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Moving Pictures: Maps and Imagination in Eighteenth-Century Anglo-America

This paper explores how Europeans in an age of empire enlisted cartography to create an imagination of movement across the landscape. Aside from coastal surveys, Anglo-American mapmakers relied heavily on the traditional sources of geographic information—travel accounts from the various inhabitants of the continent. The tension between mapmakers' ambitions and the reality of mapping in British North America led to a competition between numerous indigenous, creole, and metropolitan voices within the printed maps of America. As Anglo-Americans slowly decided to privilege certain kinds of information and discard others, they developed a new kind of cartographic imagination that would allow them to use maps in diverse, creative, and dangerous ways in the nineteenth century. Before maps could reliably be used to travel overland, Americans were learning to use maps as tools of imagined movements across time and space.