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Catastrophes with Consequences: Anglo-American trans-Oceanic Ambitions and the Failed Franklin and Strain Expeditions

This study examines two unsuccessful nineteenth-century maritime enterprises in North and Central America – British naval officer John Franklin's search for the Northwest Passage and American naval Lieutenant Isaac Strain's quest for an interoceanic route through Panama. While both efforts collapsed, each remains relevant to evaluating and teaching world historical processes. On one level, this essay seeks to demonstrate the value of trans-regional analysis by connecting the two journeys' significance to past and present maritime competition. It also hopes that instructors might employ the public and diplomatic debates that arose over these frustrated maritime exploits to enliven their classrooms (see a module in Appendix I). Moreover, readers reflecting upon the course of these episodes will find salient insights into several current international environmental and political issues.

This article begins by assessing how Franklin's disappearance during his expedition induced Anglo-American collaborations in oceanic theory and practice. It then turns to examine how Strain's mission not only stemmed in part from Franklin's disaster but also relied upon contemporary British authors' reports on Panama. By joining these often divorced narratives (see the historiographical essay in Appendix II), this article reveals the interplay between modern empires and their aspirations. Above all, this work contends that these ill-fated endeavors engendered a coordinated, if short-lived, Anglo-American vision of interoceanic transportation.

Although works on Indigenous groups, colonizers, and the environment in the Polar North and Central America inspired this essay, it seeks to investigate the *mentalité* of Anglo-American explorers, and not Indigenous peoples' reactions to their activities. However, it merits noting that Bathsheba Demuth and Ignacio Gallup-Díaz have written on indigeneity in the Bering Strait and Panama respectively.[1] In addition, Robert McGhee and Ilan Kelman have discussed human and nonhuman interactions in the Arctic.[2] In the same vein, Julie Velásquez Runk and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos

have conducted fieldwork on how the Emberá of Darién have responded to outside investment and cultural representation.[3] Hopefully, future essays will integrate Indigenous experiences across Euro-American imperial landscapes.

Franklin's Passage to Disaster in the Arctic

John Franklin spent much of his life pursuing the age-old European dream of finding the fabled Northwest Passage, which runs from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Asia through North America. After enlisting in the Royal Navy in 1800 at the age of 14, Franklin spent nearly two decades participating in naval battles and expeditions associated with the Napoleonic War. Upon defeating the French emperor, England could focus again on establishing a commercial route to the Pacific. Given this recent restructuring of European affairs, locating the Northwest Passage would now further secure English dominance over global naval affairs. In 1818, Franklin became part of an Artic expedition with such imperial overtones. One of Franklin's companions, Frederick Beechey, saw their moment as one in which the "spirit of discovery . . . was resumed and prosecuted with an ardour worthy of a great maritime nation."[4] Unfortunately, ice blocked these wishes as well as the ships from progressing toward its objects, forcing its early return.

Despite this setback, the Royal Navy strengthened its resolve. By this time, John Barrow, the Second Secretary of the Admiralty from 1804 to 1845, envisioned Arctic transit as a uniquely British enterprise. For him, "the discovery of a north-west passage to India and China has always been considered as an object peculiarly British."[5] In asserting ownership over the past, he cast dominion over the future of the waterway. He was not alone in this view. For example, civil servant and author John Shillinglaw deemed English supremacy in the Arctic a self-evident truth. According to him, "England is due the first attempt to open out the mysteries of the North more than to any other nation. She has made the North-West question her own."[6] Shillinglaw based this confidence on the fact that England had already devoted itself to the cause. Indeed, the "Arctic Seas were too eminently a theatre of British enterprise and daring to be long deserted, even by those who had experienced the fearful rigours of the climate."[7]Especially because "Some of the best and bravest of her gallant sons had sought to subdue the spirits of storm, ice, and fog which ruled with despotic sway over their desolate and solitary dominions," England's current and future sailors deserved to continue this pursuit.[8]

It was to serve this conjoined national and imperial purpose that in 1819 Franklin gained command of an expedition to map portions of the Arctic Archipelago, a set of nearly 100 major and over 36,000 minor islands lying north of Canada. On 23 May 1819, he set out to the Arctic with the aim of traversing some of the Northwest Passage through a combination of overland and maritime treks. For instruction, Franklin read the diaries of Samuel Hearne, the first European to travel across the Arctic by foot along

the Coppermine River, a river in today's Northwest Territories and Nunavut, in 1771. Interestingly, Franklin planned to rely on the Hudson's Bay Company, the same fur-trading corporation that employed Hearne, for provisions and guidance. However, Franklin did not appreciate that the Hudson's Bay Company held a rivalry with another fur-trading company that promised to back Franklin, the North West Company. Thus, Franklin realized not long after arriving that he would not receive as much help as anticipated, partially because of this inter-company feud.[9] Encountering difficulties in gaining food and boats from both corporations over 1820, Franklin also understood that he and his colleagues had brought too few supplies from England.

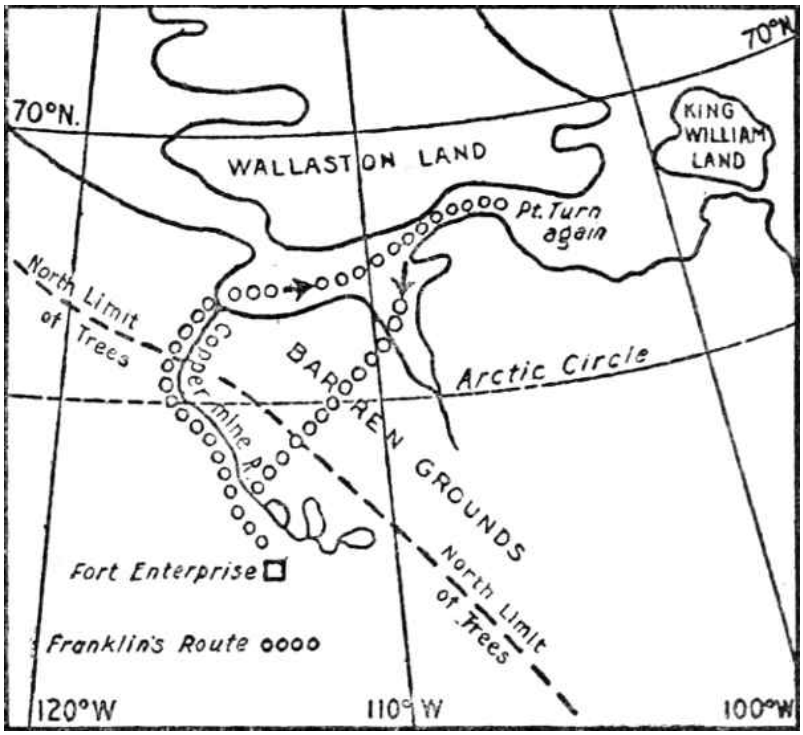


Image 1: Map of the Coppermine River as well as Franklin's voyage, denoted in circles. Source: In the Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coppermine_expedition_map.jpg

Although Franklin managed to establish ties with Akaitcho, Chief of the Yellowknives, he still struggled to form mutual trust. Akaitcho, wary because of what he heard from fur traders about Franklin's lack of equipment and money, would not help hunt until he received a guarantee of compensation. Therefore, while the crew trudged on in the summer of 1821, they killed game, traded with the Inuit, and scrounged their remaining provisions. Even though Franklin's ability to deal with these unfortunate circumstances suggested his prowess as a leader, he could not prevent the disintegration

of his expedition. After turning back in August (a point shown in Image 1 above), the crew fell apart. Without the Inuit accompanying them anymore, the men's stomachs felt emptier by the day, and their ability to follow orders flagged. To stave off disaster, Franklin and a few others in good condition left the remaining members to get emergency assistance. By the time Akaitcho and Franklin returned to find those left behind, 11 of the 20 had died by a combination of starvation, cannibalism, and murderous internal conflict. After a solemn winter of recuperation, Franklin and the other survivors landed in England in October 1822. This gruesome ending cast a dark shadow over the expedition, which some judged to be a debacle.[10] Franklin shared this low opinion. He expressed his own disappointment by lamenting the "long, fatiguing, and disastrous travels" that brought little reward.[11]

Franklin applied the lessons from this trying experience—especially the need to be more meticulous in his preparations—to his next voyage, which commenced in May 1825 and was aimed at exploring the course of the Mackenzie River, which passes through Canada's Northwest Territories.

Image 2: This map shows the route and location of the Mackenzie River system within the Canadian Northwest Territories. Source: In the Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mackenzie_River_basin_map.png

Over the next two years, the crew split into two subgroups, managed to work swiftly and efficiently, no doubt because they were unburdened by the ill health that plagued Franklin's earlier expedition. Franklin led one of these teams, which moved west from the head of the Mackenzie River to Beechey Point, Alaska. The other went to the east from the Mackenzie to the Coppermine River. As a result of their preparedness and fitness, the parties trekked and cataloged novel information on over 1,000 miles of the Arctic. Collecting this geographical data was a feat impressive enough for Franklin to receive widespread acclaim upon his return to Britain in 1827. Not long after, he was knighted by George IV and appointed as Lieutenant Governor of Tasmania.

The Power of the Fallacious "Open Polar Sea" Theory

As Franklin enjoyed the pinnacle of his career, an increasing number of voices in Britain advocated in favor of what was called the Open Polar Sea theory, an erroneous hypothesis that judged that warmer currents from the Atlantic passed into the Arctic, thus making it navigable. According to historian Michael Robinson, popular enthusiasm for this premise primarily grew innocent of firsthand knowledge about the polar regions, which "did not trickle down to the public from the press reports of the British Admiralty or the U.S. Hydrographic Office;" instead, it percolated through the collective consciousness due to a "clumsy back-and-forth between elite scientists, trusted explorers, popular writers, and geographical publishers."[12] One of those leading commentators was German cartographer August Petermann, who expressed support for the theory through journals, conferences, and books. Empirical observations also added credibility to these scientists' theoretical speculations. For example, sightings of whales migrating from the Pacific to the Arctic as well as Russian sailors' glimpses of "polynias," or open stretches of water, led more to trust in the hypothesis.[13]

Scientists from the United States contributed to these conversations on the Open Polar Sea theory. Matthew Maury, an oceanographer celebrated as "Pathfinder of the Seas," stands as the quintessential example of these American proponents.[14] He conjectured that the Gulf Stream moved into the Arctic, which served his belief in the unity of a global maritime system.[15] Maury made over a million calculations on wind directions and hundreds of thousands of barometer measurements to determine the flow of currents from warmer to cooler regions of the globe. According to this reasoning, "that boiling, bubbling pool of Gulf Stream water" explains the "great rarefaction of the air in the Polar regions" derived from latent heat below.[16] No frosty center, a "sea of fire" existed at the pole.[17] Interestingly enough, belief in the idea even spread within certain families; professor Thompson Maury – a relative of Matthew Maury – cited "the balmy air of the Open Sea" for sustaining avian life there.[18] Writing in 1876, another Arctic expert noted that "Nature does not lie" and that this theory offered "the solution of Polar problems" for all nations.[19] On the whole, its champions may have reasoned on

individual academic grounds but all contributed to a wider fervor around the supposed Arctic route.

Keen to anticipate these potential adversaries in finding an oceanic entrance, Barrow redoubled his determination to secure British rights over a Northwest Passage and prove the Open Polar Sea hypothesis. The naval administrator pontificated on ice motion with confidence: "open and deep sea does not freeze, but the ice originates in rivers, bays, and creeks, and floats about till it clings by the land."[20] For Barrow, the straits became idée fixe, leading him to call upon Franklin for what proved to be a last, fatal voyage. Barrow charged Franklin to make the "important discovery of a free and open passage" and solidify British title over it in 1845.[21] To guarantee his safety, Barrow equipped Franklin with three years of provisions as well as the *Erebus* and *Terror,* two ships remodeled to withstand the conditions. Franklin's expedition would be "the jewel of Barrow's polar enterprise."[22] With this backing, Franklin embarked on 19 May 1845, set on glorifying the Crown by linking oceans.

Image 3: American naval officer and oceanographer Silas Bent produced this map of the "Open Polar Sea" for an 1872 speech. The

red streams signify the areas of warm water that render the otherwise ice-filled pole passable. Source: In the Public Domain at https://archive.org/details/addressdelivere00Bent/page/n41/mode/1up.

Thereafter, Franklin discovered the fallibility of the Open Polar Sea theory. No amount of steam engines, iron plating, or propellers could shield his ships from the elements. In September 1846, ice trapped *Erebus* and *Terror* in the Victoria Strait, a strait in northern Canada that runs for nearly 100 miles in the southern portion of the Arctic Ocean. Unable to escape, dozens among the crew perished, including Franklin. The remaining survivors met their end by 1848 while wandering across the barren terrain.

News of the tragedy undermined assumptions that Britain would dominate the Arctic, thus encouraging the United States to extend its sphere of influence there. Ironically, this campaign began with rescue missions that believed in the Open Polar Sea theory and that Franklin could be alive. Eager to test their own hydrographical propositions as much as recover the presumably stranded British sailors, explorers from the United States flocked to the Arctic. Thus, Franklin's misfortune did not warn others of the fallacy of the Open Polar Sea hypothesis. Instead, it spurred Americans to act upon their similarly misguided scientific and imperial ideas.[23] Although he did not personally join these journeys, Mathew Maury played a key role in inspiring others to enter the Arctic. As a biographer put it, Maury "furnished many… [travelers] with helpful advice and encouragement in their undertakings, among them, especially [Elisha] Kane."[24] Kane, a participant in two American expeditions to the Artic, acknowledged his debt to Maury, even promising to name the Open Polar Sea after him. Though flattered, Maury declined the offer; today, an area between Greenland and northern Canada bears the name Kane Basin.[25]

Like his mentor Maury, Kane pronounced that the United States' involvement in the region was necessary on humanitarian and intellectual grounds. In an 1852 speech, Kane applauded this "philanthropic effort," stressing his obligation to "the sympathies of the whole civilized world."[26] However, by the second paragraph of his script, Kane emphasized strategic over moral concerns. Although Kane admitted that "complete failure [had] attended every attempt" to uncover a Northwest Passage, he felt sanguine.[27] He articulated these positive convictions on ice kinetics in phrases redolent of John Barrow's statements: "The iceless interval is evidently caused by the drift having traveled to the south without being reinforced by fresh supplies of ice."[28] Perhaps Kane's Barrow-like ideas stemmed from his fondness for British sailors. Throughout his journals, Kane reserved kind words for his transatlantic counterparts. In one instance, Kane yearned to winter beside his "English friends" so that they "might mutually sustain each other."[29] William Morton, one of Kane's deputies, exulted that they, too, had reached the "iceless open sea… the unfrozen ocean that had been supposed to surround

the pole."[30] They pictured the English as partners whose goodwill protected both against an unforgiving, alienating territory.

In this way, American confidence in the Open Polar Sea theory, even in the face of the disappearance of Franklin and his men, transformed Barrow's mission. It crossed physical as well as metaphorical boundaries, casting the United States and the United Kingdom as allies in the same cause. Indeed, United States President James Polk's correspondence with Jane Franklin, the voyager's widow, attests to this coalescence. The pair reciprocated their admiration of each other's empires, employing the same phrase "kindred people."[31] This language of common origins and purpose cemented the affinity between British and American intentions in the Arctic. Elisha Kane could not recover Franklin's body, but his exertions epitomized how Franklin's failure fueled a convergence of Anglo-American conceptions of maritime power.

Image 4: This 1850 painting by François Musin, titled "The Search for Sir John Franklin," depicts a rescue crew. Source: In the Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:François_Musin_-_The_Search_for_Sir_John_Franklin_in_the_Arctic.jpeg.

Strain's Fruitless Expedition in Panama

The forging of a substantive Anglo-American alliance in polar waters resembled a contemporary resolution of tensions between the two empires in Central America. About the time Barrow began sending voyagers to the North, the Spanish-American Wars of Independence engendered the formation of newborn republics. England viewed these nations as opportunities to extend its political sway and extract resources. But as in the Arctic regions, they were not alone: the United States announced itself through

the 1823 Monroe Doctrine as the arbiter of the hemisphere's affairs. This document heralded thirty years of rivalry between the United Kingdom and the United States around the search for trans-oceanic travel in Central America. Fearful of their competition boiling over into outright hostilities, the two signed the Clayton-Bulwer treaty in 1850. The agreement stipulated that neither Britain nor America would attempt to construct a Central American canal alone. However, this accord did not dampen their exploratory objectives.

Image 5: Map of modern-day Darién Province, which is shaded in green. Source: In the Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Darién_Gap-en.svg

The same Matthew Maury that advised Elisha Kane to look for the Northwest Passage judged Panama a favorable spot for a trans-oceanic canal. More specifically,

and as shown in Image 5 above, Maury advocated for Darién, which lies in eastern Panama today and straddles a border with Colombia. Indeed, Maury urged the Secretary of the Navy, James Dobbin, to sponsor what crystallized into the United States Darién Exploring Expedition. Like Barrow, Dobbin promoted the voyage as a means of bolstering imperial authority by bridging oceans. He anticipated the "wonderful influence which its successful accomplishment might exert upon the world" and most importantly America; continuing this thread, he forecasted that the resulting "intercourse between our Atlantic and Pacific possessions" would swell domestic economies.[32] With the California Gold Rush underway, the promise of avoiding the slower, more dangerous Cape Horn route heightened enthusiasm for Panama. President Franklin Pierce, another canal advocate like Dobbin, classified such an enterprise as a "special service," indicating his commitment to its execution.[33]

Image 6: This 1855 map of the United States Darién Expedition delineates Strain's intended path in relation to other routes. Source: In the Public Domain at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Darien_Exploring_Expedition_%281854%29.

In 1853, James Dobbin selected Isaac Strain, a Lieutenant in the United States Navy with exploring experience in South America, to probe the possibility of a trans-oceanic route in Darién. Excitement about Darién derived to a notable degree from European accounts. According to British maps, a gap existed between the mountains that would permit easy passage across the narrowest strip of land between the two oceans. Yet, this promise of an unobstructed swath of canal-friendly territory was faulty – Darién turned out to be almost as impenetrable as the Arctic Archipelago.

While readying to depart, Strain misplaced his trust in two Britons, Edward Cullen, and Lionel Gisborne, who alleged that they had found trails through the Darién wilderness. The pair surveyed Darién in the 1850s and later formed the Atlantic and Pacific Junction Company, which hoped to obtain rights for a canal.[34] Cullen's and Gisborne's boosterism led Strain to underestimate the obstacles ahead of him. For example, Cullen exaggerated Darién's assets, writing that, "Darien will become the great inter-oceanic portal, the *entrepôt* of the world, the storehouse of nations, the grand highway of commerce."[35] Although Cullen waxed lyrical about Darién in the future tense, his effusive tone insinuated that the area's ascendance was inevitable, waiting for an outsider to unlock its potential. If more laconic than Cullen, Gisborne, a civil engineer, still inflated Strain's impression of Darién's navigability. While expounding upon his blueprint for a canal, Gisborne boasted that "no engineering difficulties, and no chance of future failure" could materialize, which naturally buoyed Strain's confidence.[36]

Strain's troubles from Cullen's and Gisborne's unfounded claims began even before he set sail for Darién on January 17, 1854. Trusting in Cullen's and Gisborne's projections, Strain packed only around ten days' worth of rations. Confounded by poor maps and exhausted from trudging through dense forest, Strain and his comrades became demoralized. Noticing that "the men, covered with boils and suffering from hunger, had become very desponding," Strain designated a checkpoint "Hospital Camp" for the invalids.[37] As time elapsed, the number of burials rose, and the odds for breakthroughs diminished. Over weeks of marching in rivers, cutting through thickets, and scratching at botflies, nine of the twenty-seven in the party perished. At one poignant moment in J. T. Headley's *Harper's* article on these events, the journalist paused to reflect upon how the explorers internalized "these revolting, painful visitations, so dreaded by man."[38]

As Darién pushed Strain's forces to annihilation, the British grew concerned about the Americans' tribulations. Akin to the response to Franklin's disappearance, a transatlantic mission embarked to retrieve Strain's crew. Much as the American Kane hoped to save Franklin in Canada, a British ship, *Virago,* found and aided Strain in Darién. With similar human and strategic concerns in mind, the British tended to the sufferers' wounds and led them to safety. Before weighing anchor for home, the

American survivors composed a gushing letter to their rescuers. Writing from "the feelings in our hearts," they commended the Britons for personifying the noble "characteristics of the British gentleman and sailor."[39] Strain himself did not express his gratitude with as much deference. He admitted that without "their well-directed efforts thirteen [of] his men must inevitably have perished."[40] After all, the British Cullen and Gisborne misled Strain into this very disaster.

Image 7: This drawing from *Harper's* depicts the British attending to enervated American explorers. At this moment, Strain and his crew begin their return home. Source: In the Public Domain at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Darien_Exploring_Expedition_%281854%29.

The arrival of the *Virago* marked not only Strain's shortcomings but also the preservation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty. Had Strain prevailed, this accord could have been in jeopardy. Instead, his failure allowed the powers to retain "amity which so happily subsist[ed] between them."[41] Through this association, they would continue seeking "to accomplish a particular object, but also to establish a general principle" of Anglo-American partnership.[42] Therefore, Strain was only half-right when he lamented

that his was "an expedition without brilliancy, because [it was] without success."[43] Albeit correct on a literal level, he could have taken more consolation in defeat. This debacle ensured that Britain and America remained yoked by "bonds of friendship and alliance."[44] With this in mind, Strain facilitated the triumph of combined United Kingdom-United States hopes to dominate isthmian transit, one that would stand until America constructed the Panama Canal.

Afterlives and Conclusions

The legacies of Franklin's and Strain's adventures suggest the persistence of their unfulfilled aspirations. Thirty years after Franklin's death, the Arctic still excited interest from the United Kingdom and the United States. Former Franklin search party members Clements Markham, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, and Sherard Osborn, rear admiral, backed the 1875-1876 British Arctic Expedition. This voyage did not look for Franklin, though it continued to seek the Northwest Passage and test the Open Polar Sea theory as it traveled to the North Pole.[45] But scurvy, antiquated materials, and ice doomed this voyage. From the grave, Franklin prompted British initiatives for redemption that ultimately bred further disappointment. One commentator quipped that this was "a painful memory for the Admiralty, and not tragic enough for popular writers to use in harrowing the public's sensibilities."[46] Without a commensurate human toll, this expedition lacked the emotional tenor of Franklin's loss. As a result, the Open Polar Sea hypothesis neared its conclusion in Britain. Markham, though a supporter of polar voyages since his involvement in the Franklin episode, had voiced doubts about the theory for years. In his eyes, the fantasy that the "Polar Basin is composed of an open sea, is in itself so contrary to all experience that it scarcely merits refutation."[47] Of course Markham did not celebrate the breakdown of the British Arctic Expedition; but at least it corroborated his, as well as others, distrust in the Open Polar Sea theory.

The final episode in this saga of Anglo-American engagement in the Arctic was characteristic of the whole. Not long after the British Arctic Expedition, the United States sponsored the American Arctic Expedition (1878-1881), a mission with almost identical objectives. Its leader, George W. De Long, intended to achieve what his predecessors could not: pilot through the Open Polar Sea. But because this hypothesis was indeed false, their boats also became lodged in floating ice for two years before sinking. Some of the crew fled and avoided drowning, but De Long and nineteen others died. As with the Franklin expedition, this catastrophe disheartened the American populace. The satirical magazine *Wasp* captured the zeitgeist with its acerbic headline "sacrificed for a worthless purpose."[48] Thereafter, it appeared unlikely that anyone would collect a 20,000-pound reward for traversing the Northwest Passage anytime soon. Upon first glance, this series of events confirmed Karl Marx's *bon mot* that history occurs "first as tragedy, then as farce."[49] However, these failures were not ludicrous;

such expeditions signified the Arctic's enduring potency within the Anglo-American imagination.[50] Indeed, as faith in the Open Polar Sea theory waned later in the 1880s, Anglo-Americans shifted toward another portion of the Arctic, the North Pole.[51] Because of the vastness and relatively unknown nature of the region, it served as a particularly pliable imagined space in the minds of outsiders. Elisha Kane demonstrated this appeal by remarking that "the Arctic was a realm as great as that of the whole world known to Herodotus . . . to conquer, and conquer once for all."[52] In Kane's view, Western powers would assume this monumental task and control the polar world.

Though the legacy of Franklin's plight stimulated later United Kingdom-United States cooperation, a corresponding resurgence did not transpire in Panama. After all, explorers would encounter but not create the Northwest Passage. On the other hand, canals required capital, engineering, and time. After Strain's expedition, Americans progressively hoped to assemble this political and literal infrastructure. Almost every president after the signing of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty chafed under its restrictions, authorizing a myriad of isthmian surveys.[53] The Darién route lingered on Americans' list as a possible canal site, as evidenced by Commander T.O. Selfridge's 1870 dispatch there. Tracking Strain's trail, Selfridge launched what a Navy communiqué vaunted as "the greatest enterprise of the present age."[54] Having craved that his name be "honorably identified with one of the facts of the future," Selfridge left Darién disenchanted.[55] Penning his official report with austere resignation, he grumbled that "it [is] useless to explore… with the slightest prospect of success."[56] That being said, Selfridge eulogized that the Darién expedition had been "rendered memorable by the heroic sufferings of Lieutenant Strain."[57] This tribute demonstrates both the longevity of favorable perceptions about Stain and also provides a reminder of the inter-imperial collaboration that preceded its breakdown at the dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, the 1901 Hay-Pauncefote Treaty abrogated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, licensing the United States to build the Panama Canal. Still, this history (other than as an example of Western imperial cooperation of recent interest to world historians) and its geopolitical effects linger today.[58]

Indeed, Franklin's and Strain's unsatisfied appetites to subdue habitats and peoples, regardless of local circumstances or irreversible consequences, persist. World powers' hopes to control trans-oceanic pathways have increased in tandem with the growing effects of global warming. It has even placed at odds two longtime allies, the United States and Canada, the successor to British rule in the Arctic Archipelago. While Americans aver that these polar waterways are international and permit the "right of transit passage," Canadians deem them a historic right and liable to statist regulations.[59] Russia, China, and even India wish to be players in that region, increasing the likelihood of human, animal, and environmental damage there.[60] As these disputes over sovereignty and cost to the planet intensify up north, concerns in Central America simmer as well. For one, China's One Belt One Road Initiative extends across these two

areas. In this vein, Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Co. intended but failed to build a new trans-isthmus canal through Central America.[61] Moreover, disquiet in Darién has mounted as part of the current migration patterns of those seeking a healthier climate and freer societies.[62] With a record 19,000 children passing through Darién in 2021, Erika Mouynes, Panamanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, has called for hemispheric cooperation. Rejecting Darién as a "U.S. problem or a Panama problem," she insists that it is "everyone's problem."[63] Mouynes' words apply just as well to the Northwest Passage because these climate and humanitarian crises reach beyond the Americas. Thus, these once-closed paths that united Anglo-American imperial ambitions through failure have opened; together, they accentuate the need for integrated visions in historical scholarship and political practice.

Appendix I

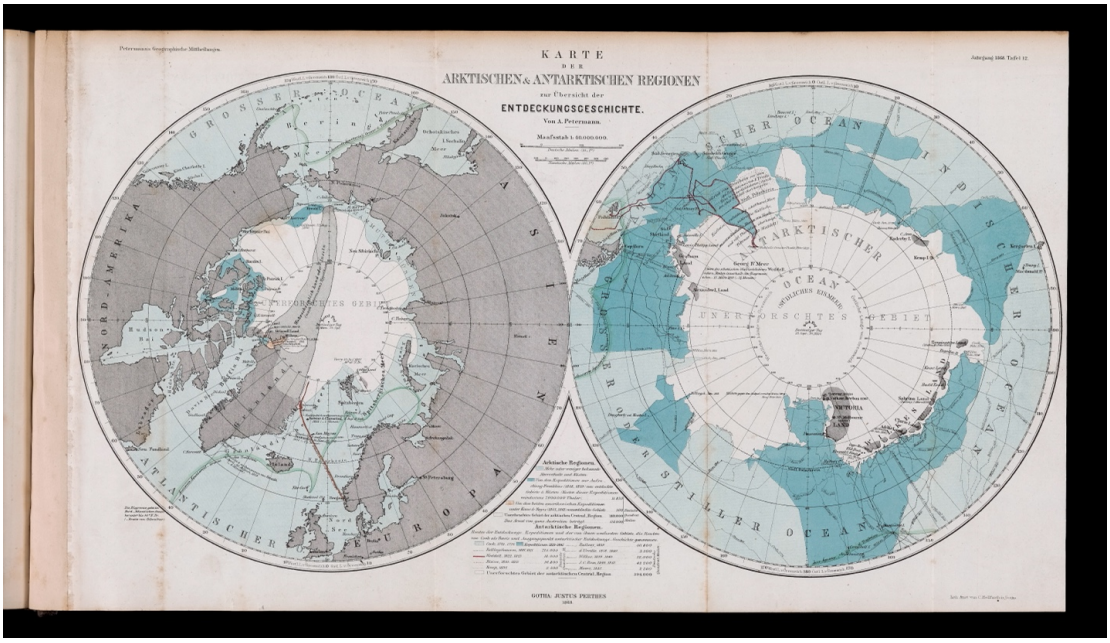
A module on interoceanic transit through the Americas.

This exercise seeks to show how ambitions for interoceanic transit through the Americas have evolved from the 19th to the 21st century. It intends to develop critical reasoning skills, expression of ideas to others, awareness of the resonances among past and present, and overall knowledge of imperial maritime history. Of course, one could replicate this model in other parts of the globe as ambitions for oceanic passageways often stretch across regions. Above all, this plan hopes to empower the students by replicating in them the sense of discovery in research that motivated the writing of this essay.

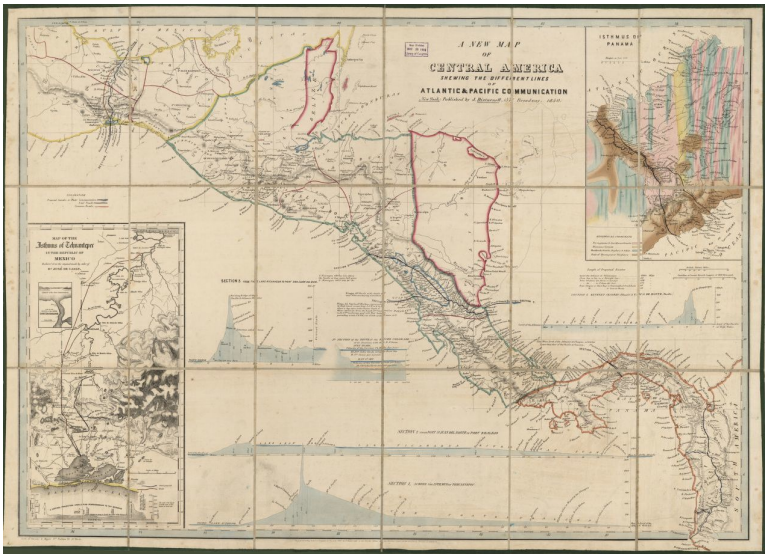
Step 1.
Time: 5 minutes
Break down the class into three groups of roughly equal size. Each team will focus on aspects of interoceanic transit in the tropics and the Arctic by analyzing sets of maps representing Central America and Canada. The bullets below outline the documents each group will be assigned and why. It might be useful to contextualize these maps from the descriptions below.

Group 1. Projections of scientific knowledge and desires for transportation during the mid-19th century. Map 1 by German polymath Augustus Heinrich Petermann evidences his belief in a clear pathway through the Arctic thanks to the Open Polar Sea theory and a land bridge. Map 2 by American cartographer John Disturnell depicts potential Central American transit routes alongside detailed geological measurements. Together, these maps communicate how knowledge and power intertwined. Both depictions seek not only to report their estimations of regions based

on evidence but also to insert their aspirations for how the places could facilitate their dreams for oceanic pathways.



Map 1. Augustus Heinrich Petermann, *Karte der Arktischen & Antarktischen Regionen* from *Mittheilungen aus Justus Perthes' Geographischer Anstalt über wichtige neue Erforschungen* (1868). Source: In the Public Domain at www.oshermaps.org/map/49424.0012



Map 2. John Disturnell, Cartographer, José De Garay, *A new map of Central America: shewing the different lines of Atlantic & Pacific communication* (1850). Source: In the

Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_new_map_of_Central_America_-_shewing_the_different_lines_of_Atlantic_%26_Pacific_communication_LOC_2018588008.jpg#filelinks

Group 2. Pictorial maps from the late 19th to early 20th century commemorate history and present progress through interoceanic transit. Map 1 by two drawers, M.M. Scott and Daniel Vierge, and one engraver, Fortune Meaulle, epitomizes the spirit of fin-de-siècle optimism in history's advancement through exploration. Names of past explorers of the Northwest Passage such as John Franklin and Elisha Kane surround the glowing light emanating from the then-unreached North Pole. But the goal of traversing the Northwest Passage is indicated to be reachable now since "Mer Libre?," or Open Sea lies at its center. Map 2 by B. Ashburton Tripp also honors the history of conquistadores and explorers like Christopher Columbus in bringing the Panama Canal to fruition. Neat depictions of the Canal's modern features complement these historical references, suggesting how civilization only improves with age. As a pair, these documents reveal how pictorial maps can display history as well as achievements to present a single narrative of power and advancement.

Map 1. M.M. Scott, Daniel Vierge, and Fortune Meaulle. *Le Tour de Monde en un Clin d'Oeil* (1876). Source: In the Public Domain at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_Tour_Du_Monde_En_Un_Clin_D%27Oeil.jpg

Map 2. B. Ashburton Tripp, *A Map of Castilla Del Oro Panama On the Spanish Main* (1930). Used under Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license, credit given to "David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries, at https://archive.org/details/dr_a-map-of-castilla-del-oro-panama-on-the-spanish-main-b-ashburton-tripp-c-8642000.

Group 3. The Arctic and the tropics serve as points of geopolitical anxiety and strategy during World War II. In map 1, Charles H. Owens argues that Russia's potential usage of the Northeast Passage during the warmer months could further the Allied cause against Germany. Similarly, Map 2 calls for the creation of a Nicaraguan Canal to bolster the crucial Panama Canal during wartime. Combined, these maps capture the worries of Allied forces as well as their unified hopes. With a pause to their quarreling over either transit route, nations sought to use both the Arctic and the tropics to defend the globe against Nazism.

Map 1. Charles H. Owens, Russia's Northeast Passage Summer Headache for Nazis, (1943). Used under Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license, David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries, at https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/3g68hu

Map 2. Unknown author from *San Francisco Examiner*, *We Need Nicaragua Canal for Defense,* (1939). Used under Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license, David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries, at https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/l2ds6c.

Step 2.
Time: 20 minutes
Each group will analyze and compare their respective maps. Students should break down internally to analyze the Arctic and tropic maps separately and then reconvene to discuss their insights. Any ideas about the documents' composition, meaning, and connections are welcome. The teams should make sure to write down their most salient talking points for the next stage of the lesson.

Step 3.
Time: 20 minutes
Every team will present their two maps to the rest of the class. After all three groups have explained their maps, they can speak as a group about how these images relate to each other in a wider narrative.

Step 4.
Time: 15 minutes
To conclude, the instructor could show the class (preferably on a projected screen) this website: https://www.hurtigruten.com/en-us/expeditions/ships/roald-amundsen/. This link describes the MS Roald Amundsen, a cruise ship named after the explorer who first traversed the Northwest Passage by boat. Built in 2019, this ship is equipped to travel through the Northwest Passage and the Panama Canal. In particular, it is vital to show this upcoming travel option:
https://www.hurtigruten.com/en-us/expeditions/cruises/pole-to-pole-adventure-the-ultimate-bucket-list-expedition-cruise2/. This nearly $70,000 worth, 94-day voyage, titled the "Pole to Pole Adventure" ventures through the Northwest Passage, following the "Wake of the Great Explorers" to enjoy this "wild and untamed region." Honoring Amundsen, "the first to conquer" the Northwest Passage, this ship turns once treacherous exploration into pleasure. Just as importantly, the trip offers the opportunity to pass through "one of the world's great engineering feats," the Panama Canal, enjoying the "lush rainforest landscape" and the region's "Colonial Highlights." Explain to the class how this example of cruise continues this centuries-long history of seeing the Arctic and tropical regions as extraordinary places to control, enjoy, and traverse. Open up the classroom for further discussion to close the lesson on how they make sense of modern tourism and its place in this history.

Appendix II

Background and Historiography: Catastrophes and the Anglo-American Imperial Imagination

In 1850, poet George Henry Boker rendered disaster glorious in *A Ballad of Sir John Franklin*. Five years before, British Royal Navy officer John Franklin led a voyage to find the Northwest Passage; but he disappeared, and his 129-man crew died. Nonetheless, Boker translated tragedy into triumph, elevating his eponymous hero to a mythical stature. In the final stanza, Boker assumed his protagonist's voice, exulting, "We have done what man has never done–/The truth is founded, the secret won–/We passed the Northern Sea!"[64] This rhetoric conjures the image of Franklin basking in victory over a conquered environment. Written in the present perfect and past tenses as well as punctuated by an exclamation mark, the verses imply that Franklin achieved his wishes before expiring, reaching an apotheosis.

Boker's glossing over the icy reality of Franklin's catastrophe resembles journalist J.T. Headley's paean to Isaac Strain's abortive 1854 expedition of Darién, Panama. Despite Strain's failure, Headley portrayed the American lieutenant in glowing terms over monthly installments in *Harper's Magazine*. Throughout the 50,000-word article, Headley infused his prose with a register of transcendence; he extolled Strain for having "alone accomplished the passage, though under an accumulation of suffering rarely recorded in the annals of man."[65] Albeit phrased differently, this proclamation of Strain's feat mirrors Boker's adulation of Franklin. Both writers commemorated the explorers for surpassing limits and completing tasks they never did.[66]

Here, Boker and Headley's paeans suggest other resonances between these two failed Anglo-American interoceanic transit ventures. Franklin and Strain carried the flags of their respective navies into separate regions but constructed physical and mental geographies of their destinations in relation to each other. As stressed above, Franklin, emboldened by the Open Polar Sea theory, set out with high expectations. But upon encountering ice instead of mild currents, actors surrounding the explorers shared attachments as well. Alongside a host of scientists from both sides of the Atlantic, John Barrow, Second Secretary of the Admiralty, sponsored Franklin and the Open Polar Sea theory. Franklin's United States envoys such as Elisha Kane proceeded into the Arctic to verify the hypothesis Barrow trusted. Even more, American oceanographer Matthew Maury – another adherent of the speculations about temperate polar channels – galvanized Kane's as well as Strain's trip.[67]

Indeed, Franklin's wreck prompted United States decision-makers such as Maury to reposition their schemes south, convinced that Panama's sultry climes and slender isthmus would be more promising than Canada.[68] Crucially, the English harbored matching goals, as evidenced by the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty discussed above. Moreover,

Strain relied upon accounts from two British explorers, Edward Cullen and Lionel Gisborne. When viewed in tandem, the continuities between these cases are striking. Notions about the permeability of impermeable places motivated a government-sponsored trip; next, the effort to pioneer a novel route collapsed in harsh surroundings; finally, disaster united the powers as they attempted to save the lost sailors.

To gain a nuanced understanding of these voyages, it is necessary to situate this essay within the literature. Scholars have discussed Franklin and Strain to varying degrees but seldom from a comparative vantage point. On one side, Franklin has attracted a host of attention. Given the focus on the Englishman's legacy, this essay seeks to build upon that extensive literature. In contrast to Franklin, Strain has received scant scrutiny. Because authors have neglected the connections between these failures, none has realized how they unified empires. This paper strives to fill this lacuna by demonstrating how unrealized interoceanic projects fostered temporary Anglo-American ties of science and ambition.

The sheer mystery and magnitude of Franklin's disappearance have intrigued authors since 1845. As Martin Sandler noted, this "epic tale – an adventure, mystery, and detective story all rolled into one, played out against the harshest backdrop in the world" has attracted many for good reason.[69] First-hand narratives from the travelers who attempted to retrieve the lost ships proliferated during the nineteenth century, cementing Franklin's prominent role in the annals of polar exploration.[70] To only name a few of the prominent British and Americans, Horatio Austin, Richard Collinson, John Richardson, John Rae, Elisha Kane, F.L. McClintock, Edwin De Haven, Edward Belcher, and others penned their experiences.[71]

In line with this trend, commentators have published at least a few hundred books and articles on the subject, giving rise to rich subfields.[72] Contemporary authors such as J.H. Skewes, P.L. Simmonds, Frederick Whymper, and Samuel Smucker judged these "Heroes of the Arctic" as valiant men seeking "the romance of the North-West Passage."[73] Even if such encomiums have given way to more critical scholarly assessments of the period, fascination with Franklin has endured. In one instance, Patricia D. Sutherland's edited collection, *The Franklin Era in Canadian Arctic History*, contains an excellent array of chapters analyzing the expedition itself, the searches for Franklin, and the cultural reactions to this episode. To complement this work, Leslie H. Neatby released an engaging account, *The Search for Franklin*. Another scholar has traced whaler William Penny's rescue attempt in detail, and more recently Scott Cookman's *Ice Blink* relies upon forensic data to suggest cannibalism and botulism, a virus-based disease that likely derived from the improperly canned foods, led to the crew's demise.[74] In light of the identification of the HMS *Erebus* and *Terror* in 2014 and 2016, respectively, Paul Watson and Russell A. Potter have offered timely meditations on the history and significance of Franklin's failure.

Moreover, numerous experts have investigated the long history of exploring the Northwest Passage, providing further context to Franklin's debacle.[75] For one, Alan Edwin Day's *Search for the Northwest Passage* supplies a thoroughly-researched annotated bibliography with thousands of entries. In addition, Clive Holland and Alan Cooke have produced monumental encyclopedias on Canadian exploration.[76] Others have synthesized this convoluted history from a more narrative perspective.[77] To recount a few well-known examples, Ann Savours, Glyndwr Williams, and Pierre Berton have written panoramic reviews of the chase for the Northwest Passage.[78] In a similar vein, Bernd Brunner's *Extreme North* surveys why the region has gained a cultural and mythological status to those within and outside the Arctic. In sum, these works give a detailed overview of how interoceanic passage through the Arctic has, and continues to be, desirable.

Furthermore, academics have assessed British and American understandings of the Arctic. American historian Michael F. Robinson has dissected cultural tropes from 1850 to 1910, revealing how the North Pole evolved into one of "the local tempests of American cultural life."[79] Across the Atlantic, Eric G. Wilson, Jen Hill, Francis Spufford, Robert David, and Ian MacLaren have delineated how the Arctic's danger compounded its allure. Moreover, Trevor H. Levere, Janice Cavell, and Theodore Binnema have investigated the links between science and the cultural imagination across the two nations during the nineteenth century. Shane McCorristine has investigated another facet of these fantasies, the supernatural realm of the "spectral Arctic."[80] In addition, Adriana Craciun has punctured the myths of Victorian Arctic narratives; in *Writing Arctic Disaster*, she deconstructs the "changing codes of authorship, publication, and the materiality of writings that transformed British Arctic voyaging and its histories."[81] Taking a wider approach to each nation of the circumpolar region, John McCannon's monograph, *A History of the Arctic,* grants a holistic view of the interactions among Indigenous and outside actors operating in the region. In all, this subfield will continue to burgeon by dissecting the distinct social constructions of the Arctic.

Beyond works on exploration itself, this piece also draws upon scholarship focusing on the Open Polar Sea theory, the scientific hypothesis that backed voyages such as Franklin's. John K. Wright and Michael Robinson have written at length on the Open Polar Sea theory, explaining its evolution with lucid prose. These studies hold particular value because neither dismisses the now-defunct hypothesis out of hand. Instead, both try to understand why it appeared and how it held its appeal. In doing so, they show why the theory gained support in the mid-nineteenth century. Adding further nuance to these conversations in a 2021 article, Nanna Katrine Lüders Kaalund and John Woitkowitz have contributed an expansive reading of the Open Polar Sea theory. They underscore "the importance of adopting comparative transnational approaches for understanding the fluid and reciprocal nature of Arctic science throughout the transatlantic world."[82] In addition to this article, Kaalund's first book, *Exploration in*

the Icy North, examines how nineteenth-century Arctic science emerged through these complex networks, particularly from travel narratives. As she demonstrates, explorers developed their understanding of this landscape in dialogue with Indigenous peoples, the harsh climate itself, and competing figures from various empires.

Shifting to Central America, US historiography often inserts Strain within a narrative that leads to the 1914 Panama Canal opening ceremonies rather than in dialogue with the North. In one illustrative example, David McCullough depicts Strain's as one of the trials necessary for the eventual union of the Atlantic and Pacific. As a result, McCullough casts Strain's expedition in a framework that elides interimperial dynamics. Of course, *Path Between the Seas* remains a stellar read; the Arctic simply lies outside of its purview. Todd Balf's *The Darkest Jungle*, the only monograph devoted to Strain, is an entertaining entryway to considering the Darién expedition. Although this essay does not directly engage with the work of scholars such as Ernesto Bassi and Jeppe Mulich, it benefits from their approach to the Caribbean Basin and Central America as fluid spaces of transimperial relations.

Despite the worth of these works, scholars have overlooked the interlocking of interoceanic transit plans across the Americas. In most cases, scholars focus on these areas in isolation. Albeit useful on a practical level, it is misleading to divide Canada and Panama in this way. This paper deviates from other academic contributions by associating Franklin with Strain as well as the Arctic and tropics. Moreover, this comparison reflects the mindset of nineteenth-century figures who pursued a channel to Asia from both directions.

This essay also finds inspiration from comparisons of the British and American empires. First, it is germane to note that though this paper draws upon wide-ranging tomes on empire by John Elliott, A.G. Hopkins, Charles Maier, Chris Bayly, Frederick Cooper, and Jane Burbank, as well as Jürgen Osterhammel, it holds more circumscribed aims. Instead, it follows Julian Go's *Patterns of Empire*. In this monograph, Go traces the intersection of British and American imperial growth, "comparing patterns of emergence, formation, or re-formation."[83] He addresses not simply what resonances between the empires surfaced, but instead why they did.[84] Go's balance between a structural framework and empirical proof evinces the explanatory force of this comparative method. However, this paper evaluates a pattern Go remarks upon little in his book: that between British and American interoceanic transit projects.

To conclude, and without a doubt, engaging with these and other superb sources has aided the development of this essay. Although this piece cannot parse through all of the literature directly on, or tangential to, these two subjects, it seeks to interact with the most relevant subfields on Anglo-American exploration of the Arctic and Central America in the text as well as in the endnotes.

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Notes

[1] See Bathsheba Demuth, *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019). and Ignacio Gallup-Díaz, *The Door of the Seas and the Key to the Universe: Indian Politics and Imperial Rivalry in Darién, 1640-1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

[2] For more, consult *Arcticness: Power and Voice from the North* edited by Ilan Kelman (London: UCL Press, 2017) and Robert McGhee, *The Last Imaginary Place: A Human History of the Arctic World* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007).

[3] Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, "Emberá Indigenous Tourism and the Trap of Authenticity: Beyond Inauthenticity and Invention." *Anthropological Quarterly* 86(2) (2013): 397–425. Julie Velásquez Runk, *Identity, Art, and Environmental Governance in Panama's Darién* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017).

[4] Frederick Beechey, *A Voyage of Discovery Towards the North Pole* (London: Richard Bentley, 1843), 23.

[5] John Barrow, *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions* (London,: J. Murray, 1818), 364.

[6] John Joseph Shillinglaw, *Narrative of Arctic Discovery* (London: W. Shoberl, 1851), 264.

[7] Ibid, 264.

[8] Ibid, 264.

[9] Interestingly, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company would merge later in 1821.

[10] George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, hesitated to help Franklin during the expedition and lambasted him afterward for his inadequacies.

[11] John Franklin, *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea,* (London: John Murray, 1824), 399.

[12] Ibid, 25.

[13] See P.J. Capelotti, "Benjamin Leigh Smith's Third Arctic Expedition: Svalbard, 1873," *Polar Record* 46, no. 4 (2010): 359–71.

[14] John Walter Wayland, *The Pathfinder of the Seas; the Life of Matthew Fontaine Maury* (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1930).

[15] Wayland, *The Pathfinder of the Seas*. In addition, D. Graham Burnett's treatment of Matthew Maury's hydrographical theories has informed this paper's reading of the polymath. Still, Burnett's chapter diverges from this essay because he discusses whales and cartography. Superintendent of the U.S. Coast Survey Alexander Dallas Bache and Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz both supported the Open Polar Sea theory for similar meteorological reasons as Maury.

[16] The Polar Exploring Expedition: A Special Meeting of the American Geographical & Statistical Society, Held March 22, 1860. United States: Society, 1860.

[17] Matthew F. Maury, *The Physical Geography of the Sea* (New York: Harper & brothers, 1855), 256.

[18] Thompson B. Maury, *The Gateways to the Pole* in Wright, "The Open Polar Sea," 360.

[19] Samuel R. Van Campen, *The Dutch in the Arctic Seas* (Amsterdam: P.N. Van Kampen & Zoon, 1876), 47.

[20] John Barrow, *A Chronological History*, 94.

[21] John Barrow, *A Chronological History*, 109.

[22] Michael Robinson, "Reconsidering the Theory of the Open Polar Sea" in *Extremes – Oceanography's Adventures* (New York: 2001), 18.

[23] Edwin De Haven, Isaac Israel Hayes, and Charles Francis stand as three of the most prominent examples.

[24] Charles Lee Lewis, *Matthew Fontaine Maury, the Pathfinder of the Seas* (Annapolis: The United States naval institute, 1927), 82.

[25] Ibid, 82.

[26] Elisha Kent Kane, *Access to an open polar sea in connection with the search after Sir John Franklin and his companions* (New York: Baker, Godwin, 1853), 16.

[27] Elisha Kent Kane, *Access to an open polar sea*, 15.

[28] Elisha Kent Kane, *Access to an open polar sea*, 10.

[29] Elisha Kent Kane, *Adrift in the Arctic Ice Pack, from the History of the First US Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1916), 85.

[30] Thomas Morton, *Dr. Kane's Arctic Voyage* (New York: Barton & Son, 1857), 18.

[31] Peter Lund Simmonds, *The Arctic regions: being an account of the American expedition in search of Sir John Franklin* (Auburn and Buffalo: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1854), 328, 331. It merits noting that United States Secretary of State John M. Clayton sent this letter on behalf of Polk to Jane Franklin. Clayton later negotiated a landmark treaty over Central American transit with Britain.

[32] James Dobbin, *Report of the Secretary of the Navy* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1854), 384.

[33] Todd Balf, *The Darkest Jungle: The True Story of the Darién Expedition and America's Ill-Fated Race to Connect the Seas* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), 7.

[34] To achieve this goal, the Company partnered with the navies of Britain, France, and the United States to conduct further studies. But this plan foundered because the parties could not communicate effectively among themselves.

[35] Edward Cullen, *Isthmus of Darien Ship Canal; with a Full History of the Scotch Colony of Darien, Several Maps, Views of the Country, and Original Documents* (London: Wilson, 1853), 5.

[36] Lionel Gisborne, *Journal of a Trip to Darien* (London: Saunders and Stanford, 1852), 246.

[37] Joel Tyler Headley, "Darien Exploring Expedition," 601.

[38] Joel Tyler Headley, "Darien Exploring Expedition," 609.

[39] Todd Balf, *The Darkest Jungle*, 310.

[40] Todd Balf, *The Darkest Jungle*, 310.

[41] John Clayton, Henry Bulwer, Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, introduction, 19 April 1850.

[42] John Clayton, Henry Bulwer, Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, article viii.

[43] Joel Tyler Headley, "Darien Exploring Expedition," 764.

[44] Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, article vi, 19 April 1850.

[45] George Strong Nares, the captain of this expedition, doubted the existence of the Open Polar Sea but one of the ships, HMS *Alert*, did attempt to get to the North Pole by water.

[46] John Edwards Caswell, "The RGS and the British Arctic Expedition, 1875-76," *The Geographical Journal* 143, no. 2 (1977): 209.

[47] Clements Robert Markham, *The Threshold of the Unknown Region* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searles & Rivington, 1876), 83.

[48] George F. Keller, "Sacrificed for a worthless purpose," *The Wasp*, Vol. 8, (12 May 1882): 304.

[49] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte: With Explanatory Notes* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008), 1.

[50] In 1981, nearly one-hundred years after the final nineteenth-century Franklin search party embarked, Canadian anthropologist Owen Beattie and a team looked for the crew's remains on King William Island. Over the past three decades, teams have leveraged advanced scientific, technological, and forensic methods to find out more about the voyage. Perhaps the most prominent of these recent breakthroughs came in 2014 and 2016 when research groups discovered the *Erebus* and *Terror*, respectively.

[51] Interestingly, then, neither an American nor a British sailor, but instead a Norwegian, Roald Amundsen, first crossed the Northwest Passage by ship.

[52] Kane, *Alaska and the Polar Regions*, 23.

[53] In the roughly seventy years between the tenures of Zachary Taylor and Woodrow Wilson, every United States president encountered the Central American canal question to a certain extent. Although some such as Andrew Johnson and Grover Cleveland voiced less eagerness than Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt, they nonetheless pushed for a US-owned pathway. Even the truncated, five-month presidency of James A. Garfield maintained that "urgent demand for shortening the great sea voyage around Cape Horn by constructing ship canals or railways across the isthmus." In this characterization of "the isthmus," Garfield referred not to a single geographical location, but instead to the variety of sites across the region and within the American imagination. James A., Garfield, "Inaugural Address," Washington D.C., 4 March 1881.

[54] Thomas Oliver Selfridge, *Report of Explorations and Surveys for a Ship-canal, Isthmus of Darien* (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1874), 1.

[55] Thomas Oliver Selfridge, *Report*, 1.

[56] Ibid, 7.

[57] Ibid, 12.

[58] Heather Streets-Salter, *World War One in Southeast Asia: Colonialism and Anticolonialism in an Era of Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[59] According to Article 38 (2) of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the "right of transit passage" is "the freedom of navigation and overflight solely for the purpose of continuous and expeditious transit of the strait." UN General Assembly, Convention on the Law of the Sea, Article 38 (2), 10 December 1982.

[60] Arne O. Holm, "India Puts Up a Fight Against China in the Arctic," *High North News,* 27 January 2023, https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/india-puts-fight-against-china-arctic (accessed 24 March 2023). Jeremy Greenwood and Shuxian Luo, "Could the Arctic Be A Wedge Between Russia And China?," *War on the Rocks,* 4 April 2022 https://warontherocks.com/2022/04/could-the-arctic-be-a-wedge-between-russia-and-china/ (accessed 24 March 2023).

[61] Beverly Goldberg, "Is the Nicaraguan mega-canal failure good news for indigenous communities?," *openDemocracy*, 27 August 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/is-nicaraguan-mega-canal-failure-good-news-for-indigenous-communi/ (accessed 31 March 2023).

[62] Mariano Turzi, "La ruta de la seda latinoamericana: China y el Canal de Nicaragua," *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad*, 12(2), (2017): 163-178.

[63] Erika Mouynes, "The (Literal) Gap in U.S. Migration Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 24 June 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/24/panama-colombia-darien-jungle-gap-latin-america-migration-crisis-united-states-biden-harris/ (accessed 20 March 2022).

[64] George Henry Boker, "A Ballad of Sir John Franklin," *An American Anthology, 1787-1900* edited by Edmund Clarence Stedman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), 263.

[65] Joel Tyler Headley, "Darien Exploring Expedition," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 58, vol. 10 (March 1855): 434.

[66] The practice of rewriting exploratory and military failures into victories is a familiar one: some British streets bear names of imperial defeats, such as the annihilation of British-led forces at Maiwand in Afghanistan (celebrated in Battersea, London) and at Isandlwana in southern Africa (so honored in Nottingham).

[67] Maury also focused on the Antarctic as evidenced by Bulkeley, Rip. "'To Unbar the Gates of the South': Maury's 1860–1861 Proposals for Antarctic Cooperation." *Polar Record* 47, no. 4 (2011): 310–26. doi:10.1017/S0032247410000549.

[68] To explore more on Maury's sights on the tropics, see John Grady, *Matthew Fontaine Maury, Father of Oceanography: A Biography, 1806–1873* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: Southern Dreams for a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2021), Penelope K. Hardy and Helen M. Rozwadowski, Maury for modern times: Navigating a racist legacy in ocean science. *Oceanography* 33(3):10–15, 2020.

[69] Martin W. Sandler, *Resolute: The Epic Search for the Northwest Passage and John Franklin, and the Discovery of the Queen's Ghost Ship* (New York: Sterling Pub. Co., 2006), xvii.

[70] It is important to note that this was by no means a singularly masculine event even if males often headed these voyages. Indeed, Jane Franklin, widow of the explorer, financed explorations and campaigned for further action. Ken McGoogan's *Lady Franklin's Revenge* goes into further detail about her role in this story.

[71] Due to the public profile of this failure, unflattering accounts such as Rae's – which proposed that Franklin's crew resorted to cannibalism based on Inuit observations – received backlash. Indeed, Charles Dickens lambasted Rae for what he deemed an impossible explanation. As later investigators would discover more than a century later, however, Rae and the Inuits were correct.

[72] As W. Gillies Ross reported in 2001, disagreements have arisen about even seemingly uncontroversial areas of this research, namely the number of expeditions sent to find Franklin.

[73] First quotation from F. Whymper and second from G.B. Smith.

[74] Scott Cookman, *Ice Blink* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

[75] On the side of geography, Thomas A. Rumney has collected a vast bibliography on Canada with plenty of sections on the polar relevant to this subject.

[76] One could also consult P.D. Baird's *Expeditions to the Canadian Arctic* for more information.

[77] James P. Delgado and Bern Keating have released accounts directed toward a public audience.

[78] See E.C. Coleman for more on the British Navy's polar ventures from the 19th century onwards.

[79] Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3.

[80] See Shane McCorristine, *The Spectral Arctic: A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

[81] Adriana Craciun, *Writing Arctic Disaster: Authorship and Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.

[82] Nanna Katrine Lüders Kaalund and John Woitkowitz, "'Ancient Lore with Modern Appliances:' Networks, Expertise, and the Making of the Open Polar Sea, 1851-1853," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 54, No. 3 (2021): 277.

[83] Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

[84] Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire*, 14.