision to institutionalize the practice of zoning and legalize preserving a landscape that redeployed the ideal in a new form. The growth of suburban development in the decades following 1926 was not spontaneous. Rather, it was encouraged and more or less made inevitable by a series of conscious choices set in motion by the *Euclid* decision. According to Robert Fishman, “suburbia was indeed a cultural creation, a conscious choice based on the economic structure and cultural values of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie. Suburbanization was not the automatic fate of the middle class in the ‘mature industrial city’ or an inevitable response to the Industrial Revolution or the so-called transportation revolution.”<sup>134</sup> This is to say that, while a variety of factors contributed to and enabled the suburban boom, at its core suburbia is a reformulation of the Jeffersonian ideal—another attempt to maintain the ideal American landscape and all the values instilled in it centuries earlier.

The automobile is often attributed to being the most influential driver of suburban development. While the importance of the automobile in encouraging suburban development should not be dismissed, it may be considered a tool of perpetuating a new manipulation of the ideal, rather than a cause. The popularity of the automobile in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is undeniable; in 1933, the President’s Committee on Recent Social Trends in the United States reported that “the automobile has become a dominant influence in the life of the individual, and he, in a very real sense, has become dependent on it.”<sup>135</sup> In fact, in the three deepest years of the Depression, the rise of motor-vehicle registrations did not halt, “and the 1940 total exceeded that of 1929 by 4.5 million.”<sup>136</sup> The automobile allowed Americans to achieve many of the fundamental values

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<sup>134</sup> Robert Fishman, “Bourgeois Utopias: Visions of Suburbia,” in *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 24.

<sup>135</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200 (Nook e-Reader).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

of the landscape ideology: independence, freedom, and self-sufficiency, which are all rooted in the ability to access, settle, and improve open land. In America's founding days, authors like Crèvecoeur expressed that, given a man had industrious character, he could come to the new country and make a better life for himself—all he had to do was get there. This idea was reiterated in the debates culminating in the Homestead Act; advocates based their arguments on the idea that Americans were entitled to the opportunity to make a life for themselves on the open Western lands. As Jackson notes, the idea continued in the days of the Great Depression, as depicted by John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939), in which farmers evicted from their homes relied for their salvation on a 'rolling junk,' which was the family's means of mobility."<sup>137</sup> If the family was failing, the car allowed them the freedom and mobility to pack up and move, to try again elsewhere.

Public transportation, which once seemed "so attractive and wonderful" to Americans, required real estate to be located within walking distance and thus began to appear restrictive compared to the automobile, which "allowed its owner to leave and return when he wanted and along routes of his own choosing."<sup>138</sup> The federal government played a major role in perpetuating the popularity and accessibility of the automobile. The Federal Highway Act of 1916 and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, according to Jackson, "moved the government toward a transportation policy emphasizing and benefitting the road, the truck, and the private motorcar. In conjunction with cheap fuel and mass-produced automobiles, the urban expressways led to lower marginal transport costs and greatly stimulated deconcentration."<sup>139</sup> Access to an automobile meant freedom and independence for Americans—the ability to access

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 203.



lands previously out of reach or out of their control—and the government, through its transportation policies, made conscious decisions to cater the development of the landscape to the automobile as the means of achieving the ideal.

While the automobile provided the freedom Americans craved, homeownership symbolized the self-sufficiency and morality originally embodied by Jefferson's yeoman farmer and later promoted with homestead legislation. Again, during the Depression the government played an instrumental role in encouraging homeownership. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover called the President's National Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership. In plainly Jeffersonian language, Hoover determined that purpose of the meeting was to support homeownership for men "of sound character and industrious habits," and explained that homeownership was "both the foundation of a sound economic and social system and a guarantee that our country will continue to develop rationally as changing conditions demand." Hoover further expressed, "I am confident that the sentiment for home ownership is so embedded in the American heart that millions of people who dwell in tenements, apartments, and rented rooms...have the aspiration for wider opportunity in ownership of their own homes...Nothing makes for security and advancement more than devotion to the upbuilding of home life." (qtd. in Jackson pg. 206). The influence of the ideology in Hoover's statements is clear; the "sentiment for homeownership" was certainly embedded in the hearts of Americans, dating back to Jefferson's conception of the yeoman ideal, and the association between men of "sound character and industrious habits," access to better opportunities, and homeownership is a direct reformulation of the implications for character embedded in the ideology. According to Jackson, Hoover did not stand alone in his sentiments; a few years earlier, President Calvin Coolidge remarked, "No greater contribution could be made to the stability of the Nation and the

advancement of its ideals, than to make it a nation of homeowners families.”<sup>140</sup> Both Hoover and Coolidge express the idea that a nation draws its strength and stability from a nation of homeowners, an idea expressed earlier in the homestead debates; Samuel Pomeroy in his speech said, “Real strength consists in the hearts, the bones, the sinews of an independent, loyal, free yeomanry.”<sup>141</sup> Again, the idea of the nation’s strength was reformulated, representing the force of the ideology in evaluating the merits of the nation.

The push for homeownership continued under Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency through his New Deal programs. FDR clearly shared the sentiments of the Presidents whom preceded him; he once stated, “A nation of homeowners, of people who won a real share in their own land is unconquerable” (qtd. in Jackson p. 203). In so many words, Roosevelt’s statement is nearly an exact replication of an idea expressed by Galusha Grow in his support of the Homestead Act; Galusha said, “Whenever agricultural labor becomes dishonorable, it will, of course, be confined to those who have no interest in the soil they till; and when the laborer ceases to have any interest in the land he cultivates, he ceases to have any stake in the advancement and good order of society, for he has nothing to lose, nothing to defend, nothing to hope for...”<sup>142</sup> The fundamental idea is the same: the nation’s strength lies in its citizens’ investment in the soil, and the only hope for advancement in American society is through owning one’s own land, or in this case, one’s own home.

In 1933, President Roosevelt encouraged the U.S. Congress to pass a law “that would protect the small homeowner from foreclosure, relieve him of part of the burden of excessive interest and principle payments incurred during a period of higher values and higher earning

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>141</sup> Speech of Samuel Pomeroy, 1862.

<sup>142</sup> Speech of Galusha A. Grow, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1860.

power, and declare that it was national policy to protect homeownership.”<sup>143</sup> According to Jackson, the measure was met with bipartisan support and on June 13, 1933, FDR signed into law the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC).<sup>144</sup> The HOLC, Jackson states, “is important to history because it introduced, perfected, and proved in practice the feasibility of long-term, self-amortizing mortgage with uniform payments spread over the whole life of the debt.”<sup>145</sup> Although the HOLC may have been unique in its creation of the first established system of home mortgaging, the central idea and values are quite similar to those reflected in the Homestead Act. Both government actions made land ownership easier and more accessible for the average American, which carries the long-established landscape values established by Jefferson: independence, self-sufficiency, and morality; in a word—Americanness.

“No agency of the United States government,” Jackson writes, “has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).”<sup>146</sup> The FHA, which was established in the National Housing Act of 1934, stemmed from President Roosevelt’s “desire for at least one program that could stimulate building without government spending and that would rely instead on private enterprise,” and served the primary purpose of alleviating unemployment.<sup>147</sup> The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (or the GI Bill) was later incorporated into the FHA with the intention of assisting the soldiers of World War II in acquiring a home.<sup>148</sup> The FHA and the accompanying GI Bill are, again, government actions that clearly reflect the perpetuation of a new mutation of the

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<sup>143</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 208.

<sup>144</sup> In practice, the HOLC also had a substantial influence in racially segregating suburbs, for more details see Jackson pp. 214-216

<sup>145</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 209.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

American landscape ideology. While the FHA encouraged homeownership, it also encouraged and enabled men to make a life for themselves through their own industry. This aspect of the FHA functions in accordance with the original Jeffersonian ideal about morality and upstanding character associated in the actual, physical cultivation of the land. The GI Bill portion of the FHA creates a strong tie between national pride and land ownership by providing soldiers with their own home as a reward for their service. During the homestead debates, the same idea was present when it was argued western pioneers were “soldiers of peace” and therefore deserving of land, and the Homestead Act itself also provides special exceptions for men who had served their country.

The United States government’s encouragement of the automobile industry and of homeownership, arguably two of the most important components of the spread of suburbia, was surely motivated by a desire to promote a landscape which reflected the American values rooted in the soil. “Not surprisingly,” Jackson writes, “the middle-class suburban family with the new house and the long-term, fixed-rate, FHA-insured mortgage became a symbol, and perhaps a stereotype, of the American way of life.”<sup>149</sup> Although the landscape of America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century looked almost nothing like Jefferson’s ideal, this “American way of life” ensured by the government in the decades following the *Euclid* decision is certainly reminiscent of Jefferson’s vision. The idealized yeoman farmer, which had grown in the previous century to become a brave pioneer on a Western homestead, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century evolved again to meet the reality of suburbia, U.S.A.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 218.

### Section III: Ideology and Architecture

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suburbia represented a new mutation of the long-held American landscape ideology, which tied values of freedom, independence, self-sufficiency, and morality together with the development of and relation to the physical land. Owning one's own plot of land in which to invest their hard work, maintaining open, green spaces, and separating the moral, single-family homes from the dangers and immorality of more compact city life are all aspects of suburbia that fit quite comfortably into the ideal that had begun as a landscape of yeoman farmers. The new manifestation of this ideology is not only evident in the popularity of suburban-style development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also in the work of various architects, who created ideal homes and communities that expunge the values of the centuries-old ideology. One example is Edward Bok, editor of the influential *Ladies' Home Journal*, who envisioned simpler homes, free of unnecessary ornamentation. According to Jackson, Bok argued "the closer we keep our children to the soil the healthier they will be physically."<sup>150</sup> Though Bok is not widely known, former President Theodore Roosevelt spoke highly of his influence on the American landscape: "Bok is the only man I ever heard of who changed, for the better, the architecture of an entire nation, and he did it so quickly and so effectively that we didn't know it begun before it was finished."<sup>151</sup>

A more widely recognized and influential figure in the creation of ideal American homes and communities is Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright is most famously known for his Prairie School Architecture, emphasizing natural, organic forms, a style influenced by his mentor, Louis Sullivan. In his 1954 work, *The Natural House*, Wright rejects the "modern" home that was being mass-produced in suburbs and cities around the country and instead promotes the idea of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

organic architecture—homes built more purposefully in line with the natural landscape. Lloyd’s discussion of organic architecture and the “natural house” is reminiscent of the Jeffersonian ideal landscape, but even more clearly of Tench Coxe in his promotion of manufactures in the United States. Although Wright is not promoting industrial development in his work, he employs a similar technique to that which Coxe used, which was to make industry seem to emanate naturally from America’s unique landscape. By portraying his ideal American home as a natural growth from the soil, Wright demonstrates the continuance of the hold of the ideology and its influence on even the more seemingly rational architects and planners.

In its 1926 *Euclid* decision, the Supreme Court implicitly expressed a desire to maintain an American landscape that fit comfortably with the values deeply entrenched in the soil. Similarly, Wright rejects the sterile modern architecture in favor of organic architecture, which more closely reflects the same values Jefferson and his peers discussed centuries earlier. Wright sets up his rejection by explaining the faults of the modern home: “What was the matter with the typical American house?” Wright questions,

Well, just for an honest beginning, it lied about everything. It had no sense of unity at all nor any such sense of space as should belong to free people. It was stuck up in thoughtless fashion. It had no more sense of earth than a ‘modernistic’ house. And it was stuck up on wherever it happened to be. To take any one of these so-called ‘homes’ away would have improved the landscape and helped clear the atmosphere. The thing was more a hive than a home just as ‘modernistic’ houses are more boxes than houses.<sup>152</sup>

Wright continues his attack on the modern house and explains its broader societal implications, “General cultural sterility, the cause of the unrest of this uncreative moment that now stalls the world, might be saved and fructified by this ideal of an organic architecture, led from shallow troubled muddy water into deeper clearer pools of thought. Life needs these deeper fresher pools

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<sup>152</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (New York: Horizon Press Inc., 1954), 14.

into which youth may plunge to come out refreshed.”<sup>153</sup> Wright seems to attribute the “general cultural sterility” of the country to the architecture of the modern house. He finds fault in its lack of unity and sense of place, which “should belong to free people.” His critique of greater American society through criticism of modern architecture is important because it establishes a clear link between American culture, values, and identity and the way the landscape is developed (or in this case, the style of homes built on American soil.) Organic architecture, Wright argues, will save the country from sterility and lead it from “shallow troubled muddy water into deeper clearer pools of thought.” It is further important that Wright believes, “Faith in the *natural* is the faith we now need to grow up on in this coming age of our culturally confused, backward twentieth century.”<sup>154</sup> He implies a sort of back to the soil mentality in order to save the “culturally confused, backward” nation. Just as Jefferson had insisted that a nation of yeoman farmers would naturally lead to morality and superior virtue, Wright insists that his organic, natural architecture will save the country from its greater cultural confusion.

Just as Tench Coxe was able to expertly employ his knowledge of the hold of the ideological landscape on American minds in order to convey manufacturing and industry as naturally and necessarily emanating from the unique resources of the country, Wright explains his organic architecture as something naturally arising from the American landscape. “Organic simplicity might everywhere be seen producing significant character in the ruthless but harmonious order I was taught to call nature,” Wright explains, evoking the centuries-old pastoral ideal state of man in harmony with nature, “I was more than familiar with it on the farm. All around me, I, or anyone for that matter, might see beauty in growing things and, by a little

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 45.

painstaking, learn how they grew to be ‘beautiful.’”<sup>155</sup> On the same idea, Wright explains his childhood on a farm had caused him to “[welcome] spaciousness as a modern human need as well as [learn] to see it as a natural human opportunity.”<sup>156</sup> Although Wright doesn’t specify, it seems appropriate to assume he is referring to Americans in his writing. “Spaciousness” was never a natural opportunity and necessity to the men of Europe, where feudalism monopolized the entirety of the land, but was rather something unique to the American landscape. This open, abundant land was infused with the American values of morality and nobility, which Wright appears to be evoking here.

Appropriately, Wright uses the familiar plant metaphor in his discussion of the natural house, a metaphor employed time and time again by those perpetuating the American landscape ideology. He writes, “Eclecticism may take place overnight but organic architecture must come from the ground up into the light by gradual growth. It will itself be the ground of a better way of life; it is not only the beautifier of the building; it is, as a circumstance in itself, becoming the blessing of the occupants.”<sup>157</sup> Later, he repeats a similar idea, “Conceive now that an entire building might grow up out of conditions as a plant grows up out of soil and yet be free to be itself, to ‘live its own life according to Man’s Nature.’ Dignified as a tree in the midst of nature but a child of the spirit of man.”<sup>158</sup> Wright uses this plant metaphor to express the idea that homes should grow out of the soil, or in other words, should emanate naturally from the landscape, and argues these natural homes will “be the ground of a better way of life...becoming the blessing of the occupants.” The metaphor here has the same effect as it did when Jefferson used it to describe how noble American character would grow naturally from a landscape of

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



yeoman farmers; Wright explains that organic architecture arising from American soil will naturally lead to a better life.

At several points in his writing, Wright does specify that this organic architecture is unique to America and its values and identity. Wright states, “Conceive that here came a new sense of building on American soil that could grow building forms not only true to function but expressive far beyond mere function in the realm of the human spirit. Our new country might now have a true architecture hitherto unknown. Yes, architectural forms by this interior means might now group up to express a deeper sense of human life values than any existing before.”<sup>159</sup> The emphasis here is that his idea of organic architecture is “hitherto unknown,” or distinctly unique to America, which is an important component of the ideology, which was founded on landscape ideals quite different than those in Europe. Wright uses a metaphor in order to evoke the contrast between the American system of land use and that of the oppressive European nation, “Savage animals, ‘holing in’ for protection were more characteristic of life based upon the might of feudal times or based upon the so-called ‘classical’ in architecture, which were in turn based upon the labor of the chattel slave. In a free country, we were ourselves free by way of organic thought, buildings might come out into the light without more animal fear; come entirely away from the pagan ideals of form we dote upon as ‘classic.’ Or what freedom have we?”<sup>160</sup> This comparison allows Wright to emphasize the unique freedom Americans have been given to make use of the land to make a life for themselves, to express and create ideas—a unique freedom that is encapsulated in the ideology.

Wright goes on to express this idea of the Americans’ freedom to use the land as they please. He states,

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 25.

We all have the means to live free and independent, far apart—as we choose—still retaining all the social relationships and advantages we ever had, even to have them greatly multiplied. No matter if we do have houses a quarter of a mile apart. You would enjoy all that you used to enjoy when you were ten to a block, and think of the immense advantages for your children and for yourself: freedom to *use* the ground, relationship with all kinds of living growth.<sup>161</sup>

Wright emphasizes the American right to sprawl, an integral aspect of the ideology, formulated at a time when the nation was still largely unsettled, but had in recent years been maximized by the increased accessibility of the automobile. At its core, the right to sprawl embodies the deeply held American ideal of freedom to access the bountiful lands of the country and to make an honest life. To threaten the American right to spaciousness, embodied in sprawling suburban developments, is to threaten the very values upon which the country was founded; it is to attempt to destroy the most recent manifestation of the precious ideology upon which we have invested so many values, and which lies at the heart of American identity.

#### **Section IV: American Landscape Architecture—A Comparison**

The principles espoused by Frank Lloyd Wright in *The Natural House* demonstrate the strong continuance and influence of the American landscape ideology in the suburban age. In Wright's discussion of his ideal landscape and home design, he expresses a belief in a strong connection between character (of both the individual and of the nation as a whole) and the development of the physical landscape, just as Jefferson had done in his formulation of his ideal yeoman landscape. For Wright, however, the ideals and principles he discusses are not confined to ideology only, but rather he was able to create physical embodiments through his design of popular homes around the nation. An analysis of the physical architecture of his homes, compared to both the homestead of Elinore Pruitt Stewart and to the modernistic homes Wright

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 135.

detested, demonstrates how the ideology not only influences thought, but also the physical terrain of the nation.



Figure 1: Homestead of Elinore Pruitt Stewart, photo by Richard Collier, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (1984)<sup>162</sup>



Figure 2: Taliesin West in Scottsdale, AZ designed by Frank Lloyd Wright<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Barbara Allen Bogart, "Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Writer and Homesteader," *Wyoming State Historical Society*, <http://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/elinore-pruitt-stewart-writer-and-homesteader>.

At first glance, the two images above appear to be quite different. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's homestead was built out of necessity, for the purpose of surviving on the land. Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West is clearly not a modest home built for subsistence on a Western homestead, but it was indeed built with an intention to communicate the same ideological values that Stewart embodied on her homestead, and the overall character of the images is strikingly similar.

In her *Letters*, Stewart discusses the isolation she experiences on her western homestead; she details the distance between homes, the long and difficult journey to reach any form of transportation, and the sparse interactions with other homesteaders. The isolation of Stewart's homestead was not intentional, but rather an inherent aspect of homesteading in the early 1900's when the West was still relatively unpopulated. A recent visitor to Stewart's homestead expresses that this feeling of isolation remains, "If you stop the car, turn off the engine and get out you'll know what it is to be still."<sup>164</sup> This isolation may have acted as a hardship and a barrier, but it also represented the fundamental value of freedom—the freedom to access abundant open land, to own a piece of land, and to make a better life. Similarly, Wright preaches decentralization as a means of freedom; in regards to where to build a home, he advises to, "Go way out into the county—what you regard as 'too far'—and when others follow, as they will (if procreation keeps up), move on," and states that how close one chooses to live to the city "depends on what kind of slave you are"<sup>165</sup> In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the passage of homestead legislation was closely tied to the question of slavery's future in the nation, so

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<sup>163</sup> Jeffery Howe, "A Digital Archive of American Architecture," *Boston College*, last modified 1998, [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/FLW\\_taliesin.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/FLW_taliesin.html)

<sup>164</sup> Laura Roesler, "Traveling into the pages of history," *Sr. Perspective*, last modified December 2, 2013, <http://www.srperspective.com/2013/12/traveling-into-the-pages-of-history/>

<sup>165</sup> Wright, *The Natural House*, 134.

Wright's reference here to slavery and the freedom associated with decentralization appears to be a clear thread of the ideology. Figure 2, above, demonstrates the sprawling architecture of Wright's Taliesin West, expressing clearly the valuation of spaciousness and decentralization.

The use of the nation's uniquely abundant landscape and resources has always been an integral aspect of the American landscape ideology. In a practical sense, the landscape could provide a means for survival, but it also provided an ideological source from which Americans drew their character and identity. Stewart expresses a clear belief in this ideology throughout her *Letters* in her details of her personal fulfillment, her happy modest life, and her description of the natural landscape and its resources as an antidote to the ills of city life. Wright expresses the same idea when he writes, "The only answer to life today is to get back to the good ground, or rather, I should say, to get forward to it, because now instead of going back, we can go forward to the ground," and, "No matter if we do have houses a quarter of a mile apart. You would enjoy all that you used to when you were ten to a block, and think of the immense advantages for your children and for yourself: immense advantages for your children and for yourself: freedom to *use* the ground, relationship with all kinds of living growth."<sup>166</sup> This notion of returning to the land and really *using* its resources is clear in the architecture of Wright's homes, as demonstrated in the image of Taliesin West above. The structure is largely horizontal, sloping naturally with the landscape, a method of design he discusses in his work, "Now why not let walls, ceilings, floors become seen as component parts of each other, their surfaces flowing into each other."<sup>167</sup> The structure's physical proximity to the landscape and the way it flows naturally with the line of the earth makes believable Wright's claim that an "entire building might grow up out of conditions

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

as a plant grows up out of soil and yet be free to be itself.”<sup>168</sup> As discussed earlier, Wright’s idea that a structure may grow from the earth is quite similar to Tench Coxe’s manipulation of the ideology to include the natural emanation of manufactures from the nation’s unique landscape and resources.

The comparison between Stewart’s homestead and Wright’s design is intended to illuminate this important factor of the ideology, its ability to be manipulated almost seamlessly to meet changing realities. As noted above, Stewart’s homestead was not designed intentionally to espouse values, but rather embodied the 19<sup>th</sup> century version of the ideal yeoman farmer lifestyle, and therefore by nature communicated these values of independence, freedom, sufficiency, spaciousness, and industriousness. Stewart’s home was built modestly, constructed with timber, and structured horizontally in line with the natural landscape based on the limitations imposed by her chosen lifestyle as a homesteader. By Wright’s time, the nation was significantly less agrarian; the proportion of farmers decreased from 32 per cent of the nation’s population in 1900 to just 3 per cent in 1980,<sup>169</sup> and therefore the architecture of his homes was not necessitated by circumstance. His emphasis on the use of natural materials, horizontal architecture, and his encouragement of decentralization were all intentional manipulations of the ideology with the aim of representing the same values instilled in the landscape over 100 years earlier.

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 186.



Figure 3: 1950's Folk Victorian home in Port Townsend, WA<sup>170</sup>

In addition to promoting his own style of architecture, Wright wrote in vehement opposition to the “typical American house,” which he claimed had no sense of unity, no “sense of space as should belong to free people,” was constructed thoughtlessly, and was more like a box than a proper American home.<sup>171</sup> As a point of architectural comparison, an image of a Victorian style home is included above (figure 3). The Victorian home is strikingly different than Wright’s Taliesin West and Stewart’s homestead; it is constructed vertically upon the landscape, appearing much less spacious and sprawling, and is indeed much more boxy than Wright’s design. This Victorian design would also allow for much more compact development, which Wright detested and viewed as utterly unnecessary on the abundant American landscape. Wright’s critique of what he deems “modernistic” architecture can be interpreted as much less

<sup>170</sup> David Taylor, “Port Townsend Gallery,” *Northwestern University*, last modified 2001, <http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~infocom/scndempr/porttownsend/>

<sup>171</sup> Wright, *The Natural House*, 14.

about the physical structures than the values the architectural styles represent. The Victorian home is unnatural, does not fit with the landscape, and encourages more compact development, while Wright's homes promote the development of a spread out landscape, with homes that emanate from the natural earth—a landscape that is not so radically different from Jefferson's original ideal. Important to reiterate is that, realistically, the landscape of the nation by the 1950's is entirely different than the American landscape in Jefferson's time, and it had been developed far past what Jefferson would have ever wanted. However, the fundamental aspects of the ideology had clearly remained and continued to influence the physical development of the landscape. Wright's ranch-style homes became the popular model for suburbs across the nation, demonstrating the continued hold of the ideology on the cultural imagination and the way it persisted in determining the development of the nation's terrain.

### **Section V: Characteristics of Suburbia and The Reflection of Ideology**

The notion of a singular, uniform "American Dream" has been subject to widespread scrutiny and interrogation; it is unclear why, in such a diverse nation, there is supposedly one dream that the entire populous should aspire to achieve. With little variance, however, the idea of the American Dream has become nearly synonymous with suburbia. The conception of this suburban American Dream is commonly attributed to the post-WWII era, in the late 1940's and 1950's. Technically speaking, suburbia can reasonably be said to be a direct result of the 1926 Supreme Court decision in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*, which determined the constitutionality of zoning laws and effectively institutionalized the single-use, sprawling developments characteristic of suburbia. Ideologically speaking, the investment of American character and values into the landscape in Jefferson's yeoman farmer ideal was the original conception of the ideology that would eventually be expressed in the suburban mode. According to Kenneth



Jackson, in the post-WWII “era of low inflation, plentiful energy, federal subsidies, and expansive optimism, Americans showed the way to a more abundant and more perfect lifestyle.”<sup>172</sup> In other words, at a time when Americans were given every opportunity to choose virtually any lifestyle, they chose suburbia.

In the roughly 100 years between the Homestead Act and the explosion of suburban development, the landscape changed dramatically. Although Americans were no longer seeking 160-acre homesteads, owning a home surrounded by a lawn in a suburban neighborhood was fundamentally not a drastic change, and it certainly fit comfortably with the American landscape ideology. Suburbia was the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s mutation of the centuries-old ideology; institutionalized by the *Euclid* decision, designed by architects and planners like Frank Lloyd Wright, and promoted in the cultural imagination as a formula to achieve the American Dream.

In Kenneth T. Jackson’s *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, he identifies five characteristics of post-WWII suburbia. The first two characteristics are suburban neighborhoods’ peripheral location on the edges of cities, and low-density development. A Bureau of Labor Statistics survey of home building in 1946-1947 found that suburbs accounted for at least 62 per cent of construction in six metropolitan regions, and “by 1950 the national suburban growth rate was ten times that of central cities.”<sup>173</sup> The location of suburbs on the periphery of cities makes sense, given the ideological impulse to seek open space and separate domestic life from economic and cultural aspects of society, which ran concurrently with the ideology as unnatural and yet practically necessary forces of life in America. Jackson further notes that “between 1946 and 1956, about 97 percent of all new single-family dwellings were completely detached, surrounded on every side by their own plots...[and] the new

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<sup>172</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 256.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

subdivisions allotted a higher proportion of their land area to streets and open spaces.”<sup>174</sup> This low-density style of development and preservation of open spaces can be traced back to a fundamental idea contained in the ideology: the American landscape is boundless, and therefore people have the right to settle in open space.

When Locke wrote in 1690 of the boundless American landscape, when Crèvecoeur wondered “Who can tell how far it extends?” in 1782, and when the distribution of the Western lands was decided in the Homestead Act of 1862, it was not unreasonable to believe that it would be impossible to settle the entirety of the country. However, this perception is wholly unfounded by the age of suburban expansion; in fact, the 1950’s represented the second highest decade of population increase between 1900-2000.<sup>175</sup> Although open, developable lands were certainly still readily available, it would have been naïve at this point to perceive the landscape as virtually limitless. The low-density, sprawling suburban developments thus signal the remaining force of the American landscape ideology in influencing the actual settlement of the land, and its ability to overrule what may have been more practical development decisions. While suburbia is not a uniquely American phenomenon, the dominance of low-density, sprawling developments contrasts dramatically with Europe. According to Jackson, in France, Denmark, and Spain, which were “relatively unscathed” by WWII and therefore did not need to provide shelter quickly for masses of displaced citizens, the single-family house was still rare. He notes that in Sweden, Stockholm “committed itself to a suburban pattern along subway lines, a decision that implied a high-density residential pattern.”<sup>176</sup> This contrast highlights the uniquely American

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>175</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Census 2000 Special Reports,” by Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, p. 12, (accessed March 23, 2016).

<sup>176</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 252.

desire to develop the landscape in an overwhelmingly spread out and practically inefficient fashion.

The third major characteristic Jackson identifies of postwar suburbs is their architectural homogeneity. Although some regional distinctions in style existed previously—colonial-style homes of New England, or row houses of Atlantic coastal cities—the ranch-style home was especially “evocative of the expansive mood of the post-World War II suburbs and of the disappearing regionality of style.”<sup>177</sup> The ranch style home was directly derived from Frank Lloyd Wright’s prairie style architecture, which Jackson characterizes as particularly suggestive of “spacious living and an easy relationship with the outdoors,” and was similarly popular across the United States.<sup>178</sup> Though Wright did not hold the monopoly on designing ranch-style homes, his theories, which strongly reflect the influence of the American landscape ideology, were certainly quite influential, and became the standard for the quintessential suburban home in post-WWII America. In addition to the widespread similarity in architectural style, suburban homes also almost always contained a lawn separating the houses from each other and from the road, a garden tended by the housewife, and a driveway in which to park the car. These aspects further reflect the ideological hold; the lawn and garden allowed suburban dwellers to feel as though their suburban homes were miniature homesteads, giving them something to tend and maintain, and the driveway was symbolic of the automobile and thus independence and mobility.

The easy accessibility of housing is the fourth characteristic Jackson identifies of American suburbs after WWII. While there were some upper-income neighborhoods around the country, the mass-production techniques, government financing, high wages, and low interest

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-253.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

rates made suburban homes cheap and widely available.<sup>179</sup> As discussed earlier, government policies and design and construction techniques demonstrated a clear preference for homeownership and suburban-style development. Policies enabling the average American family to own a home and access the fundamental components of the ideology echo closely the government strategy in the Homestead Act, which similarly made land ownership easy and inclusive of the majority of the population. The notions of cultivation, settlement, and improvement of the land necessarily morphed along with the ideology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In suburbia, a family would not cultivate crops on which to subsist, but rather cultivate flowers in the garden. Settling no longer meant building a home from scratch on 160-acres, but rather unpacking boxes and putting individualized touches on a home, like a new mailbox or doorknocker. Improvement, which in the homestead era meant transforming inherently non-valuable untouched land into a farm, would in suburban times mean earning enough money to install a new wing on the home, or adding a fresh coat of paint. The new expressions of these terms demonstrate the hold of the ideology on the cultural imagination and how its fundamental values can be easily morphed to adapt to the changing reality in America.

The final characteristic of post-WWII suburbs, which Jackson deems as the most important, is economic and racial homogeneity. Economic disparities led to the widespread movement of whites to suburbs while minorities remained in the central cities. Overt racial discrimination played a role as well; according to Jackson, the Levitt organization blatantly refused to sell to blacks for twenty years after WWII.<sup>180</sup> The landscape ideology, although originally formulated as widely inclusive, has always been somewhat discriminatory. The ongoing dichotomy between the ideological world and economic reality meant that some people

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 254.

would have to live in the economic reality. As early as 1787, Tench Coxe recognized that some immigrants would possess manufacturing skills and would thus be “better suited” to that industry. As demonstrated in the comparison between Elinore Pruitt Stewart’s letters and the lives of Deb and Hugh in Rebecca Harding Davis’s novella, there were masses of hopeless lives destined to toil away in the unrewarding factories, and these masses largely tended to be immigrants. The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty* elevated the level of discrimination to be more or less blatantly included in a lasting landmark case. Although the popularity of suburbia was enabled by its accessibility for the average American, this “average” figure was largely white and middle class. The racial implications of the landscape ideology are complex and certainly worth exploring more deeply. Unfortunately, due to limitations of this thesis I am unable to examine this aspect at length.

Through the lens of Jackson’s major characteristics of post-WWII suburbia, the influence of the American landscape ideology on the dominance of suburban development is abundantly clear. The suburbs were arguably so homogeneous because the popularity of this form of development was dependent on the singular ideology at work in the cultural imagination. This ideology has been so influential largely because it has never been explicitly articulated. Never has there been an active acknowledgement of the fundamental values invested in the landscape that so strongly influence the way Americans view the landscape and their relationship to it. Perhaps it seems naïve to attempt to explain 20<sup>th</sup> century decisions with an ideal formulated in 1785, however, it is arguably more absurd to understand the development of the American landscape as the singular, natural path.

## Section VI: The Road Not Taken—Exploring Alternatives to Suburbia

From a 21<sup>st</sup> century, post-suburban world's perspective, it is easy to look at the landscape and view it as inevitable and natural, something that just *happened*. The suburban model is so widely accepted as the norm in America that it becomes nearly impossible to try to imagine alternatives to this familiar landscape, or understand why Americans chose this path. Taking a moment to imagine the “road not taken,” or alternatives to suburban America, highlights the influence of the American landscape ideology in the conscious decision making that occurred and resulted in this dominant development pattern of the nation's landscape. In this section, I will take a short break from discussing the ideology's influence on suburban America to explore the American landscape that could have been.

Robert Fishman defines suburbia as a development that is “physically separated from the urban core, [yet dependent] on it economically for the jobs that support its residents. It is also culturally dependent on the core for the major institutions of urban life: professional offices, department stores and other specialized shops, hospitals, theatres, and the like.” And further, according to Fishman, “The suburb must be large enough and homogenous enough to form a distinctive low density environment defined by the primacy of the single family house set in the greenery of an open, parklike setting.”<sup>181</sup> According to this definition, suburbia is a form of development that not only uses the land inefficiently, but also must rely on an urban center for its economic, social, and cultural existence. It is not difficult to understand the multitude of levels on which suburbia does not make much sense. Fishman explains that suburbia radically “contradicted the basic assumptions that organized the premodern city [which were] built up on the principle that the core was the only appropriate and honorific setting for the elite, and that the

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<sup>181</sup> Fishman, “Bourgeois Utopias,” 22.

urban peripheries outside the walls were disreputable zones, shantytowns to which the poorest inhabitants and most noisome manufacturers were relegated.”<sup>182</sup> Of course, the widespread development of the American suburb occurred in a world that looked much different than the premodern city. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans were largely freed from the necessity of living where they conducted business due to the increased public transportation and, perhaps most importantly, the increased accessibility of the automobile. Fishman explains that, under these circumstances, the home could now be “redesigned as a wholly domestic environment—the home of a family that acted primarily as an emotional rather than an economic unit.”<sup>183</sup> Although Americans no longer had to live in cities, it remains true that it would have been much more convenient and efficient not to separate the worlds so drastically.

It is worth attempting to understand *why* Americans found the idea of suburbia so attractive. The suburban model, defined by a complete separation of the home or domestic environment from virtually everything else—culture, social interaction, jobs, etc.—set on small plots of land (smaller versions of homesteads) was certainly made possible by the automobile, but as discussed earlier, the vehicle merely acted as the mode through which Americans could express other beliefs and values, just as did the Supreme Court’s decision in *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*. Suburbia did not just happen; it was not natural nor was it inevitable. Suburbia was the 20<sup>th</sup> century mutation of the ideology—a way to express through the landscape the prevailing values of independence, freedom, opportunity, and moral superiority. The desire to create the suburban world as entirely separate from spheres of economics and culture represents the continuity of the dichotomy between the ideological world and the economic reality.

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

One would not be hard pressed to imagine alternatives to the dominant suburban landscape of America. Simply look to our neighbors across the Atlantic for a viable example. Certainly, suburbia is not an exclusively American phenomenon, but its dominance and concurrent reliance on the automobile is unique. An Atlantic Citylab article notes that in 2010, Americans drove for 85 percent of their daily trips, while Europeans drove only 50 to 65 percent.<sup>184</sup> The contrast of driving percentages may partially be explained by the higher frequency of shorter trips in Europe, which is illustrative in itself, because it means that, on average, Europeans live closer to where they work. The automobile allowed Americans to create entirely separate spheres for home and work, but why was this so overwhelmingly attractive to Americans? To an extent, there is truth behind the claims of cities being more dangerous and dirty, or at least a lingering bias from the early industrial cities, and it is reasonable to say that many people simply did not want to live in the urban core. However, the city and the suburb did not have to be the only two viable options.

America could have taken the path of more densely settled, multi-use villages that are on a much smaller scale than large cities, but that still incorporate jobs, cultural, social, and entertainment centers. In fact, this type of development has taken form in recent years in a style known as New Urbanism, which emphasizes denser, multi-use, transit-oriented development as an alternative to suburbia, while still preserving elements of green space. The New Urbanist movement largely responds to the many environmental consequences of suburban development, which likely could not have been predicted in the age of suburban conception, but is notable in this discussion because it is not a radical or even a new idea. It is entirely fathomable that the

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<sup>184</sup> Ralph Buehler, "9 Reasons the U.S. Ended Up So Much More Car-Dependent Than Europe," *The Atlantic Citylab*, last modified February 4, 2014. <http://www.citylab.com/commute/2014/02/9-reasons-us-ended-so-much-more-car-dependent-europe/8226/>



American landscape could have been developed on this model rather than on the suburban model, and we would not find ourselves trying to undo the damage suburbia has caused. This New Urbanism, or small village, form of development arguably makes much more sense, not only in terms of convenience (living close to cultural and employment centers means not sitting in hours of traffic), but also environmentally, socially, and economically. Despite these facts however, today there is widespread criticism and resistance to this movement, which will be discussed at length later in this essay. Perhaps more important is that this alternative was always entirely possible, but we chose suburbia instead.

Considering the components of the ideology—the freedom to own and cultivate land, the opportunity to make an honest, virtuous living, and the moral superiority and American identity associated with this mode of life—it is not difficult to understand the suburban phenomenon. The majority of 20<sup>th</sup> century Americans were no longer actually cultivating the land they owned, and America was certainly no longer an agrarian nation, but suburbia allowed Americans to maintain a mutation of the ideal, especially in the face of the increasing industrial development that threatened it. Suburbia allows families to own land in the form of plots of green lawn, and perhaps even cultivate gardens and feel like modern yeoman farmers. The separation of domesticity and work allows this “homestead” to act as a purifying force. The automobile gives Americans freedom to move as they please, to access better opportunities in the abundant American landscape. Suburban America may look virtually nothing like Jefferson’s ideal landscape, but the hold of the ideal is undeniable.

### **Section VII: Ideology in the Cultural Landscape**

Almost as rampant as the boom of suburbia was the criticism of this mode of living that accompanied it. The widespread unhappiness, lack of fulfillment, and critique of suburbia

expressed in popular culture of the mid-1900's demonstrates the breakdown of the ideology as it became mutated so far from its original form. An assumption existed that settling in the suburbs was as natural and inevitable as the germination of a seed and the growth of a plant, and with the settlement came an automatic association of happiness and fulfillment. Suburban life meant owning one's own land, tending to it as one pleased, with a car in the driveway that ensured freedom and mobility—all aspects of life that have been idealized since the earliest years of the nation. It became quickly apparent, however, that suburbia was not the key to contentment. Mounting the John Deere lawnmower on Sunday morning and pulling weeds from the garden in the backyard was not the same as farming a 160-acre plot of land in order to sustain oneself and the family. For many, the land became a curse more than a blessing. It became a promise of happiness, success, and Americanness that could not possibly be realized as it once was.

Between 1934 and 1954, the suburban population increased by 75 percent, a substantial increase which was immediately followed by widespread criticism of the suburban mode of life in the popular literature of the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>185</sup> Works like Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955) and William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1957) offered prominent critiques of the monotonous and inescapable lives of American businessmen and suburbanites, expressing the unhappiness and confusion of suburban dwellers. Such widespread criticism of suburban life during this period begs the question, why did so many people continue to live this mode of life? The answer is in the pervasive influence of the ideology we have been tracing, which ultimately caused Americans to live unhappy lives because they were made to feel like it was the natural, inevitable route to happiness. Richard Yates's novel, *Revolutionary Road*, set in 1955 and first published in 1961, is often understood as just another critique of the

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<sup>185</sup> Scott Donaldson, *The Suburban Myth* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

trappings of suburbia, serving to “anatomize the ills and woes of suburbia.”<sup>186</sup> However, closer analysis of the novel reveals that it stands apart as a critique of the blind assumption that this mode of life would automatically lead to happiness and fulfillment and calls attention to the absurd notion that people were actually somehow trapped in suburbia.

On the surface, the novel’s main characters, April and Frank Wheeler, can be understood as a fabulous couple, torn from the trendy world of Greenwich Village by an unplanned pregnancy and doomed to the miserable trapping life of the suburbs. The Wheelers fit the stereotypical “perfect smiling suburban family standing behind their white picket fence, the father heading off to work in the city in his gray flannel suit, the mother waving in her apron and pearls while ushering the children off to school,” secretly miserable beneath their happy façade.<sup>187</sup> If read that way, The Atlantic’s claim that Yates is “satirizing those suburbanites and others who thought that they themselves were too good for the ’burbs” would seem quite apt.<sup>188</sup> However, by creating a tragic story of dehumanized characters that have no individual desires except to chase an illusive ideal, Yates means to criticize the idea that all people will be happy if they blindly conform to the latest popular lifestyle. Yates’ novel, therefore, demonstrates at the same time the breakdown of the ideology when it is taken so far out of its original context and the continuing strength of that ideology in its ability to actually make people feel so trapped.

Frank and April Wheeler were not always an unhappy suburban couple; before their accidental pregnancy, Yates describes them as deeply in love, carefree, and happily living in

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<sup>186</sup> Christopher Hitchens, “Suburbs of our Discontent,” *The Atlantic*, last modified December 1, 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/12/suburbs-of-our-discontent/307131/>.

<sup>187</sup> Sabrina Patrizio, “Wouldn’t You Like to be Loved by April Wheeler: Suburban and Feminine Containment in *Revolutionary Road*,” *Boston University Arts & Sciences Writing Program* Issue 5 (2013): accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/journal/past-issues/issue-5/patrizio/>

<sup>188</sup> Hitchens, “Suburbs of our Discontent.”

Greenwich Village. When April gets pregnant, however, they feel forced to move to suburbia; April describes, “That’s how we both got committed to this enormous delusion—because that’s what it is, an enormous, obscene delusion—this idea that people have to resign from real life and ‘settle down’ when they have families. It’s the great sentimental lie of the suburbs...”<sup>189</sup> In fact, April nearly had an abortion to avoid the inevitability of moving and being trapped in suburbia. Raising a family in the city was unthinkable, somehow wrong or immoral, and it was unquestionably inevitable that a family must move to suburbia to “settle down” and raise their children. April and Frank’s unhappy move to the suburbs expresses the continuing hold of a now unfounded ideology: suburbia and its associated virtue and moral superiority is the only correct, American place to raise a family. Rationally, there is nothing fundamentally immoral about the city, but it seems the idea of “growing” a family in the environment of the city remained marked with ideological disapproval. This disapproval appears to stem from the moral superiority associated with open spaces and natural landscape versus the built, unnatural environment of the city. The only fathomable solution April and Frank can think of to cure their unhappiness is to move to Paris, which is an utterly ridiculous, unreasoned decision. Why move to an entirely new country when simply moving out of the suburbs seems to be a much more reasonable option? In America, Frank and April do not see anywhere but the suburbs as an acceptable place to have a family. They are trapped, not by any real force, but by the pervasive hold of the ideal, which requires the simplistic opposition of natural, open land and congested, concrete cities.

Yates expresses Frank’s unhappiness throughout the novel with descriptions of his dissatisfaction with his hands when they do not convey the masculine strength he so desires, or when they force him to acknowledge his unhappiness. At one point in the novel, Yates explains

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<sup>189</sup> Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2008), 117.

how Frank carries, “one hand in his pocket to conceal and dry the knuckles he had sucked and bitten throughout the play” (12), and while examining his hands, swollen from punching his car in anger, he notes with disgust his bitten-down nails and “wanted to beat and bruise them against the edge of the sink” (36). Frank seems to resent his hands for forcing him to come to terms with his reality and to acknowledge the failure of the ideology to deliver on its promise. His dissatisfaction with his own damaged hands causes Frank to remember his father’s hands with envy; their strength, sureness, sensitivity, and “the aura of mastery they imparted to everything [his father] used” (37). The memory of his father’s hands functions to demonstrate an enviable time passed, when the ideology could still work.

Frank arguably decides to build a stone path at his suburban home as a demonstration of his own strength and masculinity. As he worked, he admired his veined forearm, and “the dirty hand that hung there—not to be compared with his father’s hand, maybe, but a serviceable, good-enough hand all the same” (47). Frank spends much more time figuring out how to create a false image of himself with his hands than actually doing any work. He becomes a parody of the idealized yeoman figure. Frank’s ultimate failure is represented at the end of the novel with a real estate agent’s comment about his home, “And that awful stone path going halfway down the front lawn and ending in a mud puddle—can you imagine anyone defacing property like that?” (354). Frank’s dissatisfaction with his damaged, weak hands and the envy he expresses of his father’s hands, coupled with his failure to maintain the integrity of his suburban homestead demonstrates a doomed attempt to hold onto the ideal as it more successfully functioned in the past.

Ultimately, April sees no escape from her empty, unhappy life, and the novel ends with her tragic suicide. In her critique of the novel, Patrizio concludes, “The fate of April Wheeler

reflects the irony of postwar America, land of the free—or rather, land of individuals contained for the sake of maintaining societal status quo.”<sup>190</sup> The truth is, however, that the Wheelers were free. Nothing was stopping them from leaving suburbia except for an inability to give up on the mutated ideology. To say that the ideology, at this point, has failed or broken down is not to say that the fundamental values do not still hold true. Rather, the failure is in the fact that the ideology intertwines so closely the physical landscape and fundamental American values that people become unable to separate the two. Once the ideology becomes so mutated from its original form, it cannot function to create the ideal it has promised.

The question stands about the ideology’s functionality in modern America. Although suburbia remains a popular mode of development, the sentiment is not quite the same as in the quintessential post-WWII suburbs when it was posed as the ultimate achievement of the American dream. Suburbia in itself may not have the same overwhelming hold on the American mind, but it is evident that the broader problem of sprawl in America—largely perpetuated by suburban development—is still being passionately defended as an American right.

### **Modern Applications: The Defense of Sprawl**

Anthony Flint’s novel, *This Land: The Battle over Sprawl and the Future of America*, is an anecdotal account of various places around the U.S. attempting to combat urban sprawl through New Urbanist or smart growth techniques, and the resistance that often meets these attempts. Especially evident in Flint’s novel is the continuing association between sprawling suburban developments and feelings of superior morality, or family values, while cities continue to be thought of as dangerous and dirty. “Urban settlement seems at first fashionable and full of hope and the ultimate expression of civilization. Then it becomes viewed as unhealthy and

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<sup>190</sup> Patrizio, “Wouldn’t You Like to be Loved by April Wheeler.”

constraining, unsatisfying,” Flint continues, “We look to the suburbs for elbow room, good schools, and safety. Spreading out is ingrained in our politics, economy, and culture.”<sup>191</sup> <sup>192</sup>

These notions, coupled with the inherent Americanness and patriotism associated with land rights and sprawl, make new forms of development seemingly impossible to implement. Flint writes,

The opposition to smart growth has had a patriotic, don’t-tread-on-me quality. A group called the American Dream Coalition started annual conferences, blasting smart growth initiatives all over the nation. More recently, Tea Party activists have stormed local planning meetings, objecting to seemingly innocuous efforts such as master plans or regional growth scenarios. They claim that sustainability is part of a conspiracy driven by something called Agenda 21, a United Nations document perceived as an effort to force Americans in dense ‘habitation zones’ and take away their property rights.<sup>193</sup>

This notion of property rights is an important one in the modern application of the ideology. John Locke’s theory on property set up the basic idea that investing labor into the land would allow one to establish ownership, and from that point forward land or property ownership became fundamental to the ideology in the sense that the possession of land to cultivate or improve meant the opportunity to make an honest life for oneself. Today, the majority of Americans do not seek property to cultivate, but the fundamental idea of creating a better life through property ownership, or “improving” the land, remains. “Time and time again,” Flint writes, “[smart growth] efforts bump up against a fundamental truth: nobody tells Americans what to do with their land,” and those advocating for property rights “have argued that they have been treated unfairly—that a swaggering bureaucracy stepped in and prevented them from doing what they wished with their land.”<sup>194</sup> <sup>195</sup> While Americans do have a certain, that is, legal, right to their

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<sup>191</sup> Flint, *This Land*, 21.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

land, this attachment to property rights is rooted much more deeply and emotionally in the ideology, which has the effect of blocking rational thought. Today, as we are facing severe environmental consequences from sprawl, smart growth efforts—which oftentimes offer more convenient, economical lifestyles—are being met with this resounding “nobody tells Americans what to do with their land” mentality.

The truth is, however, that the government has almost always told Americans what to do with their land. The Homestead Act of 1862 told Americans they could have 160-acre plots of land, which they were required to improve or cultivate. In 1926, the Supreme Court told Americans they must develop the land according to zoning regulations. These regulations were not problematic, however, because they fit smoothly with, and even perpetuated, the fundamental aspects American landscape ideology: the right to open, sprawling lands, the inherent lack of value in unimproved land, and the morality associated with this kind of development. In recent years, as the destructive consequences of this sprawling lifestyle have come to light, the government has been forced to implement policies encouraging environmental preservation, compact development, and more sustainable modes of public transit. These efforts have largely not been well received, with Americans time and time again returning to the fundamental notion of property rights ingrained in the ideology.

In 1959, a man named Anthony Palazzolo invested in 18 acres overlooking Winnapaug Pond in Rhode Island with the dream of turning it into a subdivision. The ideological wheels turned in his head as Palazzolo seized upon this opportunity to improve the land to make a better life for himself. The land on the shore of the pond was “awfully wet,” Flint notes, but federal policy in the 1950’s “actually encouraged the draining and destruction of wetlands,” so Palazzolo



did not see this as a potential barrier to his dream.<sup>196</sup> In the years that Palazzolo was trying, unsuccessfully, to obtain a permit to dry up the wetlands, the policy changed; “Wetlands were no longer places to be filled in,” Flint writes, “They were valuable areas, crucial parts of the coastal ecosystem, and places to be protected.”<sup>197</sup> Palazzolo took his case to court, seeking \$3 million in compensation from Rhode Island “because the state’s environmental regulations prevented Palazzolo from using the land as he intended; the figure was based on what he could have reaped had he been able to develop the subdivision.”<sup>198</sup> Palazzolo did not get the compensation he sought, “I never got one penny off this land. All I got is tax bills,” Palazzolo told Flint, “You think those guys fighting the Revolutionary War wanted us to have to ask the next person, ‘Can I do this with my land?’ Bullshit. They were tough bastards.”<sup>199</sup> In 1926, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Euclid’s zoning laws, and in effect, the government told Americans what they could and could not do with their land. In that case however, the laws preserved the ideological landscape—Americans were comfortable with the institutionalization of sprawling, single-family homes. Americans are not comfortable with regulations that sacrifice the heart of the ideology in the name of environmental preservation or more densely built, efficient developments. Flint writes,

Density has a bad rap in America. It’s associated with big, scary public housing developments that were such sociological disasters that they were blown up. Density is all that is cramped and unhealthy and somehow un-American about urbanism. Being free from density is associated with moving up in the world; the appeal of the country is that it isn’t the town.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

This notion of “moving up in the world” associated with spreading out is an idea present in several of the texts previously discussed. Frank Lloyd Wright presented spaciousness as the means to a better life, the Supreme Court associated dense apartment-style dwellings as a parasite compared to the superior single-family homes, and the Homestead Act encouraged Americans to go to the abundant West to achieve a better, more moral and American life for themselves. Consequently, as is apparent in Flint’s comment above, the idea of living more densely appears to Americans as moving backward, climbing down the social ladder.

Powerful associations are trying, oftentimes successfully, to block smart growth efforts and preserve the sprawling landscape. In 2004, Oregon passed Measure 37 in response to the state’s urban growth boundary, which draws a line around developable land in order to preserve farmland and encourage more dense development. Flint explains Measure 37, “All property owners need to do is show that their land is worth less because of growth management restrictions...The property owner files a claim and asks for compensation. If the owner doesn’t get the money—local governments would go broke making such payouts—the land reverts back to the zoning that was in place prior to 1973,” which was the year in which Oregon began its growth management program.<sup>201</sup> In an attempt to block the passage of Measure 37, 1,000 Friends of Oregon ran a television ad “featuring a farmer wearing a feed-store cap on a tractor, warning that it would take hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars just to pay for the paperwork to process all the claims if this measure passed,” which clearly had no effect on voters, who passed the measure with 61 per cent of the vote.<sup>202</sup>

It is not difficult to see how the American landscape ideology has become so mutated and diluted that it has become somewhat contradictory. While Americans are defending sprawl as a

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 173.

fundamental American right, they are destroying the very landscape upon which the ideology was built. To defend sprawl is to defend the American right to spaciousness, independence, and freedom rooted in the land, but it is also to enable the destruction of open space and farmland that Jefferson sought to preserve. Americans, of course, do not recognize this ideological mode of thought or its contradictions, which is the reason it is so dangerous. Rather, all that matters is that this ideological landscape—and thus the very identity of an American—is being threatened by these smart growth efforts, and therefore they are met with passionate resistance.

This is not to say that smart growth efforts have been entirely unsuccessful. New Urbanist and transit-oriented developments have been popping up around the country, and it seems that the appeal of city life may be returning on some level. In his novel, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*, Alan Ehrenhalt argues for a demographic inversion and large-scale return to the city. He notes that in his years teaching undergraduates and graduates at East Coast universities, many of which are from affluent suburban backgrounds, very few students indicate that they would prefer to live in a suburb over a city fifteen years down the road.<sup>203</sup> This is a trend for which I can personally attest to, a class exercise once revealed the same outcome—nearly every student indicating a preference to live in the city—and conversations with fellow 20-somethings almost never reveal a desire to settle in the suburbs. However, this finding must be couched in the reality that the University of Michigan holds a relatively affluent population, meaning the prospect of living in a city (or simply having the ability to choose where one will live) is much more realistic than for students of other economic backgrounds. I also cannot help but think of April and Frank Wheeler, who also preferred city

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<sup>203</sup> Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 11.

life but felt the ideological impulse to raise their family in the suburbs, and wonder if that same impulse will affect my generation as well.

Ehrenhalt certainly makes an interesting case for this great return to the city, citing high gasoline prices, the deindustrialization of the central city, and the decline in violent crime as factors pushing people back to the city.<sup>204</sup> He employs various statistical trends and case studies such as the return of family life on Wall Street and the return of affluence to Sheffield, Chicago in order to demonstrate his theory. These cases strike me as quite particular and not necessarily applicable as a nation-wide trend, but the idea is worth considering nonetheless. In order for the ideology to persist, however, what matters most is persistence of the system of valuation and identification based on the mode of living on the land. The clear patriotism and ideological thought ingrained in the resistance to smart growth and staunch defense of this notion of property rights seems enough to demonstrate the ideology's persistence today.

### **Conclusion**

An individual mind is occupied by a multitude of ideologies, some consistent and some competing. One may believe in an ideology *because* he or she believes in another ideology, but one may also hold an ideology to be true *despite* his or her belief in a competing or inconsistent ideology. People do not spend much time thinking about their contradicting systems of thought, but one would certainly be hard-pressed to find someone whose beliefs agree entirely with each other. We therefore cannot discount one belief simply because it contradicts or competes with another, rather we must work to understand how a multitude of ideologies coalesce to create a singular character or identity, and how each of these characters—both in their contradictions and their consistencies—contributes to the overall character, or ideological impulse of the nation.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

The American landscape ideology is unique in its ability to function subversively to influence thought and behavior, much like a cultural norm. Property rights activists do not actively acknowledge that they hold their beliefs because of an ideological impulse that tells them that an American has the right to open land to improve one's life and create an honest, industrious character; instead, this is communicated in the notion that "nobody tells Americans what to do with their land." A family does not move to the suburbs to raise their children because of an explicitly acknowledged idea that the physical sprawling suburban dwellings, surrounded by a green lawn and separated from the ills of the city, somehow represents more moral, familial values, but rather because of an unspoken, American ideological force telling them it is the proper thing to do. The implicit nature of the American landscape ideology therefore makes it likely to contradict with other beliefs. One may outwardly believe in the importance of smart growth developments and public transit, while at the same time being compelled to settle in suburbia and cling to the automobile as a means of mobility. It seems that people do not necessarily disagree with the need for more compact, efficient lifestyles, but there is a feeling of "that's fine, but it's not for me." If enough people have that "it's not for me" feeling, it creates a serious barrier to the success of the efforts to combat sprawl. My argument is that, because of the influence of this subversive American landscape ideology, the overall sentiment of the nation is that "it's not for me." We therefore continue to sprawl, tightly holding onto this attachment to the property rights and automobiles that make us feel like Americans—free, independent, industrious, and moral Americans.

When John Locke theorized that the physical investment of labor in the land established it as an individual's property, he was not speaking in ideological terms. When Thomas Jefferson formulated his yeoman farmer ideal, he drew upon Locke's fundamental (and literal) idea of

property and the notion of the lack of inherent value in unimproved nature and added to it a certain morality and Americanness. Although Jefferson deemed his ideal “theory only,” it was based on the literal notion that the cultivation of the land would create a moral, industrious character because of the hard work, independence, and lack of idleness it required—compared to the luxury, dependence, and idleness in the manufacturing industry. Jefferson did not claim his ideal to be “theory only” because it relied on any unfounded, ideological ideas, but rather because he recognized that the people of America already demonstrated a preference for commerce and industry and it would therefore be impossible to maintain a nation of small, subsistent yeoman farmers. He was indeed correct in his prediction, but Jefferson failed to understand the hold his ideal would take on the nation as it struggled to define what it was to be an American. The landscape of the country today does not look anything like Jefferson’s ideal, and yet people continue to passionately defend sprawl and their right to the land based on the American identity and values instilled in the soil more than two centuries ago.

The historical insights in this thesis, presented in the framework of the American landscape ideology, may be useful in understanding the ways in which Americans view the land and identify themselves based on their relationship to it. This understanding is intended to assist policy-makers, planners, and architects in framing much-needed sustainable and efficient developments in a way that sits more comfortably with the American people. To many, growth boundaries, environmental stipulations, and compact New Urbanist developments appear to threaten the “American” way of life and, in turn, the very identity of an American. To be widely accepted, therefore, framing them in line with the ideology, rather than in opposition to it, is immensely important. Perhaps just acknowledging this ideology will be enough to create an opportunity to “rebel” against this subversive power.

Due to time constraints and for the purpose of clarity, there are a number of aspects related to this ideology that I chose not to discuss at length. These aspects are not unimportant, but rather each merits an individual, dedicated study in order to fully understand their complexities and implications. Especially worth studying, I believe, are the racial and gender implications and consequences of the American landscape ideology. I briefly noted the increasingly exclusive nature of the ideology as it morphed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it would certainly be interesting to explore in more depth how the ideology contributed to segregation and issues of environmental injustice. Gender plays an interesting role in the ideology as well. The female role evolved from the empowered, independent figure of Elinore Pruitt Stewart to the suburban housewife, trapped in domesticity. The ideology's role (or absence of a role) in that shift of empowerment deserves to be explored in depth. The uncertain position in which America stands today, in terms of whether or not we will really see the "great inversion" and return to the city that Ehrenhalt suggests, implies a need for more research into actual perceptions about the city and suburbs. This research may take the form of qualitative surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Whether the coming years will demonstrate a return to the cities, a continuance of suburban domination, or perhaps some new mutation of the ideology, remains to be seen. One could certainly point to the recently popular trend emphasizing small-scale, local agriculture as the American landscape ideology functioning in a new light. While we cannot predict the future, we can look at history in order to clarify the present American attachment to sprawl. This previously unidentifiable force causing Americans to cling to notions of property rights and spaciousness can now be identified as the American landscape ideology, presented and explained

in the pages of this thesis. It is my hope that identifying this subversive and powerful force is the first step in rebelling against it.



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