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Ezra Stiles and North America in the Early Modern Republic of Letters

Theodore R. Delwiche*

Department of History, Yale University

*Corresponding author. E-mail: teddy.delwiche@yale.edu

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For over two decades, historians of the early modern world have been charting the practices, principles, and ideologies of the “Republic of Letters,” an intellectual community forged via paper, not place. Few, however, have ever ventured to consider America’s place in this scholarly republic. This article charts in new detail the aspirations—and shortcomings—of eighteenth-century American efforts to participate in a truly transnational, intellectual community. Focusing on the life of Ezra Stiles (1727–95), it will dig into hundreds of unpublished, untranslated manuscripts, as well as scores of overlooked early modern periodicals and publications. What emerges is a glimpse into how Stiles especially strove to place America on the intellectual map of the early modern world. Stiles’s plan was to lay the academic groundwork for his new nation by forging connections between universities and promoting a unified intellectual front to the Republic of Letters abroad. In one sense, this vision was remarkably shrewd, standing out as one of the first efforts to connect colonial universities. On the personal level, however, this (over)emphasis on institutions came at a cost. Too preoccupied with the colonial American universities and too little focused on publication, Stiles would ultimately struggle to be recognized as a citizen of the scholarly republic.

If there was ever an apt occasion to become an American college president, it was not in the late 1770s. Years into the war, the normal hum of academic life had to compete with the strange din of battle. In New Haven, rumors about the latest casualties arrived at the start of the week, only to be disproven at the end. Contradiction dominated the day. There was a surplus of horses that did not behave, and yet a shortage of those that did. There were few places to lodge, but plenty to catch on fire. Men were shot at in the night when they refused to give answers to the sentry at the gate. And, to make matters worse, smallpox was pestering the local community like an unwelcome guest refusing to leave. With the college temporarily shuttered, boys searched for places to live and doctors to inoculate them. Fifteen miles west of New Haven in Huntington and recovering from his inoculation, Yale student Elijah Backus was less than sanguine about his condition:

The melancholy, the mournful, and the death-like aspect of this place, the dismal looking flags that were hung in the air to keep of all comers to our habitation, attended with the sickness with which I was afflicted, made the place

destined to be the receptacle for persons in my condition appear more like the infernal regions than any other place I ever had any idea of.¹

For Backus, the contemporary conditions reminded him of hell. But even then, hell needed a leader. And so when the boy recovered and classes resumed, a new president arrived to lead Yale through these tough times.

Ezra Stiles had waited for this opportunity for years. In the learned languages of Latin and Greek that he had maintained since his school days, Stiles thanked God and those who had elected him to the post.² “Unless rumor has deceived me, I have heard the approval and voice of almost the entire Republic of Letters of New England.”³ He then turned to the students and alumni gathered before him for a brief programmatic remark in Latin:

Let it be your earnest effort and mine that the fame of Yale college become so remarkable in its studies of the best arts, the culture of polite letters, and the honor of very solid erudition that we would not be a source of shame for any sister academy, but rather they would revel in the honor of our friendship. Nay, let’s try to outdo all academies when it comes to the glory of learning—and believe that we can do this—so much so that our university would shine with splendor among all other American academies like a moon among lesser lights.⁴

These were bold words for any president, especially one about to inherit a troubled, war-torn institution.⁵ Imaginably satisfied after his speech, Stiles reclined in his special presidential seat. More academic pageantry commenced. Students stood up. Students sat down. Caps were put on. Caps were taken off. Stiles then delivered

¹Elijah Backus, *Journal of Elijah Backus* (typeset transcription), 22. Gen Miss Misc, 752, F-3, Beinecke Library, Yale University. Selections of this journal can also be found in Ellen D. Larned, “Yale Boys of the Last Century,” *Connecticut Quarterly* 1 (1895), 355–61. See also the reflections of another classmate of Backus’s, which confirm the grim contemporary conditions: Macgrane Cox, *Chancellor Kent at Yale, 1777–1781* (New York, 1909), 12. For other considerations of collegiate coping mechanisms during the war, see Louis Leonard Tucker, “Centers of Sedition: Colonial Colleges and the American Revolution,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 91 (1979), 16–34; and J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (London, 2002), 241–347.

²Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, ed. Franklin Bodwitch Dexter, 3 vols. (New York, 1901), vol. 2, 8 July 1778, 280. “Probe scitis, domini, non mea neque amicorum voluntas, sed $\psi\eta\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ vestra, Laboribus hisce literatis advocaverunt.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are my own. Whenever possible, I will refer to a published version of Stiles’s paper. That being said, there is a large portion of his writings that is unpublished. In such instances, I will simply refer to manuscript folia.

³*Ibid.*: “Cumque ni me fama fefellit, Reipublicae literariae totius fere Nov Angliae approbationem vocemque exaudiverim.”

⁴*Ibid.*, 281: “Itaque Emulatio sit vestra, sitque mea, ut optimarum Artium Studiis, Literarum elegantiorum cultu, solidissimaeque Eruditionis Dignitate Collegii Yalensis Fama tam insignis fieret, ut nulli sorori Academiae de nobis pudeat, quin potius omnes Sodalitatis nostrae honore egloriarentur. Immo omnes academias Literarum Gloria superare conemur—et creditote quod superare potuerimus—adeo ut Universitas nostra inter caeteras Academias americanas splendore eluceat ut Luces inter Luna minores.” The final line is a popular adaptation of Horace, *Odes*, 1.12: 46–8: “... micat inter omnis / Iulium sidus velut inter omnis / luna minores.”

⁵Edmund Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727–1795* (Chapel Hill, 1962), 325–43.

yet another Latin oration upon “the Encyclopaedia of literature,” which lasted thirty-four minutes by his count.⁶ The voluble Latin-speaker closed with a prayer and invited everyone to dinner. “All was conducted without any Indecency, and with Propriety & Academic Decorum,” the newly minted president recounted in his diary.⁷

Was Stiles serious? It would be difficult enough to steer one institution through the war, so why all this bluster about sister academies and wider fame? This article will critically examine for the first time just what Stiles meant, on the level of both principle and practice. For Stiles offers a tantalizing case study of a much wider intellectual world that he was preoccupied with his entire life, a republic not precisely of place, but rather of paper: the *Res Publica Litterarum* (Republic of Letters). A long-standing theme of research in the European world, this concept of scholarly community has largely gone overlooked in the American context.⁸ An imperfect but illustrative example of the gap between early modern European and early American scholarly trends is the recently formed Brill (the Netherlands) journal *Erudition and the Republic of Letters*, a testament to the vitality of early modern intellectual history at this time. Of the twenty issues in the past five years, richly researched articles have focused on most corners of Europe and beyond, into China, the Ottoman Empire, and Latin America. Yet consideration of colonial or early national American sources or involvement in the learned community has occupied just a few scattered footnotes.⁹

Granted, select intellectual historians have alluded to the Republic of Letters in early North America.¹⁰ These accounts, however, mostly use the concept as a substitute for “learned men.” Like its Latin derivative *litterae*, “letters” of course can refer to epistles, as well as to scholarship more generally. This latter application of the term, perfectly reasonable and generative of serious study, has focused on

⁶Stiles would publish this oration the same year. Ezra Stiles, *Oratio Inauguralis habita in sacello collegii yalensis* (Hartford, 1778).

⁷Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 8 July 1778, 282.

⁸Caroline Winterer, “Where Is America in the Republic of Letters?,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9/2 (2012), 597–623. Winterer posits that the not unproblematic notion of Europe itself might encourage early modern Europeanists to think more easily past geographical and national borders. I am inclined to trust that as one factor but would contend there is a more obvious reason for the neglect of research. To research the Republic of Letters requires, first and foremost, a fluent knowledge of Latin. Moreover, as the vernaculars take off in scholarly publications and discourse in the eighteenth century, one must preferably also have a working knowledge of some combination of English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and/or Italian. Linguistic expectations for training early Americanists are notoriously more modest compared to those of early modern Europeanists. This is not to point any fingers, but rather to consider more broadly educational resources and access to language training. It cannot simply be a coincidence that the study of the Republic of Letters is thriving, for instance, in the Netherlands, where even an eighteen-year-old student can enter college having been the beneficiary of four to six years’ worth of courses in German, French, Latin, and ancient Greek (plus over a decade of English and Dutch, of course) at her local public school.

⁹Nicholas Popper, “The Sudden Death of the Burning Salamander: Reading Experiment and the Transformation of Natural Historical Practice in Early Modern Europe,” *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 1/4 (2016), 464–90, mentions in passing the alchemical work of George Starkey.

¹⁰Gilman M. Ostrander, *Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1775–1865* (Madison, 1999); and Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forms of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill, 2008).

intellectuals in the newly formed United States, eschewing the wider connotations that the Renaissance Republic of Letters evoked. This is not to say that early Americanists are entirely wedded to the narrower framework of the nation-state, for they too have extra national concepts. But as early modern historian Karel Davids provocatively points out, even promising concepts frequently take on a more modest scope in colonial American scholarship: “The ‘Atlantic’ or ‘transnational’ dimension barely seems to extend beyond the borders of the Anglo-American world and the networks of knowledge are centered on Britain.”¹¹ In other words, for Americanists, the Republic of Letters, even if occasionally acknowledged to be global, mostly morphs into the strictly *American* learned community.¹²

On the other hand, some historians of early modern Europe have gone in the exact opposite direction as they attempt to transplant this framework of intellectual community to select examples in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century North America. These studies have alluded to the Republic of Letters to refer to European scholarly practices *in toto*.¹³ In other words, here the concept has gone from too narrow to too expansive. Different historians have therefore tinkered with the Republic of Letters like the controls of a camera, zooming both in and out. The snapshot scholarship emerging from these different points of reference has provided important glimpses into early North American intellectual culture, albeit with inevitable blurry spots.¹⁴ What is lacking is a sharp image of what an eighteenth-century American could or did aspire to more broadly in a truly transnational intellectual world. This article will provide just that, a glimpse into how Ezra Stiles conceptualized the Republic of Letters in his own time and on his own terms. Detailed analysis of Stiles bridges the historiographic gap between early Americanists, often unaware or simply uninterested in the wider early modern world of learning, and early modern Europeanists, rarely sensitive to the “microclimates” of intellectual activity across the Atlantic.¹⁵ Stiles offers a fruitful entry into considering this historical blind spot of transatlantic intellectual activity not just in

¹¹Karel Davids, “The Scholarly Atlantic: Circuits of Knowledge between Britain, the Dutch Republic, and the Americas in the Eighteenth Century,” in Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, eds., *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden, 2014), 224–48, at 228.

¹²See Yoshinari Yamaguchi, *American History in Transition: From Religion to Science* (Leiden, 2020), 27–44; and Yamaguchi, “Collect, Preserve, and Communicate: Jeremy Belknap’s Republic of Letters and the Problems of Early American History Writing,” *International Journal of the Book* 15 (2016), 17–28. Yamaguchi acknowledges that Jeremy Belknap’s idea for the Republic of Letters grows out of Enlightenment ideals but is quick to focus only on the strictly national dimension.

¹³Anthony Grafton, “The Republic of Letters in the American Colonies: Francis Daniel Pastorius Makes a Notebook,” *American Historical Review* 117/1 (2012), 1–39; and Thomas Keeline and Stuart McManus, “*Aenigma Omnibus*: The Transatlantic Humanism of Zinzendorf and the Early Moravians,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 82 (2019/20), 315–56.

¹⁴Even the well-balanced application of the concept in the New World, such as Mark Peterson’s scholastic account of the Mather family, only goes up to 1740, precisely around the time (and especially in the ensuing decades) when the intellectual possibilities of early America were expanding beyond Cambridge and Boston. See Mark Peterson, “*Theopolis Americana*: The City-State of Boston, the Republic of Letters, and the Protestant International, 1689–1739,” in Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault, eds., *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830* (Cambridge, 2009), 329–71.

¹⁵Grafton, “The Republic of Letters in the American Colonies,” 39.

name, but in practice, for the Republic of Letters activated his imagination in ways remarkable. In short, he was obsessed with this scholarly community and rarely forwent an opportunity to talk and write about it. A consideration of Stiles's scholarly ambitions, especially in connection with the colonial colleges, also challenges regnant historiographic assumptions that early American universities were soporific, parochial places whose leaders only woke up to the ideal of research and international exchange in the nineteenth century.¹⁶

Although this minister intellectual is not quite a household name, Stiles has received a fair deal of scholarly attention, most of which focuses on his efforts to promote the study of Hebrew as well as his vision for an enlightened Christianity.¹⁷ Edmund Morgan, author of the largest and most substantive work on Stiles to date, attempted to make sense of the man as an intellectual whole. Overall, Morgan was not impressed. While acknowledging Stiles's learnedness, Morgan tended to downplay his originality and impact. In fact, Morgan made no bones about critiquing Stiles's academic ego and vanity, frequently dismissing Stiles's visions of intellectual societies and global comradery as "day-dreaming" that he indulged privately, but retreated from publicly.¹⁸

Stiles's plans were not mere pipe dreams, but strategic proposals for himself, his university, and his newly formed nation in the Republic of Letters. To get at the heart of this vision, this article will dig into hundreds of pages of Stiles's never-before-translated manuscripts, consider his correspondence both near and far, and dive deep into early modern periodicals and publications. In short, we shall critically trace the development of Stiles's lifelong fixation with the Republic of Letters not simply as an ideal but as something that he also tangibly, albeit imperfectly, worked towards. Ironically, Stiles's sustained and self-conscious effort to insert American intellect into the early modern Republic of Letters came only as

¹⁶A recent instantiation of this master narrative about the rise of the research university, which apparently only began to take off seriously in the nineteenth century, is James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University* (Princeton, 2016). The literature on the importation of nineteenth-century German university practices into America is vast and becoming increasingly varied, as historians like Emily Levine detail not only German influences on America, but American influences on Germany. See Emily Levine, "Baltimore Teaches, Göttingen Learns: Cooperation, Competition, and the Research University," *American Historical Review* 121/3 (2016), 780–823; and Levine, *Allies and Rivals: German-American Exchange and the Rise of the Modern Research University* (Chicago, forthcoming 2021).

¹⁷Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 230–79; Arthur Chiel, "Ezra Stiles: The Education of an 'Hebrician,'" *American Jewish Quarterly* 60/3 (1971), 235–41; Brian Ogren, "The Zohar in Early Protestant American Kabbalah: On Ezra Stiles and the Case for Jewish-Christianity," in Ogren, ed., *Kabbalah in America: Ancient Lore in the New World* (Leiden, 2020), 31–51. Christine DeLucia has also recently traced in detail Stiles's interactions with and (mis)understandings of Native Americans. See Christine DeLucia, "Fugitive Collections in New England Indian Country: Indigenous Material Culture and Early American History Making at Ezra Stiles's Yale Museum," *William and Mary Quarterly* 75/1 (2018), 109–50.

¹⁸Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan*, 160–62. Other brief treatments of the eighteenth-century scholar have been more even-handed, with some even recognizing Stiles as a member of the Republic of Letters, though declining to fully trace what that meant for him. See David D. Hall, "Learned Culture in the Eighteenth Century," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, 2000), 411–34; Caroline Winterer, *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason* (New Haven, 2016), 123–30; and Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy*, 230–79.

this community itself was changing. In fact, early modern historians have long since recognized that the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed declining appeals to the Republic of Letters, especially as the largely Latinate manuscript community morphed into more nationally focused intellectual centers. In this sense, Stiles attempted to play a part in a performance that had already arrived at its last act. What hindered his efforts further was his overwhelming preoccupation with the university. As president of Yale, Stiles sought to connect and promote the colonial colleges as the arteries through which the blood cells of American intellect flowed into the heart of the Republic of Letters. He rapidly vamped up communication between schools and drastically increased the awarding of honorary degrees as a means to render visible intellectual connections. This vision, however, failed to sufficiently accommodate the increasing premium placed on publication and the importance of the individual, not merely the institution. It is my intent neither to celebrate nor to chastise Stiles, but to take him seriously, for he provides the clearest account yet of where an American scholar could aspire—and where he ultimately was—in the early modern intellectual community that was the Republic of Letters.

The Republic of Letters before Stiles

Ezra Stiles no more invented the Republic of Letters than George Washington invented politics. The idea for this scholarly community dated at least back to Renaissance scholars such as Erasmus, who envisioned a world where like-minded men—and some women—could pursue intellectual exchange across religious, national, and political borders.¹⁹ As with many societies, lofty ideals did not always align with lived realities.²⁰ Still, the underlying vision of this wide-ranging scholarly republic remained alluring enough for many early modern intellectuals to routinely evoke. To consider North American participation in the Republic of Letters before Stiles, however, presents something of a conundrum. In short: can we say that those who never mentioned this community considered themselves members of it? There are, of course, all sorts of groups that one might be a part of, and yet never discuss, nor perhaps even realize membership in. While explicit North American mentions of the Republic of Letters only appear to take off in the eighteenth century, it is important to consider some of the seeds of the idea before Stiles. For this eighteenth-century minister did not invent the world around him from the ground

¹⁹Literature on the Republic of Letters is vast. To speak only to the anglophone output, the seminal monographs include Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1996); and Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750* (New Haven, 1995). A number of excellent article-length overviews of this imagined scholarly community are also worth consulting. See Dirk van Miert, “What was the Republic of Letters? A Brief Introduction to a Long History,” *Groniek* 204–5 (2016), 269–87; Anthony Grafton, “A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters,” *Republics of Letters* 1 (2008), at <https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/sketch-map-lost-continent-republic-letters>; and Marc Fumaroli, “The Republic of Letters,” *Diogenes* 36 (1988), 129–52.

²⁰A rich exploration of all sorts of misdeeds that learned men accused each other of can be found in Sair Kivisto, *The Vices of Learning: Morality and Knowledge at Early Modern Universities* (Leiden, 2014).

up. Like a resourceful carpenter, Stiles built upon a preexisting intellectual foundation, repurposing raw scholarly materials to accommodate his vision.

Rather than single out any one individual as an early example from whom Stiles drew inspiration, it is best to consider the intellectual environment that allowed him to conceptualize learned connections necessary for the Republic of Letters in the first place.²¹ Here, the broad-pan focus of the early modern Europeanist has much to offer, especially as it relates to wider intellectual traditions. Indeed, it is easy to take for granted the *translatio studii*, that movement of learning from one location to another. It appears self-evident that the so-called New World would have new schools. And yet, when we dig into the fine-grained foundations of early education in North America, we begin to realize how tirelessly early colonists labored to promote intellectual connections between mother country and colony. To do so was not always easy. Far from simply a present-day phenomenon, the engine of the mind has always stumbled along, driven by the real-world fuel of economics. Grammar schools and colleges have forever been expensive, their value not always clear.²² Dutch colonists in seventeenth-century New Amsterdam complained that the “bowl has been going round a long time for the purpose of erecting a common school and it has been built with words, but as yet the first stone is not laid.”²³ Likewise, a 1667 Connecticut boy solemnly detailed in his diary that he “sought for admission into [Harvard] colledge, could not obtain it, *pecuniae deerant* [the funds weren’t there].”²⁴ Meanwhile, opponents to schools questioned why the work of the muses mattered.²⁵ Often on the defense, university men argued for the value of their schools in all manners and means. Schools, so they argued, were helpful for the state, the church, the government; they produced ministers, doctors, politicians, and lawyers.²⁶ But there was also another reason, which early colonists occasionally articulated to themselves, but was also reflected in actual day-to-day

²¹If the goal were to single out an individual whom Stiles attempted to imitate in broad strokes, it would likely be Cotton or Increase Mather, whom Stiles read frequently. Of late, the Mather family has been having a second look, as scholars increasingly are analyzing the intellectual contributions and learned connections of the famed family. Among others see Lydia Barnett, “Giant Bones and the Taunton Stone: America Antiquities, World History, and the Protestant International,” in Paula Findlen, ed., *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2019), 225–46.

²²Margery Somers Foster, “Out of Smalle Beginnings ...” *An Economic History of Harvard College in the Puritan Period, 1636–1712* (Cambridge, MA, 1962).

²³John Franklin Jameson, *Narratives of New Netherlands: 1609–1664* (Bedford, 1909), 327.

²⁴F. M. Caulkins, *Memoir of the Rev. William Adams of Dedham, Mass. and of Rev. Eliphalet Adams of New London, Conn.* (Cambridge, MA, 1849), 8. Adams eventually attended Harvard, where he graduated in 1671.

²⁵See James Axtell, *The School upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New York, 1976), 166–200, which deals with the tug and pull of appreciation for and animosity towards schooling; John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge, 1986); and Theodore Delwiche, “*Vilesunt in Dies Bonae Litterae*: Urian Oakes and the Harvard College Crisis of the 1670s,” *Lias: Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources* 46 (2019), 29–58. Most other scholarship on early American education, especially classical education, is very far removed from contemporary academic sources and tends to miss the tension and conflict in the classroom.

²⁶Delwiche, “*Vilesunt in Dies*,” 49–55; and on doctors, Theodore Delwiche, “*Fuit ille non empiricus mercenarius*: Apprehensions towards Alchemy in Colonial New England,” *Ambix* 67/4 (2020), 346–65.

realities of the schoolroom: the purported need to maintain a connection to European learning.²⁷

As much as seventeenth-century Puritan colonists critiqued supposedly corrupted schools back home in England, they quickly filled their New England schools with a similar curriculum.²⁸ In principle, the chief aim was to produce pious Christians. In practice, the day-to-day classroom sought, often above all else, to perpetuate fluency in Latin, the lingua franca of late-day humanism and the Republic of Letters. Concerned parents and siblings warned fresh college students that they could never aspire to any intellectual achievement without mastery of Latin.²⁹ Furthermore, it was the type of command of the language that mattered. Rote, repetitive, dull—these are the descriptions that often come to mind when historians summarize a colonial classical curriculum. Nonetheless, a recently resurgent interest in neo-Latin texts in New World contexts has demonstrated the extent to which early North American teachers churned out original Latin poetry and attempted to replicate humanist pedagogy.³⁰ There even exist records of seventeenth-century Harvard students receiving fines for daring to speak English on campus. Students studied early modern authors like Erasmus and Corderius (Mathurin Cordier), alongside classical ones like Virgil and Terence. The emphasis rested not as much on mastering the content of the texts, as much as on mining Latin literature for phrases to employ in one's own writing.³¹ It was not for nothing that as a student at Harvard young John Winthrop (1714–79), a future professor and scientist with whom Stiles would correspond, extracted a particularly to-the-point quotation from an early modern language work: “The only Latin exercise that will be of great use in the whole course of life is to write a Latin letter handsomely.”³² Select colonial students—English and Native American—actually wrote Latin letters locally and internationally (to Britain).³³

²⁷Lucy Downing made this point to her brother and Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop in 1636, namely that some college, no matter how modest or makeshift, would go a long way in reassuring colonists of the New World's learnedness and connection to Old World. See Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, MA, 1935), 171.

²⁸On early modern English learning see Ian Greene, *Humanism and Protestantism in Early Modern English Education* (Farnham, 2009). For case studies concerning the implementation of English and early modern humanism in early American schools see Thomas Keeline and Stuart McManus, “Benjamin Larnell, the Last Latin Poet at Harvard Indian College,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 108 (2015), 621–42; and Theodore Delwiche, “An Old Author in the New World: Terence, Samuel Melyen, and the Boston Latin School c.1700,” *New England Quarterly* 92/2 (2019), 263–92.

²⁹Thomas to Nathan Prince, 2 Oct. 1713, Thomas Prince Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁰Stuart McManus, “*Classica Americana*: An Addendum to the Censuses of Pre-1800 Latin Texts from British North America,” *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* 67/2 (2018), 421–61.

³¹Theodore Delwiche, “The Schoolboy's Quill: Joseph Belcher and Latin Learning at Harvard College c.1700,” *History of Universities* 33 (2020), 69–104.

³²John Winthrop, Commonplace Book 1728–1735, seq. 40, Papers of John and Hannah Winthrop, 172801789, Harvard University Archives, HUM 9, Box 2. As Winthrop notes, the quotation comes from Tanquil Faber, *A Compendious Way of Teaching Ancient and Modern Languages*, the second edition of which appeared in 1723.

³³For Caleb Cheeshateaumauk's 1663 Latin letter to Robert Boyle, see Beatrix Dudenshing-Reichel and Wolfgang Hochbruck, “‘Honoratissimi Benefactores,’ Native American Students and Two Seventeenth-Century Texts in the University Tradition,” in Helen Jaskoski, ed., *Early Native American Writing: New Critical Essays* (Cambridge, 1996), 1–15. For the most recent interpretation of the text and

Again, some failed to see the point in such classical study, while others even poked fun at it.³⁴ And yet, as the place of Latin appeared to wane in schools at the turn of the eighteenth century, parents and students sought to bolster the curriculum. In 1714, Cotton Mather worried “whether the speaking of Latin [has] not been so discountenanced, as to render our Scholars very unfit for a Conversation with Strangers.”³⁵ Lest we dismiss Mather’s fear as completely ungrounded, there is in fact one case of a Dutch visitor in 1690 who found himself unable to communicate effectively in Latin with Harvard students.³⁶ A future generation of college students, attending Harvard at precisely the same time as Stiles did Yale, took matters into their own hands. In a time of an increasing bourgeois public sphere and the rise of learned societies, these teenage boys founded a club to improve their Latin.³⁷ One speaker wistfully resolved (in Latin, of course), “it is necessary that I use all my efforts for everything promoting the republic of letters everywhere, by this and whatever sort of way.”³⁸ Another compared the victories of wartime heroes to intellectuals:

Likewise in the Republic of Letters with a similar trust, and similar aid, those eager for knowledge offer a helping hand in turn to others eager for knowledge, and some encourage others for attempting new discoveries, in natural affairs, in the moral life, the civil, the religious, and the learned, until they are crowned with the prize of serene knowledge.³⁹

an exploration of the Harvard Indian College see Lisa Brooks, *Our Beloved Kin: A New History of King Philip’s War* (New Haven, 2018), 72–107.

³⁴James Raven, “Classical Transports: Latin and Greek Texts in North and Central America before 1800,” in Leslie Howsam and James Raven, eds., *Books between Europe and the Americas: Connections and Communities, 1620–1860* (New York, 2011), 157–87, at 163.

³⁵Cotton Mather, “Important Points Relating to the Education at Harvard-College; Needful to be Enquired into, Prepared and Humbly Offered by Some Who Have Newly Pass’d thro’ the First Four Years of Their Being There,” presented in full in Kenneth Minkema, “Reforming Harvard: Cotton Mather on Education at Cambridge,” *New England Quarterly* 87/2 (2014), 319–40, at 322.

³⁶Jasper Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter, *Journal of Jasper Danckaerts 1679–1680*, trans. Bartlet James and J. Jameson (New York, 1913), 266–7. Samuel Eliot Morison speculated that the problem may have rested chiefly in different pronunciations of Latin. This might actually be a factor, as recent scholarship has shown almost the exact same Latin language barrier between Dutch visitors attempting to visit Oxford in the seventeenth century. See Esther van Raamsdonk and Alan Moss, “Across the Narrow Sea: A Transnational Approach to Anglo-Dutch Travelogues,” *Seventeenth Century* 35/1 (2020), at www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0268117X.2018.1487877.

³⁷David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, 1997), especially 209–75.

³⁸Jonathan Mayhew, Clerk’s Book, seq. 12–13, HUD 3511.55000, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, MA: “illud unâ cum mandatis vestris, me adeo incitarunt, quod suavi fretus vestri favoris zephyro, humanitate et candore (quae a perefectis vestris ingeniis super alios tam longe elatis, numquam abhorruere) verbis quod abilitatem consequar, meipsum cuique rei, Remp. Ubiqumque terrarum literariam, hocce, et quocumque modo, promoventi, omnes adhibere conatus oportere.”

³⁹Ibid., seq. 15: “Sicuti ex fiducia mutuâ mutuoque auxilio in vita martiali res magnae oriuntur, et alii Heroes in aliorum pectoribus ardorem exemplo vicissim augent, usquedum nactâ victoriâ beatâ et florenti, tempora ardua laurus martialis vinxerit; haud aliter in Republica Literarum cum simili fiducia, similique auxilio scientiae cupidi scientiae cupidis alternatim manum auxiliarem porrigunt, et alii alios stimulant indicia ad nova tentanda, in rebus naturae, in vitâ morali, civile, piâ, et vita literatâ, donec placidae scientiae palmâ coronati erint.”

This was the intellectual world that Stiles came to age in, a world where some students used their humanistic education to imagine themselves in societies and scholarly republics.⁴⁰

Stiles's innovation was to connect, more overtly than any other colonial intellectual, to my knowledge, his humanist practices with a humanist persona. Like Janus, the identity that Stiles and his like-minded friends forged for themselves was two-sided. The eighteenth-century scholar took pleasure in eventually viewing himself as a citizen of a new nation. Still, Stiles never forwent identifying in decidedly older terms, as a late-day Renaissance man, a phrase we use in wishy-washy ways today, but which had much more specific connotations for an aspiring early modern scholar. Stiles's trifecta study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew that rendered him a *homo trilinguis*, the grand (though perhaps not so grand) tour that he embarked on through New England, and his pedagogical platform of κύκλοπαιδεία (i.e. universal knowledge): these were the bread and butter in the pantry of the ideal Renaissance intellectual. Just as fourteenth-century humanist Francesco Petrarch penned letters to the classical authors of centuries past, Stiles likewise did not talk about "reading" ancient works. Plato, Paul, Cicero—these were "departed friends" with whom Stiles thought he could "personally converse."⁴¹ When the Massachusetts Historical Society, of which Stiles was a corresponding member, opened in the late eighteenth century to collect and preserve American manuscripts, the short-lived newspaper touting the holdings (ambitiously titled *American Apollo*, after the head of the muses) confidently referred back to Poggio Bracciolini, that famed Renaissance book hunter who built a reputation on recovering classical texts and resuscitating ancient authors.⁴² And finally, as Stuart McManus has shown in a rich bibliography of American neo-Latin texts, Stiles wistfully equated himself to the best humanist orators of centuries past.⁴³ What made these astounding comparisons possible, what allowed them to make sense for Stiles, was his own conviction that the Republic of Letters was alive and well in his day—and that Americans like him could take part in it.

The seed of a vision

It took time for Stiles to articulate clearly where he saw himself and his country fitting in a global scholarly community. Indefatigably ambitious and wide-ranging as he was, young Ezra Stiles tended to talk off-topic. As a tutor at Yale from 1749 to 1755, he had plenty of opportunity to indulge this habit. A staple speech, such as

⁴⁰For another example of an eighteenth-century student evoking the Republic of Letters see Thomas Foxcroft, *Oratio Salutatoria* 1714, Papers of Thomas Foxcroft, Harvard University Archives, HUM 68, Box 1, Folder 8. Though the original 1749 Latin composition appears lost, there is also mention of the Republic of Letters in a nineteenth-century translation of a student's oration. See Stephen Greenleaf Bulfinch, translation of Thomas Bulfinch's 1749 valedictory oration, Harvard University Archives, HUC 6749.10.

⁴¹Ezra Stiles to John Winthrop, 2 April 1759, Ezra Stiles Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Gen MSS 1475, Box 17, Folder 1401.

⁴²"Literature: Curious Anecdotes of the Recovery of Ancient Manuscripts," *American Apollo*, 2 Nov. 1792, 1.

⁴³McManus, "*Classica Americana*," 434.

one commending newly graduated bachelor's students, could quickly run to over a dozen pages, as Stiles, like a cannon equipped with a seemingly endless supply of rounds, fired off a barrage of oratorical flares.⁴⁴ The bigger the ceremony was, the bolder the speech became. In 1752, the twenty-five-year-old tutor composed a whopping twenty-five-page Latin oration to celebrate Yale's fiftieth anniversary.⁴⁵ The better part of that speech ostensibly had very little to do with Yale, as Stiles took his audience on a whirlwind tour through a global history of academies and universities, through China, Greece, Rome, Persia, Palestine, and every corner of Europe, focusing on Confucius, Alexander, Avicenna, Hermes Trismegistus, Cicero, Newton, Boyle, and Huygens, among a dozen others. Without, it seems, reading these speeches, Morgan pointed out the inextricable self-importance.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, if we simply dismiss rather than dig into Stiles's orations, if we bemoan—*di boni!*—yet another turgid Latin composition, we fail to understand what Stiles was up to. As a tutor, Stiles began to experiment with where he imagined New England to fit into the grand scheme of learned history, as well as the Republic of Letters. When the time came to deliver an oration in honor of Benjamin Franklin in 1755, he landed precisely on that vision.

In 1753, Franklin (*in absentia*) received an honorary degree of master of arts from Yale. It would not be until 1755 that the polymath would turn up in New Haven, furnishing Stiles an opportunity to prepare another oration. Stiles began work on the speech early. Sketching out drafts of his oration three months before the visit, the Yale tutor worked at honing his message. After all, Stiles was not just concerned with praising one man, which he could accomplish easily enough, but rather with communicating what that man meant. The opening paragraph of the first draft reveals precisely what was on his mind: "The sciences and arts so long ago cultivated among Europeans, are recently, however, being cultivated by us, a fact which American academies amply demonstrate. A case in point is Cambridge, New Haven, New-Caesarea [the original name for the city], or rather Philadelphia, and Williamsburg, and that New York academy [King's College] which now sprouts up."⁴⁷ Again, like his previous orations, the initial iteration of

⁴⁴Among many others see Ezra Stiles, *Oration Habita ad Pupilos*, 8 Sept. 1750, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 45, Folder 1860.

⁴⁵Ezra Stiles, *Oratio Semi-saecularis*, 20 Sept. 1752, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 45, Folder 1897. An earlier, perhaps separate, oration of his does trace the history of Yale specifically in more detail. See Ezra Stiles, *Oratio Quinquagenaria*, 20 April 1752, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 45, Folder 1891.

⁴⁶Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan*, 360: "The inhabitants of universities have always fostered the ceremonies and trappings by which men assure themselves of their own importance: robes, rituals, secret societies, hierarchies, titles of honor. Stiles loved the whole business."

⁴⁷Ezra Stiles, *Oration on Benjamin Franklin*, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 46, folder 1915, [1]: "Scientiae ideo apud Europaeos olim, nuper autem apud nos ex<>oluntur: quod academiae abunde monstrant americanae. Testis est Cantabrigia, Testis Neo-Limen, Testis Neo-Caesaria, Philadelphia immo, et Williamsburg, & quae iam vero pullulat Neo-Ebeoracensis academia." It should be noted that "Neo-Limen" is not a common translation for "New Haven," almost always rendered as "Novus-Portus." The only other attestation of this usage I have been able to find is in John Hubbard, *The Benefactors of Yale-College: A Poetical Attempt* (Boston, 1733). Here a footnote is provided: "I think every Reader will readily own that *Neolimen* sounds better even to an English Ear than *New-Haven*, which, I hope, will justify the Use of it in this place." *Ibid.*, 2. Thankfully, Stiles omitted this rather obscure geographic and poetic point in future drafts of his oration.

this panegyric to Franklin curiously failed to front and center Franklin. Likely realizing the problem, Stiles recentered the praise of the polymath inventor of electricity in future iterations of the speech. Nonetheless, he always cued the beat of his oratorical drum to a broader melody.

For Stiles, Franklin meant that North Americans were coming of age in the Republic of Letters. “Your praises have flown across the entire globe. Triumphantly, you traverse the world, and with your unique fame dwell among the noblest, learned men of the land and of all peoples.”⁴⁸ Citing other scholars, Stiles acknowledged that some investigated the natural sciences before—and after—Franklin. But those Europeans (*Europaei*) supposedly would have learned little about the laws of electricity were it not for “our in fact immortal American philosopher Franklin” (“noster immortalis Franklin Philosophus reapse americanus”).⁴⁹ The timing of Stiles’s oration, in 1755, was, of course, years before America would exist as a nation proper. But like Cotton Mather’s appeal to the *Magnalia Christi Americana*, political realities in no way hindered Stiles from envisioning intellectual unity between colonies—a unity that, as Stiles so wished, could extend more widely into the Republic of Letters. Indeed, Stiles portended future American advancement in a global intellectual world:

In fact, scholarship and patrons of learning only recently existed among these deserts, these American wildernesses. When learning was first brought from Europe, when it first crossed over the Atlantic ocean, for a long time we were teeny-tiny children [*infantuli*]. Now, however, we are men. Nay, great men, exulting in you. Nor do we doubt that soon we will have Newtons, Halleys, Berkleys, and Lockes. For if anyone would now look upon America, especially New England, he would see the study of the liberal arts and sciences cultivated and flourishing in no small part among us ... The virgin now returns, and Saturn’s reign resumes [Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.6].⁵⁰

Stiles’s words drip with confidence. The mention of New World Lockes and Newtons serves to precisely reify his programmatic point: Franklin is the beginning, but ideally not the end of American involvement in the Republic of Letters. By invoking Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue, the then Yale tutor lays out his plan for a bold future. While this reference to a classical author might seem, on first glance, uninteresting and elusive from the vantage point of a twenty-first-century reader,

⁴⁸Ezra Stiles, Oration on Benjamin Franklin, Dec. 1754, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 46, Folder 1916 [1]: “Tuae Laudes Orbem jam inde pervolaverunt: triumphans percurris Mundum, et inter LITERATOS Telluris, et omnium Gentium OPTIMATES Fama \singulari/ tua gloriaris.” I have decided to quote from this version of the speech because Stiles wrote “read” at the top of his manuscript. As in all my quotations from Stiles’s manuscripts, I have employed the Leiden conventions to render the Latin text.

⁴⁹Ibid., [2].

⁵⁰Ibid., [5]: “Literae enim, et Literarum Maecenates, nuper tantummodo inter haec Deserta, Solitudines hasce americanas extitere. Cum vero Literae ab Europa advectae, Atlanticum mare transvolaverim primo, Infantuli fuimus diu; nunc autem Viri adstamus, immo in te gloriantes, magni. Nec dubitamus quin cito Newtonos, Halleios, Berkeleios, Lokeiosque habuerimus. Namque qui Americam perspicat, praesertim anglicanam, bonarum Artium Studia, \Scientias/ non mediocri Fructu inter nos excoli et efflorere viderit ... Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia Regna.”

the audaciousness of the quotation cannot be stressed enough. Indeed, in all of classical Latin literature, this was perhaps the most aggressively optimistic allusion an early modern intellectual could make. In his Fourth Eclogue, Virgil predicted the return of the so-called Golden Age. Generations of Christians had even wistfully interpreted this poem to foreshadow the coming of Christ.⁵¹ Stiles therefore lucidly emphasizes the advent of an allegedly new intellectual order.

While we might well dismiss such high rhetoric as airy ambition, it is important to consider the subtle pragmatics that accompanied this dream. In practice, Stiles sought to plant the seed of Benjamin Franklin's fame into the garden of the colonial universities, and from there to grow the fruits of American intellect that would be transported into the Republic of Letters. His process was multi-step: (1) find the best talent, (2) assemble said talent, and (3) promote the intellectual A team at the global level. It is for the reason that even in the version of the oration that Stiles read, he still focuses heavily on the different university presidents and institutions throughout colonial America and even Barbados (he admits that he "passes over other academies in the French and Spanish provinces, those located and recently established in Quebec and Quito").⁵² Likewise, the very Latin wording of Franklin's honorary degree artfully illuminates Stiles's effort to tie American intellect up with the university. According to the diploma, Franklin's reputation had "shown throughout the entire learned world and has merited being honored with the highest distinction from the Republic of Letters."⁵³ Who was it honoring Franklin? Yes, it was the Republic of Letters in that broad connotation of international learned men. But in the stricter sense, it was, in fact, Stiles, the man who prepared the degree and offered the praise. It was the universities, for Stiles, that would provide the best chance of further American recognition in the Republic of Letters. And yet, as we shall see, this vision, as shiny and superlative as it was, concealed a number of contradictions and cracks.

The potential and problems of Stiles's Republic of Letters

Stiles was evidently satisfied with the intellectual platform he had articulated in the oration to Franklin. It appears that sometime after delivering the speech, he drafted a clean copy.⁵⁴ Though the oration would not appear in print until well after Stiles's

⁵¹See, for instance, L. B. T. Houghton, *Virgil's Fourth Eclogue in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, 2019), 173–326.

⁵²Ezra Stiles, Oration on Benjamin Franklin, Dec. 1754, [5]: "Ut praetermittam caeteras Academias in America, \inter/ Provincias Gallicas et Hispanienses, adlocatas, illas nempe ad Quebec et Quito positas." The college in Barbados that Stiles refers to by name was Coddington College. On the history of Coddington see George C. Simmons, "West Indian Higher Education: The Story of Coddington College," *Caribbean Quarterly* 18/3 (1972), 51–72.

⁵³"To Benjamin Franklin from Yale College: Degree of Master of Arts, 12 September 1753?", Founders Online, National Archives, at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-05-02-0015>. Original source: Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 5, *July 1, 1753, through March 31, 1755* (New Haven, 1962), p. 58. "... quo toto Orbe Literato Fama inclaruit, et de Republica Literaria Laude et Honore summo dignari meritus est."

⁵⁴Ezra Stiles, Oration on Benjamin Franklin, 9 Feb. 1755, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 46, Folder 1917. It should be noted that the catalog information here is erroneous in two respects. First, the catalog appears to date the item to the title page of the manuscript, which reads "nonis Februarii A.D. 1755." This, however,

death (we shall return to the stumbling block of Stiles's publication record later), he continued to develop a clear strategy to augment American intellectual status internationally.⁵⁵ The most important prongs of his plan were to make both visible and audible that seemingly imperceptible feeling of intellectual connection. The honorary degree appeared one of the most expedient and efficient approaches to achieve the task. Even as a minister and not serving in an official post at a university from 1755 to 1778, Stiles still sought to broker intellectual relationships between universities.

When he received word in 1771 that attorney general of Rhode Island and personal friend Henry Marchant planned to make a tour through Europe, Stiles was elated. With sure excitement, he drafted out an ambitious itinerary for Marchant. In Rotterdam, Marchant was to "view the statue of Erasmus at the house in which he was born." In Leiden, he was, of course, to "visit the university" and "take down the names of professors." Stiles clarified that at any university, he should "mark those of eminence, the Geniuses & the men of profound erudition, & the branch of Literature for which they are distinguished."⁵⁶ The advice, long and lengthy, went on for twenty-four pages. (In Italy, "don't neglect Bologna," Stiles warned. "There is a famous university.")⁵⁷ This was the trip that Stiles would have liked to make himself! Despite the evident personal desire in the letter, Stiles also wanted to ensure that he could advance the intellectual status of his fellow clergymen. Like a military commander, the eighteenth-century minister had a clear mission in mind: Operation Obtain Honorary Degrees.

In several separate copies of a letter for Marchant to ferry, Stiles creatively addressed a Latin epistle to "the most famous and respected professors of theology in either Leiden University, or Utrecht University, or Geneva University, or finally in any reformed university where Mr. Marchant crosses in his travels."⁵⁸ The origin mattered here less than the product: doctorates of theology for two fellow Connecticut ministers.⁵⁹ Stiles reminded any reader of his letter about the

is not 9 but 5 February. Still, it would not make sense to automatically date this manuscript to any day in February 1755, in other words the month of the speech. On one page (11) of the manuscript, Stiles does list a date in the upper right-hand corner, 13 Dec. 1765, which is probably the correct date.

⁵⁵As far as I have discovered, the earliest publication of this item in full was in William Temple Franklin, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2 (London, 1818), 289–96.

⁵⁶Ezra Stiles, "A Plan for Making the Tour of Europe in Less than Three Months, with the travel of Less than Two Thousand English Miles," Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 54, 2336, [3]. Those interested in Stiles's fascination with Hebrew and contemporary Rabbis and Jewish practices will find much material to work with in this itinerary.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, [6].

⁵⁸Ezra Stiles, "Letter of Introduction for Henry Marchant," Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 11, Folders 888–91. Stiles copied this letter into his diary, which has been edited and published. See Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 1: 187–9. "Clarissimis Reverendissimisque Viris Facultatis Theologicae Professoribus in Academia sive Leidensi, sive Ultrajectina, sive Genevensi, sive denique in aliqua Universitate Reformatorum, ubi D. Marchant itineribus suis transierit: Ezra Stiles S.T. D. [sacra theologiae doctor] Non. Anglus Americanus, S.P.D. [salutem plurimam dicit]." It should be noted that Stiles was neither the first nor the only North American to communicate with Dutch universities. For an endearing, albeit somewhat nostalgic account of John Adams's contacts in the Netherlands, see Jan Postma, "John Adams en zijn Leidse Vrienden," *Leids Jaarboekje*, 2011, 81–108.

⁵⁹These were Chauncey Whittelsey (1717–87), a graduate of Yale who served as a minister in New Haven, and Noah Welles (1718–76), another graduate of Yale and minister in Stamford.

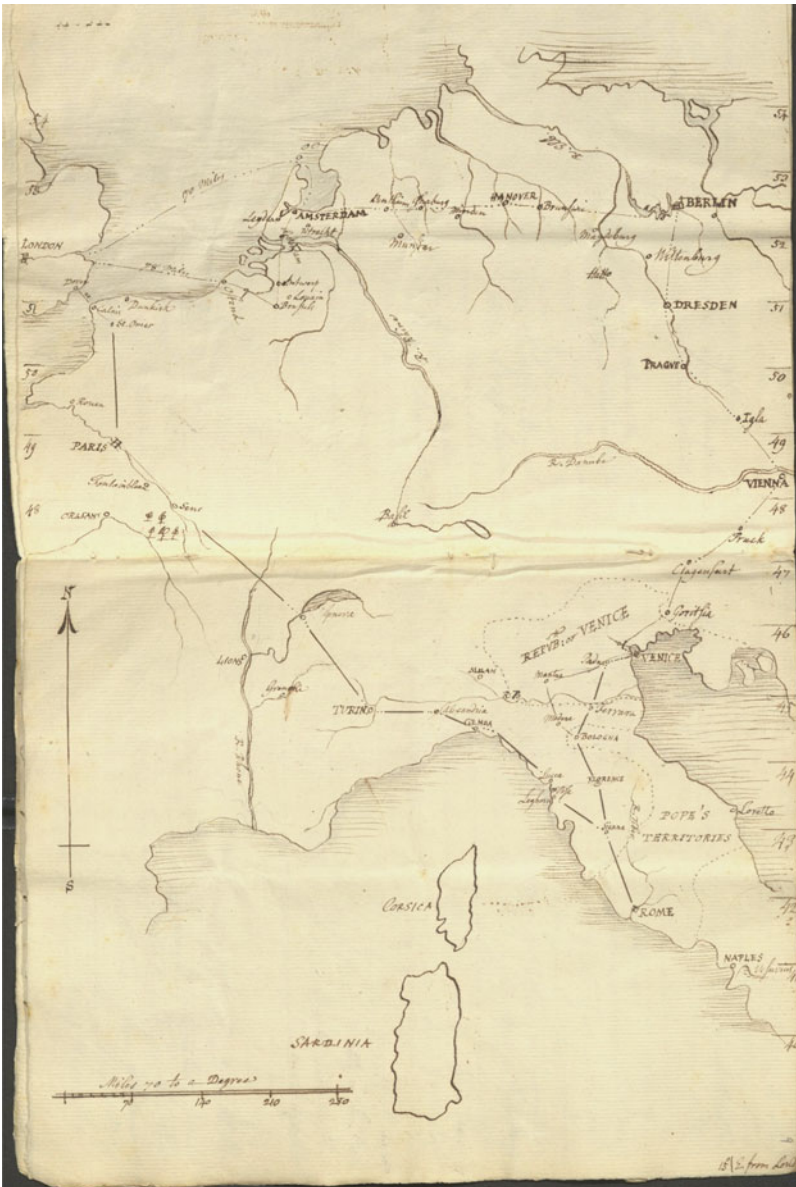


Figure 1. Ezra Stiles, “A Plan for Making the Tour of Europe in Less than Three Months, with the travel of Less than Two Thousand English Miles,” Ezra Stiles Papers, Gen MSS 1475, Box 54, 2336, [8–9]. The trip that Stiles envisioned for Marchant lays bare the learned connections (note the dotted lines that jump out across the map) that the Yale president yearned to forge in Europe.

intellectual and religious goodwill between Protestant New Englanders and Europeans. Here, as was the case often throughout Stiles’s life, his conception of the Republic of Letters and the Protestant International were interrelated if not

sometimes outright interchangeable.⁶⁰ What better way to strengthen Protestant bonds, Stiles asked, than with an honorary degree? Stiles explained that diplomas could be passed along to Marchant and carefully conveyed back to Connecticut. The minister clarified that he sought these degrees *gratis*. Though Stiles had been informed by a friend a decade earlier that it was practically impossible to obtain an honorary degree abroad without a donation of at least twenty-five pounds, he appealed to history to make his bargaining case.⁶¹ Citing the example of a sixteenth-century German professor who received an honorary degree from Cambridge University, Stiles specified his request: “academic honors for true literature flourishing freely and far away, not to be purchased or contaminated with any suspicion of a price or gold.”⁶² There is no evidence that this plot yielded any results, quite possibly because Marchant never ventured past England and Scotland during his trip.⁶³ Nonetheless, Stiles remained fixated on honorary degrees because of the concrete way they rendered and reified links between the scholarly Old and New Worlds.

In fact, throughout his life, the aspiring scholar kept detailed tabs on every new degree Franklin garnered: one from William and Mary in 1756, the University of Edinburgh in 1759, Oxford University in 1762, among others.⁶⁴ Jealousy did not motivate this academic account keeping as much as did pride.⁶⁵ For Stiles, the

⁶⁰Stiles’s diary alone reveals a deep interest in the Protestant International. Stiles read and transcribed a 1659 Latin letter that thirty-five New England ministers sent to John Dury proposing Protestant unity. A translation of the original letter appeared in 1664. See John Dury, *A Copy of the Letter Returned by the Ministers of New England to Mr. John Dury* (Cambridge, 1664); and, for the original Latin, a copy preserved in the Samuel Hartlib Papers Online, at www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/view?docset=main&docname=40_06_01. Stiles was also interested in researching the history of Protestant missionary efforts, such as in Tranquebar, India. For more on these missions and the Protestant International see Katherine Engel, “Connecting Protestants in Britain’s Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Empire,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 75/1 (2018), 37–70; Jan Stievernann, “A ‘Syncretism of Piety’: Imagining Global Protestantism in Early Eighteenth-Century Boston, Tranquebar, and Halle,” *Church History* 89 (2020), 829–56; and Edward Andrews, “Tranquebar: Charting the Protestant International in the British Atlantic and Beyond,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 74/1 (2017), 3–34.

⁶¹Charles Chauncy to Ezra Stiles, 7 Feb. 1761, in Ezra Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, L.L.D. 1755–1794 With a Selection from His Correspondence*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New Haven, 1916), 438–9.

⁶²Stiles, “Letter of Introduction for Henry Marchant,” 189: “Nos quoque rogamus Honores academicos erga veram Literaturam libere & e longinquo fluentes, non venales, nec ulla suspiratione pretii auriue contaminatos.” Stiles referred specifically to the sixteenth-century German Martin Bucer. It is unclear how widely known Bucer’s attitudes about honorary degrees would have been, but it appears that Stiles did faithfully cite his sentiment. See Martin Bucer, “Oratio Martini Buceri Cantabrigiae in Celberrima Academia Angliae Habita,” in *Martini Buceri Scripta Anglicana Fere Omnia* (Basil, 1577), 184–90.

⁶³Marchant’s travels are less pertinent for this discussion. Still, interested readers may find recent examinations of Marchant’s travel logs in David S. Lovejoy, “Henry Marchant and the Mistress of the World,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 12/3 (1955), 375–98; and Sally Hadden and Patricia H. Minter, “A Legal Tourist Visits Eighteenth-Century Britain: Henry Marchant’s Observations on British Courts, 1771 to 1772,” *Law and History Review* 29/1 (2011), 133–79.

⁶⁴Ezra Stiles, Oration on Benjamin Franklin, 9 Feb. 1755, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 46, Folder 1917.

⁶⁵After all, Franklin helped Stiles secure his own honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh. See Benjamin Franklin to Ezra Stiles, 5 July 1765, Founders Online, National Archives, at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-12-02-0095>. Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 12, *January 1, through December 31, 1765*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven and London, 1967), 194–6.

accumulation of degrees from far and wide meant the instantiation of his university-grown Republic of Letters. To be sure, honorary degrees had existed before the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Stiles in fact was well aware of this, as his diary betrays meticulous research into the history of awarding degrees in New England.⁶⁷ Yet again, the innovation here did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Instead, like a biologist in a lab, Stiles had identified a dormant allele in the academic genome of American universities. The college president sought to reactivate and thereby replicate the hitherto sporadic practice of honorary degrees, supercharging the very nature of the university as an institution that judged scholarly worth and connected intellectuals across territories. In its roughly first seventy-five years, Yale awarded three honorary doctor of divinity degrees. During his seventeen-year presidency, Stiles handed out no fewer than sixteen of these. The figures for other degrees at the time, such as doctor of law, are just as striking. Before Stiles, there had been one honorary doctor of law from Yale. During his reign, the president doled out twenty-four more, to both American and international scholars.⁶⁸ In letters to degree recipients, like Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, Stiles mused that “some men by their Merits call upon themselves the Attention of the whole Republic of Letters.”⁶⁹ The linkup between the degree, the university, and the Republic of Letters was more than just rhetorical convenience; Stiles’s was a coordinated effort to associate the three.

Rarely did an opportunity go by during his presidency when he failed to lay bare yet again his platform for American involvement in the Republic of Letters. In short, Stiles consistently evoked this imagined, international, intellectual community. When reviewing the latest mathematical textbook of the time for a local journal, Stiles breezily portended that it would “probably gain a very general Reception and Use throughout the Republic of Letters.”⁷⁰ When delivering future commencement orations, Stiles explicitly greeted other American and European universities: “Hello American sister academies; Hello Cambridge ... Hello William and Mary.” Initially, the Yale president penned a greeting to all other universities “throughout the United States” (“per status foederatos”), but crossed it out, instead writing, “everywhere throughout Europe and everywhere throughout the Republic of

⁶⁶As is the case with just about any aspect of the university, there is debate over who was the first to originate any practice, in this case to award an honorary degree. See Pieter Dhondt, “Pomp and Circumstance at the University: The Origin of the Honorary Degree,” *European Review of History* 20/1 (2013), 117–36.

⁶⁷Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 1: 71–2, 2: 494.

⁶⁸These statistics are based on an online database kept by Yale’s Office of the Secretary and Vice President for University Life. See <https://secretary.yale.edu/programs-services/honorary-degrees/since-1702> (accessed Oct. 2020).

⁶⁹Ezra Stiles to John Adams, 13 Sept. 1788, Founders Online, National Archives, at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-0422>. See also Ezra Stiles to Thomas Jefferson, 8 Dec. 1786, Founders Online, National Archives, at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-10-02-0442>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 10, 22 June–31 December 1786, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, 1954), 584–6.

⁷⁰Ezra Stiles, “Advertisement,” *Connecticut Journal*, 14 June 1786, [3]. Stiles’s friend and correspondent, Joseph Willard, then president of Harvard, had actually asked Stiles a few months earlier to review the particular textbook. See Joseph Willard to Ezra Stiles, 27 April 1786, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 17, Folder 1365.

Letters.”⁷¹ It is important to note that comparable commencement orations before Stiles never included such greetings. Colonial Harvard College commencement speakers appealed to local civil and religious leaders (and, occasionally, to English monarchs *in absentia*), but not to other colleges across colonies.⁷² Stiles made it a part of everyday habit to invoke wider intellectual communities like the Republic of Letters. When inaugurating a new building at Yale, he confidently proclaimed, “Peace be within thy Walls o Yale, and prosperity within thy Places! ... May thy renown & Glory be diffused thro’ the Republic of Letters & be Commensurate with the expansion of Knowledge & Science & with the Duration of Liberty & the United States.”⁷³ Here was a vision for American involvement in a wider intellectual world.

Stiles did not keep these ideals merely to himself. Given that the universities were important components of the plan to promote his new country in the Republic of Letters, Stiles dutifully kept up to date on other institutions near and far.⁷⁴ Though he never travelled abroad, the Yale president made frequent itineraries throughout North America, visiting and taking meticulous notes on every university he visited.⁷⁵ Stiles corresponded with various university presidents throughout the new nation, always careful in his letters to mention his wide network of other correspondents who were university presidents.⁷⁶ By 1779, Stiles had proudly recorded in his diary the names of “presidents of Colleges with whom I have been personally acquainted” (sixteen, by his tally!).⁷⁷ The timing of Stiles’s presidency was fortuitous because in the early Republic, as one Princeton president would famously remark, colleges were rising “like mushrooms” in

⁷¹Ezra Stiles, Oration for Yale College Commencement 1792, Gen MSS 1475, Box 60, Folder, 2691, [6]: “Avete itaq[ue] sorores Academiae Americanae; aveto Cantabria, materna illa sedes cui ultro cedatur primas honoranda; aveto Guilelme Maria; cunctae avete ceterae universitates, ubiq[ue] per Europam ubiq[ue] per totam Literaturae Rempubliam!”

⁷²I based this on previous research into a set of roughly a dozen commencement orations left behind by Harvard presidents Urian Oakes (1631–81) and John Leverett (1662–1724). Oakes, of course, could not have made references to other universities in British North America, considering that at the time Harvard was the only such institution. But he very well could have appealed to the Republic of Letters or to universities in Europe, both of which he did not do. John Leverett appealed to English monarchs, local and regional governmental officials, and judges, but not other university presidents, which there were in eighteenth-century North America. The closest example to Stiles’s constant invocation of other schools is a 1758 Latin commencement speech of Columbia (then King’s University) College president Samuel Johnson, a friend and correspondent of Stiles. Johnson approvingly relayed the history of schools in North America and exhorted his audience to look towards Europe for examples of erudition and learning. See Samuel Johnson and Leo M. Kaiser, “Oratio Comitalis,” *Classical Outlook* 46/10 (1969), 113–15.

⁷³Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3: 492.

⁷⁴For two instances of Stiles being kept abreast of schools, the first example concerning Philadelphia and the second Portugal, see John Ely to Ezra Stiles, 20 July 1789, in Ezra Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies*, 482–5; and David Humphreys to Ezra Stiles, 14 Feb. 1792, in *ibid.*, 514–16.

⁷⁵Stiles’s diary is littered throughout with such notes. Some of these notes, including maps of various colleges, can be found in Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies*.

⁷⁶Ezra Stiles to John Wheelock, 12 Jan. 1781, Mss 781274, Dartmouth Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁷⁷Stiles, *The Literary Dairy of Ezra Stiles*, 2: 1048. This count does mean sixteen different institutions, to be clear. Some of these universities go through multiple presidents.

American soil.⁷⁸ Just as he mapped out the universities in Europe, Stiles also traced all the new institutions sprouting up on American shores.⁷⁹ His goal, vividly expressed in his letters, was to connect the universities in intellectual exchange.⁸⁰

Stiles in fact made this clear when he corresponded with other American university presidents, like James Madison, president of William and Mary College in the late eighteenth century; John Wheelock, president of Dartmouth College; or John Willard, president of Harvard.⁸¹ Noting that God's providence had placed the pair of presidents "in two sister Seats of Literature in America," but likewise acknowledging the "ineffable contempt" between colonial universities, Stiles offered a proposal to Madison:

We hope the time is now come, when all will unite in viewing Things in a more liberal & generous Light. We are rather to glory that an Infant Republic of Letters is to be found in America. The infant Seminaries, Colleges & Universities here, I think, should cultivate a mutual Intercourse & honorable Friendship with one another. Tho' I have never as yet seen this done, yet nothing shall be wanting on my part to establish such an honorable connexion & harmony.⁸²

According to the Yale president, with constancy and coordination, "as many capital Literary Characters may be produced from 100 students educated in Amer. as the Europ. Colleges."⁸³ Madison responded favorably to Stiles's request that college leaders correspond more frequently and promote American intellect abroad so that "Europe shall behold America not only as a new start in the political horizon but the literary also." Madison added that "surely it belongs to our Colleges &

⁷⁸Philip Lindsley, *Works of Philip Lindsley*, vol. 1, *Educational Discourses* (Philadelphia, 1859), 161. Reference courtesy of Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop*. Stiles kept up to date on some colleges that have not survived to the day, such as Cokesbury College or Liberty Hall College.

⁷⁹Ezra Stiles, Map of Locations of Colleges in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 87, Folder 3204.

⁸⁰Dating as far back as 1759, there is record of Stiles corresponding with others about plans to unify curricula across colleges. See Francis Allison to Ezra Stiles, 27 May 1759, in Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies*, 422–4. Allison alluded to "proposals to unite the several Colleges on this continent, as near as might be, in the same plan of Education, to govern them nearly by the same laws, & to admit none in one college that were expell'd or deny'd admittance in another, without previously consulting the heads of the college from whence the student was expell'd, &c."

⁸¹Ezra Stiles to John Wheelock, 15 April 1780, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 16, Folder 1295, [4]. True to form, after first invoking the Republic of Letters, Stiles cut to his point: "It is my sincere wish that all the Ameri [can] Coll[eges] may ever cultivate a mutual & hon[orable] respect for one another: & that there may be a fraternal connection] among the heads of these seats of learning." For positive responses to this proposal see Joseph Willard to Ezra Stiles, 5 Oct. 1785, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 83, Folder 3120. "I sincerely meet you, sir, in your wishes, that the utmost harmony and friendship may subsist between the literary societies of Cambridge and New Haven. I think, sir, while you and I continue in our present stations, no sinister methods will ever be taken, to advance one at the expense of the other."

⁸²Ezra Stiles to James Madison, 12 July 1780, "Correspondence of Ezra Stiles, President of Yale College, and James Madison, President of William and Mary College, 1780," *William and Mary Quarterly* 7/4 (1927), 293–4.

⁸³This fixation with numbers is characteristic of Stiles, as he was convinced that the more quantifiable and the more numerous a population, the better. See Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, 123–9.

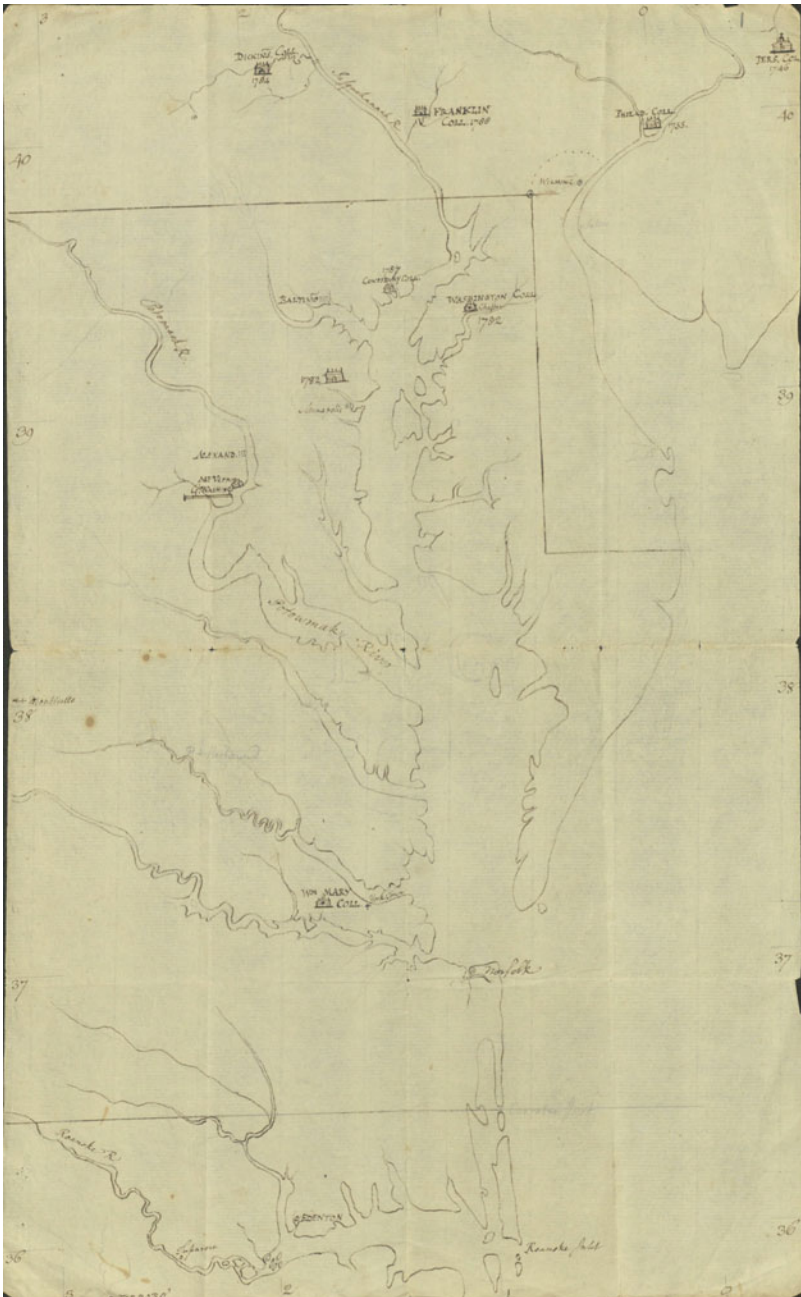


Figure 2. Ezra Stiles, “Map of Locations of Colleges in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia,” Ezra Stiles Papers, GEN MSS 1475, b. 87, f. 3204. Beyond keeping in touch with university presidents, Stiles also mapped new colleges springing up in the early republic.

Universities to lay the Foundation from which the future glory of America shall arise.”⁸⁴ With such brevity and grace, Madison told Stiles precisely what he wanted to hear, either unwilling or unable to perceive the inbuilt problems with the dream.

Never mind the abundance of national pride in this vision for American involvement in the Republic of Letters, a community that supposedly cared not for national origins.⁸⁵ In many ways, the Yale president played on a productive contradiction of the mid-eighteenth-century Republic of Letters more broadly, one which Lorraine Daston has described as patriotic cosmopolitanism. “So long as glory was a good treasured by nation and savant alike, and so long as intellectual glory could be transmuted into national glory, even the thoroughly local academies could be turned into cosmopolitan ends.”⁸⁶ Instead, the difficulty with Stiles’s vision was subtler and yet all the more sharp: early modern universities were not the primary loci that celebrated members of the Republic of Letters identified with. As Laurence Brockliss succinctly puts it, “The educational institutions of eighteenth-century Europe are not renowned for their contribution to the advance of science and learning.”⁸⁷ In fact, it was even something of a trope for an early modern intellectual, be he a budding alchemist or historian, to frame his university days in begrudging terms.⁸⁸ The supposedly real work of the mind happens after and outside the university. To be sure, there were institutions famed for their research productivity, such as Leiden University, which Stiles recognized and evoked,

⁸⁴James Madison to Ezra Stiles, 27 Aug. 1780, as published in Stiles and Madison, “Correspondence of Ezra Stiles, President of Yale College, and James Madison, President of William and Mary College, 1780,” 293–4.

⁸⁵Nationalism and cosmopolitanism, however incompatible they might seem, often went hand in hand in Stiles’s speeches. See Ezra Stiles, Yale College Commencement 1781, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 57, Folder 2525, [12]: “harmoniam volamus, et simul omnino in hocce, quod nostrum cultu<s> in sylvanis hisce academiis, literaturae ad culmen perfectionis perveniat: ut palma ab europaeis aisatiisque universitatibus propriatur” (“Let’s wish for harmony and be agreed in this regard, namely that our culture of literature in these sylvan academies reach the height of perfection, so that the badge of victory can be snatched away from the European and Eastern universities”). Likewise, Stiles often proposed ambitious topics for students to expound in commencement performances. In 1788, one student responded affirmatively to the proposition “An academica educatio Americana, pro civibus nostris, Europae praestet” (“Whether American university education on behalf of our citizens surpasses Europe”).

⁸⁶Lorraine Daston, “The Ideal and Reality of the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment,” *Science in Context* 4/2 (1991), 367–86, at 381.

⁸⁷Laurence Brockliss, “Starting-out, Getting-on and Becoming Famous in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters,” in Andre Holenstein, Hubert Steinke, and Martin Stuber, eds., *Scholars in Action: The Practice of Knowledge and the Figure of the Savant in the 18th Century*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 2013), 71–100, at 80.

⁸⁸A famous example of student discontent is historian Edward Gibbon’s jaundiced reflection on his Oxford Days. In his autobiography, *The Autobiography of Edward Gibbon, Esq.* (New York, 1846), Gibbon flatly dismissed the fourteen months he spent at Magdalen college as “the most idle and unprofitable of my life ... The schools of Oxford and Cambridge were founded in a dark age of false and barbarous science; and they are still tainted with the vices of their origin.” *Ibid.*, 106. In the New World, a particularly precocious youth, like Harvard-educated alchemist George Starkey, might reject in his published works the early science instruction at the college, even as he employed the methods of that very education. On this see William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry* (Chicago, 2002), 156–207.

unsuccessfully, in a bid to secure funding for professors in 1783.⁸⁹ But what made Leiden famous was not the awarding of honorary degrees or the number of students, a statistical preoccupation that Stiles maintained throughout his life. Rather, it was, as scholars like Anthony Grafton and Peter Burke have explained, the “brain drain” of the university that mattered, the rich resources dedicated to attracting preeminent philologists and humanists who could focus their time on producing scholarship rather than lecturing.⁹⁰ The intellectual connections that Stiles forged were simply not the same.

This is not to say that Stiles, to put it crudely, was all talk and no game. He had his hand in just about every American academic society that sprang up in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁹¹ He helped establish and wrote the charter for Brown University.⁹² He placed several of his fresh Yale tutors into presidential positions at other new colonial American universities.⁹³ Like a good university president, he was never not fund-raising, always seeking books and scientific apparatus for his students (some of these efforts helped secure donations not simply for Yale, but for other institutions like Harvard and Princeton).⁹⁴ But when it came to hunting down and entangling intellectuals within the university, an honorary degree was not a professorial post that could generate explicit association of scholar with university. In some sense, the whole premise of an honorary degree conceals a fatal flaw with Stiles’s dream. The recipients of law or theological doctorates *honoris causa* more often than not receive such praise precisely because they have conducted apparently worthwhile lives outside the academy. To consider Benjamin Franklin as the American par excellence in the Republic of Letters, as Stiles did throughout his whole life, curiously undermines the very contention about the importance of the university. Franklin, as is well known, was an autodidact, a man of no formal university training. Furthermore, to make a university degree the passport of entry into the Republic of Letters actually hindered a large portion of possible American participation in this intellectual community. Fewer than one in a thousand men in eighteenth-century North America held a college degree.⁹⁵

⁸⁹Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor: A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency Jonathan Trumbull* (New Haven, 1783), 94.

⁹⁰Peter Burke, “Erasmus and the Republic of Letters,” *European Review* 7/1 (1999), 5–17, at 9. On the reputation and practices of scholarly research at early modern Leiden more broadly, see Anthony Grafton, “Civic Humanism and Scientific Scholarship at Leiden,” in Thomas Bender, ed., *The University and the City: From Medieval Origins to the Present* (Oxford, 1988), 59–79; and, more broadly, William Otterspeer, *Groepsportet met Dame: Het Bolwerk van de Vrijheid: de Leidse Universiteit 1575–1672* (Amsterdam, 2000).

⁹¹As biographers like Abiel Holmes would note after Stiles’s death—to be discussed later in this article—Stiles was a fellow of the American Philosophical Society, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Connecticut Society of Arts and Sciences, and a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹²Walter C. Bronson, *The History of Brown University 1764–1914* (Providence, 1914), 14–27.

⁹³Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan*, 384–5; David W. Robson, “College Founding in the New Republic, 1776–1800,” *History of Education Quarterly* 23/3 (1983), 323–41. Stiles was sometimes asked directly for suggestions for presidents of newly founded universities, like St. John’s College in Annapolis. See Ezra Stiles to Jesse Dewees, 28 Oct. 1790, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 4, Folder 283.

⁹⁴Cora E. Lutz, “Ezra Stiles and the Library,” *Yale University Library Gazette* 56 (1981), 13–21; and Francis Parsons, “Ezra Stiles of Yale,” *New England Quarterly* 9/2 (1936), 286–316.

⁹⁵Ostrander, *Republic of Letters*, 5.

There was also, of course, another substantial portion of the population explicitly excluded: women.

We need not project any contemporary preoccupations onto Stiles to understand how his plan struggled to accommodate roughly half the eighteenth-century population. Stiles well understood that select women could be regarded as members of the early modern Republic of Letters.⁹⁶ On numerous occasions over a period of ten to fifteen years he corresponded with famed historian Catherine Macaulay, whom he also referred to in one of his published sermons as the “ornament of the Republic of Letters.”⁹⁷ Stiles directly secured donations from Macaulay of her works to stock a Connecticut library, and late in his life read Macaulay’s *Letters on Education*, which advocated for robust women’s schooling.⁹⁸ Macaulay served as a clear case in point of a woman intellectual who, though she could take no part in the early modern university, still garnered great fame for herself and her country in the Republic of Letters. Even if much more modest, other colonial American women highlighted to Stiles an intellect that could not be accommodated in his vision of a university-centric intellectual community.

In the fall of 1754, precisely around the time when Stiles was composing his first oration for Franklin and rendering his intellectual plan visible (as discussed above), nine-year-old cousin Alethea Stiles wrote to him. Alethea thanked Stiles for the “pretty presents” he had sent her, but had a bone to pick with the then Yale tutor:

My brother is glad of the book you sent him and says he will learn it. He talks a great deal about going to the college. And why may not I go to college? For my father says one Jenny Cameron put on jacket and breeches and was a good soldier. And why may not I do so and live at college? I have learned Eutropius and am now in Justin.⁹⁹

With her reference to Jenny Cameron, a Scottish woman rumored to have taken part in the Jacobite Rising of 1745, the younger cousin highlighted the precedent for transcending traditional gender roles.¹⁰⁰ This was no fleeting remark of hers,

⁹⁶The place of women in the early modern intellectual world has been the subject of rich research. Among others see Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1986); Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 2012); and Dirk van Miert, “Structural Impediments for Women to Participate in the Republic of Letters (1400–1800),” in Rosemarie Buikema, Antoine Buyse, and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Cultures, Citizenship, and Human Rights* (London, 2019), 197–214.

⁹⁷Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor*, 19.

⁹⁸Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 1: 293, 3: 504. On Macaulay see J. G. A. Pocock, “Catharine Macaulay: Patriot Historian,” in Hilda L. Smith, ed., *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (Cambridge, 1998), 243–59; and Catherine Gardner, “Catharine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education*: Odd but Equal,” *Hypatia* 13 (1998), 118–37.

⁹⁹Alethea Stiles to Ezra Stiles, 7 Oct. 1754, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 11, Folder 899. Marcy writes in continuous blocks without punctuation. I have preserved all of her spelling and wording, but, in the interest of readability for a modern audience, have added punctuation.

¹⁰⁰For one such depiction, see the broadside “Miss Jenny Cameron in a Military Habit,” National Library of Scotland, Jacobite prints and broadsides, 133, Blaikie.SNPG.15.3 A. And, for a wider discussion, Carine Martin, “Female Rebels’: The Female Figure in Anti-Jacobite Propaganda,” in Allan I. Macinnes, Kieran

for Alethea kept at it. She sent Stiles detailed digests of her readings in Roman history.¹⁰¹ And, in a remarkably adroit move at the age of eleven, she passed along a stitched wallet with an accompanying original Latin letter.¹⁰² Both opponents and proponents of women's education in early national America agreed on this: the study of the classics had been the traditionally distinguishing factor of men's education.¹⁰³ To delve into classical history and culture was acceptable, but to start learning the languages, as Caroline Winterer has lucidly shown, was a risky endeavor.¹⁰⁴ Alethea Stiles, however, shattered the paradigm. She showcased to Stiles that she could accomplish fine needlework and fine Latin work as well. Whatever amounted to Alethea's efforts? Stiles apparently responded, but unfortunately no such replies survive today.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, it might not be too far-fetched to suppose that the cousinly correspondence made an impression. During his presidency, Stiles began to directly address learned women in his Latin commencement orations.¹⁰⁶ As private academies took off in the mid- and late eighteenth century, including both coeducational institutions and those tailored only to young women, Stiles provided a fitting question for Yale students to ponder: "whether female academies would be beneficial."¹⁰⁷ The most concrete action that he took to address how women could partake in a local learned community, let alone the Republic of Letters, was characteristically consistent with his previous plan: to award an honorary (non)degree. When twelve-year-old Lucinda Foote passed the Yale entrance examination with flying colors in 1783, Stiles conferred on her a piece of parchment, much more modest than an actual degree, but containing some of the same language in Latin:

Let it be known to you that I examined 12-year-old Miss Lucinda Foot and that she's made remarkable progress in the learned languages, in Latin and

German, and Lesley Graham, eds., *Living with Jacobitism, 1690–1788: The Three Kingdoms and Beyond* (London, 2014), 85–99.

¹⁰¹Alethea Stiles to Ezra Stiles, 22 Dec. 1755, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 11, Folder 900.

¹⁰²Alethea Stiles to Ezra Stiles, 1 March 1756, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 11, Folder 901. The only mention of Alethea Stiles in scholarly literature that I have been able to track down deals with her needlework. In keeping with the character we encounter in the letters, Stiles signed and dated her work, apparently a very unusual move. See Carol Huber, Stephen Huber, Susan P. Schoelwer, and Amy K. Lansing, *With Needle and Brush: Schoolgirl Embroidery from the Connecticut River Valley, 1740–1840* (Old Lyme, CT, 2011), 54, Plate 32.

¹⁰³Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 217–22.

¹⁰⁴Caroline Winterer, "The Female World of Classical Reading in Eighteenth-Century America," in Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly, eds., *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Philadelphia, 2008), 105–23. In her trailblazing research of the past two decades, Winterer has fruitfully explored the ways women engaged with classical culture beyond just reading and writing. See Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca, 2007); and, to a lesser extent, Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life 1780–1910* (Baltimore, 2002).

¹⁰⁵This conclusion stems from the fact that Stiles wrote directly on the epistles both the dates he received them, and those he answered them.

¹⁰⁶Ezra Stiles, Yale College Commencement 1781, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 57, Folder 2525, [11].

¹⁰⁷Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 3: 10. Reference courtesy of Cora E. Lutz, "Ezra Stiles and the Education of Women," *Yale University Library Gazette* 71 (1996), 49–55.

Greek, so much so that I found her to smoothly translate and expound, both words and sentences, parts in Virgil's *Aeneid*, in selections from Cicero's orations, and in the Greek Testament. I completely affirm that, were it not for the reason of her sex, she would be fit to be admitted as a student at Yale university in the recent class. Given from the library of Yale College, 22 December 1783. Ezra Stiles, President.¹⁰⁸

In just about every way, this (non)degree was superfluous.¹⁰⁹ Stiles eagerly recorded the details in his diary, unable, it appears, to witness the inextricable irony. The Yale president believed firmly that his nation's best bet to promote its intellectual character locally and abroad was to be forged at the universities. Therefore, anyone of any intellect, even those whom the university explicitly excluded, had to be connected somehow to the institution. Stiles rarely stopped to consider whether it still made sense to place such stark importance on the university as the broker of American brainpower. Late in his life, though, and especially after his death, it would become clear that it did not. Even when the Republic of Letters appeared to be functioning well for Stiles, there were hints of a chilly reception yet to come.

Clues in the letters

Despite the underlying tensions in his blueprint for further American involvement in the Republic of Letters, Stiles still sought to advance his cause in that tangible, titular way: by sending letters. It was not for nothing that the student who delivered a congratulatory oration to Stiles upon his election to the Yale presidency ended the Latin speech by hoping for increased "epistolary exchange between foreign academies, and benevolent friends of learning throughout the whole world."¹¹⁰ Throughout his life, the eighteenth-century scholar penned letters across the colonies and the Atlantic, to correspondents in at least Britain, Scotland, Germany, Portugal, Russia, and the Netherlands. Extant letters of Stiles's (including those sent or received, as well as drafts) number around a thousand.¹¹¹ This is almost certainly a fraction of all the epistles he ever sent. Unfortunately, many of the letters Stiles composed in the 1780s and 1790s, when he was president of Yale and

¹⁰⁸Ezra Stiles (1727–95) (Yale 1746). Testimonial concerning the educational achievements of Lucinda Foote (MVP #846A), 22 Dec. 1783, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives, Yci 818 +C8: "Vobis notum sit: quod Dominam Lucindam Foot Aetat[is] 12. Examine probavi, eamque in linguis edoctis, Latina et Graeca, laudabilem progressum fecisse; eo ut familiariter et reddidisse & tractasse reperivi, tum verba tum sententias, alibi in Aeneide Virgilio, in selectis Ciceronis Orationibus, et in Graeco Testamento. Testorque omnino illam, nisi Sexus ratione, idoneam ut in classem Recentium in Universitate Yalensi Alumna admitteretur. Datum e Bibliotheca collegii Yalensis, 22 die Decembris, Anno Salutis MDCCLXXXIII. Ezra Stiles President."

¹⁰⁹This is not to say that Foote was unhappy with the honor. The fact that the piece of parchment survives to this day hints at some degree of importance placed upon the object.

¹¹⁰Samuel Whittelsey Dana, *Oratio Gratulatoria*, Ezra Stiles Papers, Box 57, Folder 2487, [9]: "Occasio dabitur, ut speramus instituendi morem, amplificandi—peregrinis cum academiis commercium inibitur epistolarium, cumque munificis literarum amicis ubique gentium."

¹¹¹This estimate is based not only on the Beinecke Library's Ezra Stiles Papers but also those at the New Haven Colony Historical Society (The Ezra Stiles Collection 1682–1795 MF #9). I extend the warmest of thanks to both institutions for providing high-quality scans since travel proved prohibitive during the COVID-19 pandemic.

probably most prolific in his correspondence, are lost.¹¹² Nonetheless, those letters that do survive provide a vivid portrait of the potential and problems in Stiles's international intellectual endeavors.

No set of epistles showcases Stiles's Republic of Letters functioning at its best—and yet foreshadowing failure—than his 1794 correspondence with Christoph Daniel Ebeling.¹¹³ A professor of history and Greek at Hamburg University, Ebeling had begun, twenty years prior, researching for a massive, multivolume *Erdbeschreibung und Geschichte von Amerika* (Description of the Land and History of America).¹¹⁴ A project of this size required mounds of manuscript, masses of information. In other words, it was the perfect opportunity to tap into the Republic of Letters for intellectual exchange and assistance. Ebeling first touched base with Joel Barlow, a promising graduate of Yale living nearby in Germany whom Stiles knew.¹¹⁵ In the letter accompanying Ebeling's, Barlow explained the plan to write this German-language history of the United States, adding that "every such attempt to instruct the European world in whatever concerns America, deserves our warmest encouragement."¹¹⁶ So Barlow's words fell like music on Stiles's ear, for he undoubtedly agreed.

Ebeling laid the flattery on even thicker. Feigning bashfulness, the Hamburg professor doubted whether to even write in the first place. But "Mr. Barlow, whose friendship I am so fortunate to enjoy as he lives near Hamburg since some months, assured me that you would kindly pardon the boldness of a stranger, whose ardent desire to describe America in such a manner as would not be entirely unworthy of its happy state makes him wish for the best materials he may be able to find."¹¹⁷

¹¹²Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan*, 465–72 provides a brief but information-rich account of the Stiles papers. We know that many of Stiles's letters are missing because of an inventory kept in his will. Undoubtedly looking after his own reputation, Stiles had many of his manuscripts collected and bound during his lifetime. Some of those volumes, however, have been lost.

¹¹³There is a modest but serious set of scholarship examining the intellectual aspirations of Ebeling in their own right. See Gordon Stewart, *The Literary Contributions of Christoph Daniel Ebeling* (Amsterdam, 1978); Stewart, "Christoph Daniel Ebeling: America's Friend in Eighteenth Century Germany," *Monatshefte* 68/2 (1978), 151–61; and Christoph Daniel Ebeling and William Coolidge Lane, "Letters of Christoph Daniel Ebeling," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 35/2 (1925), 272–451. In German-language scholarship see also Jürgen Overhoff, "Christoph Daniel Ebeling (1741–1817): Forschungsbericht zu einem weit über Hamburg hinaus bedeutsamen Aufklärer, Amerikanisten, Pädagogen, Publizisten, Musikkritiker und Bibliothekar," *Mitteilungen des Hamburger Arbeitskreises für Regionalgeschichte* 43 (2004), 69–82; and Overhoff, "Ein Literat als Lehrer an der hamburgischen Handlungsakademie: Die politische Ökonomie des Christoph Daniel Ebeling," *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 32 (2008), 255–71.

¹¹⁴The first volume appeared in 1793, with six more to follow by 1816. Volume 1 covered New Hampshire and Massachusetts, Volume 2 Rhode Island and Connecticut, Volume 3 New York, Volume 4 Pennsylvania, Volume 5 Delaware and Maryland, Volume 6 Pennsylvania, and Volume 7 Virginia.

¹¹⁵On several ceremonial occasions, Stiles appointed Barlow to deliver addresses and poems. For a colonial student, this was one of the most sought-after honors.

¹¹⁶Joel Barlow to Ezra Stiles, 27 May 1794, in Ezra Stiles Letters 1794–1795, MS am 825, Houghton University Library, seq. 19. On Barlow's travels and life see Richard Buel Jr, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore, 2011); and Clifford L. Egan, "On the Fringe of the Napoleonic Catastrophe: Joel Barlow's Letters from Central and Eastern Europe, 1812," *Early American Literature* 10/3 (1975), 251–72.

¹¹⁷Christoph Ebeling to Ezra Stiles, 26 June 1794, in Ezra Stiles Letters 1794–1795, MS am 825, Houghton University Library, seq. 22. at [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:444171648\\$22i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:444171648$22i).

Ebeling noted that there was simply no better person than Stiles to help with such a task: “To whom should I rather apply than to you, reverend sir, whose merits are not unknown even to us, distant so many thousand leagues from you?”¹¹⁸ With the *captatio benevolentiae* completed, the professor dug into the nitty-gritty and explained the scope of his project. For every single American state, Ebeling planned to describe the climate, minerals, and meadows; the government, constitutions, and courts; the army, churches, and tax structures; the colleges, academies, and learned societies, among dozens of other topics. Together, these meticulous histories would counter “the many imperfect and false accounts Europe has of your country.” We can imagine that Stiles could not have been more ecstatic upon receiving this epistle. Here was a German scholar, a university professor mind us, asking for the Yale president’s apparently unique help to promote America’s cultural and intellectual character in Europe.

Stiles penned no fewer than eighty pages back to Ebeling. Statistics, original source extracts, analyses, and lists: the Yale president had much to offer. Among many other topics that Stiles covered, he noted the establishment and encouragement of schooling. Education “has been all along carried unto such effect, that it is a very rare thing indeed to find a person of either sex in New England who cannot write & read: and all are possessed of Bibles.”¹¹⁹ When it came to the history of Yale, Stiles was more precise. The college leader detailed the names of every Yale president since its founding (his own name included, of course), as well as the growth in the student population (again, culminating in Stiles’s own presidency).¹²⁰ Ebeling appeared content with the information he had received and the contact he had made. Navigating the Republic of Letters with true dexterity, the Hamburg professor used each contact as a springboard to connect with yet someone else. In Ebeling’s letter to Thomas Jefferson, he began by mentioning that “your worthy country men Mr. J. [Jeremy] Belknap and president Stiles of Yale College have exhorted me, to beg Your kind advice in an arduous task I have undertaken.”¹²¹ The Republic of Letters here was functioning like a well-oiled machine. And yet the medium might have been the real message.

Though Ebeling wrote his letter to Stiles in English, he reiterated that the entire history of the United States would be published for a German audience and thus written in their tongue, a language Stiles did not know (“I wish you read German, in order to peruse my book yourself,” Ebeling remarked).¹²² Ebeling was not unique in this regard, as early modern scholars have long noted that the eighteenth century witnessed a departure from Latin as the universal language of

¹¹⁸Ibid., seq. 23.

¹¹⁹Ezra Stiles to Christoph Ebeling, 20 Feb. 1795, in Ezra Stiles Letters 1794–1795, MS am 825, Houghton University Library, seq. 69.

¹²⁰Ibid., seq. 71.

¹²¹Christoph Daniel Ebeling to Thomas Jefferson, 30 July 1795, Founders Online, National Archives, at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-28-02-0331>. Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 28, 1 January 1794–29 February 1796, ed. John Catanzariti (Princeton, 2000), 423–28. Ebeling framed his work as a clear complement to Jefferson’s history of Virginia, of which an abridged German version, *Jeffersons Beschreibung von Virginien*, had appeared earlier in 1788. Ebeling called this abridgement “very well made, but rather too short.”

¹²²Christoph Ebeling to Ezra Stiles, 26 June 1794, seq. 23.

it after his death.”¹²⁹ Albeit somewhat harsh, this assessment could not have been more correct. While Morgan ended his biography with Stiles’s death, if we trace for the first time the Yale president’s scholarly reception into the early nineteenth century, we are able to witness in tragic detail how Stiles failed to accommodate his vision for the Republic of Letters to contemporary scholarly realities.

Conclusion

In 1795, just as he was planning to pen another letter to his transatlantic correspondent, Ebeling learned that Stiles had died. As it had done since its founding, New England’s intellectual and religious community hurried to commemorate the deceased minister and Yale president. Celebration, however, was not the only treatment that Stiles received. Nothing casts the gap between ideal and reality in greater relief than the different ways the learned world remembered Stiles shortly after his death. In the fragmented and faded remnants of the Republic of Letters, Stiles received some praise close to home. But there was also scorn, from near and far. For someone who had labored his whole life to be considered a member of the scholarly republic and promote his fellow citizens in it, Stiles would be judged on new terms and, in the twist of true tragedy, considered precisely the problem with American intellectuals in the Republic of Letters.

To begin with the praise: shortly after Stiles’s passing, newspapers around the country printed and reprinted fond obituaries. Stiles was remembered for his intellect, contacts, and connections.¹³⁰ One mourning author mentioned, “His mind ... was peculiarly calculated for the duties of that exalted office which he sustained in the republic of letters, and in which he became significantly instrumental in promoting the happiness of his country and of mankind.”¹³¹ A Yale graduate (the same one who delivered the congratulatory oration to Stiles in 1778) argued that the fallen president exhibited “the polished urbanity of the gentleman. Acknowledged eminence in the republic of letters introduced him to an extensive circle of correspondents in the old and new world, and gave him peculiar advantages for promoting the interests of science.”¹³² Abiel Holmes—student, tutor, and son-in-law to Stiles—similarly praised the deceased man in a massive biography published just years later:

Viewing all institutions for the promotion of knowledge, as constituting one grand republic of letters, he conducted as a citizen of this extensive community; and his superiority to local and vulgar prejudices evinces the real greatness of his soul. In this trait of his character he resembled that truly noble

¹²⁹Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan*, 134.

¹³⁰In the days and weeks following Stiles’s death, a number of newspapers printed death notices and obituaries. Among others were the *Connecticut Journal*, the *Argus & Greenleaf’s New Daily Advertiser* (New York), the *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), the *Boston Gazette*, the *New Hampshire Gazette*, the *United States Chronicle* (Providence), and *Spooner’s Vermont Journal*.

¹³¹Anon., “Biographical and Panegyric: President Stiles,” *The Mercury* (Boston), 26 May 1795, [1].

¹³²James Dana, *The Heavenly Mansions: A Sermon Preached May 14, 1795* (New Haven, 1795), 30.

emperor, who said: “As I am Antoninus, Rome is my city, and my country; but, as I am a MAN, the WORLD.”¹³³

More than any individual obituary, Holmes’s biography spread the memory of Stiles’s intellectual and religious passion. The work even received positive reviews in English and German periodicals.¹³⁴ A Yale student under Stiles also noted laconically, but no doubt lovingly, in a 1799 diary entry, “Finished reading the *Life of President Stiles*. It is a very valuable piece of biography.”¹³⁵

As clearly witnessed above, much of this admiration connected Stiles to his transatlantic intellectual efforts. Writing a few years later, a Princeton divinity professor would make this point even more cogently. In his retrospective look at the eighteenth century, Samuel Miller mused that “the last century is not only distinguished by numerous discoveries, and by rich additions to the general stock of science, but also by the rise of several nations from obscurity in the republic of letters, to considerable literary and scientific eminence.”¹³⁶ Among other countries, there was America, and among the individuals who helped accomplish this supposed maturation into scientific renown was Ezra Stiles.¹³⁷ Another student of Stiles’s reiterated the point several decades later, arguing that Stiles “has done more than any other person to explain and recommend to the respect of mankind, the wisdom of the institutions of New England.”¹³⁸ It would seem that the Yale president had made his dream come true. Nonetheless, if we are to take the transnational discourse of the Republic of Letters seriously, we must consider Stiles’s reception beyond his home country.

Writing from Hamburg in a German periodical, Ebeling too produced an obituary for this “upstanding, learned, and extremely active man” (“rechtschaffnen, gelehrten und äußerst tätigen Mannes”).¹³⁹ The German professor emphasized his personal, albeit brief, connection to Stiles: “I have to add, based on my own experience, that I also mourn the loss of this worthy man—because I had the chance to get to know his worth through active demonstrations.”¹⁴⁰ Ebeling likewise highlighted the Yale president’s erudite contacts, while also subtly provincializing them. Stiles apparently “maintained an extensive correspondence with the

¹³³Abiel Holmes, *The Life of Ezra Stiles, D.D. LL. D.* (Boston, 1798), 107. Interestingly, Holmes notes that “the curious enquirer will naturally wish to know the replies to many queries, taken from the President’s letters to the Literati in foreign countries,” but that “no replies have been discovered.” *Ibid.*, v.

¹³⁴See, for instance, anon., “Half-Yearly Retrospect of American Literature,” *Monthly Magazine or British Register* 9 (1800), 647; and anon., “Historischen Wissenschaften,” *Intelligenzblatt der Allgem. Literatur-Zeitung* 182 (1802), 1478.

¹³⁵Thomas Robbins, *Diary of Thomas Robbins, D.D. 1796–1854*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1886), 103.

¹³⁶Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York, 1803), 302. Reference courtesy of Floris Solleveld, “Afterlives of the Republic of Letters: Learned Journals and Scholarly Community in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 5 (2020), 82–116.

¹³⁷Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 397 n.

¹³⁸James Kent, *An Address Delivered at New Haven before the Phi Beta Kappa Society* (New Haven, 1831), 44.

¹³⁹Christoph Ebeling, “Todesfälle merkwürdiger Personen, nebst einigen Nachrichten von ihren Lebensumständen,” *Amerikanisches Magazin* (Hamburg, 1797), 172–4, at 172.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 173: “... muß ich aus eigener Erfahrung hinzusetzen, daß auch ich den Verlust dieses würdigen Mannes beklage, weil ich Gelegenheit hatte, seinen Werth durch thätige Beweise kennen zu lernen.”

learned men in North America, as well as various men in England. He was also a member of the most distinguished academic societies in the United States.”¹⁴¹ The effort to bind Stiles up with intellectual ties connected only by Britain and America is no coincidence. As historians like Kaspar Eskildsen have argued, eighteenth-century German scholars largely sought to create their own national republic of scholarship, failing to believe in the wider Republic of Letters, a term conspicuously absent in Ebeling’s obituary.¹⁴² Even with evidence to the contrary (Ebeling himself wrote from Germany!), the Hamburg professor portrayed Stiles as a participant in a narrower intellectual world. Ebeling’s obituary also betrays the contemporary preoccupation with publication in learned periodicals, a scholarly fixation that would spell doom for Stiles. For it was not the number of honorary degrees or letters sent or contacts forged between universities that mattered most. It was, quite simply, the individual scholarly output that could make or break intellectual reputation.

Ebeling provided a descriptive bibliography of Stiles’s publications. The number of items on the list? Just two. First, there was the president’s Latin inaugural oration, which the Hamburg professor succinctly, though not too flatteringly, summed up as “40 pages in which he tries to provide a kind of overall survey of the sciences.”¹⁴³ The latinity of the speech, Ebeling bitinglly added, “is a considerable way off from the classical [standard].”¹⁴⁴ Intellectual quips quickly lose their sting over time, but this assessment of Ebeling’s would not be too far off from dismissing someone’s academic writing today as “not scholarly enough,” or, worse yet, “poorly written.” More criticism followed. On the one English sermon that Stiles published, Ebeling reminded his German audience that “according to our conceptions of eloquence, this speech is too packed with erudition and too exhaustively learned in its treatment.”¹⁴⁵ In terms of serious scholarship, Ebeling could find little. The obituary ended on an underwhelming note: “It cannot be determined from these writings in which scholarly fields Stiles was mostly engaged. There are no essays of his in the collections of the academic societies of which he was a member.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹Ibid., 172: “Mit den Gelehrten in Nordamerika, wie auch mit verschiedenen in England, unterhielt er einen ausgebreiteten Briefwechsel; auch war er Mitglied der vornehmsten gelehrten Gesellschaften in den V. St.”

¹⁴²Kasper Eskildsen, “How Germany Left the Republic of Letters,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65/3 (2004), 421–32.

¹⁴³Ebeling, “Todesfälle merkwürdiger Personen,” 173: “40 Seiten worin er eine Art Übersicht aller Wissenschaften zu geben sucht.”

¹⁴⁴Ibid.: “Die Latinität dieser Rede ist von der klassischen ziemlich entfernt.” In regard to this question of classical Latinity, I, for one, do not find Stiles to stray far from classical standards like those of Cicero. The few infelicities in the Latin are more due to printing errors or small mistakes than to stylistic decisions. Based on evidence from having examined over a dozen unique copies of his printed inaugural oration, it appears that Stiles also personally corrected the same few slips in Latin spelling or grammar. Nonetheless, the perceived problem of Stiles’s Latinity seems to have persisted. In his biography of the deceased Yale president, Abiel Holmes included a lengthy and learned footnote about Renaissance attitudes towards departing from classical Latinity. See Holmes, *The Life of Ezra Stiles*, 28–9.

¹⁴⁵Ebeling, “Todesfälle merkwürdiger Personen,” 174: “Nach unseren Begriffen von Beredsamkeit ist diese Rede zu überladen mit Belesenheit, und zu abhandelnd.”

¹⁴⁶Ibid.: “In welchen Wissenschaften Stiles sich am meisten umgesehen hatte, läßt sich aus diesen Schriften nicht entscheiden. In den Sammlungen der gelehrten Gesellschaften, von welchen er Mitglied war, finden sich keine Aufsätze von ihm.”

On the one hand, Ebeling was demonstrably mistaken, but, on the other hand, the blunder did not matter. The Yale president had published at least one other Latin oration, as well as his roughly 350-page history of three Puritan judges involved in the trial and killing of Charles I.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, by digging hard enough through newspaper and periodical databases available in our current digital age, we can turn up a few other select essays and reports of Stiles's.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it makes little sense from the vantage point of today to prove the early modern Hamburg professor wrong. Glory, fame, and renown in the Republic of Letters—however sought-after they were, these were prizes that required readership. Like the tired cliché about a tree in the forest, without the knowledge of Stiles's publications, they may as well have not existed for Ebeling and his German audience. Publication in periodicals mattered. Indeed, there was a reason why the eighteenth-century French scientist François Rozier wrote to the American Philosophical Society in 1773, observing that “men of learning do not cease to complain of the slow communication of discoveries and news relative to the arts and science.”¹⁴⁹ Rozier promised that if contributions could be solicited for his learned periodical, “all Europe will be informed in the space of three months or less.”¹⁵⁰ By failing to partake in the learned periodicals of his day, Stiles failed to be noticed.

Later biographical entries, including one in the early nineteenth-century, massive, multivolume *Dictionnaire universel, historique, critique, et bibliographique*, approached closer to the truth about Stiles's scholarly output, but one that was no more satisfying: “He left behind more than forty manuscripts, one *Ecclesiastic History of New England*, which had not been completed.”¹⁵¹ Likewise a mid-nineteenth century Dutch history of the United States—*De Kerk, School, en Wetenschap in de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika* (The Church, School, and Science in the United States of North America)—had much to say about many American authors and their publications, but on Stiles it only mentioned in passing that he was an “outstanding mathematician” (“voortreffelijken wiskundige”).¹⁵² In the coming decades, the largest reception that any of Stiles's writings garnered was a letter to Benjamin Franklin, whose select epistles were translated into at least French, German, and Dutch.¹⁵³ Again, the individual mattered here,

¹⁴⁷Ezra Stiles, *Oratio Funebris Pro Exequiis Celebrandis Viri Perillustri Johnathan Law Armigeri* (Novi-Londini, 1751); and Stiles, *A History of the Three Judges of King Charles I* (Hartford, 1794). Ebeling mistakenly believed that the latter had not yet been published before Stiles died.

¹⁴⁸Several decades later, a much fuller bibliography of Stiles's work did appear in S. Austin Allibone, *A Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors* (London, 1870), 2259.

¹⁴⁹François Rozier to American Philosophical Society, 24 Jan. 1773, as quoted in James E. McClellan III, “The Scientific Press in Transition: Rozier's Journal and the Scientific Societies in the 1770s,” *Annals of Science* 36 (1979), 425–49, at 444.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁵¹Louis-Mayeul Chaudon, *Dictionnaire universel, historique, critique, et bibliographique*, vol. 11 (Paris, 1812), 513. Thanks are due to Anna Delwiche for help with the French.

¹⁵²Derk Buddingh, *De Kerk, School, en Wetenschap in de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika* (Utrecht, 1853), 182.

¹⁵³For the European editions of Franklin's select epistles see Benjamin Franklin, *Private Correspondence of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William Temple Franklin (London, 1817); Franklin, *Gedeknschriften van Benjamin Franklin Bestaande in Uitgelezen Brieven* (Haarlem, 1817); Franklin, *Correspondance inédite et secreté du. Docteur B. Franklin* (Paris, 1817); and Franklin, *Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Nachgelassene*

not the institution. Stiles's effort to grow the Republic of Letters from the universities was not the object of praise. Unfortunately for the deceased president, neither were his writings.

In fact, some would soon critique Stiles for being a poor example of American ingenuity and literature. An 1807 article in the *Edinburgh Review*, one of the most prominent learned journals of the time, had little nice to say about the "few specimens of the finer arts which from time to time come across the Atlantic."¹⁵⁴ Mockingly citing a paragraph of Ezra Stiles's, whose works were apparently "not sufficiently known," the reviewer sought to showcase the poor state of American writings.¹⁵⁵ In an article that appeared in a New York magazine months later, an unamused American author dismissed the "fashion" in British journals "to sneer mightily and to make themselves merry at the state of literature in America, which they pronounce to be very coarse and very superficial."¹⁵⁶ The disgruntled writer referred to the offhanded citation of Stiles, which was supposed to demonstrate that "sentiments so small, and a style so tedious, are not only tolerated, but encouraged in this country."¹⁵⁷ Instead of defending the former Yale president, the essayist simply dismissed him: "But all the world knows, that Dr. Ezra Stiles never was remarkable for the vigour of his intellect, or the refinement of his taste; he was a good, plain, matter-of-fact man, who collected together a multitude of miscellaneous matters, and told them to his friends and the public, in no very connected series, or elegant arrangement."¹⁵⁸ In other words, Stiles was faulted for an apparent lack of originality and style. Tragically, he was accused of being a poor intellectual example for his country. And even more tragically, at least some of his countrymen agreed. Conveying information to friends, long a staple of the Republic of Letters, no longer mattered as much as individual intellect and publications.

Stiles's vision, both for himself and for his country, did not come to fruition in the eighteenth century or the early nineteenth. Another anonymous writer in an early nineteenth-century publication forcibly questioned, "What *men of letters* has America ever produced, whose names have been advantageously heard of beyond the precincts of their own country?"¹⁵⁹ This writer conceded the example of Benjamin Franklin, but again bitterly inquired, "What other American name has been heard of as worthy of a place in the republic of letters?"¹⁶⁰ This was no passing remark, for early national Americans often noticed the criticism directed at them. An anonymous "Americanus" in 1800 would even complain of too harsh treatment of America's place in the intellectual world: "there is an

Schriften und Correspondenz (Weimar, 1817). Fittingly enough, the one letter of Stiles included in each of these collections featured him evoking the Republic of Letters ("de letterkundige republiek," "la république des lettres," or "Republic der Wissenschaften").

¹⁵⁴Anon., "Janson's Stranger in America," *Edinburgh Review* 10 (1807), 103–16, at 114.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵⁶Anon., "Hints on the State of American Literature," *Monthly Register, and Review of the United States*, 1 Dec. 1807, 1–21, at 1.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.* The writer adds that Stiles's friends supposedly tried to prevent him from publishing one of his works "lest it should injure the worthy President's former reputation, as a man of letters, and an author."

¹⁵⁹Philopolis, *A Letter to the Editor of "The Scotsman, or "Edinburgh Political and Literary Journal"* (London, 1825), 37, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

American size of genius, corresponding to our youthful standing in the republic of letters, which can no more be estimated by transatlantic proportions than a yard measure among the inhabitants of *Lilliput* by a measure of the same denomination of *Brobdingnag*.”¹⁶¹ With the fantastical and piercing comparisons, this author acknowledged that his nation at the turn of the nineteenth century was still young in the transnational scholarly world. Stiles had sought to bring American involvement in the Republic of Letters to age, but it never developed widely enough to garner recognition.

In the ensuing decades after Stiles’s death, few would even believe in the possibility of a Republic of Letters, past or present. Writing from Göttingen in 1816, George Ticknor, a to-be Harvard professor, solemnly reflected that this imagined community had never existed: “the thing itself remained as unreal as Sidney’s “Arcadia,” or Sir Thomas More’s “Utopia.”¹⁶² In fact, as Caroline Winterer elucidates in her recent *American Enlightenments*, many Americans doubted their own intellectual standing: “Long after the Revolution, Americans languished in their own minds—and those of European nations—as a second-tier intellectual backwater.” According to Winterer, “it would be the new American aristocracy of wealth created by the Industrial Revolution that would pump enough money into U.S. universities and libraries to bring them to greatness in the twentieth century.”¹⁶³ Herein lies the great irony of Stiles’s lifework.

Even before the founding of the new nation, the aspirant intellect had been plotting to launch American scholars onto the international scene. As president of Yale during the very early years of the republic, Stiles sensed an opportunity to connect American universities into the Republic of Letters. On the one hand, his vision was decidedly ahead of the times, originating far before the recognizable plans for the modern American research university in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But, on the other hand, his university focus failed to appreciate the increasing premium placed on publication and the place of individuals over institutions in the Republic of Letters. Stiles had believed firmly and fervently his entire life that the early modern, humanistic Republic of Letters was not just real, but ready to welcome him and his fellow Americans once and for all. Unfortunately, that never fully happened for Stiles. And so as the curtain closed on the Republic of Letters, arguably the most persistent ploy to inset America into the scholarly performance came to an incomplete end.

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¹⁶¹Americanus, “Remarks on American Criticism,” *Monthly Magazine, and American Review*, Sept. 1800, [3], original emphasis. The reference is to fantastical creatures of Jonathan Swift’s creation. See Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (London, 1726). For discussions of Swift’s influence and readership in eighteenth-century America see Flory Perkins Gates, “James Otis and Jonathan Swift: Comments upon Their Literary Relationship,” *New England Quarterly* 5/2 (1932), 344–6; Jordan D. Fiore, “Jonathan Swift and the American Episcopate,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 11/3 (1954), 425–33; and Yvette R. Piggush, “‘A Very Dangerous Talent’: Wit for Women in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Boarding School*,” *New England Quarterly* 92 (2019), 46–74.

¹⁶²George Ticknor, *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor*, vol. 1 (New York, 1909), 100.

¹⁶³Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, 251.

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