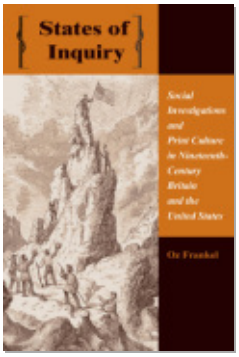
Introduction



Published by

Frankel, Oz.
States of Inquiry: Social Investigations and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States.
Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
Project MUSE. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.3227.

Introduction

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the U.S. and British governments asserted themselves—with great fanfare—in the arenas of knowledge and print. A few of the instruments elaborated for that purpose are familiar to us today, two of which stand at the center of this book: the function of the state as an energetic gatherer of facts about (or investigator of) social, economic, and other aspects of national affairs, and the role of government as a prolific publisher of policy reports and official documents. In Britain, royal commissions of inquiry, inspectorates, and parliamentary committees famously investigated myriad social problems and sites, such as child labor, poverty, sanitary conditions in urban slums, and the safety of mines. On the other side of the Atlantic, the U.S. government surveyed Indian tribes (and, through expeditions and explorations, the West in general) as well as the condition of the South during and after the Civil War. The two states also printed, bound, and circulated numerous accounts about these and additional topics for the perusal of legislators, bureaucrats, and ordinary citizens. The British study and depiction of the lesser regions of society shared important features with the U.S. exploration and publication of reports on the West and the South.

The nineteenth-century state justified its new informational tasks in diverse terms. The list is long and includes policy making, transparency and accountability, public education, and even archive keeping and memorialization. This book argues that investigations and reports in effect constituted a new form of politics that interlaced communication with representation. Beyond declared goals and the façade of "information," legislatures and governments sought to represent their citizens and the national (or, sometimes, imperial) sphere in ways that exceeded conventional modes of political representation, namely, electoral politics. They engaged in unprecedented scientific, literary, and aesthetic documentation of the country, its social circumstances, economy, and history as well as its natural environment. Concurrently, the British and American states in-

vested heavily in documenting and publicizing their own actions and deliberations. In other words, official reportage facilitated the representation of the centralized, modern state *to* its publics and, in turn, the representation of the nation *by* (and *to*) the government itself. One consequence was that investigations and reports incorporated less powerful groups into the national conversation by rendering them presentable and representable political subjects. This was the case with American Indians and freed slaves in the United States and the working or unemployed poor in Britain. Exchange of knowledge and texts thus operated through multifarious paths, implicating governments and legislatures, the disenfranchised populations—now the object of national attention—and diverse communities of readers who recognized the state in its published documents. Conversely, through fact-finding enterprises, the state conjured up its subjects, publics, and spheres. It also fashioned itself a target of observation and scrutiny. I term this field of communication between the state and its constituencies *print* statism (following Benedict Anderson's notion of *print* capitalism).

From the vantage point of the mid-nineteenth century, it became incumbent upon governments to enhance their capacity to communicate, and tools were put in place to enable the state to serve as its own medium. Individuals as well as groups became vigorously involved in this new field as speakers and readers—as informants and witnesses, on the one hand, and as interpreters, collectors, and "poachers" of state-issued documents, on the other. Knowledge as well as tangible objects such as reports and books changed hands. The full dimensions of this vibrant commerce are somewhat obscured today by the contemporary culture of information and its preoccupation with matters of utility and facticity—the quality, veracity, and comprehensiveness of state proclamations and official data. These evaluative standards do not account for the dynamics and meanings of the traffic in knowledge and its venues. Knowledge is not only a tool of government but also a currency of explicit and tacit transactions between the state and its citizens.

Governance may be intrinsically tied to some forms of knowledge and communication, but the mediated exchange described in the following chapters is a specifically historical phenomenon. It emerged before the modern regime of information reshaped, at the turn of the twentieth century, journalism, public science, and politics. By the progressive era (in the United States), citizenship would become intertwined with possessing information, as in the notion of the "informed citizen." The nineteenth-century state's declared wish to enlighten lawmakers and citizens served often as a pretext to manage public debate and master public perception. Official circulation of knowledge betrayed even greater

aspirations of power and regimentation: building state institutions, curbing social unrest, forging citizens, fostering a national spirit, and even spawning empires. However, the trope of the state as a monolithic and ever-ascending entity, whose knowledge brims with power and whose power always knows, is at best an oversimplification. Too much of the recent scholarly discussion about knowledge and the state has been haunted by the specter of the panopticon, the Foucauldian paradigm for the coercive power of post-Enlightenment knowledge. My study shifts attention instead to the place of the state/knowledge nexus within a larger dynamic of exchange and substitution. This is neither to reject Michel Foucault's art of seeing—including his "insight" into the capacity of particular discourses to mint subjectivities—nor to embrace the nineteenth century's other apparition, its public sphere (or "public opinion") ideology that uncritically trumpeted its own supposed inclusiveness and rationality. Governments and legislatures certainly capitalized on their capacity to launch investigations and publish reports. Nevertheless, the specific political effects of this series of performances were uneven and inconclusive. For one, chronic gaps existed between the sometimes fantastical and totalizing ambitions of bureaucrats and legislators and the reality of daily governance. Recall also that the nineteenth-century state was neither the only receptacle of authority in society nor the sole author of imperious taxonomies and categories of knowledge. The relationship between state power and knowledge is complex and in need of historicization. It is further complicated if we turn our focus from abstract discourses and their hierarchy-making potentials to the actual sites and scenes where the state and its constituencies encountered each other for the ostensible purpose of producing and consuming knowledge. As this book demonstrates, rather than simply empowering the modern state, official publications and investigations facilitated unforeseen encounters and dealings between governments and legislatures and their local interlocutors.

The state could not exercise full mastery over the process of inquiry, the behavior of its emissaries as investigators or authors, or the fate of its printed reports once they were issued and promiscuously circulated. The contingent, interpersonal nature of the exchange between official agents and studied populations often determined investigative field experiences. While government occasionally initiated inquiries at the behest of vulnerable communities, in other instances, commissioners had to contend with acts of resistance such as demonstrations, boycotts, attempts at counter-investigations, or witnesses who simply chose to "talk back" rather than to answer questions. Massive social surveys also revealed confusion over matters of discourse due in part to competition among systems of measurement and observation; contests that involved different disciplines such

as modern physiology and city planning, besides older protocols of deciding facts that rested on judicial and legislative procedures. Irrespective of discourse, in the locales of investigation, facts and knowledge proved elusive and occasionally ungovernable. Likewise, official reports were subjected to practices of critical reviewing and other elements of modern print culture that constricted the power of government.

At times, it seemed that the American and British states were not ascending as much as fumbling through the economy of facts, social and otherwise. Always costly undertakings, investigations and publications required resources and skills the state found difficult to muster. Inquiries often revealed friction among bureaus and accentuated the fault lines between the executive and legislative branches of government. Print culture afforded state officials and legislators the cultural capital entailed by authorship—sometimes at the expense of the unified, commanding voice of the state. We still frequently label major governmental and legislative reports after their nominal "authors" rather than the bodies that actually craft them, and the state expresses itself through the voices of individual officials.

Other questions of voice suffused the nineteenth-century project of policy investigation as well. In common parlance, having a voice subsumes the difference between political agency (if only through entitlement to electoral franchise) and the public articulation of opinion. We conceive of the lack of voice as signifying endemic oppression. Consequently, Karl Marx's often quoted assertion that French peasants "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" seems symptomatic of the predisposition, even among nineteenth-century radicals, to deny the other agency.[1] Equating voice and power should not be taken for granted. In the mid-nineteenth century culture of social inquiry, marginal populations did speak and represent themselves rather frequently. The state, in fact, invited them to make claims about their condition. Yes, government often sought to commandeer these voices. Public inquiries modified indigenous voices by eliciting particular responses. Officials selected and edited self-representations and on rare occasions even forged them, less by falsifying evidence than by counterfeiting voice, by speaking for or instead of, by ventriloquizing the other. (Giving voice to the voiceless—a recurrent refrain in modern historiography—is always a suspect endeavor.) These investigative ventures were even less benign when representation—a form of substitution or "standing in"—resulted in complete occlusion or erasure. For instance, federal efforts to capture and commemorate indigenous Indian life were integral to the policy of removing and "civilizing" the Indian. The testimony committed to writing and print is already muffled,

"voice"-less. No longer aural and immediate, it becomes merely a simulacrum of presence. This point however can be carried further, for the state itself was also somehow left voiceless by official reportage. At the conclusion of the investigative sequence, when oral exchanges and other types of evidence were translated into printed reports, not even the mighty state could speak for itself—its voice had to be modulated and mediated; published documents subsumed the multivalent tasks of representation.

This book thus takes as its main topic, and documents in some detail, two fundamentals of modern public culture. First are the procedures of investigation, meaning the set of tactics and performances developed to select the location and timing of the encounter and then to acquire and authenticate information, particularly the experience of individual government envoys in the "field" of investigation and that of their interlocutors. Second is the factual report as a unique type of text, its authorship, publication, distribution, and uses, which this study situates within the entire print output of the state and the history of the book. The full dimensions of the traffic between the state and its public (or publics) become apparent only if we follow the thread of investigation throughout, to explore how the publication of reports completed, complemented (or undermined) the aggregation of knowledge. The rest of this introduction briefly describes the fields that the new medium of investigations and official reportage, "print statism," linked and reconfigured: society, print culture, representation, and the state.

Society

A panoply of circumstances prompted the early nineteenth-century concern with "society": novel methods and locations of production, urbanization, fresh humanitarian discourses of care as well as new calculi developed to manage the populace and to restructure government, such as utilitarianism. This engrossment with the social domain, still more by way of contemplation than extensive inquiry and reform, originated in Britain and other European countries during the concluding decades of the eighteenth century when a need arose for efficient strategies to mobilize entire populations. Such efforts corresponded to the demands of the new market regime but historically became imperative chiefly under circumstances of war, in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In the early nineteenth-century United States, urbanization, new modes of organizing labor, migration and immigration, and cycles of economic recessions inspired awareness about the social sphere, or society. As significant were the presence of (and

ongoing exposure to) distinct racial groups and, once again, the experience of war, in this case the Civil War and the social turmoil that befell the country in its wake.

Society was open to diverse interpretations as an autonomous system, an organic body, a realm of grouping and affiliation, or, alternatively, a site of great vulnerability and strife, in need of intervention, assistance, or regimentation. For the purpose of this discussion, the most important aspect of the newly rearranged social scene was that distinct social blocks lived completely ignorant of each other, or so argued some contemporary observers. The social sphere, spatially conceived, had grown thoroughly divided between segments that were known and familiar and those that were designated hidden. The *social* enters public consciousness in times of crisis: war, riot, major accident, epidemic, or natural disaster. Otherwise, it is highly factual and endemically elusive, requiring recurrent explorations and discovery.

Social inquiries were consequently devised to uncover the circumstances or "condition" of weaker or disenfranchised populations. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, investigations came to define British political culture as well as the frantic reform drives in the American Northeast. In Britain, government dispatched commissioners and inspectors to the mills and mines of the industrializing Midlands and the North, while Parliament and numerous reform societies, philanthropists, and journalists amassed testimonies and statistical data on the impoverished. This information fed the grand debate over the social predicament of Britain, which Thomas Carlyle termed the "condition of England" question. Cycles of legislation centralized poor relief and inaugurated state regulation of new industries by restricting child and female labor and imposing safety and education measures upheld by periodic inspections. These early steps overlapped with a protracted campaign that was given added impetus in the early 1830s to remake the British polity, its electoral system, local government, and ancient institutions such as the military, the Church of England, and the old English universities.

Critical reforms on a national level corresponded to the sensibilities of a middle class whose contours were now defined by a new franchise replacing an antiquated mélange of urban voting privileges with a £10 yardstick (1832). This class shared the investigative perspective according to which the condition of the poor encompassed moral and physical dimensions. Paid agents of the popular Statistical Associations, for example, frequented the houses of the poor, counted the number of rooms and inhabitants (the habit of sharing beds always produced anxieties about sexual permissiveness), tabulated the possession of books, re-

corded the command of skills such as knitting among women and mending furniture among men, and even evaluated the competence of parents to sing a "cheerful song" to their children. Other organizations dedicated their energies to more immediate targets, for instance, the suppression of vice and vagrancy. Such reforms and invasive philanthropy contributed to this new class's self-conception. However, the British middle classes did not escape public inspection either. Reform campaigns and official inquiries targeted factories and mills that were largely owned by newly arrived entrepreneurs. Proprietors protested what they considered intolerable intrusions into their private affairs.

The United States had not yet experienced the Industrial Revolution in full. Nevertheless, Boston, Philadelphia, and especially New York were among the fastest growing urban centers in the world, contending with tenements, squalor, prostitution, crime, and abandoned children. Antebellum reformers emphasized the perfectibility of the individual (a concern manifested, for instance, by temperance and hygiene campaigns), but that goal, of course, always had social dimensions as well. Prisons and asylums were sites of experimentation. Observers from Europe visited the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia and other innovative institutions. A burgeoning literature on penal practices followed the great controversy brewing around the "silent" versus the "separate" prison systems of Pennsylvania and New York. State governments, organizations such as the Boston Discipline Society, and reform crusaders like Dorothea Dix—celebrated as a "voice for the mad"—published research about incarceration and confinement. The 1830s heralded a watershed for American reform. The decade witnessed an unprecedented drive for the abolition of slavery and the proliferation of reform organizations. One consequence of this ferment was the creation of state-supported public school systems, beginning with Massachusetts.

The conflict over slavery in the United States shared significant properties with the debate over the social crisis in Britain. Abolition, with other modes of early nineteenth-century social investigation, attempted to penetrate isolated, inaccessible sites—the factory, the prison, the workhouse, the plantation—in an effort to learn the true situation of their inhabitants. To give one example, the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) inspired Frederick Law Olmsted to launch a one-man commission of inquiry into the South's social and economic arrangements. With the Civil War and Reconstruction, the federal state replaced abolitionists in rendering the South an object of numerous fact-finding enterprises. Another field of social inquiry that was uniquely American addressed the condition of the Indian tribes. Before the Civil War, native nations were the only social group directly cared for by the federal government, per-

haps with the minor exception of federal attempts to ensure healthy conditions aboard immigrant ships. Indian policy, namely, the policy of removal west of the Mississippi, triggered national controversy that spawned reports and counterreports. The federal government accumulated information about the tribes within (and sometimes outside) its territorial confines and launched research projects into Indian culture and history.

Print Statism

Rather than exploring these landmarks of early nineteenth-century social history in the familiar contexts of reform, policy, history of scientific discourse, or "government growth," this book pursues a different tack. Society was conceived to be autonomous but its discovery took place in the public sphere and the realm of politics. After all, conventions of accumulating and diffusing knowledge did not necessarily emanate from the social crises they addressed. They were primarily rooted in expanding electorates of voter-readers, the bureaucratization of public life exemplified in the proverbially gray world of commissions and committees, the rise of professional authors, and the symbiosis between politics and printed texts through, for instance, party platforms or (in the United States) party newspapers. During the first three decades of the century, the last hurdles to universal white male suffrage in America, usually property requirements, were removed. Research into immigrant neighborhoods or female and child laborers often targeted those outside the voting citizenry. Inquiries that focused on African Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction and Native Americans addressed the prospects of their inclusion in the polity. In Britain, where the populace consisted of subjects rather than citizens, Parliament and the ministry conducted intensive social studies under the penumbra of discord over the expansion of the electorate, from the early 1830s conflicts over the Reform Bill to the 1840s threat of violence leveled by the Chartist movement. Particularly in Britain, early nineteenth-century social inquiries appeared to expand the representative functions of government beyond the franchise. In the United States, the electorate was proportionally much larger and the gap between voters and nonvoters even more pronounced.

The history of print and literary culture provides another context for print statism, especially the growing literacy rates, the burgeoning daily press (the American penny press furnishes the best example), popular magazines, and the technological breakthroughs that enabled cheap mass printing and distribution of documents. The quantity of state publications was soaring at the same time

that stereotyping, electrotyping, the steam press, and the rolling press—the most notable cluster of innovations in print technology since the invention of moveable type in the fifteenth century—further mechanized the print shop. This study highlights the contribution of state reports as well as other state-published ephemera to the culture of print. Social reports have been often studied as platforms for the inculcation of ideas and transmission of information, as vehicles of policy and propaganda. The medium itself—its physical properties, its aesthetic signification, and the consequences of its unhampered circulation—has been overlooked. The entire course of investigation was geared toward the publication of factual documents. Bureaucrats and lawmakers deeply engaged in the preparation of reports, their content, design, and production as artifacts and, consequently, allocated immense resources for that goal. The state interjected itself into the literary marketplace by distributing and even selling documents and by paying attention to the reading habits of its citizens. In this regard, print capitalism often served as a template for the manner in which print statism circulated texts in society.

Government manufactured its papers with an eye to literary genres, as well as to the formats of review or scholarly journals. They shared with them not just sensibilities and language but also publishing strategies, such as serialization. Recently, there has been a lively critical interest in the embodiment of social and political discourses in nineteenth-century literary texts. My analysis contributes to this discussion by addressing the textual quality of official documents and their ossification into identifiable, self-referring genres. The textuality of government itself is highly significant in this regard, not just its susceptibility to multiple interpretations but its public presence in tangible printed documents and the possibilities it offered for mass reading.

One historical genealogy connects print statism dialectically with the permutations of the eighteenth-century political discourse that demanded government accountability, open debate, and public scrutiny of the affairs of the state. Michael Warner recently demonstrated how American colonial print culture sustained an imaginary public sphere whose discursive rules fused citizenship and democratic action with the reading and writing of printed texts. Print culture and republicanism became mutually constitutive. The voluntary networks of the American "republic of letters" or the kind of intellectual milieu of critical discussion that thrived in late eighteenth-century London—both long gone by the mid-nineteenth century—left decisive imprints (pun intended) on modern public sphere ideologies. Still, we should not regard nineteenth-century state reportage merely as an embodiment of the Enlightenment desire for political and

social transparency. As we shall see, print statism flourished in a new cultural order and served differently conceived states, publics, authors, and readers. It is nevertheless of some importance that the early Victorian and Early Republic governments appropriated and further expanded the function or the posture that had been initially codified in the previous century to critique the British *ancien regime* at home and in the colonies. Public inquiries opened a space for the modern state's self-invention and self-reflection, however limited.

Viewed another way, the state's print output comprised a vast archive, an archive in print. The archive designation here has literal and figurative connotations: the archive as a comprehensive repository that is classified, catalogued, and periodically updated; the archive as a body of knowledge the state generates, aggregates, and sustains; and the archive as a place, a site of registration and retrieval or memory. Over the last 150 years, social historians and social commentators have repeatedly visited parliamentary papers. Among the first to do so, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels scanned this treasure trove for their own purposes. It remains one of the chief sources for nineteenth-century British historiography. In some ways, however, the print archive functioned as a counterarchive, for unlike historical state repositories it was not shielded and kept in a concrete interior space. Rather, it was exteriorized, reproduced, and circulated for general commentary. The state could not retain the exclusive power of perusing its own record, and the print archive could be made to divulge more than one sort of truth. But even with its celebrated openness and publicity, the state print archive was sporadically a volatile place, raising suspicions of concealment (if not within its own confines, then elsewhere, in other, better-guarded state archives) and deception. In addition, its existence raised the problem of consignment: what should be published and what should remain secret, private, or merely unpublished, and, by implication, whether the state or its officers have a protected sphere of private writing. The print archive also became symptomatic of the state's "inner" truth, betraying its appetite for the printed page, its gluttonous consumption of paper, its compulsion in creating the archive.

Large-scale research projects did not merely archive but also "made" history. Major public hearings and other forms of official investigation often amounted to remarkably visible, dramatic, attention-grabbing events and occasionally engendered momentous (hence, historic) turning points in policy, legislation, and public perception. This historical movement followed two different trajectories. While reform was predicated on notions of progress and historical linearity, the concept of social discovery—at the heart of reform and investigation—entailed repetition and circularity. The persistent urge to open previously enclosed spaces

or other locales of perceived violation and abuse for inspection required (then and ever since) the recurring identification of old regimes and horrifying Bastilles. Sequences of discovery and rediscovery have been inscribed into post-Enlightenment public discourse. It has been therefore one element in the cultural work of social investigations to literally and figuratively write history. At the same time, they have sustained the ghost of the unreformed order of things.

The print archive was an archive of facts. The following analysis describes several techniques employed to verify information and to represent reality (social and other) on the printed page. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, facts were expected to be "authentic" rather than "objective." These concepts support somewhat different notions of factuality. Objectivity became a predominant quality, as in "objective journalism," only later in the century. (At the turn of the twentieth century, the role of "objectivity" in the fields of social knowledge—social work, social science, reform—was in fact contested as it would be again by the end of the century.) Social observers incessantly employed the adjectival modifier *authentic* to describe factual matter. In addition, they toiled hard to convince readers that they were presenting facts in their immaculate form, precisely as they were uprooted from their original soil—as if smidges of earth were still hanging from them as a measure of authenticity. Nineteenth-century social inquiries were formalized in a culture that had already been conditioned to associate print with the rendering of facts, either in journalism, science, or, as importantly, the law.

From its inception, modern science was inseparable from the printing press. This intimacy is evident whether one subscribes to the argument that the invention and spread of movable type during the Renaissance stabilized scientific intercourse by affording what Elisabeth Eisenstein termed *typographical fixity*, or to the more historically textured approach according to which only in the seventeenth century and later—when the state regulated the book market and institutions such as the Royal Society established publishing procedures—could a culture of credit rather than a technology of print guarantee truth in the scientific text, as Adrian Johns recently contended in *The Nature of the Book* (1998). Johns's view that in order to become a successful author of scientific tracts in the early modern period one had to be savvy about the machinery, the labor, and the professions of print also might be applicable to the world of the Victorian social reporter and certainly to the work of the naturalist or western explorer. Nineteenth-century social inquiries fueled public debates with printed texts of varying sizes and authority; these were embellished by genres of representation categorized as facts, among them statistical charts, testimonials, social maps, personal jour-

nals, and illustrations. These reports, along with a freer and more vitriolic press and new types of literary expression, battled and dialogued in an effort to document social predicaments and, simultaneously, to argue for specific solutions. The production of social facts took place in particular sites—factories, slums, prisons, the South—each bolstering micro-economies of knowledge, a textual wealth of journalistic reporting, travel accounts, fiction, and social inquiry.

An expansive notion of an economy of knowledge is necessary here. The commerce of knowledge in society and of social knowledge followed diverse procedures. On occasion, it hinged on the rules of the marketplace itself, where information was bartered or sold as a commodity (as books and newspapers are traded), but information changed hands by other means as well. It could be obtained by authority, deception, appropriation, surveillance, or sheer theft. A few of these methods might be rather innocuous, for instance, the custom of newspapers to excerpt each other or to lift passages of government documents without the need for permission. Legislatures and governments (as well as political parties, especially in the United States) assumed primary roles in the configuration of this new public culture. The state was certainly not the only agent trafficking in social facts or seeking reading constituencies. Indeed, government entered into a few fields of knowledge quite late. Regardless of timing, it always had to compete with enterprising reform associations or individual philanthropists and journalists who churned out countless treatises and annual reports on the underprivileged. Voluntary public associations, which proliferated after 1830, had at their disposal an impressive publishing apparatus. In the United States, this means of public education had emerged in previous decades as waves of revivals, known as the Second Great Awakening, propped up a book-making infrastructure driven by demand for Bibles and religious tracts.

Nevertheless, by the 1830s, the British state sponsored the most comprehensive social surveys, and in the United States, state and local governments began to engage in social policy. Many reform causes sought legislation or state sponsorship of one kind or another. Reform associations took upon themselves the task of representing the poor and their circumstances—an assignment that sooner or later, directly or vicariously, the state itself assumed. Also bear in mind that the state regulated the circulation of printed matter. One way or another, the social report always had the state on its horizon and, vice versa, the state had society (or policy) on its horizon.

Patterns of investigation and publication in Britain and the United States reflected the temper of these representative governments and typified public are-

nas nurtured by a series of tense conflicts that were devised as discursive exchanges or debates. After the turn of the twentieth century, peppering public deliberation with factual matter became an even more essential task for the state but increasingly was done under the signs of science, information, and expertise. While one way to evaluate the historical importance of the practices described in this book might be to regard them as precursors of the modern, knowledge-laden public sphere, there were significant breaks between the nineteenth-century and the twenty-first century informational states. In the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, the production of knowledge was not dominated by a strong, institutionalized, social science. In fact, the difference between social science proper and the kind of investigative work performed by government agencies, presidential task forces, royal commissions, or legislatures endured into the twentieth century. I maintain that state-sponsored social and policy reportage constitutes a distinctive political-discursive form that predates and coexists with professional social science. This distinction rests, in part, on the representational capacities of official investigations and their affinity with traditional legislative inquests, the type of inquiries performed by congressional or parliamentary committees as part of oversight responsibilities. These procedures are closer to common law methods of determining facts than to the modalities of modern science. Many official investigations, regardless of subject matter, adopt courtlike practices in line with parliamentary or congressional traditions.

This study also highlights aspects of public life that became less visible with the additional systemization of knowledge production but never really disappeared, for instance, the modern state's predilection to enhance its extraparliamentary representational faculties in times of crisis. New Deal documentary projects of the 1930s spring to mind. Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration sponsored these efforts to depict Depression-stricken social groups and to record and commemorate authentic regional culture.

Representation

Print statism was central to the new politics of representation. But what is "representation," and how is it tied to exchange, communication, and substitution? At the outset of her classic study *The Concept of Representation* (1967) Hanna Pitkin maintains that despite its elusiveness, the concept of representation in politics and in the arts, "taken generally, means the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact . . . in representation something not literally present is considered as present in a

nonliteral sense."[2] Three applications in Pitkin's typology of representational functions are especially relevant to our discussion. First, the notion that representation is (or should) be descriptive; a person or thing stands for others by being acceptably like them, and therefore the absent is made present by "resemblance or reflection as in a mirror or in art." In politics, this approach conceives of the legislature as a miniature version of the people. In the name of achieving a more precise likeness, its proponents frequently call for proportional representation. Second is the idea of symbolic representation or representation through symbols where no resemblance or reflection is required, as in the manner by which the king or other leaders represent the nation or a flag represents the state. Both approaches regard representation in terms of "standing for" something else. Third is the application of representation in the sense of "acting for," performing duties and functions on behalf of somebody else. This notion foregrounds the function of representative bodies in making law or policy for the people rather than merely operating as a mouthpiece for the unmediated wishes of voters. (Pitkin's classification is pertinent even if, unlike her, we accept that the process of representation partakes in constituting subjects rather than simply substituting for them.)

Explicit and implicit aspects of representation were manifest at every stage of investigation and reportage in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States. Commissioned individuals who conducted social surveys acted for government as its delegates—usually equipped with a detailed list of instructions—but in the field they also stood for the state. They symbolized the state and even attempted to deliver government messages or to explain its measures and policies to their local counterparts. Conversely, investigators represented investigated populations or environments, either by producing accounts that depicted these groups or places as part of their commission, by taking upon themselves to speak on behalf of the downtrodden, or, more rarely, by cultivating strong resemblance to the societies under investigation either as a means to acquire information or because of a deep-seated identification. In the field (slums, factories, Indian reservations, the conquered South), investigators were also on the lookout for representative witnesses. Here too we may recognize diverse modes of representation. First, the "representative" stood for the typical or average. Her ordinariness could be vouched for by the randomness of the encounter (as in sampling), or she might be the composite persona conjured through the power of statistical representation. Second, inquiries attempted to engage the actual leaders or representatives of the local population (as in trade union leadership or Indian chiefs). The third understanding invokes the conception elaborated in Ralph Waldo Emerson's es-

say *Representative Men* (1850): inspiring models of self-sufficiency, self-making, heroism, and social climbing, or, the representative man's double, an individual who could attest to particularly extreme forms of suffering and deprivation.

A plethora of representational tasks surrounded the official report and its distribution. Reports described in great minutia the social strata or the institutions under inspection. State publications in general were also expected to represent government descriptively (by detailing the course of the investigation) or symbolically (for instance, in the physical attributes of reports as books). Circulating these tomes, government offices and legislators endeavored to satisfy the demand for accountability—another dimension of political representation. As mentioned earlier, the project of social investigation itself was sometimes conceived of in terms that imply virtual representation, giving voice to those otherwise not politically represented. Recurrent public allegations of misrepresentation were another telltale sign of representational work. On occasion, these charges were leveled at government accounts. In other instances, the cry of "misrepresentation" prompted formal investigation.

Wide expectations that state-initiated reportage, print statism, would represent local society became evident when such an endeavor failed to deliver. An extreme example involves the infamous 1847 Commission on Education in Wales. Its report portrayed Welsh society in derogatory terms and blamed the Welsh language in particular for hindering progress. These insults coming from the pens of English (and Anglican) commissioners and from the printing press of government in London incensed Welsh public opinion. The report became known as the "treachery of blue books" and lingered in Welsh popular memory as an atrocious violation, akin to Cromwell's seventeenth-century massacres in Irish national imagination. For the purpose of this discussion, the most striking aspect of this episode is that before the nineteenth century such comparison between mass slaughter and a slighting official report would not have made much sense. One of the report's staunchest critics, Henry Richard, opined in 1868, more than twenty years after the fact, that the real Welsh nation was comprised of those who had not been heard by the commission and consequently remained without a voice.[3] The commission thus did not misrecognize or misrepresent the modern Welsh nation as much as inadvertently call it into being.

These and other intertwined and multivalent representational tasks, accents, expectations, and ambitions were greatly shaped by the strong involvement of representative legislatures in unleashing investigations or supervising the publication of official documents. It is also of some importance that a few of the most influential political thinkers of the period conceived of democracy in terms of

descriptive representation. Writers required that the legislature be a mirror of the nation, that it reflect the people, the state of public consciousness, or the transformation of social and economical forces in the nation. In John Stuart Mill's view, in addition to watching and controlling the government, Parliament is also the state's "Congress of Opinion, an arena in which not only the general opinion of the nation, but that of every section of it, and as far as possible of every eminent individual whom it contains, can produce itself in full light and challenge discussion; where every person in the country may count upon finding somebody who speaks his mind."[4] Other visions about the mirroring function of government were articulated in the United States. For instance, John Adams argued that a legislative body ought to be "an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them."[5] The essence of proportional representation (which was not the principle of representation in the two polities) is the idea of being present through one's voice.

Regardless of specific theories of representation or the particularities of national institutions, the representative work of representative regimes (and arguably of other regimes as well) should be recognized to be multifaceted and historically contingent. The politics of representation described in this book collapses the difference between political and aesthetic representation. Curiously, the term *representation* itself rarely surfaced in nineteenth-century discourse in conjunction with the state's informational mission. How might we account for this absence? One point to consider is contemporary public sphere ideology and its tendency to emphasize presence. The key concept of "public opinion" served to efface political mediation, to fill the gap between the public and its substitutes—elected representatives—by supposedly endowing all citizens of an opinion-based polity with a voice in national decision making. Likewise, the analogy that was sometimes established in Britain between official social investigations and the summoning of the entire public to partake in parliamentary-style grand debate sidestepped the difference between representative and direct democracies.

In this spirit, government reports were crafted to be transparent to both the field of inquiry and to the process of political decision making. The claim of transparency was buttressed by the employment of various representational techniques, including novel ones like high-quality lithography and, later, photography. Authenticity of facts denotes presence, while the notion of objectivity—usually associated with the ethos that guides the institutions and individuals that present those facts—acknowledges mediation. (Similarly, the mirror metaphor itself indicates presence rather than mediation or representation.) This ambivalence about political representation was not necessarily propelled by a

strong democratic impulse. In fact, it often typified great concerns about electoral politics and majoritarianism. Early Victorian Britain grappled with unrest over the Chartist demand for universal suffrage. Antebellum reformers in the United States often grumbled about the excess of Jacksonian politics and its leveling effects. By the 1850s, many reformers held the rowdy, conspicuously corrupt, party politics in utter contempt. Social reportage was therefore sometimes a way to supplant electoral politics rather than merely supplement it.

Investigative activities and publications intermediated between government and the citizenry (understood as the reading public) but also between the "center" and the "periphery," between the state, expansively understood, and unknown or remote regions and people—making present what was, or appeared to be, absent—government and the nation's extremities. Mediation operated in a polity that appeared more cohesive (or even more democratic), while society, progressively shaped by the marketplace, became more differentiated and fragmented. Through the range of printed matter it offered the public, the state anticipated the reading subject to be a citizen—voter, lawmaker, or participant in national conversation—but also an actor in the marketplace, further bridging the gap between itself and "civil society." Ultimately, the state performances described here constituted only one form of communication in modernizing societies in which communication in general became increasingly mediated.

The new communicative field was replete with ambiguities. First, the state assumed contradictory positions as both subject and object of representation and investigation. Its dual role as a social reporter and a topic of reporting became at times a double-mirror entrapment. The investigated populations were also caught in seemingly opposing positions as subjects and objects. Social investigations in both countries questioned the subjectivity of the dependent population, their autonomy as individuals, their ability to make decisions, to sustain themselves in the market, to render an opinion, to be citizens. But specific investigative procedures often presupposed or even ensured this subjectivity. Thus, for instance, the U.S. Civil War investigation (see chapter 6), which looked into whether the newly emancipated freedmen could be full members in society and the polity, already guaranteed in a way their political subjectivity by allowing slaves and former slaves to give full public testimony, hitherto forbidden to them. Similarly, the project of social investigation in Britain (state-sponsored and otherwise) worked through the friction between the panoptic desire to forge or reform subjects according to middle-class models, and foundational middle-class assumptions about the autonomy of the subject or the notion of noninterference that guided the marketplace, where subjectivity was a priori assumed. Racial dif-

ferences in the United States complicated both the wish to make the other and assumptions about his or her market suitability.

Beyond (and sometimes, instead of) the subjectivity of individuals, nineteenth-century social investigations recognized and even reinforced the collectivity of social groups. This was a collateral of the inquiry's representational work manifested in efforts to classify communities or to create typical or comprehensive descriptions of conditions and views. The drive to incorporate indigenous organizations and leaders into the investigations also acknowledged the group as a group. The representation of populations, regions, and communities in social reports paralleled the function of constituencies in electoral politics. As political theorist Melissa Williams observes, regardless of the current emphasis on the principle of one-man-one-vote (a relatively recent phenomenon), historically, doctrines of representation have been based on assumptions concerning groups and, therefore, "in most senses in which we use the term, *political representation* means the representation of a constituency, an aggregation or collection of citizens."[6] A third realm of ambiguities involved the very ambition to make the absent present. The project of social research was attached to the notion of discovery, of making known, present, or visible (as in bringing light to) previously hidden or suppressed social realities. As we shall see, common techniques of investigation and reporting militated against this sensibility by estranging or othering the field of inquiry and consequently sustaining it at some distance.

Notwithstanding its expansionist tendencies, the state enjoyed great authority but had limited power over this medium of mediation and exchange. It was ensnared, as much as its citizens and dependents, by these efforts at representation (i.e., rendered a subject and questioned as a subject). Many of the investigative projects and publication schemes described in this book resulted in failure or at least fell victim to the law of unintended consequences. There was much that was unpredicted, unplanned, and out of control in the state's accumulation and distribution of knowledge, projects that were often governed more by the political/bureaucratic unconscious than by well-articulated policies. To give an example, because of its new task as a social researcher and its decision to sell its official documents in the open market—the British state confronted in the late 1830s a liable suit (*Stockdale v. Hansard*) instigated by a casual remark made in a "blue book" on the condition of Newgate prison. The suit pitted Parliament against the courts, threatening a constitutional crisis. In the wake of this episode, the state was forced to reposition itself with respect to what Roger Chartier labels the "order of books," the legal/cultural system that governs the making, selling, and reading of books and prescribes, among other things, the range of rights and li-

abilities that are associated with authorship. Parliament had to reassert by law its speaking and publishing privileges.

Structure

The comparative component of this book serves as a form of organization and interpretation. It points to developments that exceeded national particularities, and yet the two cases are presented in some detail to avoid losing local flavor as well as the contingencies and intermittencies that are essential features of the historical record. The material is not forced into unbending variables, however. Exhibiting the American and the British experiences side by side allows them to serve as each other's context or frame. Thus, for example, the concurrence of the U.S. case highlights the conspicuous nation-building, or even patriotic aspects that were somewhat muffled in the British project of domestic social exploration. (The fissures described in this project were clearer in the British domestic sphere than in the colonial context. Royal commissions worked in the empire, but the national focus in the 1830s and the 1840s was much closer to home.) At the same time, the British state's systematic role in documenting society assists us in finding greater coherence within otherwise seemingly disparate projects on the American scene. In the realm of similitude, the comparison demonstrates, for instance, the unsurpassable importance of legislatures in shaping public culture in self-described democracies. In the contemporary scholarly focus on state formation, bureaucracies take center stage while the continuing effects of parliamentary or congressional culture often go unnoticed.

Although unequal in their size and reach, the British and American governments were rather weak relative to state institutions in continental Europe. Neither nation had a very large or strong bureaucracy or any other organization that could generate widely acceptable knowledge about society. There were, however, important differences between the objects of inquiry and between the manners in which government documents traveled in the two nations, a dissimilitude that yields insights into divergent systems of power. The British government offered its papers for sale and thus, inadvertently, limited their actual circulation, relying on the press to disperse much of the information included in blue books and other such products. In the United States, for much of the period, the distribution of official documents was integrated into the relationships between lawmakers and their constituents. Massive numbers of officially published books and reports were sent gratis directly to voters.

The comparative approach is an analytical tool as well as a feature of the his-

torical narrative. Social knowledge in the nineteenth century was garnered and generated in comparative contexts. Comparing groups, institutions, regions, and countries was a common strategy for gauging and categorizing social phenomena. The comparative style rhetorically placed public issues within particular frames of reference and sometimes borrowed from the vocabularies of other societies, for example, the notion that the American racial hierarchy was akin to the caste system in India. There was a lively interchange of reports and social explorers between the United States and Britain in addition to other strong professional and personal ties, especially between the coterie of Boston reformers and their British counterparts. In the fields of print and publication, the British Parliament and the U.S. Congress were not merely aware of each other's contributions but, in an ironic twist, took each other as role models.

Since print culture undergirded the new politics of representation, the first part of the book focuses on the operation of governments as publishers. Here social reports are discussed among remarkably diverse print products. Chapter 1 explores Parliament's enormous publishing output on the social arena as well as on trade, law, administration, and other aspects of British public life. The chapter follows efforts made at the beginning of the nineteenth century to overhaul and rationalize the British knowledge policy and the subsequent schemes proposed to find readers for official papers. Chapter 2 analyzes large-scale publishing projects supported by the U.S. Congress and congressional disputes concerning the state's informational mission. Chapter 3 examines the publication of expedition accounts during the 1840s and 1850s. Through a discussion of select case studies, I show the development of a particular sense of authorship among government officials, the emergence of generic rules in western reporting, and finally (using a collection of close to a thousand applications for volumes of the 1850s Pacific Railroad expeditions) the great public desire to acquire or even collect state documents. All three chapters engage the relationship between governments, authors, and readers.

The second and third parts of the book examine more closely the work of social investigators in the field and at their writing desks. Chapter 4 focuses on a uniquely British institution, the royal commission of inquiry, and its relation to other types of official probes, namely, the workings of inspectorates, which were established to supervise new laws regarding poor relief, child labor, and mine safety, as well as parliamentary investigations conducted by select committees. The chapter delineates the course of action taken by a host of commissions, in particular the exertions of petty officials who populated the lower rungs of the

new bodies. It describes the techniques devised to elicit cooperation, and the complicity or resistance exhibited by the lower classes, the object of official attention. Investigative practices offered the investigated communities numerous possibilities of mimicry and parody, but investigators could also use imitation or impersonation to obtain or to authenticate information. Field investigators in both countries occasionally assumed a precarious position as mediators between the scenes of social malady (or remote peoples and lands) and respectable society.

Chapter 5 considers the making and the diffusion of the literary products of British officials, their "bureaucratic poetics." It follows the process of crafting official reports, including the interaction among officials/writers of what were in effect multiauthored documents. Whereas chapter 2 scrutinizes the state's preoccupation with readers and reading, this discussion details strategies exploited by readers to intercept and appropriate official publications. Here, as in the previous chapter, I examine in what ways the investigation as a practice and the report as a text functioned to incorporate the investigated population into society, and under what terms.

Chapter 6 focuses on a single case study of social investigation. The American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission was a three-man board appointed in March 1863 by the Secretary of War to explore the condition of and future policy toward former slaves. The Freedmen's Commission traveled to the South and Canada to examine in different settings the "aptitude" and wish of former slaves to live under freedom. A profound ambiguity concerning the status of these freedmen as either racial others or products of slavery (the free market's other) dominated, in fact, overwhelmed the commission's work. This chapter describes these and other conceptual and practical conundrums that emanated from the decision to define the freedmen question as a problem of knowledge under official state investigation. My case study exemplifies the tension between government's desire to master social knowledge and knowledge's endemic ungovernmentability.

The third part of the book explores a few 1840s and 1850s studies of American Indian tribes, research that was conducted during a time of great public dispute over the federal removal policy, the future of the native peoples, and even the status of the aboriginal as fully human. Chapter 7 examines Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's two state-sponsored projects, first his study of the Iroquois nations on behalf of the state of New York, a survey that coupled a census with ethnographical work, and second, his mammoth work for Congress on the Indian tribes of America. Schoolcraft's work demonstrates how the preservation and representation of aboriginal culture turned into a state mission, justified either as a

duty for the Indian or as an effort to create a new American identity. Chapter 8 analyzes Lewis Henry Morgan's own pioneering research of the Iroquois, some of which he conducted under the auspices of New York State. The chapter follows Morgan's membership in the New League of the Iroquois—a group of young professionals who "played Indians" as a pastime—to explore the relationship between racial masquerade and social investigation.

As for the period selected, the origins of the investigative routines described here may be traced to the end of the eighteenth century, if not earlier. Nevertheless, during the 1830s this new political culture received its fullest expression following the Reform Act in Britain and the emergence of the two-party system in the United States. This study focuses on the middle decades of the century through the late 1850s in Britain and the early 1870s in the United States. The concluding third of the nineteenth century was characterized by increased focus on the results of industrialization and labor disputes (in the United States) and the colonial world (in Britain), a succession of political reforms in Britain (with additional expansions of the national electorate in 1867 and 1884–85), and a more controlled production and growing transmission of information with the rise of expert institutions.

This book is based on archival research and draws upon current theoretical debates over knowledge, print culture, and the state, as well as over the nature and the history of the "public sphere." In addition to state reports and other official papers, sources include private and official correspondence, unpublished papers of governmental departments or congressional committees, records of congressional and parliamentary debates, and review magazines (or daily newspapers) where many reports were excerpted and critiqued. Some informational projects are not included in this study; arguably, the most important are the ambitious national censuses both governments conducted. This topic has already received ample scholarly attention. Furthermore, the census seems closer in nature to conventional forms of representational politics rather than the politics of representation described in this book. The census came into being as a device to organize and maintain the electoral system. This was certainly the case in the United States, which inaugurated its national census in 1790, a decade before Britain. Heads were counted in order to outline electoral districts, and although not every individual enumerated was entitled to vote (e.g., women, minors, and particular minorities), they were, through some means, represented in national institutions. The census and social investigations therefore involve somewhat different elicitation of voice. Census enumeration is conducted under conditions of anonymity. The identity of individuals is kept from public view and is largely

irrelevant to the purposes of this undertaking, but the census leads to the expression of the aggregate political voice of the nation through the ballot. Both modern techniques of voting and the census schedule are linked to periodicity, anonymity, and result in "bounded totals."[7] In contrast, in public investigations where the inquiry itself was expected to produce representations, voice and representation collided.

A word about terminology: this study calls attention to the institutional diversity of the state, especially the division between the legislative and the executive branches. In most cases, I circumvent the confusion inherent in the concept of *government* that connotes either the executive branch or a comprehensive political system, which includes the executive branch, by assigning the term *government* to the administration in the United States or to the "ministry" in Britain.

This page intentionally left blank