John Melish
An Early American Demographer

John Melish (1771-1822) was an author whose works on geography and population analysis have received little attention from historians and political economists. A native of Scotland, Melish early adopted the United States as his home, establishing his residence in Philadelphia where he became a successful merchant and importer. An extensive traveler throughout the young, growing country and in numerous British and Spanish possessions, he became an ardent geographer, cartographer, and demographer.

Melish's detailed geographic descriptions are characterized by astute observations and the careful collection of data. A realist and pragmatist, as his two published letters to James Monroe clearly demonstrate, his thinking reflected the rationalism typical of the eighteenth century and still found in the early nineteenth century. The obvious potentialities of the young nation of his adoption made him extremely optimistic about its future technological, political, and social development. His ideas regarding population increase, progress in mechanical arts, and the standard of living place him beside Maurice de Saxe, Mirabeau, Godwin, and Steuart of the eighteenth century. He anticipated theories regarding the relationship between manufacturing, labor supply, and wages which may also be found in the works of the senior Mill and others. Whatever pessimism he expressed stemmed from the failure of the national government to take the steps he recommended to increase population and prosperity. His pessimism was not due to any Malthusian expectations of population pressing upon available food supply.

Melish supported Locke's views on property rights, and was an early "rugged individualist" who nevertheless had an appreciation for co-operative enterprise, such as he found in the communal activities at Harmony. Imbued with a strong Protestant ethic, he believed that prosperity could only be gained by an industrious, "virtuous"
population. He became a supporter of protection for domestic manufactur- ing despite the fact that protective tariffs militated against his interest as an importer.

Melish favored immigration as well as an increase of population through a high birth rate; he spoke of periodic "doubling" of the population, made occasional projections into the future, and expressed in these projections his extreme optimism regarding the ability of the land to support an abundant number of people.

In terms of his geographical descriptions and statistical calculations, Melish may be considered a scientist. Although occasionally relying on secondary sources of information, his usual method was personal observation. Population analysis was still an infant discipline in the early nineteenth century, while the study of geography was considered a science. Although primarily a geographer convinced of the value of his descriptions, Melish was also an ardent political economist. He was aware of the main current of inductive thought, and combined empirical and comparative methods to good advantage as he attempted to prove the immense possibilities for technological development, which he believed always accompanied a population increase.

An extract from the Port Folio describing one of his best works, Travels in the United States of America in the Years 1806 and 1807 and 1810 and 1811, may slightly exaggerate his capabilities and attempts to be scientific, but is, in general, a fair description of his work:

Here is a kind of phenomenon. Two whole volumes of Travels in America, without any material errors; with no palpable falsehoods; no malignant abuse of individuals; no paltry calumnies on the institutions of the United States.—The author is a plain practical man, whose observations are chiefly valuable on account of the stamp of truth and simplicity which they bear, and who has examined the United States as many others are interested in regarding it, as a safe asylum for those who are about to form either commercial or agricultural establishments. He is obviously a shrewd and sensible observer, and there is a clearness in his perceptions, and an accuracy in his details, which is very satisfactory. The second volume contains a number of highly interesting and curious statistical papers, which add much to its value; and through both volumes are interspersed a number of very well executed maps.¹

¹ Melish, A Geographical Description of the United States (Philadelphia, 1816), 168.
His extensive descriptions cover a wide variety of topics, including physical and social environment, rivers, capitals, mountains, population statistics, the nature of manufacturing and trade, political developments, and "progress of the people." He even included a list of post offices and newspapers of the various states and territories. In addition to exceptionally detailed descriptions of the United States, he furnished his readers with excellent material on surrounding areas, such as Newfoundland, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Lower and Upper Canada, the Spanish internal provinces, and of Florida, the West Indies, and the islands of Bahama and Bermuda. He never dogmatically asserted knowledge when facts were not available to him. For example, in his discussion in 1818 of Africa, with which he had no direct contact, he said, "The present population is estimated at 51,000,000, including those on the Islands; but all conjecture on a country so little known must be very vague."

A good perspective of Melish as an early American demographer may be found in an extract of a letter which Thomas Jefferson wrote to him after the publication of *Travels Through the United States of America*. With more than the reader's usual satisfaction, Jefferson wrote:

I have read your Travels with extreme satisfaction and information. As to the western states, particularly, it has greatly edified me; for of the actual condition of that interesting portion of the country, I had not an adequate idea. I feel myself now as familiar with it, as with the condition of the maritime states.

The candour with which you have viewed the manners and condition of our citizens, is as unlike the narrow prejudices of the French and English travellers preceding you, who, considering each the manners and habits of their own people as the only orthodox, have viewed every thing differing from that test as boorish and barbarous; that your work will be read here extensively, and operate great good.

John Melish spoke glowingly of the "blessings of America." Wherever he traveled throughout the young country—from the Ohio territory to southern Georgia—he met with signs of inestimable na-

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tional wealth. Even for a cautious observer such as he, the uninhabited fertile fields, the long navigable rivers, the thickly wooded mountains, the industrious, pioneer spirit of the people, and the fresh freedom of a nation that had just won political independence were bound to arouse extremely hopeful reactions. Melish looked upon the country as a virtual fulfillment of the dream of a Promised Land when he proclaimed that "the people enjoy ... a blessing which is consolidated by their manners and habits; and guaranteed by an extent of country, which affords 'room for their descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation.'" He clearly recognized the important relationship between population, agriculture, and manufacturing.

... the heart that feels these advantages must dilate with joy and heave with gratitude to the supreme Giver. The vast quantity of fine lands to the west invites and encourages an emigration from the east, and has a tendency to bind these two sections together by the indissoluble ties of kindred affection; the manufacturing industry of the north is aided and encouraged by the surplus raw materials and demand for manufacturers in the south, and both, feeling the convenience of the exchange, are bound together by the ties of mutual interest.

Development of the mechanical arts, increasing agricultural improvements, and a rise in population were almost inevitable under existing circumstances, he believed, for "a country possessing faculties like this is invulnerable, and its liberties fixed on a rock, not to be overturned by human power. The rapid growth of society, under such circumstances, is certain; and an attempt to repress it would be equally futile with an attempt to repress the waves of the ocean."

Although by 1818 and 1820 he was to attribute the poverty-stricken idleness of thousands of Philadelphians to the failure to develop more manufacturing, in 1812 he saw only prosperity and wealth. He was particularly aware of this happy situation in Pennsylvania, and pointed out that "the inhabitants have every external appearance of ease and affluence, and they are remarkably civil and industrious. There are no beggars to be seen here. Indeed, I have not

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6 Ibid., 14-15.
yet seen any in the United States, which is a remarkable contrast to Europe, and bears testimony to the prosperity of the country.”

Ceaselessly impressed with the enormous size of the country, Melish exclaimed in a passage reminiscent of the later Biblical prophets that “there is room for the industry of thousands of generations, yet unborn; and, as if by the special order of Providence, mankind are invited into the most distant regions of the country, by the advantages of soil and climate, no where exceeded in the world.” In Georgia he was impressed with the high birth rate and declared that “the Georgian ladies appear to be very fond of children, and, in the country at least, they seem to be sufficiently prolific; for we hardly ever passed a house without seeing a cluster of young ones; and often a child at the breast of a mother, whom, judging from external appearance, I would have reckoned past child-bearing.”

Melish’s exuberant appraisal of America, embellished with philosophical speculations, may make him appear a sentimental traveler inoculated with an unwarranted and overabundant optimism. However, as subsequent remarks make clear, he employed the most rigorous tools of population analysis then available and derived his conclusions from careful statistical calculations, albeit often without qualifications. Whatever his measuring tool, he saw the United States as the benevolent gift of Providence and as a blessing for every enterprise, including reproduction.

Melish always used the latest census figures or the most accurate estimations he could find. If he had stopped at that point in his descriptions, he would be of little interest to historical demography, but from various tables he derived extremely interesting conclusions and forecasts. After estimating the surface of the world in square miles, subtracting the amount of water, determining the total population, and calculating the ratio of population to square miles in each continent, country, and state in the union, he arrived at conjectures regarding the possible number of people the land could support. Using the ratio of the Chinese empire (one hundred inhabitants to each square mile) as his base and as “the greatest that the world will con-

9 *Travels in the United States of America . . . ,* I, 175.
tain," he tried to determine the largest population possible for the United States and its subdivisions. Moreover, "allowing the United States to double its population every 25 years, for a series of years to come," he projected his population statistics up to 1983, at which time he said the country would have approximately 690,000,000 inhabitants. According to his table, "the United States would be as thickly settled as the Chinese empire in 1950; and as thickly settled as China Proper about the year 1983."

The probability is, that no single state will contain a population of more than 100 to the square mile, while the aggregate of the United States continues under 20. The aggregate will probably be equal to 20 or upwards, about the year 1880.

Assuming nine millions as the present population of the United States, and the state of Ohio to contain 39,000 square miles, it could maintain the whole population of the United States without being so populous as the Netherlands, and not near so populous as China Proper. The inhabitants of the United States bear a proportion to the state of Ohio equal to 230 to the square mile.

Agreeably to this ratio, the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana could contain the whole present population of America.

The United States Territory, by the same ratio, could contain the whole population of the world, that of China Proper excepted.

The United States Territory could contain the whole population of Europe and America, without having more than 84 to the square mile. By adding that of Africa to the number, it would only be 124 to the square mile, not near so populous as England.

Melish was convinced, therefore, that there was sufficient land area for a virtually unlimited increase in population. In a single reference to Malthus he reached the climax of this feeling and employed a favorite Biblical quotation as divine authority for his contentions when he said, "So we see that mankind have plenty of room in the world, and they may with great propriety continue to fulfil the scripture injunction—'Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth,' the opinions of men of the Malthus School to the contrary notwithstanding."

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 270. In view of the last census, it is interesting to note that for 1950 Melish spoke of a population nearly 90,000,000 more than the actual count. His estimation is a good example of his overly optimistic view of the country's future reproductive development.
16 Ibid., 270-271.
He was acutely aware of the relationship between the development of economic institutions and population. In his analysis of this relationship he differentiated between “various states of society”—savage, shepherd, agriculture—and the amount of animal and vegetable food that could be raised to support the respective populations. In the “savage state” he allowed one person for every three square miles, or a total world population of thirteen million; for the “shepherd life,” five inhabitants per square mile, or about two hundred million as the world’s number. The varieties of the “agriculture state” permitted, he thought, a range from ten to three hundred per square mile, so that the world’s food supply could provide for 6,200 million inhabitants.17

In order to impress his readers with the vastness of the globe for future population increase, Melish even calculated the number of square miles needed to contain the world’s population in, first, a standing, then, a lying position. Although no more practical than the medieval question of the number of angels on the head of a pin, the precision of his discussion is at least amusing.18

Like Botero, Graunt, Petty, and Hume before him, Melish spoke of a “doubling period.” In the following two selected excerpts, Melish varies his computations to fit several schemes of “doubling.” Previously he had spoken about the population doubling every twenty-five years. In these selections he first uses a period of thirty years and then an “increase in the same ratio as it has done for 100 years.”19 For the first time he speaks of the relationship between births and deaths, and in a Malthusian tone refers to the fact that “destructive wars” reduce the natural increase in population. Despite the large destruction of human life, his projective estimates were extremely high.

Supposing the world to contain the number of inhabitants ...827,448,397, and allowing 30 years as a generation, the number of deaths yearly will be... .......................................................... 27,581,613

monthly, .................................................. 2,298,467
daily, .................................................. 75,566
hourly, ............................................... 3,148
each minute, ........................................ 52
Being nearly 1 every second of time!

17 Ibid., 271.
18 Ibid., 271-272.
19 Melish, A Geographical Description of the United States, 17.
By a long series of observations, it has been found that the births are to the deaths as 643 to 516; in round numbers it may be assumed as 6 to 5; therefore the births will be

- Yearly: 32,178,548
- Monthly: 2,671,535
- Daily: 88,160
- Hourly: 3,673
- Each minute: 60
- Each second: 1

The annual increase of the population of the world, by the above calculation, is 4,596,935. Were society left to its natural operation, this would, in the course of a century, add nearly 460 millions to the present population; but making allowance for the destructive wars in which mankind engage, and the casualties to which they are subjected, we may deduct 260 millions from the number, and allow them to increase at the rate of two millions per annum, or 200 millions in a century. This will give about one thousand and forty millions as the inhabitants on the globe a century hence; and there our calculations may rest, for very few of our readers will live beyond that period.

In this selection and in the one that follows, it is obvious that Melish had no qualms about projecting his statistical analyses a century or more beyond the year 1816.

Supposing the population to increase in the same ratio as it has done for 100 years, the result [for the country as a whole, which was three inhabitants to each square mile] would be... equally populous with Pennsylvania [16 inhabitants per square mile], about the year 1863. About the year 1905, it would equal Connecticut [60 per square mile]; and about the year 1926, it would be equally populous with England [181 per square mile].

Melish was especially impressed with the unbalanced sex ratio in the United States and postulated several reasons for it. He spoke of the division of the sexes according to the latest census (1810) and then attributed the excess of males born over females to the "wise regulation of Providence." This male preponderance was necessary, he believed, in order "to provide for the drain that afterwards takes place in the male world, for the defence of the country, for the prosecution of foreign commerce, for travelling into distant countries, and

21 Melish, A Geographical Description of the United States, 17.
22 Melish, Travels in the United States of America... II, 294.
for settling up distant districts." His theories here appear to have arisen out of carefully analyzed data, for he pointed out that

Above 26, the males outnumber the females, both in the United States and in this state [Ohio]. In the United States, the difference is nearly 1 in 17; and in this state it is more remarkable, being nearly 1 in 5. On looking over the census of the United States, a curious fact appears: this great disproportion in the state of Ohio has actually a counterbalance in that part of New England comprehending New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. In these four states, the females of 26 and upwards outnumber the males by 16,953; being, in the aggregate, equal to 1 in 11. . . . This result, so different from all the other states, corroborates the well-known fact, that the great influx of population into this state has been from these states; and this and other circumstances show that they are, in fact, the great nursery from whence the northern part of the western world is to be peopled.

Melish also formulated a theory of selective migration that, without benefit of contemporary demographic studies, may have sounded plausible in 1812. He contended that

The mass of the New England people get a virtuous education; they are generally handsome in their persons, active, hardy, and industrious; and it is the very flower of them who emigrate. The mind that conceives a settlement in a distant country must be possessed of independence; the spirit that executes an overland journey of five or six weeks, in search of independence, must be ennobled by the Great Spirit; and his blessing on their virtuous exertions is their reward. Having seen and admired these exertions, they have every good wish of mine in their favour. I will only suggest to the males to take a greater portion of the "blooming Yankee girls" along with them, and not suffer nearly 17,000 of them to pine away as old maids in their own country, when it is seen they are so much wanted in this.

Doubling of the population was of constant interest to Melish. He delighted in judging how long it would take a particular area to develop before doubling would occur. His theory on the rate of doubling was in direct proportion to the fertility of soil and the development of manufacturing. An increase in population, he believed, inevitably produced an increase in prosperity. As an example, he pointed out that the population of Lexington, Kentucky, "nearly doubled its population in 10 years; and as it is progressing in manufactures and

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 295.
25 Ibid., 295-296.
wealth, and the adjoining country rapidly settling up, there is every probability that it will increase in the same ratio for a considerable time to come." He was somewhat disturbed at first with the Shakers, the religious sect that prohibited marriage. "Were such a practice to become general," he said, "the globe would soon be depopulated." But he believed that "the ties of affection between the sexes are too deeply seated in our nature by the God of Nature, to be rooted out by this or any other sect."

In his western travels Melish was greatly struck by the extensive arable land around the Mississippi River and its branches. It reaffirmed his faith in America, in the unlimited ability of the country to grow in numbers, and it strengthened him in his theory on the relationship between increased population and national wealth. He was, however, greatly worried about what he thought to be wasteful use of land by the Indians. By again invoking excerpts from the Bible, interpreting the intentions of Providence, and relying on Lockian theory on the expenditure of labor on land, he justified white usurpation of Indian territory.

The Indians are certainly entitled to their fair proportion of the country, according to their numbers; but let it be remembered, that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," and that it is the duty of man to "subdue it," and to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish it." From the policy heretofore pursued by the United States, we may be very certain that the Indian rights will be duly regarded; but it certainly never was intended by providence, that two or three hundred men should claim and hold waste a space capable of supporting millions. The right which man has to appropriate any portion of the earth to his exclusive use, arises entirely from his having expended labour in its improvement. As population and power overspread the land, the Indians must of necessity betake themselves to agriculture and virtuous industry. It is the interest of both the white and red children that it should be so, and this doctrine cannot be too frequently or too strongly enforced.

The vastness of arable land and the ease with which a citizen could become a freeholder worked together, in Melish's opinion, toward population increase. By paying the small sum of eighty

26 Ibid., 187.
27 Ibid., 303.
28 Travels Through the United States . . . , II, 474-475.
29 Melish, A Geographical Description of the United States, 53.
dollars as the first installment on a section of land, a farmer could raise enough produce to pay the remaining installments before they became due. Then, after attaining a considerable portion of land for himself, "there is no setting limits to his prosperity." Whether or not Melish had any idea of diminishing returns, his belief in the increase of productivity from the soil is well expressed in the quotation he uses to preface a letter to James Monroe: "The man who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, deserves well of his country. All is the gift of industry—whatever exalts, embellishes, or sweetens life."

On the basis of American experience, Mathew Carey in 1822 discussed the cultivation of soils of the highest and lowest fertility in his *Essay on Political Economy*. He averred that in the occupation of an area by settlers it is the fertile, low-level lands that were cultivated last. Before Carey, Melish had differentiated the types of land and had given a clue as to why poorer lands frequently bring returns equal to the more fertile lands.

A general remark may also be made, that the occupiers of land, particularly non-residents, holding large tracts, will, in order to save the land-tax, probably in their returns make as much of the land second and third rate, as they consistently can. First rate land pays a tax of 1 dollar 20 cents per 100 acres; second rate 1 dollar; and third rate 60 cents.

Carey claimed that it was not fertility alone that determined the settlement of an area, but ease of clearing, location of roads, nearness to towns, and available capital and labor. Melish, on the other hand, believed that fertile land and a favorable climate invariably resulted in a successful settlement despite its distance from a market.

I have uniformly noticed, throughout my travels, that a settlement in a good soil and favourable climate never fails to succeed, whether it is near a market or not; whereas a settlement in an unfavourable soil, or unhealthy climate, however favourable its situation for commerce, is precarious, and subject to great vicissitudes. The balance of chances is against it. Numerous instances occur in the course of this work to confirm both these positions.

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30 Ibid., 56.
33 Ibid., 365.
The ratio of farmers to the number of urban persons they can support is a significant economic consideration not overlooked by Melish. However, he based his estimates of this ratio on statistical compilations that would have permitted a standard of living that was neither comparable to the average early nineteenth-century family, nor commensurate with the state of agriculture and industry at that time. To assert in 1812 that the Mississippi River valley alone could support a population of two hundred million required an amazing Comtian "prevision" of future technological improvements, or a lack of sufficient insight into the obvious problems such a prediction implies. Melish's usual technique in making such estimates was to compare the potential population of the United States with the most densely settled areas of the world, often without the qualification that the standard of living might impose. At any rate, he was aware that surplus agricultural production could support a considerable urban population.

What a fine prospect is held out here to the human race! and how delightful the contemplation of it to a benevolent mind! The whole of the banks of this beautiful river [Ohio] are fit for cultivation. Allowing it, therefore, to be divided into farms of 160 acres each, having a quarter of a mile on the river, and a mile back from it, and each farm to maintain 10 persons, the district, from Pittsburg to the falls, would contain upwards of 60,000 souls; and their surplus produce would support double that number of industrious tradesmen and their families, in the various towns settled upon it.34

Whether production tends to result in increased population or vice versa is still a problem for students of population analysis. However Melish may have viewed the problem, on numerous instances he reported that "the progress of agriculture, manufactures, and the mechanic arts, is even more remarkable than that of the population."35 At the same time, he pointed out that "the MECHANIC ARTS have kept pace with agriculture; and these two important branches have been mutually subservient to each other."36

During the period of most of Melish's writings (1812-1820), the United States was going through an era of rapid industrial develop-

34 Ibid., 147-148.
35 Melish, A Geographical Description of the World, 78.
ment that both threatened and was threatened by foreign commerce. Despite the fact that advocating protective tariffs for domestic manufacturing operated against his interests as an importer of dry goods, this early demographer was imbued with that kind of objective spirit that makes personal gain and private interests subordinated to observable facts and the general social order. Perhaps his voice was small, but it was added to that swelling tide of intellectual opinion that resulted in extension of the protective policy from 1816 through the remainder of the century. Melish believed that the prosperity of the country depended upon its industrialization, and that prosperity and population were inseparably associated.

During the War of 1812, when foreign trade was greatly hindered if not destroyed, the country had been thrown upon its own resources. Domestic production of various commodities which had previously been imported from England was greatly stimulated by this period of restriction, and the establishment of numerous industrial enterprises rapidly took place. Iron foundries, paper mills, glass works, and other industries grew in such profusion and increased so rapidly, Melish found, “that the internal manufactures will soon be equal, not only to a supply of the demand at home, but it is probable that vast quantities of cotton yarn and cloth, and of hemp manufactures, will be exported. . . . In 1812 the amount of imports was nearly equal to the exports. The state of commerce is rapidly changing from external to internal trade.”

Upon the conclusion of peace, however, it was expected that things would return to much the same status as before. English products that were withheld during the war began to pour into the country at low prices and on long credit. American consumers and merchants eagerly welcomed these importations of European luxuries and wares, but the manufacturers envisaged only disaster and ruin. However, with the English corn law of 1815 and commercial restrictions imposed by France, Holland, and other European countries, the foreign market was again cut off. At the same time, the struggling American manufacturers continued demanding protection against foreign importation. Into this problem Melish threw all his literary skill. In one of the most important economic works of his

career—an open letter to Monroe dated January 12, 1818, entitled *The Necessity of Protecting and Encouraging the Manufactures of the United States*—he wrote that “the average imports for the last three years amount to about $80,000,000, and the exports to about $55,000,000. Now the effects of this are very visible in the drain that has taken place in our national resources.”

His suggestions were forceful and to the point:

What ought we to do to relieve ourselves from the evils that are pressing upon us? The answer is plain, and obvious. Provide the means of giving active employment to your population. That done, the evil will be speedily corrected; and nothing more is wanted to make the American people the most independent, as they are already the most free, upon earth. The means of giving active employment to the inhabitants is only to be found in the general establishment of manufactures; and to secure this important measure, nothing more is wanted but for the Congress of the United States to lay on duties sufficiently high to protect them; to devise a system of laws to guard against smuggling; and to hold forth a sufficient guarantee to encourage the manufacturers to persevere till the system is brought to maturity. This will be a corrective for all the political evils we complain of.

With the enactment of adequate legislation, Melish believed forthcoming technological improvements would place the country on a more equitable basis with Britain. Furthermore, he was convinced that many entrepreneurs would emigrate from Europe to set up business under the protective arm of the United States. As a successful immigrant, Melish frequently encouraged his friends to emigrate from Europe and avail themselves of the benefits of economic opportunity and political freedom.

Although diligently seeking to protect American industry, Melish warned against a surplus of commodities beyond the demand of domestic consumers. Overproduction, he warned, was an evil assiduously to be avoided, for continued reliance on foreign markets had been the principal cause of many miseries connected with the factory system in Europe.

Whether or not Melish made a significant impression on Monroe, there is no doubt about his influencing Jefferson. In an interview

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38 *The Necessity of Protecting and Encouraging the Manufactures of the United States*, 11–12.
39 Ibid., 13.
with the latter, Melish communicated as strongly as he could his ideas regarding the value of domestic manufacturing. Impressed, Jefferson wrote Melish in January, 1813:

I have not formerly been an advocate for great manufactories. I doubted whether our labour, employed in agriculture, and aided by the spontaneous energies of the earth, would not procure us more, than we could make ourselves, of other necessaries; but other considerations entering into the question, have settled my doubts.  

Melish was never very explicit in showing the relationship of industry, prosperity, and population to advantage. Many more cogent remarks were made in his earlier works, wherein he clearly indicated that technological advance was highly desirable because it produced increasing efficiency of labor and in turn resulted in higher per capita production, lower prices, and a higher standard of living.

Along the Atlantic coast Melish noticed that the influx of immigrants and a natural increase of population, combined with commerce and growing industrialism, were producing larger and larger cities where disease rates were higher than those in rural areas. Yellow fever was one of the major problems, and he had talked with Jefferson at some length about it. Melish disliked the common "sunk necessaries" and noticed that "the filth collected in them is constantly generating a most offensive and pernicious gas, which mingles with the atmosphere; is breathed every day by the inhabitants of large cities, and must contribute to render them unhealthy." He concluded that "mankind are probably better accommodated by a great number of small towns than by a few large cities."

Finally, this early Philadelphia geographer-demographer did not neglect discussion of racial distributions. Enumerations of "Free Persons" and "Slaves," based on the 1800 census, appear throughout his writings, and from these he made incisive comments. In one of his travels he was confronted with a rumored plot of Negroes about

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41 Quoted by Melish in *The Necessity of Protecting and Encouraging the Manufactures of the United States*, 7.
43 For example, see his *Travels in the United States of America . . .*, I, 397-398.
44 Ibid., 155.
to kill all the white people and usurp control of the country. His pointed statistical analysis strove to dispel the rumor by showing that "the free people outnumber the slaves above two to one, and we cannot suppose that ever the proportion on the side of the slaves will be greater than it is now, more especially when we consider that all importation has ceased." It should be noted that this comment was made during 1812, at which time Charleston was "the only port in the United States in which [blacks] can be imported." Melish never failed, when discussing slavery, to express his opposition to the institution, and he looked forward to its abolition: "From the light of reason, of philosophy, and of religion that is every where shining around us, may we not hope, that the time will soon arrive when man will no more deal deceitfully with his fellow, but justice, and righteousness, and mercy, will extend over all the earth?"

University of Pennsylvania

Marvin E. Wolfgang

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