

Space, Nation, and the Triumph of Region: A View of the World from Houston

Cameron Blevins

For this article's accompanying online component, see Cameron Blevins, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," <http://spatialhistory.stanford.edu/viewoftheworld>.

On a rainy spring evening in 1898 the Texas newspaper editor Rienzi Johnston found himself in Chicago's Grand Pacific Hotel for the annual banquet of the Associated Press (AP). Johnston and eighty-seven fellow editors from across the country dined alongside two full-size printing presses built out of flowers and candy while seated at tables arranged to form the initials AP. Over little-neck clams and roast snipe they listened to a series of speeches on the defining issues of the day. A prominent lawyer defended the Associated Press and its powerful national news syndicate from charges of monopoly, while a string of boisterous toasts celebrated the recent outbreak of war between the United States and Spain. In a fit of patriotism, one southern editor rose from his chair to declare that three decades removed from a bloody civil war, "Our People: they know no North, no South, no East, no West." Johnston was no stranger to national integration. This editor of a midsize regional paper served as Texas's delegate to the Democratic National Committee, briefly filled a vacated seat in the U.S. Senate, and was a rising leader within the AP's ranks. Johnston moved comfortably in a web of national associations and affiliations that extended well beyond his office in Houston and the carefully arranged tables of the Chicago banquet hall.¹

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¹ *The Associated Press Sixth Annual Report: The Board of Directors to the Stockholders at the Seventh Annual Meeting, Held at Chicago, May 17, 1899* (New York, 1899), 209–32, esp. 227, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433082527858>. Rienzi Johnston was a former president of the Texas Press Association and would later serve as the vice president for the Associated Press. For Johnston's involvement in the Associated Press, see *American Newspaper Publishers Association Bulletin*, no. 1139, March 4, 1904, p. 90; "M. E. S.": *His Book, a Tribute and a Souvenir of the Twenty-Five Years, 1893–1918, of the Service of Melville E. Stone as General Manager of the Associated Press*

As Johnston raised his glass of champagne in Chicago on the evening of May 18, 1898, thousands of readers in Texas opened up the Wednesday edition of his newspaper, the *Houston Daily Post*. They were met with a flurry of news items from places scattered across space: a tornado swept across Nebraska, Spanish warships docked in Puerto Rico, and Texas's dentist association convened in Waco. The Baltimore Orioles won both games of a doubleheader with the Philadelphia Phillies, and a fire broke out in a Houston laundry. Nebraska, Spain, Puerto Rico, Waco, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Houston merged into a constellation of locations that readers used to craft mental maps of the world. By printing some places more than others, papers such as the *Houston Daily Post* continually reshaped space for nineteenth-century Americans. Johnston's national connections and the expansive daily geography of his paper point to a larger question: How did newspapers construct space in an age of nationalizing forces?²

Historians have traditionally experienced an uneasy relationship with space and place. Some still operate under the old positivist paradigm of, in the geographer Edward Soja's formulation, seeing space as an empty vessel for human action. In recent decades, however, the "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences has re-centered questions of space and place for historians. The work of Henri Lefebvre stands at the heart of this shift. The French philosopher's *The Production of Space* oriented a generation of historians to the ideas that space is socially constructed and that this process is crucial to understanding a society. Far from being a passive backdrop, space is constitutive, ever-changing, and strongly tied to processes of power. Other spatial thinkers from the 1970s onward similarly worked against geography's positivist tradition in their articulation of place. Scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan, Denis Cosgrove, Michel de Certeau, Doreen Massey, and Edward Casey offer theoretical frameworks for how societies and individuals transform space into a particular, defined *place* by inscribing locations with meanings, values, feelings, and imaginings. Place is constructed through multiple channels, from lived experiences to emotional attachments to acts of naming.³

(New York, 1918), 307; and Richard Allen Schwarzlose, *The Nation's Newsbrokers*, vol. II: *The Rush to Institution, from 1865 to 1920* (Evanston, 1990), 256, 258. For his involvement in the Texas Press Association, see F. B. Bailio, *A History of the Texas Press Association: From Its Organization in Houston in 1880 to Its Annual Convention in San Antonio in 1913* (Dallas, 1916), 125, 134. For his involvement in the Democratic National Committee, see Frank W. Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans*, ed. Eugene C. Barker (4 vols., Chicago, 1916), IV, 2014–16; and *The Baltimore Sun, Almanac for 1901* (Baltimore, 1901), 60. For biographical information on Johnston, including his stint as a U.S. senator in 1913, see "Johnston, Rienzi Melville," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fjo38>.

² "A Tornado in Nebraska," *Houston Daily Post*, May 18, 1898, p. 4, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph82891/m1/4/>; James Gordon Bennett, "The Spanish Fleet," *ibid.*, p. 1, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph82891/m1/1/>; "A Summary of Today's Important News," *ibid.*, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph82891/m1/3/>; "The National League," *ibid.*; "Fire in a Laundry," *ibid.* On the concept of mental maps, see Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (New York, 1974); Alan K. Henrikson, "Mental Maps," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (New York, 1991), 177–92; and Alan K. Henrikson, "The Geographical 'Mental Maps' of American Foreign Policy Makers," *International Political Science Review*, 1 (Oct. 1980), 495–530.

³ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989). On the "spatial turn," see the introductory essay for the special issue "Historical GIS: The Spatial Turn in Social Science History," Anne Kelly Knowles, "Introduction," *Social Science History*, 24 (Fall 2000), 451–70; Anne Kelly Knowles and Amy Hillier, eds., *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship* (Redlands, 2008); Diarmid A. Finnegan, "The Spatial Turn: Geographical Approaches in the History of Science," *Journal of the History of Biology*, 41 (Summer 2008), 369–88; and Charles W. J. Withers, "Place and the 'Spatial Turn' in Geography and in History," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70 (Oct. 2009), 637–58. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass., 1991). Other influential works on the production of

Questions of space and place appear, both explicitly and implicitly, in some of the most influential historical scholarship of the past two decades. In *Gay New York* (1994) George Chauncey mapped the changing “sexual topography” of New York City as men appropriated neighborhoods, cafeterias, and bathhouses into a gay male world. Walter Johnson engaged in a rich analysis of place in *Soul by Soul* (1999) by arguing that southern antebellum slavery crystallized at the particular site of the slave market. Scholars such as Becky Nicolaides, Robert Self, and Thomas Sugrue led a wave of “new suburban history” to situate power and space in the connections between cities and suburbs. Essays on the theory of spatial history, a profusion of panels at major conferences, and even coverage by national news media indicate that spatial history is a thriving field.⁴

My work incorporates space and place by analyzing how Johnston’s *Houston Daily Post* constructed an imagined geography between 1894 and 1901. The term *imagined geography* operates in the tradition of Lefebvre by positing the paper’s geography as an active process of social construction rather than a passive reflection of the world. Newspapers print, and thereby privilege, certain places over others. The *Houston Daily Post* demonstrates how a middling regional newspaper produced space in relation to the large-scale forces reshaping late nineteenth-century America. Although the ubiquitous phrase “the annihilation of time and space” had become by the 1890s, in the words of one historian, a “stale metaphor,” this breathless cliché encapsulated national developments that defined the age. Technologies from the telegraph to the railroad to the telephone knit the continent together. Standard Oil, Carnegie Steel, and their fellow behemoth corporations reshaped the political economy, while groups such as the American Railway Union, the

space include David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore, 1973); Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (New York, 1984); Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York, 1984); Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics*, 16 (April 1986), 22–27; Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*; and Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (New York, 1994). For an overview of the major issues and writers addressing space and place, see Phil Hubbard and Rob Kitchin, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London, 2011). Influential writings on place and place-making include Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, 1977); Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London, 1984); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, 1984); Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* (June 1991), 24–29; and Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, 1997). On place-naming, language, and place, see Hilda Kuper, “The Language of Sites in the Politics of Space,” *American Anthropologist*, 74 (June 1972), 411–25; Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago, 1987); Yi-Fu Tuan, “Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81 (no. 4, 1991), 684–96; and J. B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” in *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, ed. Paul Laxton (Baltimore, 2001), 51–81. For accessible introductions to the concept of place, see John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston, 1989); and Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (New York, 2004).

⁴ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York, 1994), esp. 23. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999). Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996). For an introduction regarding this topic and suburbs, see Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds., *The New Suburban History* (Chicago, 2006). Philip J. Ethington, “Placing the Past: ‘Groundwork’ for a Spatial Theory of History,” *Rethinking History*, 11 (Dec. 2007), 465. See also the commentaries following Philip J. Ethington’s essay by Thomas Bender, David Carr, Edward Casey, Edward Dimendberg, and Alan Munslow. *Ibid.* At its 2012 conference, the American Historical Association featured a series of sessions called “The Future Is Here: Digital Methods in Research and Teaching in History.” See *Program of the 126th Annual Meeting: American Historical Association, Chicago, January 5–8, 2012* (Washington, 2012), iv, 74. Coverage of spatial history in the news includes Patricia Cohen, “Humanities Scholars Embrace Digital Technology,” *New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2010, p. C1.

Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the People's party blossomed into national organizations. Sectional divisions and disparities remained, but far-flung communities found themselves tied to ever-larger forces that subsumed region and locality. It is tempting to neatly translate these processes of integration and nationalization into how newspapers produced space. Spurred on by the sprawling news conglomerate of the Associated Press and an integrated system of information, newspapers presumably constructed an increasingly homogenized imagined geography. A deeper look at Johnston's paper, however, reveals a much more complicated process. Despite Johnston's seat at the AP banquet, the late nineteenth-century forces of nationalization, incorporation, and standardization did not neatly map onto the pages of the *Houston Daily Post*. Instead, the paper transmuted them into a particular imagined geography that emphasized regional specificity rather than national integration.⁵

To measure and map the *Houston Daily Post*'s production of space, I turn to an increasingly powerful instrument in the historian's tool kit: digital technology. The twenty-first century's electronic abundance presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The *Houston Daily Post* is one of more than 1,100 newspapers digitized by the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* initiative. Even this single slice of the digital archive, however, proves massive and unwieldy: from 1894 to 1901, the *Houston Daily Post* printed more than 1,700 issues, 20,000 pages, and 115 million words. For perspective, a full-time researcher poring over the *Houston Daily Post* nonstop for eight hours a day, five days a week, would take more than three years to finish reading the paper.⁶

Rather than drown in a deluge of source material, I turn to "distant reading," a method articulated most famously in the humanities by the literary scholar Franco Moretti. Distant reading seeks out macropatterns across large numbers of texts. Instead of analyzing

⁵ My use of "imagined geography" is a conscious reference to Edward Said's "imaginative geography" and Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities." Both concepts cover many of the themes I explore in this article, including socially constructed space, relations of power, and overlapping scales. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979), 53–55; and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983). Richard R. John, *Network Nation: Inventing American Telecommunications* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), esp. 11–12. Many syntheses of the period highlight national forces, including Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877–1920* (New York, 1967); and Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982). The emergence of national telecommunications technology is outlined in John, *Network Nation*. For examples of how business historians have long articulated integrative forces, see Louis Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," *Business History Review*, 44 (Autumn 1970), 279–90; Alfred Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); and Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895–1904* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985). A classic treatment of the mobilization of national political parties is Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York, 1978). On the growth of the American government, see Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (New York, 1982); and Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). For works offering detailed discussions of the relationship between sectional disparities in development and national politics, see Richard Franklin Bensel, *Sectionalism and American Political Development, 1880–1980* (Madison, 1984); and Richard Franklin Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (New York, 2000), 289–344. On the role of the Associated Press in homogenizing information, see Menahem Blondheim, *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

⁶ As of September 3, 2013, *Chronicling America* listed 1,105 newspaper titles available for viewing on its Web site, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers/>. The collection I analyze contains 1,716 issues, 20,411 pages, and 115,148,132 words. Rough time calculations were based on a generous reading speed of 300 words per minute, multiplied by 480 minutes in an eight-hour workday, multiplied by 260 workdays in a year. For an early example of a historian's manual content analysis of a much smaller set of newspaper data, see Richard T. Farrell, "Advice to Farmers: The Content of Agricultural Newspapers, 1860–1910," *Agricultural History*, 51 (Jan. 1977), 209–17.

specific passages in Edward Bellamy's 1887 utopian novel *Looking Backward*, for instance, the historian might track themes of utopianism across hundreds of nineteenth-century novels. This approach often necessitates the use of computers to "read" massive quantities of text. In the case of my project, I measure the frequency and distribution of specific geographic place-names across the pages of the *Houston Daily Post*. While perusing an issue of the *Houston Daily Post*, a historian might intuit that Chicago loomed large in the Houston paper's imagined geography. A computer, by comparison, can count exactly how often the word *Chicago* appeared in every issue of every year and then map the city's position in a hierarchy of constructed space.⁷ (See figure 1.)

Counting words is a blunt tool to study a complex subject. I am not trying to revive the quantitative history movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and I do not elevate digital analysis as a form of scientific "proof." Distant reading cannot and will not replace the close reading of historical texts and the interpretation of their meaning and context. The two must be used in concert. Digital methodology played an indispensable role throughout my project in crafting new questions and uncovering hidden patterns. But computational analysis alone cannot articulate the full complexity and significance of my topic. Consequently, I weave together both digital and traditional readings of the text to present a richer understanding of how newspapers produced space. Given the recent interest in digital history and its centrality to my paper, I have written an accompanying online essay, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," that elaborates on my methodology and presents interactive visualizations to map the *Houston Daily Post's* imagined geography. Analyzing hundreds of millions of words illuminates the complex ways one newspaper produced regionally distinctive space in an age of national forces.⁸

The Growth of a City and Its Paper

Houston was in many ways a typical midsize American city in the 1890s. Established as a frontier outpost during the chaotic upheaval of the Texas Revolution in the 1830s, the town was transformed by railroad construction and an influx of migrants into a regional entrepôt and the state's second-largest city by 1890. Railway lines connected Houston to the hinterlands of central and eastern Texas and western Louisiana, carrying lumber and cotton into the city and from there to national and international markets. Much like Atlanta, Memphis, and Birmingham, Houston embodied the regional urban development of the New South in the late nineteenth century. The discovery of oil in nearby Beaumont in 1901 inaugurated Houston's dizzying ascent from a small commercial city

⁷ Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London, 2013); Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London, 2005). For responses to Franco Moretti and "distant reading," see Jonathan Goodwin and John Holbo, eds., *Reading Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Critical Responses to Franco Moretti* (Anderson, 2011), <http://www.parlorpress.com/pdf/ReadingMapsGraphsTrees.pdf>. The literary historian and digital humanities leader Matthew Jockers prefers the term *macroanalysis*. Matthew Jockers, *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History* (Urbana, 2013). Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (Boston, 1887).

⁸ I consciously align my work with the field of digital humanities. For an introduction to the field, see Matthew K. Gold, ed., *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis, 2012). On the role of computing in the discipline of history, see "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *Journal of American History*, 95 (Sept. 2008), 452–91. Cameron Blevins, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space: A View of the World from Houston," *The Spatial History Project*, <http://spatialhistory.stanford.edu/viewoftheworld>.

Occurrences of Place Names

Mentions per 100,000 words in the *Houston Daily Post*, 1894-1901

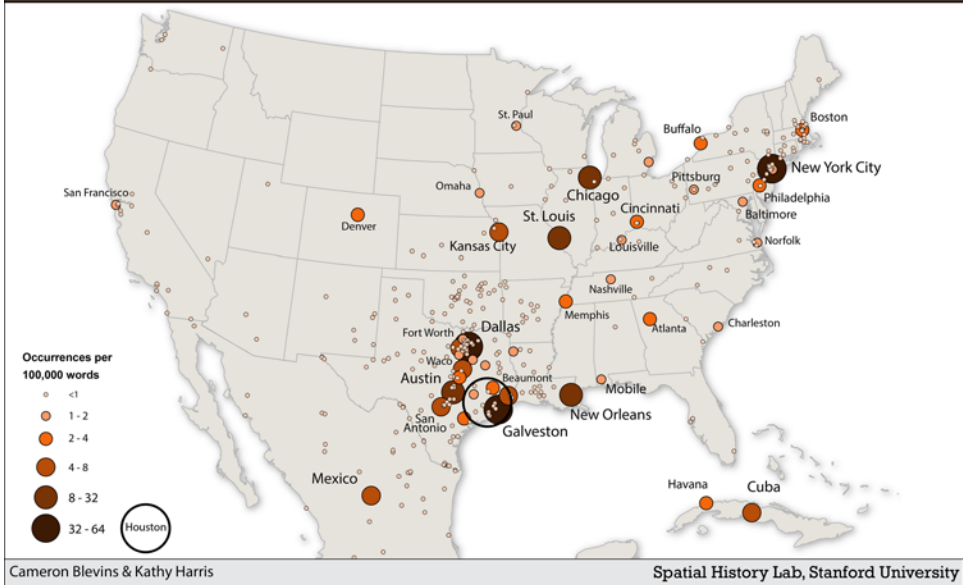


Figure 1. The frequency with which the *Houston Daily Post* printed specific place-names reveals the imagined geography of the newspaper. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, *Spatial History Lab, Stanford University*.

into the “Energy Capital of the World.” In the seven years leading up to 1901, however, Houston could stand in for any number of middling cities in the urban United States.⁹

The *Houston Daily Post* emerged by the 1890s as the city’s leading newspaper. Local businessman J. L. Watson established the paper in 1885 and quickly brought a modernizing bent to his enterprise; in 1890 he bought several linotype machines, making the *Houston Daily Post* one of only three papers in the nation and the first paper west of the Mississippi River to use the new technology. Under the management of Watson and the editorial direction of Rienzi Johnston (also a prominent local businessman), the paper catered to an upper-class and middle-class clientele by printing commercial information along with the standard fare of news, editorials, entertainment, and advertisements. The staunchly Democratic paper emerged by the mid-1890s as one of the two largest papers in the state, with over 9,200 daily subscribers and more than 23,500 subscribers to its weekly edition. In 1899 the national advertising trade journal *Printers’ Ink* selected the *Houston Daily Post* as one of four finalists in the “Southern Sugar Bowl,” a contest for newspapers in the southern half of the country that provided the best value for advertis-

⁹ For general histories of Houston, see Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: The Unknown City, 1836–1946* (College Station, 1991); David G. McComb, *Houston, the Bayou City* (Austin, 1969); and George M. Fuermann, “Houston, 1880–1910,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 71 (Oct. 1967), 226–46. Houston had 27,557 residents in 1890. See Elizabeth Cruce Alvarez, ed. *Texas Almanac, 2004–2005* (Dallas, 2004), 383, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht162511/m1/>. The classic treatment of Houston’s position in the New South is Harold L. Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830–1910* (Philadelphia, 1983). For references to Houston as the “Energy Capital of the World,” see Story Jones Sloane III, *Houston in the 1920s and 1930s* (Charleston, 2009), 7.

ers. By the turn of the century, the *Houston Daily Post* was a successful commercial paper in a successful commercial city.¹⁰

Newspapers such as the *Houston Daily Post* were one of the primary shapers of space for nineteenth-century Americans. They were by no means the only sources of geographical information—maps of roads and rivers, letters from out-of-state relatives, or popular travelogues could all influence how people saw the world. But newspapers had the advantage of being cheap, widely available, and timely. They underlay what the historical sociologist William Roy terms “structural power,” or “the ability to determine the context within which decisions are made.” As one of the late nineteenth century’s most ubiquitous sources of information, papers such as the *Houston Daily Post* helped define the geographical context of the world by printing some locations and ignoring others. To understand the *Houston Daily Post*’s imagined geography is in part to understand the structural power of the age.¹¹

My approach to analyzing newspapers requires a holistic conceptualization of “news” that includes the entire spectrum of a paper. I intentionally aggregate all content—feature stories, editorials, advertisements, freight tables, stock quotes, classifieds—into potential geographic sources for readers. The word *Dallas* in a front-page headline was given the same weight as a *Dallas* in a retail advertisement. This does not imply that the *Houston Daily Post*’s subscribers read every word of every issue equally, but it avoids biasing certain modes of reading over others. A reader looking for a new pair of gloves might, in fact, be more interested in a back-page advertisement from a Dallas merchant than in a front-page editorial by the Dallas mayor. By incorporating content such as classified ads and baseball box scores, an individual editor’s influence also diminishes. The well-heeled Johnston catered to an elite business class, but factors beyond his control also shaped the *Houston Daily Post*’s imagined geography: real-world events, the demands of readers and advertisers, and changes in the publishing industry.

Having aggregated the paper’s content, I then mined the *Houston Daily Post* for more than six hundred different towns, cities, and states. Methodological constraints limited my analysis to specific populated places rather than, say, natural features (the Platte River) or generalized regions (the far West). And while tantalizing analysis remains to be done on a global scale, the story I tell is predominantly an American one. Even within those constraints, a vast geography emerged: across 1,716 issues the paper printed more than 1.3 million instances of place-names. By measuring their frequencies and mapping their locations, I could begin to re-create the *Houston Daily Post*’s imagined geography of the United States between 1894 and 1901. Two distinct scales emerge in this geogra-

¹⁰ On Johnston, see J. L. Watson, and the beginning of the *Houston Daily Post*, see Johnston, *Houston*, 92–93; and Diana J. Kleiner, “Houston Post,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/eeh04>. “Johnston, Rienzi Melville.” Subscription numbers are from N. W. Ayer & Son’s, *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia, 1894), 746. By 1902 the *Houston Daily Post*’s subscriptions had risen to 14,207 for its daily edition and 29,050 for its weekly edition. See N. W. Ayer & Son’s, *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia, 1902), 829. For the *Houston Daily Post*’s participation in the contest, see “The Southern Sugar Bowl,” *Printers’ Ink: A Journal for Advertisers*, July 5, 1899, pp. 29–31.

¹¹ For Americans’ relationship with geography and maps in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880–1950* (Chicago, 2001); and Susan Schulten, *Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, 2012). William Roy, *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America* (Princeton, 1997), esp. 13. See also William H. Sewell, “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (July 1992), 1–29.

phy: a national scale oriented toward New York and the American Midwest, and a dominant regional scale of Texas and its immediate orbit.¹²

A View of the Nation

On a national scale, New York loomed large as the *Houston Daily Post*'s third most frequently mentioned place-name. On the opposite side of the country, the American West was largely ignored outside of the state of California and the urban centers of Denver and San Francisco. The newspaper covered the American South in only slightly more depth than it did the West, primarily through references to southern states and the cities of Atlanta, Memphis, and Nashville. In contrast to the West and the South, however, the Midwest (in particular, the middle and lower Mississippi River valley) stamped its imprint across the *Houston Daily Post*'s imagined geography of the nation. The paper printed tens of thousands of references to Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City, along with smaller cities such as Omaha and St. Paul. Mentions of midwestern states such as Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas similarly swung the paper's gaze toward the nation's interior during the 1890s.¹³ (See figures 1 and 2.)

Measuring and mapping how often the *Houston Daily Post* printed different national place-names illustrates the complex relationship between the physical or "actual" geography of the late nineteenth-century United States and the imagined geography crafted by the paper. In many respects, the space produced by newspapers reflected existing economic, political, or cultural systems. By nearly any measure—number of inhabitants, political influence, commercial activity—St. Louis dwarfed a city such as Topeka; it is no surprise that the *Houston Daily Post* printed *St. Louis* nearly twenty times as frequently as *Topeka*. But newspapers did not passively mirror the world. Instead, they actively defined the space of what Benedict Anderson famously termed the "imagined community" of a nation from their specific perspective in time and space. Understanding this process requires a comparison of the "actual" geography of demography and urbanization with the imagined geography of the *Houston Daily Post*.¹⁴

In the 1970s and 1980s city-systems geographers studied nineteenth-century American cities within a broader urban hierarchy. Much of this literature focused on commercial and financial linkages while offering a detailed, top-down view of U.S.

¹² In the accompanying methodological supplement, I describe in much greater detail the challenges and decisions involved with extracting place-names. See Blevins, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," <http://spatialhistory.stanford.edu/viewoftheworld>. Like other facets of space, scale is socially produced. For a forceful articulation of this point, see Neil Smith, "Homeless/Global: Scaling Places," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. John Bird et al. (London, 1993), 87–119. On historians' use of scales, see Richard White, "The Nationalization of Nature," *Journal of American History*, 86 (Dec. 1999), 976–86. For the purposes of readability, I use *scale* in its more traditional (and simplistic) sense to delineate two different kinds of space: national and regional. I define *regional* primarily as places falling within the modern-day boundaries of Texas but also loosely encompassing Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana (including New Orleans), Mexico, and Cuba. I define my national scale as all American places outside of this regional orbit.

¹³ It is possible that the West's lowly position is attributable to my methodology, as the region's dearth of large urban centers meant that I extracted fewer western populated places from the *Houston Daily Post* to begin with. Although I may have missed a collection of small western towns that the paper habitually referenced, the paper's utter lack of attention to western *states* such as New Mexico or Idaho makes this unlikely. I have defined the American Midwest as comprising Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. For a cultural discussion of the Midwest as a region, see Kent C. Ryden, "Writing the Midwest: History, Literature, and Regional Identity," *Geographical Review*, 89 (Oct. 1999), 511–32.

¹⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

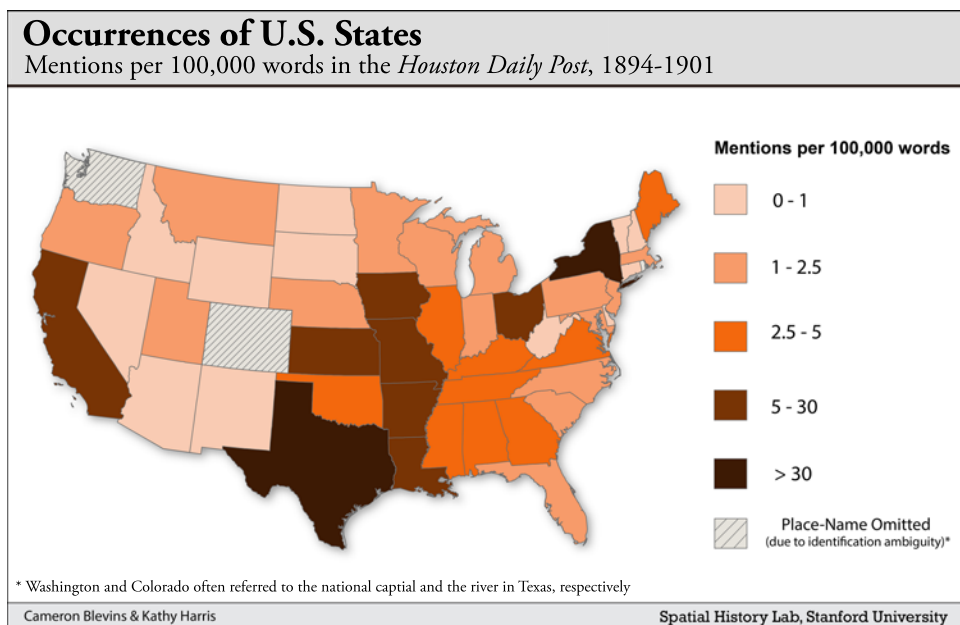


Figure 2. New York and midwestern states along the middle and lower Mississippi River valley drove the *Houston Daily Post*'s imagined geography of the nation. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University.

geography. The urban system of the nineteenth-century United States revolved around what Donald Meinig terms an "American Core" consisting of two connected spheres: the Northeast, centered on New York, and the American Midwest, centered on Chicago. By the 1890s New York stood at the commercial, cultural, and financial apex of the urban United States: headquarters for corporate America, the social enclave of an elite bourgeoisie, and a clearinghouse for financial information. The *Houston Daily Post* referenced New York more than any other city besides Houston, from the bylines of foreign news stories to its regular short features "Texans in New York" and "Gossip of Gay Gotham." Chicago, meanwhile, had emerged by the close of the century as a booming metropolis of 1.5 million inhabitants and the primary gateway between the eastern and western United States. Whether through its coverage of the 1896 Democratic National Convention or in its daily reports on the grain market, the *Houston Daily Post* mentioned Chicago more frequently than any other national metropolis besides New York.¹⁵

¹⁵ Allan Pred, *The Spatial Dynamics of U.S. Urban-Industrial Growth, 1800-1914: Interpretive and Theoretical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966); Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and City-Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); Michael P. Conzen, "The Maturing Urban System in the United States, 1840-1910," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 67 (March 1977), 88-108; Timothy R. Mahoney, "Urban History in a Regional Context: River Towns on the Upper Mississippi, 1840-1860," *Journal of American History*, 72 (Sept. 1985), 318-39; David Ralph Meyer, "A Dynamic Model of the Integration of Frontier Urban Places into the United States System of Cities," *Economic Geography*, 56 (April 1980), 120-40. D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. III: *Transcontinental America, 1850-1915* (New Haven, 1998), 313-23. For examples of these short features, see, "Texans in New York," *Houston Daily Post*, Nov. 13,

The geographer Michael Conzen argues that New York and Chicago so dominated the late nineteenth-century urban system that their influences have to be “peeled away,” in order to understand the lower levels of regional organization.” And it is precisely by “peeling away” New York and Chicago that the most striking and unexpected divergences between “actual” and imagined geography begin to emerge. Population, for instance, mapped poorly onto the pages of the *Houston Daily Post*. St. Louis was the only city besides New York and Chicago that was both one of the ten largest American cities and one of the *Houston Daily Post*’s ten most-mentioned cities. By contrast, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore (the third, fifth, and sixth largest cities, respectively), failed to appear in the newspaper’s fifteen most-mentioned places between 1894 and 1901. San Francisco, the ninth-largest U.S. city and the hub of the American West, fell outside the paper’s forty most-mentioned places. Demographically, large urban centers in the Northeast and far West were underrepresented in the *Houston Daily Post*.¹⁶ (See figure 3.)

The relative position of the American South in the pages of the *Houston Daily Post* is even more striking. The historian Harold Platt describes Houston’s pattern of municipal development during the 1890s as “typical of urban progressivism in the New South.” In many ways, Houston mirrored other cities in the region: railroad cars carried cotton through the city, while its municipal leaders battled over public works projects and instituted a deeply entrenched system of white supremacy. One would expect these regional similarities to shape the imagined geography of the *Houston Daily Post*. Instead, New South urban centers from Norfolk, Virginia, to Savannah, Georgia, to Birmingham, Alabama, were surprisingly muted in the newspaper. In fact, Atlanta was the only southern city besides nearby New Orleans to appear in the paper’s thirty most-mentioned places. A lack of southern urbanization does not explain this trend; the *Houston Daily Post* displayed a remarkable disinterest in southern states as well, with only neighboring Arkansas and Louisiana appearing in the paper’s ten most-mentioned American states (not including Texas). Despite Houston’s cultural, political, and economic connections to the South, the *Houston Daily Post* turned its gaze away from the region.¹⁷

The *Houston Daily Post* instead aligned its imagined geography along the corridor of the Mississippi River valley toward the American Midwest. At the heart of this orientation stood a commercial railroad network that had been expanding for the past half century. In the years leading up to the American Civil War, Houston’s leaders lobbied for new

1901, p. 1, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph84642/m1/1/>; and “Gossip of Gay Gotham,” *Houston Daily Post*, Dec. 30, 1897, p. 4, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph84377/m1/4/>. Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (New York, 2001). William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

¹⁶ Conzen, “Maturing Urban System in the United States,” 102. On city population rankings, see “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990,” 1998, Population Division working paper no. 27, U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>, table 13. *California* appeared far more frequently (8.2 times per 100,000 words) than did *San Francisco* (2.2 times per 100,000 words).

¹⁷ Platt, *City Building in the New South*, 211. On the New South more broadly, see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge, 1951); and Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York, 1992). In particular, see Edward L. Ayers’s opening discussion of the geography of the New South, which includes eastern Texas and Houston. *Ibid.*, 3–8. New Orleans was the seventh-most frequently mentioned city by the *Houston Daily Post* and Atlanta was the eighteenth. I have included the following states in the American South category: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. I have excluded Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. The top-ten states mentioned by the *Houston Daily Post* are, in order: Texas, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado, California, Louisiana, Arkansas, Iowa, and Illinois.

Top Ten Cities		
Ranking by Population (1900) vs. Ranking in <i>Houston Daily Post</i> (1894-1901)		
Rank	By Population	By Mentions in Post
1	New York	Houston
2	Chicago	New York
3	Philadelphia	Galveston
4	St. Louis	Dallas
5	Boston	Austin
6	Baltimore	Chicago
7	Cleveland	New Orleans
8	Buffalo	St. Louis
9	San Francisco	San Antonio
10	Cincinnati	Waco
Cameron Blevins		Spatial History Lab, Stanford University

Figure 3. The size of cities did not necessarily correspond with how frequently the *Houston Daily Post* mentioned them. From the newspaper’s perspective, small Texas cities towered over national metropolises. Table by Cameron Blevins, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University. Population data from “Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990,” 1998, Population Division working paper no. 27, U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>, table 13.

rail lines to run through the town to compete with Galveston’s port. At the end of the war, railway tracks radiated outward from Houston over a roughly fifty-mile radius. In early 1873 the north-south Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad extended its tracks across the Texas-Oklahoma border. Seven years later, workers completed a major line from Houston that bypassed Galveston and connected Houston to the Texas and Pacific Railroad, which stretched westward across the state to the California-based Southern Pacific. By 1890 more than two hundred train cars rolled through Houston each day.¹⁸

Upon first glance, Houston’s railroad connections gesture toward a familiar story of national integration. In the language of the nineteenth century, this industrial-age technology obliterated distance. The completion of the first transcontinental at Promontory Point in 1869 epitomized the ability of the railroad to transcend locality and region and connect a nation. The industry’s imposition of time zones in the 1880s established a single, standardized measure of time. Massive railway corporations, for better or worse, linked local communities to national and international markets while becoming some of the most influential power brokers of their day. Railroads laid their tracks across the *Hous-*

¹⁸ Andrew Forest Muir, “Railroads Come to Houston, 1857–1861,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 64 (July 1960), 42–63. See also Platt, *City Building in the New South*, 14–19. On railroads in eastern Texas, see Melvin C. Johnson and Jonathan K. Gerland, “Tapping ‘Green Gold’: The Steam Rail and Logging Tram Roads of East Texas,” *Environmental History*, 1 (Oct. 1996), 46–65; and James P. Baughman, “The Evolution of Rail-Water Systems of Transportation in the Gulf Southwest, 1836–1890,” *Journal of Southern History*, 34 (Aug. 1968), 357–81. On the number of trains moving through Houston in 1890, see Johnston, *Houston*, 92.

ton Daily Post's imagined geography of the nation, but they did not so much homogenize space as undergird a regionally specific process of spatial production. The paper crafted a very particular imagined geography by tracing the web of railway lines snaking northward into the American Midwest and the nodes of this regional transportation network: Dallas, St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, St. Paul, Chicago.¹⁹ (See figure 4.)

Digital analysis of place-names in the *Houston Daily Post* uncovers a skeleton of locations that mirror the midwestern railroad network, but a closer reading of the newspaper reveals the full extent and shape of this network in the paper's imagined geography. During the 1890s the *Houston Daily Post* dedicated a recurring section to this railroad network, "In the Railway World," that included stories, notices, business reports, and court decisions related to the industry—a world that centered on Texas and the Midwest. The newspaper peppered this section with mundane information such as: "The slower time schedule between Chicago and Kansas City is now billed to become effective one week from today on all roads." Railway schedules appeared in every issue, detailing the arrival and departure times for nearby locations such as Galveston and San Antonio along with distant cities such as Omaha and Chicago. Advertisements by companies such as the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad promised to whisk passengers in reclining chairs and sleeping cars twice a day from Houston to points across eastern Texas and onward to St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago.²⁰

Two factors made the "Railway World" section central to the *Houston Daily Post's* production of space. First, content related to the railroad industry was densely packed with geographic information. By necessity, these timetables, notices, and advertisements presented detailed lists of locations. The newspaper re-created in minute detail the daily activity of a regional transportation network: which lines connected what cities, when and where trains were scheduled to arrive and depart, and the cost of tickets to different destinations. By comparison, a typical news story on President William McKinley might print only a single location to provide narrative context. Second, the title, "In the Railway World," sounded expansive but coverage was in fact quite parochial. The paper printed railway information related primarily to Texas and the Midwest. In doing so, it largely ignored the rapidly expanding southeastern network orbiting Atlanta, the older system of rail lines in the Northeast centered on Pennsylvania, or the long trunk lines emanating from California. The railroads purported to unite the nation by annihilating distance, but they also enabled a process of spatial production deeply marked by regional specificity.²¹

Even as the *Houston Daily Post's* "In the Railway World" detailed the spatial structure of the midwestern transportation network, the paper's imagined geography depended

¹⁹ On the impact of the railroad on perceptions of time, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, 1986); and Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 10–35. For a scathing critique of the role of transcontinental railroads in late nineteenth-century America and their manipulation of space, see Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York, 2011).

²⁰ "Headlight Flashes," *Houston Daily Post*, Jan. 26, 1896, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph83951/m1/3/>. For an example of a railroad advertisement, see "Purchase Tickets over the MK and T," *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1894, p. 8, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph82783/m1/8/>.

²¹ The major western termini of the transcontinentals, San Francisco and Los Angeles, were completely peripheral for the *Houston Daily Post*. For an overview of southern railroads during the period, see Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 9–13. For an example of the dominance of Texas and midwestern space within the "In the Railway World" section, see "In the Railway World," *Houston Daily Post*, Jan. 10, 1896, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph83936/m1/3/>.

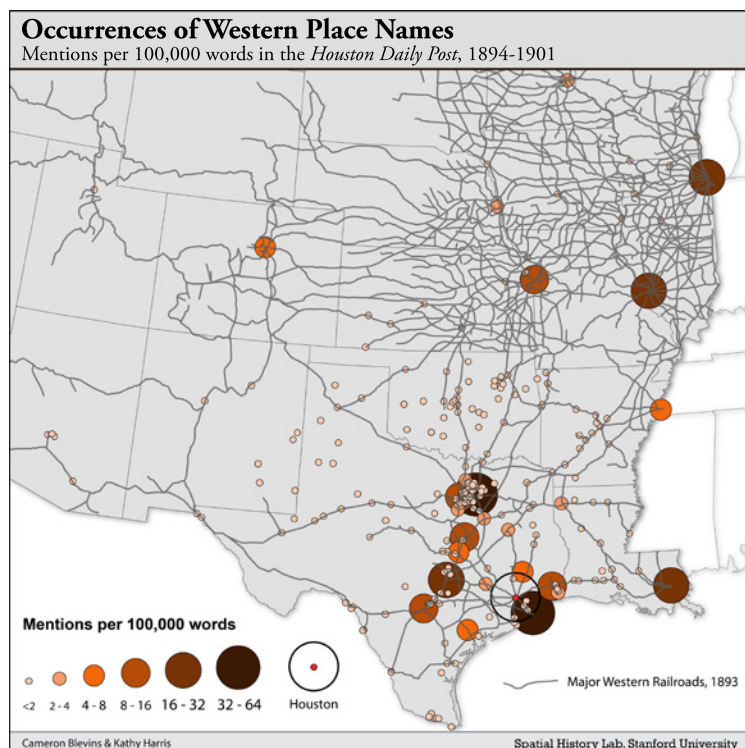


Figure 4. The “railway world” of the *Houston Daily Post* followed a network of routes and hubs in Texas and the American Midwest. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, *Spatial History Lab, Stanford University*. Railroad data provided by the Stanford Spatial History Lab’s Shaping the West project, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/project.php?id=997>.

more specifically on the system of capital that moved across that network. Although the *Houston Daily Post* offered a wide mix of content, it catered to the world of commerce. The paper produced space in part by printing information about the flow of goods and capital: stocks, futures, exports, port registers, crop reports, railroad receipts, and prices for provisioning, wholesale, or dry goods. Just as industrialization and corporate capitalism structured the physical geography of cities, farms, and factories in the late nineteenth century, so too did they structure the *imagined* geography of the nation’s newspapers.

Understanding the connection between commercial information and the paper’s imagined geography required me to move beyond counting word frequencies. As explained in the accompanying methodological essay, my computer program could extract place-names but it could not connect specific occurrences of places with their immediate context—identifying, for instance, every occurrence of *New Orleans* that appeared in a political election story versus in a commercial port register. Instead, I turned to sampled content analysis, or a combination of close reading, digital analysis, and statistical sampling. First, I selected a random sample of issues from the *Houston Daily Post* from 1894 to 1901 and overlaid an image of each of those pages with a grid of 1,200 cells. I then assigned each cell in the grid to a single category of content (news; advertisements; commercial data; noncommercial data; miscellaneous; and marginalia) and to multiple types of geography (Texas and its surrounding region; the Midwest; all remaining U.S. geog-

raphy; and international places). For example, ten cells overlaid onto a story about the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad were categorized as news content containing both Texas and Midwest geography. By aggregating all 228,000 cells from the sample, I could approximate the percentage of page space dedicated to different categories of newspaper content and geographic coverage.²² I used this sample to produce statistically significant estimates for the entire collection, which allowed me to establish connections between content and geography in the newspaper.²³

Sampled content analysis revealed a telling spatial pattern: midwestern geography had a larger relative presence in commercial content than it did in any other category of content. This was not the case for other geographical places. For instance, national geography *outside* the Midwest appeared in commercial content at roughly the same rate as it did in traditional news-story content. Freight tables and feature stories were equally likely to contain information about national places such as Baltimore, California, or New England. By comparison, specifically midwestern geography appeared in 21.1% of commercial content but in only 8.5% of traditional news-story content. A freight table was almost 2.5 times as likely as a feature article to contain information about midwestern places such as Chicago, Iowa, or Ohio. Sampled content analysis reinforces the extent to which Houston's connections to a larger commercial system pulled the *Houston Daily Post's* production of space toward the nation's interior.²⁴

The midwestern commercial geography of the *Houston Daily Post* took on even greater specificity by tracing movements along three overlapping urban orbits: Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. In particular, the newspaper traced the flow of two major

²² Blevins, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," <http://spatialhistory.stanford.edu/viewoftheworld>. The random sample encompassed seventeen issues, or 1% of the entire collection. I developed a digital interface to perform content analysis on this sample. By overlaying a grid of cells onto each image of a newspaper page from the sampled issues I could calculate the percentage of page space dedicated to different categories of content and geography. The content categories were: narrative news; narrative miscellaneous (jokes, stories, sermons, etc.); advertisements and classifieds; fragmentary commercial information (stock prices, shipping receipts, etc.); fragmentary noncommercial information (weather tables, hotel guest lists, etc.); and marginalia (titles, page numbers, dates, etc.). The geographic categories were: Texas and its surrounding region; the Midwest; all remaining U.S. geography; and international places. Content categories were mutually exclusive; each cell could only be classified as one kind of content. Geographic categories were not mutually exclusive; multiple categories could be assigned to each cell. Hence, a story about a Texas senator in Washington would be classified as both Texas and non-Midwest U.S. geography. The program I developed is open source and available for download at <http://www.cameronblevins.org/imagegrid/>.

²³ The nature of random sampling means that different samples will produce different results depending on the size of the sample and the range of variation in the collection as a whole. Therefore, I used a statistical technique called "least squares estimates" to estimate how representative my sample was for the entire collection. This produced 95% confidence intervals (ci), or ranges of values, for each of the content/geography measurements within my sample. These 95% confidence intervals indicate that if a new random sample were generated from the collection, its content/geography measurements would fall within these ranges of values 95% of the time. Hence, there is a strong likelihood that if the entire collection of 1,716 issues was measured, its content/geography measurements would also fall within these ranges. I include the 95% ci for specific content/geography measurements in the footnotes that follow. I am happy to provide my statistical estimates for the entire set of measurements upon request. On least squares estimates, see Leo H. Kahane, *Regression Basics* (Los Angeles, 2008), 17–36. On confidence intervals, see "Having Confidence in Data," in *Statistics for Humanities*, by John Canning, <http://statisticsforhumanities.net/book1/index.php?title=Chapter17>.

²⁴ Midwestern geography occurred in 21.1% (ci of 17% to 25.2%) of commercial page space and 8.5% (ci of 6.3% to 10.9%) of traditional news page space. National geography, excluding the Midwest, occurred in 27.5% (ci of 22.7% to 32.4%) of commercial page space and 28.4% (ci of 25.1% to 31.5%) of traditional news page space. On the printed space of Gilded Age newspapers, see John Henry Hepp IV, *The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876–1926* (Philadelphia, 2003), 89–114.

commodities along these orbits: grain and livestock. In almost every issue, the *Houston Daily Post* reported on the daily market activity for these two commodities. In August 1897 the paper reported that the Chicago and St. Louis wheat markets “opened with a roar” amid a buying frenzy that pushed prices to their highest level in years. Four years later, the paper plastered “Cattle Die Mysteriously” across the top of its business section but reassured readers that the “tone of the live stock markets yesterday was steady for the choicest grades.” It also printed on that day, as it did in every issue, the prices and receipts in Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City for an array of animals: dressed beef, mast-fed hogs, Indian steers, native muttons, and choice yearlings.²⁵

The flow of cattle and wheat across the American interior in the late nineteenth century illustrates the relationship between the production of space and a broader process of market integration. The historian William Cronon describes how the distribution and sale of goods in distant markets stripped a farmer’s wheat or a cattleman’s steer of their geographic origin: “Once within the corporate system, places lost their particularity and became functional abstractions on organizational charts. Geography no longer mattered very much except as a problem in management: time had conspired with capital to annihilate space.” Yet from the vantage point of the *Houston Daily Post* many places did, in fact, retain their particularity: not as origin points, but as conduits and destinations for commodities moving through a corporate system. The paper’s imagined geography reflected Houston’s pull toward specific overlapping commercial orbits: midwestern grain and livestock, Texas cotton, or New York finance. By charting commodity flows the paper articulated a capitalist system from a particular vantage point within it. But the *Houston Daily Post* did not just passively reflect this system; it also actively reinforced the structural power of capital in the 1890s. The paper looked to New York and the Midwest while simultaneously turning away from the booming industrial belt of the Northeast and the extractive zones of the far West. By printing some places more than others, it produced a delimited version of space for its readers. Through the seemingly innocuous channel of commercial information, the paper constructed an imagined geography deeply tied to corporate power. Newspapers such as the *Houston Daily Post* served as both mirror and handmaiden for a system of capital that had not so much homogenized national space as reshaped and rearranged it in specific ways.²⁶

The Triumph of Region

Even as the *Houston Daily Post* produced its national geography, the paper subsumed the scale of the nation beneath that of the region. Despite a cosmopolitan business reader-

²⁵ “Dollar Wheat, and Strong,” *Houston Daily Post*, Aug. 21, 1897, p. 8, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph84259/m1/8/>. “Cattle Die Mysteriously,” *ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1901, p. 13, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph85823/m1/13/>. For other examples of commercial data anchored by this particular geographic framework, see these entire pages: *ibid.*, March 11, 1897, p. 8, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph90447/m1/8/>; and *ibid.*, July 25, 1900, p. 8, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph83302/m1/8/>.

²⁶ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 259. On the integration of agricultural markets in the nineteenth century, see Jeremy Atack, Fred Bateman, and William N. Parker, “The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. II: *The Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (New York, 2000), 245–84. On northern industrialization, see Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1995), 102–32. On industry in the far West, see David Igler, “The Industrial Far West: Region and Nation in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 69 (May 2000), 159–92.

ship, the national connections of its editor, and the overwhelming integrative forces of the 1890s, regionalism flourished in the paper. By nearly any quantitative measure the *Houston Daily Post* focused its spatial production on Texas and the state's immediate orbit. Two out of every three printed place-names fell within this region. At the top of the list, seven of the ten most frequently mentioned cities were in Texas's region. (See figure 3.) Sampled content analysis reveals a similar pattern: 57.5% of the paper's total page space referenced the smaller-scale geography of Texas and its surrounding area—more than double the amount containing references to other U.S. places. Not surprisingly, *Texas* and *Houston* stood in a class of their own: together, they occurred once every 210 words, or between twenty-five to thirty times per page. The *Houston Daily Post* engaged in a process of pointillism that pinned thousands upon thousands of fragmentary shards of information onto a regional geography. Articulating the contours of this geography and how the paper constructed it highlights the unexpected prominence of regionally specific space in the late nineteenth century.²⁷

From the 1840s onward hundreds of thousands of migrants poured into Texas. Farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers planted cotton in the blackland prairie of central and eastern Texas, while ranchers moved to the plains of west Texas during the last quarter of the century. The *Houston Daily Post's* imagined geography of the region in part mirrored this pattern of settlement. Although new ranching and railroad towns such as Abilene, Lubbock, Midland, and Amarillo sprouted up in both western Texas and in the pages of the *Houston Daily Post*, the paper's production of regional geography tended to concentrate in the eastern half of the state. Cities in eastern Texas—Houston, Galveston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Waco, and Fort Worth—made up seven of the paper's twelve most-mentioned cities. (See figure 5.) A dense second tier of modestly populated eastern Texas towns helped fill out the paper's production of the region: Brenham, Denton, Corsicana, Port Arthur, and La Porte. None of those towns had more than ten thousand residents, but the paper nonetheless mentioned them more frequently than it did national metropolises ten times their size. From the vantage point of New York or Chicago, these Texas towns were peripheral specks on the nation's landscape. From the vantage point of the *Houston Daily Post*, however, they stood at the heart of the paper's imagined geography.²⁸

²⁷ As previously mentioned, I define "regional" as all places falling within the modern-day boundaries of Texas, but also loosely encompassing nearby areas of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana (including New Orleans), Mexico, and Cuba. On the problems involved with identifying Texas in a regional context and its position between West and South, see Ty Cashion, "What's the Matter with Texas? The Great Enigma of the Lone Star State in the American West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 55 (Dec. 2005), 2–15. While 57.7% (CI of 54.1% to 59.2%) of the paper's page space referenced places in Texas and its surrounding area, only 25% (CI of 20% to 26.8%) of the paper's total page space contained national geography (a combination of two categories: national—non-Midwest and American Midwest). By term frequency, 66.86% of the printed occurrences of place-names were either regional or local.

²⁸ For a general history of Texas in the decades leading up to the 1890s, see Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York, 2003), 269–90. On cotton farming, race, and gender in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Texas, see Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, 1997). On the rise in cattle production in Texas during the late nineteenth century, see Jeremy Zallen, Erik Steiner, and Richard White, "Cattle Production in the American West: Number and Value of Cattle, 1867–1935," *Stanford Spatial History Project*, http://www.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/viz.php?id=141&project_id=997. The Texas towns Brenham, Denton, Corsicana, Port Arthur, and La Porte occurred more frequently in the *Houston Daily Post* than did both Indianapolis and Milwaukee, for example, two of the country's twenty-five largest metropolises at the turn of the century. Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," table 13.

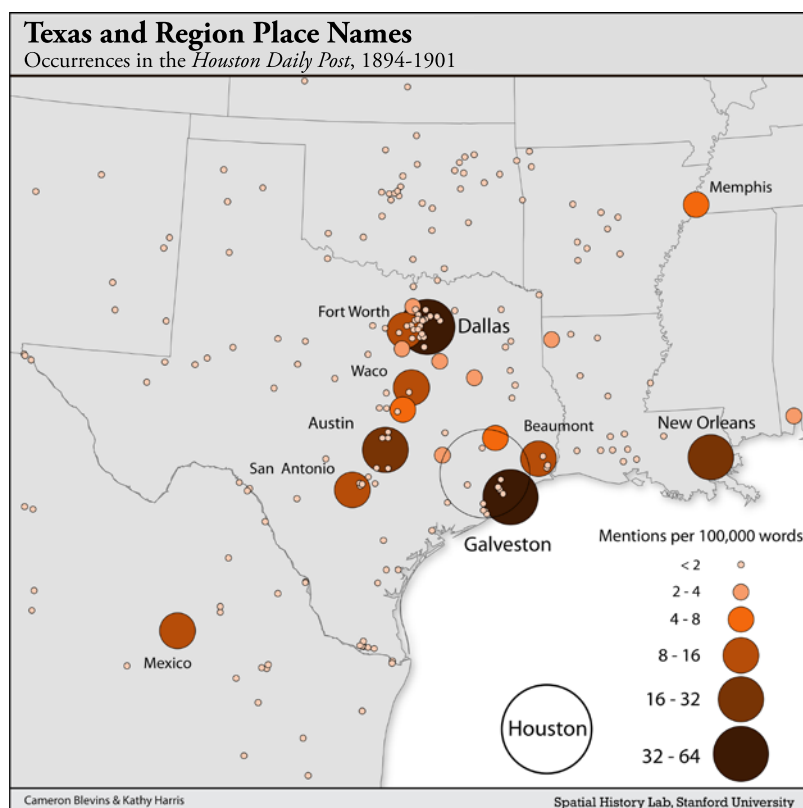


Figure 5. The *Houston Daily Post* focused much of its imagined geography on eastern Texas and the surrounding region. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University.

I argue that the *Houston Daily Post*'s emphasis on local and regional space can be traced to late nineteenth-century shifts in American journalism. In the 1880s and 1890s newspapers completed a transformation from the partisan presses of the early nineteenth century into highly commercialized entities targeting a mass market of readers as consumers. Newspapers courted an ever-larger demographic to support a business model based on subscription and advertising revenue. To expand their audience, many editors took a scattershot approach to content, which grew to encompass stories, jokes, advice columns, political cartoons, municipal notices, sports scores, stock prices, court notices, and police reports. In the words of the historian Gerald Baldasty, "the American newspaper had become a cafeteria of information: it contained something for everyone." With this diversification came a fragmentation of both form and content that changed how a paper such as the *Houston Daily Post* produced local and regional space.²⁹

In *Communities of Journalism* the historian David Nord describes how the *Chicago Times* of the 1880s printed "tiny stories from everywhere on every conceivable subject

²⁹ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, 1978); Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, 1992); Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore, 1998). Baldasty, *Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, esp. 122. On the fragmentation and diversity of news, see also David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana, 2001), 108–32.

... [often] unrelated, one- or two-sentence items grouped together under headings such as 'Slices of News,' 'News Nebulae,' or 'Local Skimmings.'" The *Houston Daily Post* engaged in a similar editorial process, printing hundreds of short, three- to five-line news items from across the state. Published in a section called "Short Texas Specials," they were frequently grouped by theme: "Weather and Crops," "Texas Marriages," "The Fire Record" (fire reports), "A Day in the Courts" (state judicial notices), "Island City Notes" (news from Galveston), or "A Day in the City" (Houston news). Even as stories fragmented, the paper still needed to provide locations for them. The *Houston Daily Post* pinned these discrete items, one after the other, onto a map of the state and region.³⁰

The paper also included a dizzying range of fragmentary content that, unlike the material in "Short Texas Specials," was largely devoid of narrative form: tables of regional temperatures, lists of letters held in the Houston post office, Texas baseball standings, local hotel guest registers, and tables of county election results. Much like the timetables or commodity prices that undergirded the geography of the *Houston Daily Post's* commercial "Railway World" section, these items conveyed functional information rather than the story-driven journalism that readers today tend to think of as "news." Often lacking actors or even events, this kind of nonnarrative content fades from the historian's gaze. But that does not make it peripheral. The sampled content analysis described earlier in this article revealed that nonnarrative content such as advertisements or train schedules made up more than 40 percent of the newspaper's page space. This nonnarrative content skewed far more toward regional geography than did narrative content. Nearly 70 percent of the page space classified as nonnarrative content contained regional geography. For narrative content, that number dropped to 49 percent. Region dwarfed nation in all types of content, but the trend was far more pronounced in fragmentary information than in traditional story-driven news. As the *Houston Daily Post* interspersed tables of data alongside columns of text, its production of space became denser and more granular. A listing of guests at the local Lawlor Hotel reads like a gazetteer: "... W.A. Fletcher, W. Wiess, Beaumont; John H. Conniff, New Orleans; M.S. Hasil, Fort Worth; H. Hughes, Galveston. ..." Thirty-four names linked to thirty-four locations, all packed into a scant one-tenth of a column. Like a pointillist painter, the *Houston Daily Post* crafted a vision of the state and region using an endless staccato of locational pinpoints.³¹

No section of the newspaper embodied the industry's shift toward fragmentary and nonnarrative content more so than advertisements. The historian Pamela Laird describes how manufacturing companies increasingly turned to a growing advertising industry at the end of the century to more effectively sell their products to a national consumer market. Late nineteenth-century newspapers consequently plastered their pages with hundreds of ads aimed at this consumer society, displaying products from sewing machines

³⁰ Nord, *Communities of Journalism*, esp. 115.

³¹ Nonnarrative content made up 42.6% of the paper (CI of 39.9% to 46%). This figure includes the categories of advertisements and classifieds; fragmentary commercial information (stock prices, shipping receipts, etc.); fragmentary noncommercial information (weather tables, hotel guest lists, etc.); and marginalia (titles, page numbers, dates, etc.). Narrative content, meanwhile, made up 57.4% of the paper's page space (CI of 54% to 60.1%). 69.7% of nonnarrative content contained regional geography (CI of 66.9% to 74.4%); 15.5% contained other national geography (CI of 12.9% to 18%). Meanwhile, 48.5% of narrative content contained regional geography (CI of 40.6% to 51.5%); 31.5% contained other national geography (CI of 24.6% to 34%). For another historian's breakdown of different kinds of news in a sampling of 1890s newspapers, see Baldasty, *Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*, 113–37, appendix. "The Hotels," *Houston Daily Post*, Nov. 15, 1898, p. 7, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114559/m1/7/>.

to railroad tickets to the juggernauts of commercial marketing: pills, powders, and patent medicines. The *Houston Daily Post* was no different, dedicating almost one-third of its total page space to advertisements and classifieds.³² (See figure 6.)

The growth of large-scale manufacturing and a national consumer market led to a boom in professional advertising agencies during the 1890s and early 1900s. Focusing on the rise of national advertising, however, discounts the importance of local advertising for a newspaper such as the *Houston Daily Post*. National brand-name products such as Royal Baking Powder and Lea and Perrins' Worcestershire Sauce regularly appeared in the *Houston Daily Post*, but they were overshadowed by a torrent of local and regional advertisements. Sampled content analysis showed that only 13.4 percent of the paper's advertising page space featured national companies. By comparison, over 77 percent of the advertising page space originated in Texas and its immediate region. A typical issue from December 1898, for instance, began on the front page with an advertisement for the Houston Drug Company and ended on the back page with an advertisement for Galveston's Tremont Hotel. The 1890s may have witnessed the coming-of-age of mass-market production and distribution, but local shopkeepers, merchants, and businessmen continued to control the advertising world of the *Houston Daily Post*.³³

Classified ads stood at the heart of regional advertising. The *Houston Daily Post* printed a page or more of classifieds in every issue, trumpeting: "The *Post* prints more 'Want Ads' than any other Texas Newspaper." Whether that assertion was true or not, the paper undeniably printed a huge number of classifieds: on average more than two hundred per issue. They underlay not only the paper's revenue model but also its production of regional space. Much like hotel registries and railroad timetables, classifieds were densely packed with geographic information. People who took out a want ad needed to provide details on their posting and a way for respondents to contact them, both of which often necessitated locating themselves in space. In one 1896 issue, Jack Thomas from Barnum was trying to sell a variety of hatching eggs, F. C. Sandow was renting his farm near Lynchburg, and an anonymous poster in Flatonia was looking for "a little boy to adopt about 2 years old without parents." Most importantly for the *Houston Daily Post*, classifieds operated almost exclusively within a local and regional orbit. Although companies in New York or Chicago occasionally posted want ads for sales agents, the vast majority of the paper's classifieds were submitted by Texans and aimed at a Texan audience.³⁴

³² Twenty-nine percent of the *Houston Daily Post*'s page space contained advertisements and classifieds (CI of 26.5% to 32.2%). Laird, *Advertising Progress*. See also Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York, 1983); and Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York, 1994).

³³ Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 155–257. For examples of national advertisements for products such as Royal Baking Powder and Lea and Perrins' Worcestershire Sauce alongside far more common local advertisements, see *Houston Daily Post*, Nov. 15, 1898, p. 1, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114559/m1/1/>; and *ibid.*, p. 8, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114559/m1/8/>. 13.4% of advertisements contained national geography (CI of 10.2% to 14.7%). 77.2% of advertisement page space contained regional geography (CI of 73.6% to 84.4%). Using sampled content analysis, I combined the national geography and Midwest geography categories to compare with the regional category. Houston Drug Company advertisement, *Houston Daily Post*, Dec. 7, 1898, p. 1, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114580/m1/1/>. Tremont Hotel advertisement, *ibid.*, p. 12, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114580/m1/12/>. On the integration of large-scale production and distribution in business, see Chandler, *Visible Hand*, 207–483.

³⁴ "The Post," *Houston Daily Post*, Feb. 21, 1899, p. 9, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph114647/m1/9/>. A random ten-issue sample contained an average of 231 classified ads per issue. "For Sale," *ibid.*, March 21, 1896, p. 7, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph84006/m1/7/>; "Real Estate for Sale," *ibid.*; "Personal," *ibid.*

Figure 6. As this page from the *Houston Daily Post* shows, advertisements made up a large portion of the page space in nineteenth-century newspapers. Courtesy Houston Daily Post, Jan. 25, 1901, p. 7, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph83392/m1/7/>.

The *Houston Daily Post* produced regional space on a microscopic level by charting the small-scale movement of people, goods, and information through Houston and the surrounding area. By locating cotton crops and hotel guests and railroad depots across hundreds of thousands of discrete pieces of content, the paper constructed a dense map of local and regional space that transcended the geography of the nation. But the newspaper did not just passively chart flows and connections. It also reinforced what the sociologist William Roy terms “structural power”—the ability to control the context for making choices. The *Houston Daily Post* could not determine where people grew cotton or which trains they rode, but it could define the geography they used to decide where to farm or how to travel. The paper emphasized certain geographical contexts over others and, by doing so, undergirded a regional commercial elite. Fragmentary commercial content subtly reinforced the world view of this readership: a wholesaler looking at shipping receipts from Galveston, a land speculator perusing real-estate notices near Denison, a lawyer checking railway departure times to Dallas. Even when non-elites directly participated in the *Houston Daily Post* via classifieds, they did so under rigid structural constraints. Postings such as, “A colored girl wants a place to do general house work or cooking,” enabled an individual to shape the content of the paper, but only by participating in a regional

system that commodified her labor along axes of race, class, and gender. The paper, and the structural power it supported, operated in the realm of the ordinary and everyday.³⁵

The classifieds section of the *Houston Daily Post* is a far cry from the lavish Associated Press banquet hall in Chicago where this article began. But those ads illustrate a central paradox in the late nineteenth century's production of space: the persistence of regionalism in an age of national forces. On first glance, the *Houston Daily Post's* deep connections to the Associated Press should have defined the contours of the paper's imagined geography. By the 1890s the Associated Press had established a powerful communications monopoly that controlled much of the journalistic landscape. The organization relied on a symbiotic relationship with the Western Union Telegraph Company to gather information from a nationwide network of agents, repackage it into a standardized "American" perspective, and redistribute the information to member papers such as the *Houston Daily Post*. According to the historian Menahem Blondheim, the Associated Press crafted itself into a hidden institution that "helped Americans accommodate to a common information environment. By giving news that impressed the minds of Americans a national orientation, it fostered the integration of American society."³⁶

Powerful new integrative forces in technology, communications, and business were indeed creating a "national orientation" during the late nineteenth century, but this process did not tidily correspond with how a newspaper such as the *Houston Daily Post* produced space. If the Associated Press drove the paper's production of space, the effect would have been a homogenized vision of the nation that subsumed locality and region. Instead, the opposite occurred. The paper shaped its imagined geography of the nation along the specific commercial network that connected Houston to the American Midwest. Closer to home, the *Houston Daily Post* privileged region over nation through a process of spatial production that was tiny in scale, mundane in nature, and utterly ubiquitous. In short, the world looked very different from Rienzi Johnston's office in Houston than it did from the faraway headquarters of the Associated Press.

Houston and Beyond

How did the world look from different vantage points in space or time? A brief coda offers a glimpse into the potential for digital analysis to answer this question through a comparison of the *Houston Daily Post* and an earlier Houston newspaper, the *Telegraph and Texas Register*. Just as the *Houston Daily Post's* imagined geography did not necessarily mirror the "actual" geography of the urbanization or demography of the 1890s, neither did it mimic previous constructions of space. Between 1836 and 1851 the *Telegraph and Texas Register* operated as a semiofficial government mouthpiece, first for a fragile Texas republic and then for a newly admitted American state. Like the *Houston Daily Post* fifty

³⁵ Roy, *Socializing Capital*, 13. "Situation Wanted," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, p. 9, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph83079/m1/9/>. On the intersection of structural power and everyday actions by individuals, see Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*.

³⁶ For an example of attribution to the Associated Press, see "Havana Desperate," *Houston Daily Post*, June 28, 1898, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph82930/m1/3/>. Blondheim, *News over the Wires*, 195. On national forces in the field of communication, see also Robert MacDougall, "The Wire Devils: Pulp Thrillers, the Telephone, and Action at a Distance in the Wiring of a Nation," *American Quarterly*, 58 (Sept. 2006), 715–41; and Alex Nalbach, "Poisoned at the Source? Telegraphic News Services and Big Business in the Nineteenth Century," *Business History Review*, 77 (Dec. 2003), 577–610.

Change in Rank of Southern States			
Place Name	State Rank, 1836-1851	State Rank, 1894-1901	Change in Relative Frequency
Kentucky	2	10	-52%
Louisiana	3	6	-10%
Mississippi	4	11	-53%
Alabama	7	12	-37%
Florida	8	25	-69%
Arkansas	9	7	+21%
Georgia	10	15	-32%
Tennessee	11	14	-22%
Virginia	12	13	-14%
South Carolina	20	32	-48%
North Carolina	23	28	+5%
West Virginia	N/A	40	N/A
Cameron Blevins		Spatial History Lab, Stanford University	

Figure 7. The *Houston Daily Post* mentioned southern states less frequently than did its predecessor, the *Telegraph and Texas Register*. The first two columns compare the rankings of American states in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* and the *Houston Daily Post*, sorted by how often the two papers mentioned them. The last column illustrates changes in how frequently states appeared in the *Houston Daily Post* compared to the *Telegraph and Texas Register*, as measured by the number of occurrences of a state per 100,000 words. Table by Cameron Blevins, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University.

years later, the earlier *Telegraph and Texas Register* peered out at the world from its Houston printing office. But the two papers produced radically different views of the world.³⁷

The *Telegraph and Texas Register* and the *Houston Daily Post* shared similarities: the nearby ports of Galveston and New Orleans loomed large in both, as did ever-present New York. But the differences between the two papers were stark. On a national scale, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* focused its gaze on coastal ports such as Mobile, Charleston, and Philadelphia. It also placed a much greater emphasis on the American South during the 1830s and 1840s, mentioning almost every southern state at a higher frequency than did the *Houston Daily Post*. (See figure 7.) Like the later *Houston Daily Post*, the *Telegraph and Texas Register*’s production of space was shaped by the movement of goods, people, and information within a larger system of capital. The difference, however, lay in *how* that movement occurred. Whereas the *Houston Daily Post* followed the dense railroad network of the Midwest, its predecessor emphasized the shipping channels of the Gulf of Mexico

³⁷ Marilyn McAdams Sibley, *Lone Stars and State Gazettes: Texas Newspapers before the Civil War* (College Station, 2000); Andrea Kökény, “The Construction of Anglo-American Identity in the Republic of Texas, as Reflected in the *Telegraph and Texas Register*,” *Journal of the Southwest*, 46 (July 2004), 283–328.

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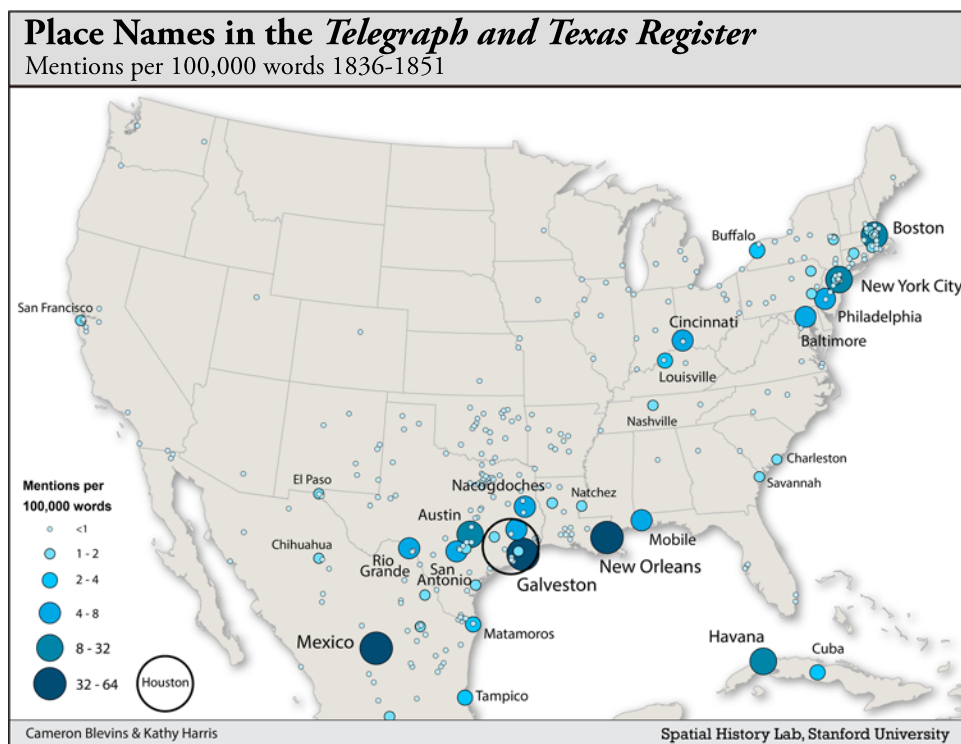


Figure 8. The imagined geography of the *Telegraph and Texas Register* between 1836 and 1851 illustrates an earlier “view of the world” from Houston. In contrast to the later *Houston Daily Post*, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* focused on port cities in the Gulf of Mexico and the northeastern seaboard. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University.

and the Atlantic Seaboard. (See figure 8.) Everything from dry goods to mail packets in that earlier era passed through the docks of Boston, Baltimore, Havana, New Orleans, and Galveston before reaching Houston. These changes in transportation and communication help explain the imagined geographies of the two papers.³⁸

On a smaller regional scale, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* struggled to define Texas as a spatial entity and printed the place-name *Texas* only around half as often as did the *Houston Daily Post*. Tellingly, the earlier paper often identified itself in relation to Mexico, referencing its southern neighbor more than five times as frequently as did the *Houston Daily Post*. Although the Republic of Texas laid claim to a broad swath of territory in the 1830s, encompassing all of present-day Texas, half of present-day New Mexico, and northward into present-day Colorado and Wyoming, its leading newspaper focused on a

³⁸ The relative frequency (as measured by occurrences per 100,000 words) of the place-names *Galveston* and *New Orleans* actually decreased from the *Telegraph and Texas Register* to the *Houston Daily Post*, while the relative frequency of *New York* increased. Texas's deep connections to the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans are outlined in Edward L. Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution* (College Station, 2004); and Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (New York, 2005), 93–123, 197–236. On communications connections, see Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 67; and W. L. Newsom, “The Postal System of the Republic of Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 20 (Oct. 1916), 103–31.

small core of eastern Anglo settlement in San Antonio, Austin, Houston, Galveston, and Nacogdoches. (See figure 9.) West of these small settlements the young republic's boundaries disintegrated. A close reading of the earlier paper during the 1830s and 1840s reveals just how much it struggled to articulate a borderlands geography wracked with violence and instability. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* often eschewed fixed, specific populated places in favor of vague locations married to events: "A party of Indians supposed to be Wacoos and Towaccanies, lately made a descent upon the settlements between the Gualaloupe and Colorado [Rivers], and killed the mail rider." One editorialist admitted that the interior of Texas "is in possession of Mexico and of the Comanche Indians, and never has been in possession of Texas—and although claimed as within our boundary, has yet to be conquered." If the later *Houston Daily Post* engaged in a process of spatial pointillism that anchored thousands of pinpoints in Texas, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* painted a watercolor portrait of the region defined by nebulous shapes and permeable borders. Electronic visualizations in the accompanying online essay, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," provide an even more dramatic visual comparison between the two newspapers.³⁹

Comparing the two newspapers is a fitting coda to demonstrate the possibilities of moving beyond the *Houston Daily Post* in both time and space. Did the *Denver Republican*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, or the *Pittsburg Times* in the 1890s mirror the *Houston Daily Post*'s overwhelming regionalism? How did all of these papers construct international space in the context of rising American imperialism? Shifting backward in time, historians of the Atlantic world might apply computational analysis to the colonial era. The imagined geographies of newspapers from Philadelphia, Kingston, or Rio de Janeiro could illuminate the nodes and anchors of the Atlantic world and its spatial coherence as a category of analysis. As libraries and archives continue to digitize their holdings, historians will have the chance to apply digital analysis to not just newspapers but also maps, novels, account books, letters, diaries, sermons, and speeches. Recovering the imagined geography of the *Houston Daily Post* is an early step on the path toward a more comprehensive spatial history.⁴⁰

³⁹ Although *Texas* was the most frequently mentioned place-name in both papers, the *Houston Daily Post* nearly doubled the *Telegraph and Texas Register*'s rate of printing *Texas*: from nearly 150 times per 100,000 words in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* to over 285 times per 100,000 words in the *Houston Daily Post*. "Indians," *Telegraph and Texas Register*, Jan. 5, 1842, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph48164/m1/3/>. "Colonization," *ibid.*, May 1, 1839, p. 3, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph48051/m1/3/>. I rely on Ethington's theory of *topoi*, or places. Ethington argues that history is best understood and written about in terms of sites of human interactions. See Ethington, "Placing the Past," 483–87. For an additional example of locating place-events, see "Comanche Peak," *Telegraph and Texas Register*, Dec. 22, 1841, p. 2, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph48162/m1/2/>. On constructed space and identities in this region during the early nineteenth century, see Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier*. On the violence and instability of early nineteenth-century Texas, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820–1875* (Norman, 2005); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven, 2008); Pekka Hämmäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, 2008); and Raúl A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821–1861* (Chapel Hill, 2008). Blevins, "Mining and Mapping the Production of Space," <http://spatialhistory.stanford.edu/viewoftheworld>.

⁴⁰ Scholars are already using digital technology to map and analyze elements of the Atlantic world. See, particularly, Mapping the Republic of Letters project, <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/>. See Caroline Winterer, "Where Is America in the Republic of Letters?," *Modern Intellectual History*, 9 (Nov. 2012), 597–623. Related efforts are underway in history and other fields. For British literature, see David Cooper and Ian N Gregory, "Mapping the English Lake District: A Literary GIS," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36 (Jan. 2011), 89–108. For classics, see Walter Scheidel and Eljah Meeks, *ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World*, <http://orbis.stanford.edu/>.

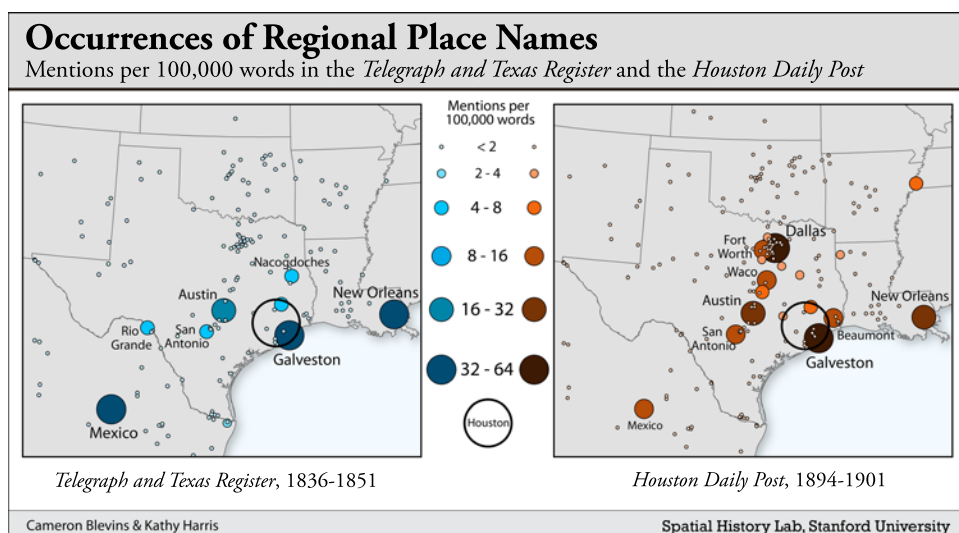


Figure 9. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* and the *Houston Daily Post* crafted divergent imagined geographies of Texas and the surrounding region. The U.S.-Mexican War and the borderlands context of the 1830s and 1840s differentiated the earlier *Telegraph and Texas Register*'s production of regional space from the later *Houston Daily Post*. Map by Cameron Blevins and Kathy Harris, Spatial History Lab, Stanford University.

The claim that the digital age transforms the practice of history is a truism that flattens a complex process. Technology has and will continue to reshape the discipline, from the everyday practice of sending e-mails to the more profound question posed by the *Journal of American History*'s editor, "What is the future of the print journal in a digital age?" This article has focused on one facet of technological transformation: the scale and form of the digital archive. Vast quantities of digitized sources allow historians to ask and answer questions in fundamentally new ways. The imagined geography of the *Houston Daily Post* was, in part, buried under an avalanche of freight tables, price lists, classifieds, and advertisements. Unearthing the newspaper's underlying spatial production required a computer program to calculate the frequency of more than one million place-names strewn across hundreds of millions of words. This method of analysis would have been impractical even a decade ago. And a decade from now there will be new sources and new kinds of tools to study them. That is the promise of digital history: to radically expand our ability to access and draw meaning from the historical record.⁴¹

For all of its potential, digital history is not without risk. It requires a disciplinary leap beyond the humanities and social sciences into unfamiliar fields such as engineering and computer science. Most of us lack the technical training to simply borrow methods and techniques from these fields. My project relied as much on writing computer code, building a spatial database, and visualizing data as it did on reading and interpreting

⁴¹ Edward T. Linenthal, "Editor's Annual Report, 2012–2013," *Journal of American History*, 100 (Sept. 2013), 616. The 2012 president of the American Historical Association, William Cronon, authored a series of columns in *AHA Perspectives* around the theme of "The Public Practice of History in and for a Digital Age." They are available online at <http://www.williamcronon.net/aha-writings.htm>.

text. It would have been impossible without the help of computer scientists, geographers, and graphic designers. But collaboration only works if we can persuade our colleagues that solving historical problems can help them answer interesting questions in their own fields. Collaborative digital projects are more administratively complex than a single-author monograph, and higher overhead costs make them dependent on the ebbs and flows of grant cycles, institutional support, and the shelf life of specific technologies. Not all, or even most, will meet their goals. The discipline needs to openly acknowledge the failures as much as the successes to appraise what worked, what didn't, and what could have been done differently.

Finally, lost in the talk of disciplinary upheaval is the fact that the traditional skills of the historian have never been more needed. The ability to instantly search millions of records requires exactly the kind of skepticism that historians have always wielded. What are a collection's biases, gaps, and silences? Who produced the sources and under what circumstances? Current technologies such as Geographic Information Systems or tablet computers will move in new directions or eventually fade into obsolescence. But the need to recognize contingency, to offer context, to investigate nuance and complexity, will not. An individual historian will still be able to build a career using these skills and no others. It is unlikely, however, that the profession as a whole will thrive with these skills alone. In this environment, inaction is ultimately reactionary; it is as much a mistake as thinking that our traditional skills are now obsolete. Technology opens potentially transformative avenues for historical discovery, but without a stronger appetite for experimentation those opportunities will go unrealized. The future of the discipline rests in large part on integrating new methods with conventional ones to redefine the limits and possibilities of how we understand the past.