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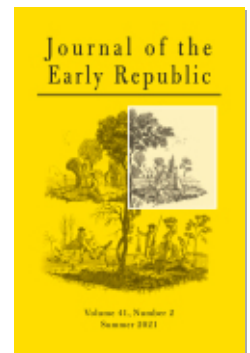
The Heart of a Deal: Corruption and Conquest in David  
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# The Heart of a Deal

## Corruption and Conquest in David McCullough's *The Pioneers*

MICHAEL A. BLAAKMAN

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David McCullough deserves credit for drawing the interest of larger audiences to the early American republic. But by my lights, perhaps the most useful thing about his latest book, *The Pioneers*, is how vividly it illustrates the difference between writing about things that happened in the past and what it means to do *history*.

The book is mostly set in Ohio. After bushwhacking across the Appalachians, courageous New Englanders spend decades felling trees, building towns, and becoming men of consequence. They and their proliferating descendants establish schools and universities, nurture individual liberties, and fend off efforts to legalize slavery. White women are present. They are dutiful, and often die. Free and enslaved black people are mostly absent, until they are being ferried along the underground railroad by white Ohioans. Indigenous people are present, but primarily as an obstacle to be feared, fought, and finally removed. They are referenced in degrading racial tropes, uncritically quoted from primary sources (8, 186, 233). They are mostly gone from the scene following the 1795 Treaty of Greenville. After 1830, “only the Indian names were to remain” (230). In all these respects, *The Pioneers* differs little in substance or in tone from the materials upon which it is largely based: nineteenth-century hagiographies penned and peddled by local historians who were, in many cases, descendants of the people they wrote about.

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It is presented as a story of heroic perseverance and noble ideals, of hardship, hope, and heart.<sup>1</sup>

But before *The Pioneers* is any of those things, it is a story about land speculation. And because this is the part of the book that aligns with my own research, it's where I'd like to focus my discussion of the difference between writing about the past and writing history.

The book's first chapter chronicles the 1787 journey of a Massachusetts minister named Manasseh Cutler. That summer, Cutler spent three and a half weeks lobbying the Confederation Congress in New York City on behalf of the Ohio Company, a group of veteran New England officers who had banded together to purchase lands northwest of the Ohio River. For historians, this is an oft-told tale. In McCullough's version, the focus is squarely on "the amazing Reverend Manasseh Cutler," with whom the author clearly feels some affinity (259). McCullough's narrative of these negotiations relies almost exclusively upon Cutler's journal and letters, as edited and published by his grandchildren. Of the sixty-three citations accompanying this discussion, fifty-two of them are from this source.<sup>2</sup>

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1. On local histories and Native erasure, see Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis, 2010).

2. On the Ohio Company, see Andrew R. L. Cayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780–1825* (Kent, OH, 1986), 12–32; Timothy J. Shannon, "The Ohio Company and the Meaning of Opportunity in the American West, 1786–1795," *New England Quarterly* 64 (Sept. 1991), 393–413; R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720–1830* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 143–68; Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Private Access and Public Power: Gentility and Lobbying in the Early Congress," in *The House and Senate in the 1790s: Petitioning, Lobbying, and Institutional Development*, ed. Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon (Athens, OH, 2002), 57–99; Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York, 2007), 197–211; Colin Calloway, *The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army* (New York, 2014), 35–57. My tally of McCullough's citations is based on *The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West* (New York, 2019), 13–31. The other eleven citations include two Cutler letters reproduced in other publications; the journal and letters of Cutler's son (also edited by Manasseh Cutler's granddaughter); a family genealogy; the papers of Puritan leader John Winthrop; historical articles published in 1876 and 1908; history books published in 1848, 1887, and 1876; and precisely one work of historical scholarship published in the last hundred years (1989). To be sure, newer scholarship is not always better scholarship. Nevertheless, over the last century, increasingly rigorous standards for historical research, evidence, and analysis have yielded countless new insights on the early American

In other words, McCullough glues his readers to Cutler's side throughout his Congressional quest. We learn only what he chose to record, and we share his blinders. We accompany Cutler into New York City, his pockets bursting with letters of introduction. We watch him socialize with politicians and submit his proposal to purchase 1.5 million acres. Success seems imminent, at first. But soon enough, vague political obstacles arise. They seemingly come and go at random; because Cutler didn't spill much ink explaining why people might oppose him, neither does McCullough. One early meeting "did not go well," McCullough relates, though "what exactly was said, [Cutler] did not record" (16). Later, Cutler learns again that "a number in Congress were 'decidedly opposed' to his terms—though what this was about, he did not say" (25). The next day, Cutler rejects the terms a Congressional committee proposed, but again we do not learn why. Along the way, Cutler plays an ill-defined but apparently essential role in drafting the Northwest Ordinance, and "against all odds . . . almost singlehandedly" persuades Congress to pass it (caption, Plate 4).

Eventually, Cutler brokers a deal to extend the proposed purchase to 5 million acres by partnering with a second group, the Scioto Company. We learn neither why this seemed a sensible strategy nor why it needed to be kept "a profound secret" (25). Several days later, Cutler decides to end negotiations because his "patience was nearly gone" (27). But just in the nick of time, he learns "that a new Northwest Ordinance had passed Congress 'without the least variation,' and the Board of Treasury was directed to close a contract with the Ohio Company" (28). Surprised but

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republic. McCullough's readers benefit from very little of this. It is also worth noting that although McCullough's bibliography references Manasseh Cutler's original papers (one collection at Ohio University, and a larger collection at Northwestern University), the footnotes themselves exclusively cite the edition prepared by Cutler's grandchildren: William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, eds., *Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.* (2 vols., Cincinnati, OH, 1888). Sixty years ago, one historian compared the Cutlers' edition to the original manuscripts. He deemed the former "a striking late-nineteenth-century illustration" of not only "the distortions created by the older standards of editing," but also the "hazard to editorial objectivity" posed by "family interest." Lee Nathaniel Newcomer, "Manasseh Cutler's Writings: A Note on Editorial Practice," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (June 1960), 88. Thanks to Andrew Fagal for referring me to Newcomer's essay.

thrilled, Cutler begins the journey home. A few pages later, Company settlers are free to venture “forth to the wilderness” (35).

Throughout this chapter, McCullough portrays the Ohio purchase as a common-sense and virtuous plan—cheap and vacant land, where hearty veterans will renew the American promise—which required only Cutler’s vision, charm, and persuasion to accomplish. There is a moral to this story. It is a parable of persistence.



Manasseh Cutler, McCullough tells us, had a favorite quotation: “‘*Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*’—‘Fortunate is he who understands the cause of things’” (6). The line is from a nostalgic ode in Virgil’s *Georgics*, contrasting the idyllic joys of rural society with the narrator’s own age of corruption and conquest.<sup>3</sup>

Taken out of context, the maxim captures much of why historians do what we do: to understand the causes of things. But in pursuing that goal, historians employ three key strategies that are missing from McCullough’s discussion of Cutler and Congress—and indeed, from the book as a whole. To avoid cherry-picking evidence that merely substantiates our preconceptions, we strive to account for everything we find in the historical record. To filter out bias and to sort perceptions from historical reality, we draw on different types of documents from multiple perspectives. And to unlock the meaning of our sources, and to see factors at play that they do not address, we interpret our evidence in historical context gleaned from up-to-date scholarship.

These methods are by no means exclusive to academic historians. But they are what separates the craft of history from the act of writing about the past; they’re essential for everyone who wants to convincingly explain the causes of historical events and change over time. When we bring them to bear upon Manasseh Cutler’s 1787 negotiations, the story looks significantly different. It becomes more legible. Its politics appear less random and more dramatic. And, crucially, its meaning—its moral—is entirely changed. The Ohio Company emerges as not just an assiduous campaign to plant the rustic ideal in an alleged wilderness but also, collapsing Virgil’s distinction, the epitome of corruption and conquest.

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3. *The Georgics of Virgil: Bilingual Edition*, trans. David Ferry (New York, 2005), book two, 84.

Three contexts are key for understanding why Cutler's negotiations played out the way they did. First, although British and American negotiators had decided in the 1783 Treaty of Paris that the lands northwest of the Ohio River belonged to the United States, the mere fact of an agreement signed in Europe did not make it so. Neither did the fraudulent treaties that American leaders pointed to as proof that Indians had ceded their homelands in the region. In the mid-1780s, at military installations along the frontier—Fort Stanwix, Fort McIntosh, Fort Finney—the United States tried forcing Indians to ratify the idea that the U.S. had defeated Native nations in the Revolutionary War and therefore conquered their lands. But the treaties had not adhered to Indigenous protocols for diplomacy. Through deceitful mistranslation, rivers of liquor, and intimidation at the point of a gun, they were coerced out of Native negotiators who did not carry the consent of their communities. As scholars of Native American history have shown, from the perspectives of Shawnee, Wyandot, Miami, Delaware, and other Native peoples, the lands the Ohio Company aspired to remained squarely their own.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the Ohio Company was not alone in seeking Native lands. Beginning during the Revolutionary War, the fledgling republic was swept by an unprecedented mania for land speculation. And though many members of Congress were speculators themselves, in their official duties Congressmen hoped to use western lands to buoy the nation's finances. They were wary of how speculation would impact the public good. Some thought the lands should be quickly sold to pay down the public debt. Others predicted that quick sales would only benefit speculators, who, as Robert Morris feared, would "readily combine" to quash competition and deflate prices, forcing the government to find other means of revenue "after having needlessly squandered an immense property." Many worried that rapid expansion would also breed disunion and spark war with Native Americans. Morris and others therefore argued that Congress should securitize western land to support the public credit, until it could

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4. See, for instance, Dorothy V. Jones, *License for Empire: Colonialism by Treaty in Early America* (Chicago, 1982), 120–86; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, 1991), 396–468; Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis, 2008), 106–62; Calloway, *Victory with No Name*; Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690–1792* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018), 210–42.

be sold at high prices. By the time Cutler arrived, Congress had spent years striving to assemble land policies that excluded speculators.<sup>5</sup>

And yet—the third key context—Congress’s fiscal situation had also recently reached its nadir. “By 1787,” historian Max Edling writes, “the insolvency of the national government was total.” That year, Congress defaulted on its debt to France, and members of Congress estimated that the nation owed \$30 million to domestic creditors. Although Congress had been trying for nearly two years to ready Ohio lands for sale in small tracts to actual settlers, the work was cumbersome, costly, and consistently derailed by Native resistance to encroaching surveyors. The first lands wouldn’t be offered at auction until the autumn of 1787.<sup>6</sup>

With these contexts in mind—plus a wider array of primary sources—the true significance and drama of Cutler’s negotiations comes into view. On July 6, Cutler began lobbying a Congress that remained jittery about large-scale land sales. But to assuage Congressional qualms, he presented the Ohio Company as anything but a typical speculative scheme. Instead of chasing bald self-interest and possibly stoking disunion, the Company pledged to bring “Systematic settlement,” social order, and sturdy patriots to the frontier, binding far-flung regions to the federal union. As one Company director explained two months before Cutler’s journey, “the probability of loosing that Country” to some foreign power “if no measures are taken, the embarras’d state of our Finances,” and “the Aid which may be expected from so large a sale at this time,” would be “induce-

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5. Robert Morris to the President of Congress, July 29, 1782, in *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781–1784*, ed. John Catanzariti and E. James Ferguson (9 vols., Pittsburgh, 1973–1999), 6: 71. According to a member of the committee that drafted it, the 1785 Land Ordinance aimed to prevent speculation: William Grayson to George Washington, Apr. 15, 1785, in *The Papers of George Washington: Confederation Series*, ed. W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig (6 vols., Charlottesville, VA, 1992–1997), 2: 498–501. See generally Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (1987; repr. Notre Dame, IN, 2019), 1–43; Farley Grubb, “U.S. Land Policy: Founding Choices and Outcomes, 1781–1802,” in *Founding Choices: American Economic Policy in the 1790s*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin and Richard Sylla (Chicago, 2011), 259–89.

6. Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York, 2003), 149. E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776–1790* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1961), 221; Richard Henry Lee to William Lee, July 30, 1787, in *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, ed. Paul H. Smith et al. (25 vols., Washington, DC, 1976–2000), 24: 381–82; Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 149–55.



ments” for Congress “to comply with our proposal.” Cutler had plenty of allies in Congress. Several of them were behind Congress’s decision, on July 13, to adopt the Northwest Ordinance: a “blueprint for empire,” as historian Peter Onuf has called it, which outlined how western regions would undergo a period of political apprenticeship before eventually becoming states on par with the original thirteen. Though McCullough conflates the two, this landmark document was *not* the same as the “ordinance” that approved the Ohio Company’s purchase two weeks later. The Northwest Ordinance neither sold any land nor mentioned the Ohio Company, and Cutler was en route to visit Philadelphia while Congress considered and passed it. Nevertheless, the Northwest Ordinance was certainly designed to appeal to the Ohio Company and the type of settlers it promised to bring.<sup>7</sup>

To a national state that had largely failed to project sovereignty over the Appalachians, then, Cutler’s was a compelling pitch. Still, for many in Congress, it was not enough. “The magnitude of the purchase makes us very cautious about the terms of it,” wrote one Massachusetts delegate. A critical mass of Congressional delegates hoped that by spurring competition, the public could reap greater fiscal benefits from such a sale. Congress’s minutes reveal that as late as July 14, members were motioning to end private negotiations with the Company and publicly advertise the lands, instead.<sup>8</sup>

Four days later, however, Congress received an ominous bit of news. The papers of the Continental Congress contain a remarkable document: a written speech by Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant. Although the communiqué did not reach New York until July 18, Brant had composed

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7. Manasseh Cutler, “Journey on Horseback; 885 miles; an account of Dr. Cutler’s work for the Ordinance of 1787, Vol. 2, July 13 to Aug. 4, 1787,” July 27, 1787, Vol. 63, Manasseh Cutler Collection, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL; Samuel Holden Parsons to unknown, Apr. 23, 1787, Folder 6, Samuel Parsons and Parsons Family Papers, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford; Onuf, *Statehood and Union*, xix (quotation), 58–60. On the authorship of the Northwest Ordinance, especially its anti-slavery clause, see Paul Finkelman, “Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (Winter 1986), 343–70.

8. Nathan Dane to Rufus King, July 16, 1787, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (34 vols., Washington, DC, 1904–1937), 32: 345–46.



it seven months prior at the Huron village at the mouth of the Detroit River. There, several tribes had formed their own confederacy—the United Indian Nations—to check U.S. expansion. Speaking on behalf of this council, Brant asserted Native sovereignty in the Ohio country, instructing Congress to “prevent your Surveyors and other people from coming upon our side of the Ohio River” lest the “United force” of Indian nations “be obliged to defend those rights and privileges which have been transmitted to us by our ancestors.” Appealing to Congress’s touchy sense of its own perception on the world stage, Brant predicted that if war broke out, “the world will pity us, when they think of the amicable proposals we now make to prevent the unnecessary effusion of Blood.” Congress had been hearing increasingly dire reports of violence—especially from Virginia’s Kentucky district—long before Brant’s speech reached Congress. News of the Native confederacy therefore made quite an impression; it seemed to explain the recent uptick in Native attacks.<sup>9</sup>

Once Brant’s speech arrived at New York, Congress became much more amenable to the Ohio Company’s proposals. After July 18, only a stray delegate or two protested a backroom deal. In the context of mounting Native power, a sale to the Ohio Company made increasing sense for several reasons. By installing battle-hardened veterans in the disputed territory, it would turn a land sale into an act of conquest. Moreover, it would shield white settlement south of the Ohio from Native counter-offensives. One Virginian believed that the Ohio Company might “form a compleat barrier for our State.” This line of thinking made the Virginia delegates into Cutler’s staunchest allies in Congress. Finally, in selling a huge and contested tract to the Ohio Company, Congress would shed itself of a significant liability. All-out war with the United Indian Nations

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9. Joseph Brant, “Speech of the United Indian Nations,” Dec. 18, 1786, in *Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, National Archives Microfilm Publication, 204 Reels, Item 150, Letters and Reports from Maj. Gen. Henry Knox, Secretary of War, 2: 381–89. On Brant’s speech, see Brooks, *Common Pot*, 121–27. On the confederacy, see White, *Middle Ground*, 433–48. On Congress’s aspirations to treaty-worthiness, see Eliga Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2012). On white–Native violence in the Ohio Valley, see Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, 1996); Griffin, *American Leviathan*; Honor Sachs, *Home Rule: Households, Manhood, and National Expansion on the Eighteenth-Century Kentucky Frontier* (New Haven, CT, 2015).

could depress land values and stymie Congress's attempts to convert expropriated land into a fiscal resource; it seemed logical to shunt that risk onto speculators.<sup>10</sup>

Yet while members of Congress increasingly agreed that the Ohio Company's plan was desirable, the two sides remained far apart on its terms. The Company proposed to pay for lands by redeeming millions of dollars' worth of public debt. To many, that was the whole point. Almost every time a delegate mentioned the potential sale in private correspondence, they framed it as a means to "pay the debt & discharge the greatest part of the Taxes." And although public and private interests could converge on matters of frontier security, when it came to revenue they stood directly at odds. Haggling over the terms of sale, the Company wanted to maximize its profits through low prices and a long installment plan. Congress, meanwhile, sought to squeeze the greatest fiscal benefit it could out of the purchase—and brought negotiations to a standstill by deciding that it now wished to sell far more land than the Company could commit to buying.<sup>11</sup>

At that impasse, on July 20, William Duer, a voracious financier and secretary of Congress's Board of Treasury, approached Cutler with a plan. With "a number of the principal characters in the city," later known as the Scioto Company, Duer would quietly join in the Company's purchase. Their participation would allow Congress to sell the 5 or 6 million acres it now wanted to unload. "The funds of the [Ohio] Comp[an]y were only a Million" at the start of negotiations, one Virginia delegate reported, but since then had "increased in an amazing degree." Moreover, the Scioto

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10. William Grayson to James Monroe, Aug. 8, 1787, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 24: 393–97. Cutler, "Journey on Horseback," July 19, 1787, Vol. 63, Manasseh Cutler Collection.

11. Richard Henry Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, July 14, 1787, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 24: 353–56. The haggling can be traced in Ohio Company proposal, May 8, 1787, *Papers of the Continental Congress*, no. 41, Memorials Addressed to Congress, 8: 226a; Congressional committee proposal, July 10, 1787, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 32: 311–13; Richard Henry Lee to George Washington, July 15, 1787, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 24: 356–57; William Irvine to Richard Butler, July 19, 1787, *ibid.*, 364; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 32: 376–77; Ohio Company amended proposal, July 21, 1787, *Papers of the Continental Congress*, no. 41, Memorials Addressed to Congress, 8: 234–38; Congressional committee amended proposal, July 23, 1787, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 33: 399–401; Ohio Company final proposal, July 26, 1787, accepted by Congress on July 27, 1787, *ibid.*, 427–30.

group included many members of Congress themselves, enlisting private interest to obviate public scruples.<sup>12</sup>

After an ultimate threat that the Ohio Company would purchase land from one of the state governments instead, a deal with Congress was finally achieved on July 27. The Scioto reinforcements had proven essential. “Without connecting this Speculation,” Cutler reported, “similar terms & advantages could not have been obtained for the Ohio Company.” Its addition had to be kept “a profound secret” because it fundamentally contradicted the Ohio Company’s pretense of systematic expansion. Unlike the Ohio Company, the Scioto purchasers promised nothing in matters of stability, security, or settlement. They aimed merely to flip the lands for quick and easy profit.<sup>13</sup>

Then again, profit was paramount among the Ohio Company’s motives, too. Although some of its members planned to move west, many did not. They joined as investors. *The Pioneers* portrays the Ohio Company as a pure-hearted plan for settlement. But it was more than that. As McCullough hints but does not discuss, it was also a speculative scheme—a stroke of financial engineering. Its central ploy was to purchase public securities, deeply depreciated because Americans doubted the nation could make good on the promises they represented, and redeem them for lands at face value. The Company nominally agreed to purchase 1.5 million acres for 66 cents each. But at the going price of public securities, one scholar has estimated, they would pay only about an eighth of that.<sup>14</sup>

The Company’s speculative character is evident in the very sources McCullough read. In a 1788 letter to the Company’s treasurer, for instance, Cutler described two classes of “adventurers.” Some were actual

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12. Cutler, “Journey on Horseback,” July 20, 1787, Vol. 63, Manasseh Cutler Collection; William Grayson to James Monroe, Aug. 8, 1787, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 24: 393–97.

13. Cutler, “Journey on Horseback,” July 27, 20, 1787, Vol. 63, Manasseh Cutler Collection. On Duer and the Scioto Company, see Robert Jones, *The King of the Alley: William Duer: Politician, Entrepreneur, and Speculator 1768–1799* (Philadelphia, 1992); Hurt, *Ohio Frontier*, 189–97; Richard Buel, Jr., *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore, 2011), 102–36; Suzanne Desan, “Transatlantic Spaces of Revolution: The French Revolution, *Scioto-manie*, and American Lands,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 12, no. 6 (2008), 467–505; François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York, 2014), 247–52.

14. Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier*, 157.

settlers, “men who intend immediately to go into the Country with their families.” Others were absentee speculators, who depended on settlers “to cultivate the Country & render it valuable” so that their tracts could be profitably resold. Both groups, Cutler noted, relied on gaming the market in public debt. And that was getting tough, because Massachusetts’ “ratification of the *federal Constitution*” had sparked new confidence in the national future, giving the market price of Continental securities “a sudden start.” To avoid further erosion of investors’ profits, Cutler suggested that “individual Adventurers should not apply to the *Brokers*” to acquire the public securities needed to purchase their shares. That would only further increase their price. Instead, the Ohio Company would vertically integrate, with its own broker who could buy securities “on the best terms in his power.” The Company’s financial proposition ultimately ran aground of Alexander Hamilton’s fiscal reforms, which made its contract suddenly more expensive by driving the price of public securities close to par. Unable to fulfill its terms, in 1792 the Company reduced the size of its purchase by nearly a third.<sup>15</sup>



McCullough concludes that the Ohio Company pioneers and their descendants “accomplished what they had set out to do not for money, not for possessions or fame, but to . . . propel as best they could the American ideals” (258). This is a hopeful way to write about the past. But writing *history* compels us to see broader contexts and all the evidence, and in the case of the Ohio purchase it requires us to ask why members of Congress opposed Cutler or supported him. When we bring historical methods to bear upon this question, McCullough’s conclusion appears more fable than fact. Cutler’s objective was not quaintly benign, a noble vision riding on one parson’s charm and determination. Rather, through financial and political savvy, the Ohio Company acquired a speculative claim to a huge swath of Indian territory—other sovereign people’s land, designated for conquest—by leveraging the new nation’s fiscal woes. Corruption and theft lay at the heart of the deal.

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15. Manasseh Cutler to Richard Platt, Feb. 20, 1788, Vol. 70, Manasseh Cutler Collection. The letter also appears in *Life, Journals of Manasseh Cutler*, 1: 380–81. Pasley, “Private Access and Public Power,” 85.