

DAVID LOWENTHAL

David Lowenthal

26 April 1923 – 15 September 2018

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2001

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Belonging to a family of lawyers and professors, the polymath David Lowenthal hated disciplinary divisions. American by birth but British by inclination, he learned the practice of geography through wartime service in Western Europe. During a long and highly productive career, spent mainly at the American Geographical Society and then at University College London, he made important contributions to Caribbean studies, environmental history, landscape interpretation and cultural and historical geography. His later work on heritage informs management agencies across the globe. The ideas of the pioneering nineteenth-century environmentalist George Perkins March formed an essential touchstone for many aspects of his writing. In addition to scholarly articles and books (notably *The Past is a Foreign Country*), Lowenthal also wrote for a wider audience. His impact in the public realm was arguably as great as that among academics.



DAVID LOWENTHAL

David Lowenthal was an intellectual giant who worked with brilliance and originality across many fields of scholarly enquiry. American by birth, British by inclination, his span of expertise extended far beyond the disciplines of geography and history in which he was formally trained. At the convergence of the humanities and social sciences, his writings covered historical geography, environmental perception, Caribbean studies, landscape interpretation, environmental history, heritage studies and cultural history. Peter Seixas remarked: 'I marvelled at his breadth of knowledge. It gave me a sense of wonder. How did he manage to keep all those different sources in his head at the same time?'¹ Or again, Laura Watt said that I was 'so impressed by ... his ability to play with material across centuries, and across disciplines. [It] was truly astounding ... [His] polymath mind [was] quoting a Roman philosopher in one breath and discussing skateboarders or some recent film in the next.'²

In a very long career, sixty-plus years that were abidingly productive, David's essays and major books enjoyed significant academic and popular audiences. They were marked, first, by immense erudition, though worn lightly, never pedantic or stuffy, and, second, by considered judgement. He thought that the problem with many disciplines, including his own, geography, was their over-concern with present crisis, which allowed no time to think of anything else.³ In contrast, he believed scholars needed time to ponder, to contemplate, to reflect. He adhered to Erwin Panofsky's argument 'In defense of the Ivory Tower'.⁴ He did not remain cloistered in an Ivory Tower, however. He became increasingly a public intellectual, speaking out and influencing international and national public and private institutions concerned with issues of history, memory, conservation and above all heritage. Never a shrinking violet, he urged, 'Our heritage must be accepted in its totality, the vile along with the valiant, the evil along with the eminent, the sorrowful as well as the splendid. Consciously informed use of heritage is essential to civilized life.'⁵

¹ Peter Seixas interview with Barnes, 30 April 2019.

² L. Watt, 'David Lowenthal and the genesis of critical conservation thought', paper given at the annual meeting of the *American Association of Geographers*, Washington, DC, 6 April 2019.

³ D. Lowenthal and Y. Hamilakis, 'A conversation with David Lowenthal' [on 28 January], *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46 (2017), 1–18.

⁴ E. Panofsky, *In Defense of the Ivory Tower* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Alumni Bulletin, 1957).

⁵ D. Lowenthal, 'Why the past matters', *Heritage and Society*, 4 (2011), 167.

The life

Early years and army service (1923–46)

David Lowenthal was born on 26 April 1923 in New York City, the eldest child of Max Lowenthal (1887–1971, b. Minneapolis, Minnesota) and Eleanor (née Mack; 1898–1965, b. New York City).⁶ From a first-generation Jewish family from Lithuania, Max graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1909, and three years later gained a law degree from Harvard. In 1915, he established his own legal practice in New York City specialising in labour law, concerned particularly with the protection of workers' rights. By the 1930s he was 'a very wealthy New York lawyer', with a home on Central Park West in the heart of Manhattan.⁷ Early on Max's work led him into politics and public service both within the 'New Deal' of Roosevelt and later government war work. Always an out-of-sight influence, he never ran for public office or electioneered. In the mid-1930s Max befriended then Senator Harry Truman who, after he became president (1945–1953), appointed him to a series of national counsels and committees. In 1946 Max was sent to Berlin to gather evidence for the restitution of property stolen by the Nazis and later he influenced Truman's 1948 decision to recognise the State of Israel. Because of his commitment to and defence of labour rights, along with his close relation to Truman, from 1947 Max came under the scrutiny of J. Edgar Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) he directed. Max's response was to write an exposé, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation* (New York, 1950), detailing egregious examples of the agency's spying, 'red-baiting' and harassment of radicals and foreigners. Inevitably, it made Max only more of a marked man. Subsequently, questions were asked about him at Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee, ending his thirty-eight years as a public servant.

David and his younger brother, John (1925–2003, a lawyer and filmmaker), and sister Elizabeth ('Betty Levin', b. 1927, a children's novelist) thus grew up in an affluent, highly educated, socially well-connected, liberal reformist family. Their mother, Eleanor, had a degree in history and music from Radcliffe College. Her uncle, Julian William Mack (1866–1943), was a University of Chicago law professor and then US Court of Appeals judge, while Max's brother-in-law, James Gutmann (1897–1988), was a Columbia University philosophy professor. David recalled the dinner table conversation as 'dazzling'.⁸ As befitting their social class, the family boasted an Irish nanny, a dedicated cook and a farmhouse holiday home at Bridgewater in the Litchfield Hills, north-west Connecticut. Other vacations were spent on the Massachusetts

⁶ H. Clout, 'David Lowenthal, 1923–2018', *Geographical Journal*, 185 (2019), 127–8.

⁷ Anon. 'Adele D. Bramwen, artist, 64, is dead', *New York Times*, 14 August 1964.

⁸ D. Lowenthal, 'David Lowenthal: childhood, schooling, army' (undated typescript), 15.

island of Martha's Vineyard. At an early age, David was taught piano, and attended in New York first the Walden School and later the Lincoln School of Teachers' College, Columbia University. Founded in 1917, the Lincoln School was based on the educational methods of the well-known American pragmatist philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952). Encouraging individual exploration, learning by doing and collaborative small-group work, David was in his element, freely indulging his passion for reading. Later in life, he described himself as a 'bookish voyager'.⁹ Following Dewey, the school also emphasised the importance of public service, a responsibility to contribute to the larger social conversation, and a striking leitmotiv of David's later work as a scholar.

Such was the high reputation of the Lincoln School that David was not required to take the normal entrance exam for admittance to Harvard, where between 1940 and 1943 he read for a BS degree in History (he was denied a BA because he lacked Latin). To say he read for a History degree is misleading, however. At Harvard he designed his own academic programme avoiding specialisation, allowing him to read expansively. As he later remarked: 'I hate disciplines. Specialization has been the bane of education.'¹⁰ Despite his free-form degree programme, he never took a geography class; in fact, he never even heard of Harvard's Department of Geography. He enjoyed a course in geology, though, and assisted the director of the university's meteorological institute drawing weather maps for the Joint Army-Navy Weather Agency. Furthermore, his final-year honours thesis was on a classic topic within political geography, the placement of a national border, in his case the New Brunswick (Canada)-Maine (United States) boundary dispute.¹¹

Because of the war, he was among the many in his class of 1944 who completed the four-year degree in three years. In May 1943, within a week he went from Harvard Yard to army boot camp. He had been drafted into the US infantry. It was a radically different world.

Twenty-five-mile hikes carrying 50-pound packs alternated with rifle instruction and bayonet assaults on stuffed dummies. From April to July we were based first at hot, dry, dusty Camp Phillips, Kansas, then at hot, wet, humid Fort Collins, Arkansas, and finally in the swampy mosquito-ridden marshlands of northern Louisiana, before boarding ship for France.¹²

⁹D. Lowenthal, 'Remarks upon receipt of the Victoria Medal', *Geographical Journal*, 163 (1997), 355.

¹⁰Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 2.

¹¹D. Lowenthal, 'The Maine Press and the Aroostook War', *Canadian Historical Review*, 32 (1951), 315–36.

¹²D. Lowenthal, 'From infantry to intelligence in wartime France, 1944–45' (an unpublished memoir updated by David in 2018), 1.

David arrived at Cherbourg in Normandy on 15 September 1944, some three months after D-Day. He was a rifleman in General Omar Bradley's First Army. Because of short-sightedness and an ability to speak some French, he was excused the usual duties of a GI, assigned instead to teach troops enough of the language to get along with the locals. But the locals 'had enough of soldiers in their midst, German or Allied, and wished to see the back of us as soon as possible', he later recalled.¹³ To that end, 'they plied us with diarrhoea-inducing unripe camembert and with the rawest of calvados, swilled in such quantity as to blind many soldiers used to nothing stronger than beer'.

In October, David's company left Normandy and headed east toward the Vosges mountains. At first they encountered 'only tattered remnants of German forces'.¹⁴ Each day armed forays led to the capture of a few wounded German teenage soldiers who had only recently been press-ganged into the *Wehrmacht*. With his command of German enhanced during infantry training, David was charged with interrogating them. It was a case of 'one terrified young man questioning another terrified young man', he later acknowledged.¹⁵ The wounded Germans were desperate to get word back to their families. Years later, David admitted: 'Twice I promised dying boys this would be done, although I knew it could not. Those young lives ebbing away for some remote insane cause haunt me to this day.'¹⁶

As David's company continued eastward, now over rough terrain and in appalling weather, it met major resistance. Asked-for reinforcements never came, and his company began to run low on food and water. Unable to advance, David and his comrades dug in, confined to foxholes that were soon wet, boggy and waterlogged. In turn, days of enforced immobility produced 'trench foot', a fungal infection due to booting immersion. When relief finally arrived, trench-foot invalids, including David, had to be carried to field camp, then sent by train to the coast. Once across the Channel, he was transported by hospital train to Taunton, Somerset. There his feet were elevated, left uncovered until the swelling subsided and he could walk again. That stay in England proved pivotal. To recuperate, David took walking trips into the Somerset countryside, provoking an 'immediate affection for England'.¹⁷ That feeling never dissipated. He found a new home.

In December 1944 David was reassigned to military intelligence at the London outpost of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), forerunner of the CIA. At first, using Baedekers and other travel guides, his assignment was to count lavatories in German castles to ascertain if there were an appropriate per capita number for

¹³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵ D. Lowenthal in conversation with H. Clout.

¹⁶ Lowenthal, 'From infantry to intelligence', 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

occupying Allied officers. A month later, he was dispatched to Paris to work on the OSS's Intelligence Photographic Documentation Project (IPDP), 'a grand and never completed mission to survey and catalogue the whole of western Europe's terrain and built environment' in preparation for any future military conflict.¹⁸ Working officially now as 'a geographer', David went to France, Belgium, Luxembourg, eastern Germany and Bohemia. In this role, he acquired the geographical skills he had not received at Harvard. His discharge papers disclosed at OSS that he carried out 'geographic survey and fieldtrips . . . Wrote reports on military geography, with relation to industrial installations, topography, communications, transportation, and other social and economic features, [and] briefed air photo intelligence teams on the above areas.'¹⁹

David believed his assignment to IPDP was because of a recommendation from the French geographer, Jean Gottmann, FBA (1915–94), who was related to his philosopher uncle, James Gutmann (Lowenthal 2007).²⁰ In 1941, Gottmann, who was Jewish, fled to the United States to avoid the Vichy regime and the Nazis. Max Lowenthal supervised him when Gottmann then worked as an advisor to the US Board of Economic Warfare. It was also during that period David first met the French geographer.²¹ After Gottmann returned to France in 1945 on a mission for the French government, the two resumed their friendship: Gottmann was twenty-nine, David twenty-one. In Paris, Gottmann took David to several small select gatherings of French academics, including André Siegfried (1875–1959), who discussed especially the forthcoming shape of the postwar world.

For the IPDP, geographers worked with photographers in two-person teams travelling by jeep to areas to be surveyed. David and his photographer, Joe Bucolo, took and annotated tens of thousands of photographs. Their text and images were edited and printed in Paris, then sent back across the Atlantic. Their final mission was in southern Belgium in late summer 1945. There, however, while directing Bucolo who was driving, David fell off the jeep's roof and fractured his wrist. Sent back to America, he was discharged from the army in September 1945, but continued to work on issues of military intelligence in the State Department for another twelve months. In the end, neither the landscape photos nor descriptions he compiled were ever used. The entire body of IPDP's texts and images went up in flames in a warehouse fire outside Washington, DC.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ D. Lowenthal, 'Mémoires de temps de guerre et de la paix', in *L'Orbite de la Géographie de Jean Gottmann, La Géographie* 1523bis (2007), 190–4. On Gottmann, see H. Clout and P. Hall, 'Jean Gottmann 1915–1994', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 120 (2003), pp. 201–15.

²¹ L. Muscarà, 'David Lowenthal's past and our foreign present', paper given at the annual meeting of the *American Association of Geographers*, Washington, DC, 6 April 2019.

Although the fruits of David's wartime labour were destroyed, the efforts themselves, as David said shortly before his death, were 'formative and hugely important. [It was] through military intelligence work I became a geographer.'²² He learned how to undertake field surveys; to depict and to interpret natural and human-made landscape features; to use photography and writing to represent different forms of terrain and the built environment; and finally, to know and to appreciate European regional landscapes, especially those of Britain, which were markedly different from those in the United States.

Graduate school and the American Geographical Society (1946–72)

In autumn 1946, rather than studying geography when he entered graduate school at Columbia, David took pre-med courses including psychology.²³ Gottmann changed that. Now teaching at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, Gottmann met David on several occasions. In 1947, he helped him secure a summer internship at the American Geographical Society (AGS) in Manhattan, and then persuaded him to transfer to the graduate programme in Geography at the University of California, Berkeley, shaped and run by perhaps America's most famous twentieth-century geographer, Carl Ortwin Sauer (1889–1975: America's 'Dean of geographers' as the *New York Times* called him in his obituary). Sauer was another polymath and like David was suspicious of disciplinary boundaries. The two were made for one another. David fell under his influence, recognising Sauer's 'intellectual curiosity and drive [that] embraced every epoch and every aspect of the ever-changing interplay between humans and their earthly home'.²⁴ David could not speak Spanish, however, so he was unable to carry out fieldwork in Mexico or in many parts of South America, the usual research sites for Sauer's students. He was given two weeks to find an alternative field location.²⁵ Given his facility in English, German and French, he selected the three Guianas—British, Dutch and French—during their colonial period and defined by the use of African slave and Asian indentured labour.²⁶ It led David to be interested in the larger Caribbean region, particularly the islands of the West Indies, and it remained a research interest throughout his career.

²²Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 2.

²³H. Clout in conversation with Mary Alice Lowenthal, 15 November 2018.

²⁴D. Lowenthal, 'Foreword', in M. Williams with D. Lowenthal and W. Denevan, *To Pass on a Good Earth: the Life and Work of Carl O. Sauer* (Charlottesville, NC, 2014), pp. vii–xi, vii.

²⁵Watt, 'David Lowenthal and the genesis of critical conservation thought'.

²⁶D. Lowenthal, 'Colonial experiments in French Guiana, 1760–1800', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 32 (1952), 22–43; D. Lowenthal, 'Population contrasts in the Guianas', *Geographical Review*, 50 (1960), 41–58; D. Lowenthal, 'The range and variation of Caribbean societies', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 83 (1960), 786–95.

For his doctoral research, Sauer and his colleague, John Leighly (1895–1986), encouraged David to study the life and work of the early American environmentalist George Perkins Marsh (1801–1882).²⁷ Rather than remain at Berkeley, however, David undertook that topic at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Initially intending to enter the Geography Department, in the end he decided History was more intellectually congenial. His supervisor was Merle Curti (1897–1996), with geographers Richard Hartshorne (1899–1992) and Andrew Hill Clark (1911–1975) members of his supervisory committee. David's subsequent dissertation demonstrated that Marsh's experiences in his native Vermont and later during his diplomatic career in Turkey and Italy had profoundly shaped his depiction of the adverse impact of humans on the natural landscape of the Alps and Mediterranean Basin. In this sense, the dissertation was a case study of what David would soon call 'environmental perception', showing in this case how the life of Marsh had fashioned his environmental attitudes, allowing him to perceive the pernicious effects of human action on nature. But the thesis was also an account of the beginning of the idea of American nature conservation. Going against the nineteenth-century grain of the advocacy of a rapacious destruction of nature, Marsh in *Man and Nature* urged its protection and preservation.²⁸ In effect, David's thesis anticipated the concerns of the environmental movement that were to become so prominent during the next decade and culminating in Earth Day (1970).²⁹ In early summer 1952, David presented a paper from his thesis at the International Geographical Union conference in Washington, DC and impressed three British geographers from University College London (UCL) who were in the audience: Henry Clifford Darby, FBA (1909–1992), William Richard Mead, FBA (1915–2014) and Eric Brown (1922–2018).³⁰ It was to become an important encounter for his later career.

In autumn 1952, David was hired as Assistant Professor of Geography at the then all-women Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. He later said that the mostly women faculty members were collectively one of the most impressive group of

²⁷B. Clark and J. B. Foster, 'George Perkins Marsh and the transformation of Earth', *Organization & Environment*, 15 (2002), 164–9.

²⁸G. P. Marsh, *Man and Nature, or Physical Geography Modified by Human Action* (New York, 1864); D. Lowenthal, 'George Perkins Marsh and the American geographical tradition', *Geographical Review*, 43 (1953), 207–13; D. Lowenthal, 'George Perkins Marsh on the nature and purpose of geography', *Geographical Journal*, 126 (1960), 413–17.

²⁹D. Lowenthal, 'Eden, Earth Day and Ecology: landscape restoration as metaphor and mission', *Landscape Research*, 38 (2013), 5–31.

³⁰Lowenthal, 'George Perkins Marsh and the American geographical tradition'; D. Lowenthal, 'George Perkins Marsh and Scandinavian studies', *Scandinavian Studies*, 29 (1957), 41–52. On Darby see M. Williams, 'Henry Clifford Darby 1909–1992', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1995), pp. 289–306; on Mead see H. Clout, 'William Richard Mead 1915–2014', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 14 (2015), pp. 383–408.

colleagues with whom he ever worked.³¹ Apart from offering new courses on modern imperialism and the geography of underdeveloped areas, he arranged for Vassar to be a depository of the US Army Map Service and to receive a collection of US Geological Survey maps. While there David also revised his thesis for publication, retitled *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter*.³² He dedicated it to Merle Curti, acknowledging also editorial assistance from his first wife, Jane (1916–2002), whom he met at Vassar. There had never been anything quite like that book published in geography, a study combining painstakingly researched biography with a sophisticated political and social argument for environmental conservation. Clarence J. Glacken (1909–1989), the great Berkeley geography scholar of the history of the idea of nature, and who within a decade would publish his own magnum opus, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, called David's book 'satisfying, deeply human, and extremely interesting [and] a fitting memorial to Marsh and a great credit to its author'.³³

Even before David's book was published, he was talent-spotted by the Director of the AGS, Charles Baker Hitchcock (1906–1969). In 1956, along with two other brilliant young men—William Warntz (1922–1988) and Calvin John Heusser (1924–2006)—Hitchcock appointed David as an AGS Research Associate, giving him the luxury of pursuing any research interest with no teaching obligation. David initiated two research projects, both building on his graduate work. The first was on the islands of the Caribbean. The very same year David started at AGS he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship (1956–7) at the University College of the West Indies in Jamaica. It allowed him to continue working on the Caribbean and the ecologies and societies of islands more generally. A Rockefeller Foundation grant (1960–2) further consolidated that interest resulting, first, in the edited collection *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* and, later, the single-authored tome, *West Indian Societies*.³⁴ A central element in both books was the issue of race, leading David to work sporadically for more than a decade in London for a non-profit think tank, the Institute of Race Relations (1961–72).

The second was to integrate environmental perception, environmental history and cultural landscape in studies of the meaning of place. This line of inquiry partly emerged from his study of Marsh, but it was also inspired by John Kirtland Wright (1891–1969), David's mentor at the AGS, who earlier developed the idea of 'geosophy',

³¹ Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 5.

³² D. Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter* (New York, 1958).

³³ C. J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley, CA, 1967); C. J. Glacken, 'George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter', *Geographical Review*, 49 (1959), 437–8.

³⁴ D. Lowenthal (ed.), *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* (New York, 1961); D. Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (New York, 1972).

defined as ‘the study of geographical knowledge from any or all points of view’.³⁵ In David’s case his question was how place, environment and landscape were perceived differently by different people. He answered it in one of his most celebrated academic papers, ‘Geography, experience, and imagination: towards a geographical epistemology’, published in the discipline’s flagship journal, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*.³⁶ David concluded that essay:

Every image and idea about the world is compounded of personal experience, imagination, and memory. The places that we live in, those we visit and travel through, the worlds we read about and see in works of art, and the realms of imagination and fantasy each contribute to our images of nature and man. All types of experience, from those most closely linked with our everyday world to those which seem furthest removed, come together to make up our individual picture of reality.³⁷

Over the rest of the 1960s, David continued work on environmental perception, often at interdisciplinary meetings held at the AGS under the aegis of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He also received grants to pursue the topic from Resources for the Future Inc., and a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship (1965–6). His work attracted much attention not only in geography but also in architecture, planning, landscape design and urban studies, with numerous invitations to present talks and to take up visiting professorships including at Berkeley, Columbia, MIT and Harvard.³⁸ One of those invitations came from geographers at UCL, a result in part because of the paper he gave on Marsh at the 1952 IGU in Washington, DC. The Head at UCL Geography, the esteemed historical geographer, Clifford Darby, wrote the invitation. At UCL, David collaborated with historical geographer Hugh Prince (1927–2013), developing a remarkably fruitful investigation of the characteristics of English landscapes, their perception and appreciation.³⁹ David cherished the partnership, saying it engendered ‘an extraordinary sense of togetherness [and] was too enjoyable to give up’.⁴⁰ But he didn’t have to. Because of increasingly acute money

³⁵J. K. Wright, ‘Terrae incognitae: the place of imagination in geography’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 37 (1947), 12.

³⁶D. Lowenthal, ‘Geography, experience, and imagination: towards a geographical epistemology’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 51 (1961), 241–60.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 260.

³⁸D. Lowenthal, ‘Fruitful liaison or folie à deux? The Association of American Geographers and the American Geographical Society’, *Professional Geographer*, 57 (2005), 472.

³⁹D. Lowenthal and H. C. Prince, ‘The English landscape’, *Geographical Review*, 54 (1964), 309–46; D. Lowenthal and H. C. Prince, ‘English landscape tastes’, *Geographical Review* 55 (1965), 186–222; D. Lowenthal and H. C. Prince, ‘English façades’, *Architectural Association Quarterly*, 1 (1969), 50–64; D. Lowenthal and H. C. Prince, ‘Transcendental experience’, in S. Wapner, S. Cohen and B. Kaplan (eds.), *Experiencing the Environment* (New York, 1976), pp. 117–31.

⁴⁰D. Lowenthal, ‘Reminiscences’, talk given at UCL in 2002.

problems at the AGS—he was the last remaining Research Associate on the payroll—David moved permanently to UCL in 1972, taking up the Chair of Geography vacated by Asian specialist, Paul Wheatley, FBA (1921–1999).

University College London and after (1972–2018)

David Lowenthal was not the first choice, however. Colleagues in the UCL department were almost unanimous that Wheatley's successor should be a model builder or a quantifier. Three distinguished geographers of that persuasion were approached by the head of the College, but each declined to apply. It was then that David was considered. The Head of the Department, William Mead, wrote to UCL's Provost, Noel Annan (1916–2000), to justify David's candidature: 'We are looking first and foremost for a distinguished scholar, [someone] excellent with post-graduate students . . . The very last thing we are looking for is an administrator.'⁴¹ With a firm commitment that administration would never come his way, which he saw as 'a real blessing', David accepted the offer.⁴² The special dispensation was not revealed to junior colleagues, however.

Over the next thirteen years at UCL, David taught undergraduate courses about the West Indies, environmental perception (with Jacquie Burgess), and latterly conservation and preservation (with Hugh Prince). During 1977–8, one of the authors of this essay, Barnes, was in David's upper-year environmental perception course. He was a superb lecturer, the best that Barnes had as an undergraduate; each of his presentations was lucid, witty and erudite, with stunning visual illustrations, impeccably timed, always ending with some biting take-home point despite a beguiling grin and carefree shrug. David's intellectual sophistication and deep learning made us afraid of him, though. He was so unlike any of us mere undergraduate mortals. He was the only American that Barnes knew, however, so when he received during his third year a clutch of offers from US Geography graduate schools, as nervous as he was having never spoken to him before, he knocked on David's office door seeking advice. He could not have been more generous and welcoming. Pouring glasses of sherry from a bottle stored in a top filing cabinet and quickly perusing the offers, David said: 'You must go to Minnesota. My father was from Minnesota, and he was a good and true man. Go there.' Barnes did, never regretting it, forever grateful for the unreserved good and true guidance. In 1971 David had taught the spring term in Minnesota, where he enjoyed a lively discourse with his colleagues in geography.

⁴¹ UCL Archives, Letter from N. Annan to R. W. Steel, 6 May 1972.

⁴² Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 5.

But not only undergraduates were intimidated by David; postgraduates and junior faculty were too. Despite Mead's justification to the Provost, David supervised only one doctoral student to completion during his tenure at UCL (although he ran many training sessions for postgraduates). It was hard not to feel overawed, to cower under David's encyclopaedic knowledge, capacious razor-sharp memory and flawlessly formed rounded sentences. It was unfortunate, though, given David's also great generosity and hospitality. For example, he hosted many distinguished North American scholars at departmental seminars, accommodating them in his home, holding Saturday evening parties for them with his wife Mary Alice (née Lamberty) at their large rambling house at Harrow-on-the-Hill. He was a gregarious, welcoming man, with a fondness for puns and an anecdote for every occasion, but these qualities were sometimes concealed when he took on the formal scholarly persona of the distinguished Professor David Lowenthal. He especially missed at UCL interaction with Master's students, an opportunity afforded him within North American universities, but not in Britain during the 1970s and early 1980s. To compensate he looked to the wider intellectual community within and beyond the University of London, where he gave myriad guest seminars to advanced scholars in anthropology, archaeology, architecture and design, art history, planning, heritage studies and landscape architecture. He also used long vacations to make new academic contacts around the world.⁴³

In early autumn 1985, when British universities were under severe financial constraint, David's position at UCL came to an end. His plan was to take up an adjunct professorship at Berkeley, and to that end he and his wife purchased a house in the Berkeley hills. The professorship materialised but he decided against taking it up because Europe had so many intellectual possibilities. Nonetheless, he kept the house and after 2002 lived there about a third of each year—Berkeley was 'not really America' he once said.⁴⁴ London remained his base, first at Harrow-on-the-Hill, later a flat in Marylebone, central London, close to Wigmore Hall where he and wife frequently attended concerts (David never listened to recorded music or watched television). Even though he had no permanent academic job, he continued to hold short-term visiting professorships both in the UK and the USA, organise seminar series, give prestigious named lectures, contribute to scholarly societies and institutions, and especially to advise heritage organisations and to engage in public debates about heritage. He was fulfilling Dewey's charge to participate in the social conversation.

⁴³D. Lowenthal, 'Perceiving the Australian environment', in G. Seddon and M. Davis (eds.), *Man and Landscape in Australia: Towards an Ecological Vision* (Canberra, 1976), pp. 357–65; D. Lowenthal, 'Australian images: the unique present, the mythical past', in P. Quartermaine (ed.), *Readings in Australian Arts* (Exeter, 1978), pp. 84–93; D. Lowenthal, 'Mobility and identity in the island Pacific: a critique', *Pacific Viewpoint*, 26 (1985), 316–26.

⁴⁴G. Seddon, 'David Lowenthal: a tribute', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27 (2003), 1.

Among the many organisations he advised included UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the International Council of Museums, the Getty Conservation Institute, the World Monuments Fund, the Council of Europe and English Heritage. In the public media he contributed notably to the disputes around the Parthenon sculptures ('Elgin marbles'), and the Cecil Rhodes statues in Cape Town and Oxford.⁴⁵

While doing all these things David also managed to keep his nose to the grindstone of writing, turning out matchless prose in the form of a continuous production line of academic papers and single-authored books (four after 1985). The most well known, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, appeared just a month after he left UCL.⁴⁶ Lavishly illustrated, about landscape, history, memory and heritage, it was a doorstopper, just shy of 500 pages. It kept on selling and was reprinted continually (three times alone in 1988). Thirty years later, a new version appeared, enlarged by a third with 3,000 footnotes, *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited*.⁴⁷ In 2016, this version won the British Academy Medal in recognition of its 'landmark academic achievement which has transformed understanding in the humanities and social sciences'. Not bad for a 93-year-old.

Central to David's prodigious output was his wife, Mary Alice, a former editor at the AGS. She was, as Neil Silberman puts it, 'David's sounding board, editor, and overall enabler of his continuing research and travel'.⁴⁸ Certainly, Lowenthal, as David Livingstone avows, was one of the 'discipline's great writers ... [defined] by the richness of his vocabulary, the grace of his prose, and the elegance of his rhetoric'.⁴⁹ But that writing was fashioned in part by Mary Alice's 'sharp editorial pen', as Kenneth Olwig observes.⁵⁰ He adds that while 'the ideas are Lowenthal's ... it is the skill of the editor that makes a key difference in the reading value and shelf life of a manuscript'.⁵¹

⁴⁵ D. Lowenthal, 'Classical antiquities as national and global heritage', *Antiquity*, 62 (1988), 726–35; D. Lowenthal, 'On arraigning ancestors: a critique of historical contrition', *North Carolina Law Review*, 87 (2009), 901–66; D. Lowenthal, 'Facing up to the deplorable past', *Perspectives on History*, 12 May 2016.

⁴⁶ D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985).

⁴⁷ D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited* (Cambridge, 2015). In 2011, David Lowenthal and Simon Jenkins had discussed 'Prizing the past for the present and the future' at the British Academy, subsequently written up in *British Academy Review*, 18 (Summer 2011).

⁴⁸ N. A. Silberman, 'David Lowenthal, 1923–2018', *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 25 (2018), 242.

⁴⁹ D. Livingstone, 'George Perkins Marsh: prophet of conservation', *Social and Cultural Geographies*, 3 (2002), 351–2.

⁵⁰ K. R. Olwig, 'In memoriam: a consummate scholar, David Lowenthal (26 April 1923–15 September 2018). A personal memory', *Landscape Research*, 44 (2019), 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Throughout, David maintained a relentless schedule of travel long into ‘retirement’—attending conferences, presenting talks, acting as a heritage consultant, journeying to new islands and revisiting old ones.⁵² *Quest for the Unity of Knowledge*, his last book, the proofs of which he planned to begin reading the day he died, fittingly brought together the major themes of David’s elongated and illustrious scholarly life.⁵³ They included the environment, human perception, race and religion, the past and present, heritage, conservation, landscape, geography and history, and island life. As Sverker Sörlin writes, ‘These are themes that have been lived [by David] as much as they have been researched.’⁵⁴ David died in his sleep on 15 September 2018 in his ninety-sixth year, survived by Mary Alice and his daughters Eleanor and Catherine.

The works

The sheer volume and polymathic character of David’s writing makes it difficult to identify neatly separated corpuses of work. In his remarkably long career, he produced eight single-author books, a dozen edited volumes, over 150 substantial articles and numerous brief reports, encyclopaedia entries and book reviews.⁵⁵ His writings tend to run into one another, making any categorisation only approximate. With that caveat, we organise David’s principal interests under four headings: heritage, environment and perception, landscape and the West Indies.

Heritage

The latter part of David’s career after he left UCL was best known for his writings on heritage. Indeed, he is usually taken as the originator, the founding father of heritage studies.⁵⁶ His 1985 book, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, was seminal, becoming the canonical text in the field. In their bibliographic analysis, Gentry and Smith found that it is ‘the most heavily cited book on heritage ever published, and is held by four times as many libraries globally than the next most popular work’.⁵⁷ Thirty years after

⁵²D. Lowenthal, ‘Islands, lovers and others’, *Geographical Review*, 97 (2007), 202–29.

⁵³D. Lowenthal, *Quest for the Unity of Knowledge* (London, 2019).

⁵⁴Personal communication, Sverker Sörlin, 4 December 2018.

⁵⁵H. Clout, ‘David Lowenthal, 1923–2018’, in E. Baigent and A. Reyes Novaes (eds.), *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies*, 39 (2020), contains a substantial list of David’s publications.

⁵⁶H. Clout, ‘David Lowenthal, scholar who established heritage studies’, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2018.

⁵⁷K. Gentry and L. Smith, ‘Critical heritage studies and the legacies of the late-twentieth century canon’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (2019), doi 10.1080/13527258.2019.1570964.

The Past Is a Foreign Country was published, a much-revised version, *The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited*, appeared.⁵⁸ It was almost two-hundred pages longer, reorganised into twelve chapters under four sections rather than seven chapters under three sections in the previous edition. Yet more examples were added, replacing those that were out of date, as were more footnotes (now running to over 110 pages). In both books, the prose took a narrative form, with the argument made illustratively through layers of examples on a single page, with semicolons neatly separating each. The range of sources was astonishing, from the Bible and classics to an Alan Jay Lerner song and an episode of *South Park*.⁵⁹ As Neil Silberman observed, ‘David was a master of the vivid antiquarian anecdote, the cultural detail, [and] the obscure newspaper clipping.’⁶⁰

Several commentators noted that neither book needed to be read sequentially to be appreciated. They were perfect for serendipitous dipping, dropping the reader at one compelling case or another they probably knew little or nothing about. That Horace Walpole and Walter Scott built gingerbread houses; that English Heritage placed a blue plaque on a house in Soho London commemorating ‘Jacob von Hogflume Inventor of time travel 1864–1909 [who] lived here in 2089’; and that the cigarette hanging from the bottom lip of the American bluesman Robert Johnson was airbrushed out of his photo for the US 29 cent stamp.⁶¹ There was not only the startling variety of sources, but the elegant and exact prose that bound them. Luca Muscarà calls David’s ‘lexical precision . . . extraordinary’, while Gentry and Smith evoke his use of multiple encrusted examples to label his style ‘thick description’ after the anthropologist Clifford Geertz.⁶²

David’s interests in history and heritage were there from the very beginning of his career as a geographer, which began when he worked for the IPDP at the end of the Second World War identifying buildings and landscapes of strategic significance in Western Europe.⁶³ It linked to his doctoral research on George Perkins Marsh around environmental preservation and conservation. And it was there in his joint writings with Hugh Prince on the distinctive qualities of the English landscape. It became more systematic and focused during the 1970s as David became a frequent keynote speaker at conferences and workshops on historic landscapes and valued environments. It was also during that same period that he began to work out how the past was

⁵⁸ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 315, 491.

⁶⁰ Silberman, ‘David Lowenthal, 1923–2018’, 242.

⁶¹ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited*, pp. 191, 433, 545.

⁶² Muscarà, ‘David Lowenthal’s past’; Gentry and Smith, ‘Critical heritage studies’.

⁶³ Lowenthal, ‘Mémoires de temps de guerre et de la paix’.

deliberately used to shape the meaning of a given place and space in the present.⁶⁴ He insisted that the connection between historical fact and heritage designation was often tenuous, brilliantly illustrating this point in his essay on the American Bicentennial celebrations.⁶⁵

David was not, of course, arguing that we should dispense with the past. He thought it fundamental to our individual and social lives. There was not just one past, however. Different aspects of the past became more or less important as social interests changed. As he put it in the introduction to a 1979 lecture he gave at Syracuse University:

Awareness of the past is essential to the maintenance of purpose in life. Without it we would lack all sense of continuity, all apprehension of causality, all knowledge of our own identity. [But] the past is not a fixed or immobile series of events; our interpretations of it are in constant flux ... Today's past is an accumulation of mankind's memories, seen through our own generation's particular perspectives ... The changing present continually requires new interpretations of what has taken place.⁶⁶

Consequently, what counts as heritage is also in flux. The same heritage object—a memorial, a statue, a historical plaque—will take on different meanings over time. In some cases, the meaning may shift so dramatically that the object rather than being revered becomes reviled, requiring even its removal (as happened with statues of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, South Africa).

Again, David did not then think that heritage should be suppressed. Heritage is vital and necessary, acting as a mnemonic device helping us to remember and connect to the past. It serves a crucial function. But David's argument was that the past invoked by heritage is never true history. We must remember that heritage expressed as displays, exhibitions, monuments, buildings, neighbourhoods, plaques, ceremonies and a host of other forms, is never the past as it was. It is a past always coloured by agendas of the present. The myriad illustrations in both editions of *The Past is a Foreign Country* repeatedly demonstrate this thesis: heritage is not bad, but it is not history. Sometimes the past that is invoked by heritage is patently bogus, as when it has been Disneyfied, or when subject to extreme political ideology as under Nazism or Stalinism. In other instances, it is not so obvious, more hidden. David deals with both overt and covert cases. Ultimately, all forms of heritage whether apparent or not will present warped versions of the past.

⁶⁴D. Lowenthal, 'Past time, present place: landscape and memory', *Geographical Review*, 65 (1975), 1–36.

⁶⁵D. Lowenthal, 'Environmental perception: preserving the past', *Progress in Human Geography*, 3 (1979), 549–59; D. Lowenthal, 'Age and artefact: dilemmas of appreciation', in D. W. Meinig (ed.), *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York, 1979), pp. 103–28.

⁶⁶Lowenthal, 'Age and artefact', 103.

To determine how warped, David appealed to the acid test of the historical method. It provided a ‘testable truth’, as he put it. That method still might not reveal the past as it really was, but he believed that it separated the wheat of more credible accounts of the past from the chaff of less credible ones. Historical truth could at least be approximated if not fully revealed. As Peter Seixas expressed it, David believed that while one ‘could not recreate the past as it was, nevertheless there were better and worse ways of getting at it’.⁶⁷ Heritage did not, while the historical method did.

David’s belief in the touchstone of history put him at odds with what Gentry and Smith identify as second-generation heritage studies known as critical heritage studies (CHS).⁶⁸ Aligned with various forms of post-structuralism, CHS supporters dispute that the historical method renders a more credible version of the past than any other method. For them, the historian’s account is as fictional as Walt Disney’s. Both are full of biases, erasures, leaps of logic and value judgements. These critics suggest David might have realised this if he had been more theoretically self-conscious and astute. Instead, he was overly taken by his many examples that became ends in themselves, missing the larger picture, with both books ‘lacking sustained argument and critical substance’.⁶⁹ For example, Comer Vann Woodward reviewing the 1985 version of the book criticised it for its ‘helter-skelter commingling’.⁷⁰ Stuart Piggott was harsher, saying about the same edition, ‘detail is piled upon uncritical detail ... Professor Lowenthal goes down, not waving but drowning, under the dry but relentless wave of his own Dead Sea of index cards’.⁷¹ David retained the same approach for the 2015 version, adding even more examples, leading David C. Harvey in his review to say: ‘We end up revisiting a world of scholarship that, although impressive in its fermentation over a seventy-year career, hasn’t really evolved for three decades.’⁷² Other criticisms coming from CHS included David’s geographical narrowness (his foci were primarily Western Europe and North America); his frequent reliance on examples involving anglophone dead-white-men; his patrician view from above; and his lack of political engagement, specifically a failure to recognise the hegemonic character of heritage that according to critics is bent on tricking subordinate social classes into supporting a system that is an anathema to their interests.

In 1996, David followed up the first edition of *The Past is a Foreign Country* with *Possessed by the Past: the Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History in the USA*

⁶⁷ Peter Seixas interview with Barnes, 30 April 2019.

⁶⁸ Gentry and Smith, ‘Critical heritage studies’.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ C. V. Woodward, ‘*The Past is a Foreign Country*’, *History and Theory*, 26 (1987), 346–52, 347.

⁷¹ S. Piggott, ‘*The Past is a Foreign Country*’, *Antiquity*, 60 (1986), 152–3.

⁷² D. C. Harvey, ‘*The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited*’, *The AAG Review of Books*, 5 (2017), 208.

(titled *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* in the UK).⁷³ About two-thirds the size of the earlier book, but with no illustrations, it doubled down on his earlier claim about the importance of the distinction between history and heritage:

The historian, however blinkered and presentist and self-deceived, seeks to convey a past consensually known, open to inspection and proof, continually revised and eroded as time and hindsight outdate its truths. The heritage fashioner, however historically scrupulous, seeks to design a past that will fix the identity and enhance the well-being of some chosen individual or folk.⁷⁴

So, while history and heritage are both necessarily inflected by the present, history is open to revision, seeking always better representations of the past. History may never realise its ambition to describe the past as it was but it is able to discriminate between more reliable and less reliable accounts. In contrast, the open-endedness of history is denied by the project of heritage that fixes the past, closes it down, ‘conserving and celebrating national and local legacies’.⁷⁵ It is less about holding up a mirror to the past than making it ‘congenial’, intentionally comforting the interests of the present.⁷⁶

Environment and perception

David’s wider interest in the environment was sparked by his reading of nineteenth-century American environmentalists including David Henry Thoreau (1817–1862), John Muir (1838–1914) and, most pertinent, George Perkins Marsh (1801–1882). Like David, Marsh was a polymath and was against disciplinary specialisation. Marsh had served first as a US diplomat in the Ottoman Empire during the 1850s and then for twenty-one years as the US Ambassador to the new kingdom of Italy (1861–82). As one of his many side projects, Marsh compiled a trove of original sources—he could read in twenty languages—documenting the destructive consequences of human action in the Alps and on the Mediterranean Basin, from the Ancient Greeks onward. Published as *Man and Nature* (1864), Marsh unusually for the time blamed humanity for debasing the Earth, not original sin, the cause normally singled out. In particular, he faulted material avarice and ecological blindness that became only more entrenched—at least within the USA under its regime of frontier industrial capitalism

⁷³D. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: the Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, 1996); D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London, 1997); D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (paperback) (Cambridge, 1998).

⁷⁴Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, p. xi.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 247.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 148.

and associated avaricious appetite for natural resources. As remedy, Marsh advocated environmental conservation that not only cut against the grain of then prevailing opinion but then later ‘shap[ed] the course of conservation history in the US and elsewhere’.⁷⁷ One hundred years after its original appearance, David edited and introduced a new edition of *Man and Nature*.⁷⁸

Study of the environment had long been part of the definition of geography as a field. David’s dissertation on Marsh was different from mainstream disciplinary concerns, partly because of its biographical approach, and partly because of its focus on conservation. The emphasis on the latter, particularly after the thesis was published as *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter* (1958), made it a perspicacious forerunner of 1960s American environmentalism. One of that book’s reviewers, the well-known sociologist Lewis Mumford (1895–1990), very much appreciated the focus on Marsh, whom he described as the ‘fountain head of the conservation movement’.⁷⁹ He was less keen on the volume’s subtitle, however, believing it diminished and parochialised Marsh’s achievements.

Maybe partly to make amends, David significantly rewrote his book, republishing it in 2000 with a new subtitle, ‘Prophet of Conservation’.⁸⁰ As with the revised version of *The Past is a Foreign Country*, the new edition of *George Perkins Marsh* was all but a brand-new volume. The historical geographer William Cronon, who commissioned the book, said it went ‘well beyond what is ordinarily even called a “revision”; it would be a new biography’.⁸¹ While David recognised that the environmental problems that *Man and Nature* tackled—deforestation, soil erosion, desertification—were no longer now uppermost in many minds—instead they were global warming, biodiversity, rising sea levels—the important point was Marsh’s identification of the primary cause of environmental devastation, humans, and more recently reinforced by the idea of the Anthropocene.⁸² As David said in his introduction, the first biography was by a young man and the second was by an old man, with some forty more years of experience and with the world an entirely different place.

David’s doctoral dissertation and the associated later books argued Marsh’s life experiences gave him an ability to perceive the catastrophic damage humans wrought on the physical environment. Termed environmental perception, it was codified in

⁷⁷ W. Cronon, ‘Foreword: look back to look forward’, in D. Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle, 2000), pp. ix–xiii, x.

⁷⁸ D. Lowenthal (ed.) *Man and Nature by George Perkins Marsh* (Cambridge, MA, 1965).

⁷⁹ L. Mumford, *The Brown Decades: a Study of the Arts in America, 1865–1895* (New York, 1971), p. 35.

⁸⁰ D. Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle, 2000).

⁸¹ Cronon, ‘Foreword’, p. xii.

⁸² Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet*, p. 423; D. Lowenthal, ‘Origins of Anthropocene awareness’, *Anthropocene Review*, 3 (2016), 52–63.

David's formative 1961 paper, 'Geography, experience, and imagination: towards a geographical epistemology'.⁸³ It drew inspiration from J. K. Wright's presidential address to the Association of American Geographers on 'geosophy', which concluded that 'the most fascinating *terrae incognitae* of all are those that lie within the minds and hearts of men'.⁸⁴ David took that phrase to heart making his own purpose to 'consider the nature of these *terrae incognitae*, and the relation between the world outside and the pictures in our heads'.⁸⁵ To do so he drew on a dizzying array of disciplinary sources, from philosophy, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, history and geography. He argued that we never perceive the world as it really is. Instead, we are stuck in the bubble of our own past experiences, imagination, memories, social norms and cultural expectations that collectively determine the pictures of the world we carry around in our heads. To understand human action and its effects on the outside world it is vital to identify those pictures, our *terrae incognitae*. As he later put it:

I was concerned to show that it was not only environmental realities, but our perceptions of them, forged by experience and preconception, colored by taste and preference, and reshaped by memory and amnesia, that guided our environmental judgements and actions. All environmental behaviour, individual and group alike, was grounded in intention and feeling. These topics took me down psychological and other pathways hitherto unfrequented by geographers, notably the malleable mechanisms of long-term memory and surreal landscapes of dreams and visionary experiences.⁸⁶

The link David forged with psychology was especially productive, triggering within human geography the new approach of behavioural geography. It came in both softer and harder versions. The softer form was concerned with examining the shaping effects on an individual's geographical perception of a person's culture, history and social position. It was the variety that David was most intellectually inclined towards, related to the humanities. The harder type was rooted in clinical psychology and behavioural science, focused on cognitive processes underlying spatial reasoning, decision-making and behaviour. Here formal mathematical models were invoked and rigorously tested against statistical data. Perhaps the best example of that research tradition was work on so-called mental maps, perceptual cartographies individuals supposedly stored in their brain and called forth to talk about or to travel in the world. Following David's argument, they were not the world as it 'really' was but only as it was mentally constructed in the mind of the perceiver. They were *Geographies of the Mind*.⁸⁷

⁸³ Lowenthal, 'Geography, experience, and imagination: towards a geographical epistemology'.

⁸⁴ Wright, 'Terra incognitae', 15.

⁸⁵ Lowenthal, 'Geography, experience, and imagination', 260.

⁸⁶ D. Lowenthal, 'Environmental perception: an odyssey of ideas', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 7 (1987), 338.

⁸⁷ D. Lowenthal and M. J. Bowden (eds.), *Geographies of the Mind* (New York, 1976).

Landscape

David's fascination with landscape intersected with his concerns in heritage, environment and perception, forming in effect a tightly merged complex of interests. Possibly his concern with landscape was the primary spark for the other elements. Interpreting landscape through photographs and written words was his first task as a professional geographer when he served in the OSS during the Second World War. It is unlikely that when he undertook that task he drew on any larger conceptual landscape scheme. That came in graduate school, first at Berkeley, then at Wisconsin. Drawing on the German tradition, Carl Sauer at Berkeley made landscape (*landschaft*) the central plank of his geographical science. Landscape was conceived as a cultural product, the consequence of a historical mutual relation between humans and their physical environment. In Sauer's words, 'culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result'.⁸⁸ For Sauer, the purpose of geography was to reconstruct different historical cultural landscapes through fieldwork and archival research.

At Wisconsin, however, David received a very different argument about landscape, albeit also from someone steeped in the Germanic geographical tradition, Richard Hartshorne. He contended that the term was incoherent because it contradictorily meant both a restricted area and its opposite, an unlimited spatial vista. For that reason, Hartshorne thought landscape had 'little or no value as a technical or scientific term' and should be thrown on to the intellectual rubbish heap of geography.⁸⁹ Olwig contends that David's doctoral research on Marsh in effect had been his attempt, contra Hartshorne's, to rescue and revivify landscape as a central geographical idea; to demonstrate that it was profoundly useful, indispensable in understanding ourselves within an explicitly geographical world.⁹⁰ Rather than abandoned, landscape should be celebrated as one of geography's motherhood and fatherhood terms like space and place. In his work on landscape, David followed some of Sauer's precepts, making field and archival work foundational, taking as axiomatic that landscapes were sodden with cultural values, generating meaning and significance. But he also parted ways. Sauer was interested primarily in rural, pre-modern and representative landscapes, whereas David's concerns were often with modern, everyday and vernacular landscapes, both rural and urban. David had an ally here, another come-lately geographer from Harvard who also fought in the Second World War with the American

⁸⁸C. O. Sauer, 'The morphology of landscape', *University of California Publications in Geography* 2 (2), 46.

⁸⁹R. Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography* (Lancaster, PA, 1939), p. 158.

⁹⁰K. R. Olwig, 'Landscape: the Lowenthal legacy', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93 (2003), 871–7.

army in France, John Brinkerhoff Jackson (1909–1996). In 1951, Jackson founded the journal *Landscape*, devoted to the interpretation of the same ordinary and locally inflected landscapes that fascinated Lowenthal (and who published frequently in its pages). Another difference between Lowenthal and Sauer on landscape was that Lowenthal wanted to make judgements about the cultural landscapes he interpreted, including the values of its inhabitants who gave them expression. To do so required scholarship and rigour. It wasn't just mere opinion, something made up on the spot, but entailed considered evaluation and assessment, historical and social knowledge, and an aesthetic sensibility and training.

All those qualities were found in the collaborative work David undertook on the English landscape with Hugh Prince in the early 1960s. A little later, David used his Guggenheim Fellowship (1965–6) to travel to various parts of America—mainly the west coast from Mexico to British Columbia—to capture examples of ordinary, vernacular buildings and landscapes on black and white film, rather as he and Joe Bucolo had done in Europe for the IPDP.⁹¹ Some of these images appeared in his books and articles. Most fittingly, though, the year before he died, his landscape prints were shown in an exhibition in Montpellier, France, which appropriately also included photographs taken by that other celebrator of ordinary landscape, J. B. Jackson.⁹² Jackson was one of five others whose work focused on the ordinary landscape, both urban and rural. More generally, David's passion for the idea of landscape helped keep it alive within geography in the face of Hartshorne's critique, allowing it later to become one of the core notions of a 'new cultural geography' that took hold within the discipline from the 1980s. A little later, a selection of David's essays on landscape was brought to a wider audience in French translation by Marianne Enckell.⁹³

The West Indies

David's interest in the West Indies was in some sense orthogonal to these other previous three bodies of work. Originally derived from his Berkeley MA thesis on the Guianas, he said in his last interview that West Indian societies had 'tremendously

⁹¹ D. Lowenthal, 'Public attitudes on environmental quality; assumptions behind the public attitudes', in H. Jarrett (ed.), *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy* (Baltimore, MD, 1966), pp. 128–37; D. Lowenthal, 'The American scene', *Geographical Review*, 58 (1968), 61–88; D. Lowenthal, 'Recreation habits and values: implications for landscape quality', in P. Dansereau (ed.), *Challenge for Survival: Land, Air, and Water for Man in Megalopolis* (New York, 1970), pp. 103–17; D. Lowenthal, 'Finding valued landscapes', *Progress in Human Geography*, 2 (1978), 373–418.

⁹² Pavillon Populaire, *Notes sur l'asphalte, une Amérique mobile et précaire, 1950–1990* (Montpellier, 2017).

⁹³ D. Lowenthal, *Passage du temps sur le paysage* (Gollion, 2008).

excited' him.⁹⁴ He was intrigued especially by the sharp differences across the relatively geographically compact set of Islands. Indeed, the idiosyncrasies of island life continued to fascinate him throughout his entire career, explaining his relentless island travel into his ninth decade. Barbuda in the Caribbean and later on Sark in the Channel Islands were special favourites.⁹⁵ David spent the academic year, 1956–7, at the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of the West Indies (Jamaica—UWI). The Institute comprised a dozen or so scholars from various social sciences 'all working on small islands and encompassing so-called different subject matter'.⁹⁶ This was the beginning of David's long association with the UWI, where he taught American history and served as a consultant to the vice-chancellor. He travelled to many West Indian islands and published on countless Caribbean insular themes.⁹⁷ In 1960, he received a two-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to further his studies, and edited *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* for the AGS.⁹⁸ With financial support from the Institute of Race Relations (London), David then undertook archival research and worked on a monograph, *West Indian Societies*.⁹⁹ He explained:

Islanded among continental giants are eleven million West Indians in some fifty societies, each distinct from the others, yet all different from the Anglo-American and Latin American leviathans that frame the Caribbean. This book chronicles the likenesses and differences of these societies, their insularities and common bonds, and their citizens' efforts, in the wake of the hemisphere's longest history of slavery and

⁹⁴Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 3.

⁹⁵D. Lowenthal and C. G. Clarke, 'Slave breeding in Barbuda: the past of a negro myth', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 292 (1977), 510–35; D. Lowenthal and C. G. Clarke, 'Island orphans: Barbuda and the rest', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 18 (1980), 293–307; D. Lowenthal, 'The scourging of Sark', *Island Studies Journal*, 10 (2015), 253–8.

⁹⁶Lowenthal and Hamilakis, 'A conversation', 6.

⁹⁷D. Lowenthal, 'The population of Barbados', *Social and Economic Studies*, 6 (1957), 445–501; D. Lowenthal, 'The West Indies chooses a capital', *Geographical Review*, 48 (1958), 336–64; D. Lowenthal, 'The range and variation of Caribbean societies', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 83 (1960), 786–95; D. Lowenthal, 'The social background of West Indian Federation', in D. Lowenthal (ed.), *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* (New York, 1961), pp. 63–96; D. Lowenthal, 'Race and color in the West Indies', *Daedalus*, 96 (1967), 580–626; D. Lowenthal, 'Post-emancipation race relations: some Caribbean and American perspectives', *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, 13 (1971), 367–77; D. Lowenthal, 'Black power in the Caribbean context', *Economic Geography*, 48 (1972), 116–34; D. Lowenthal and C. G. Clarke, 'Caribbean small island sovereignty: chimera or convention', in U. Fanger (ed.), *Problems of Caribbean Development* (Munich, 1982), pp. 225–76; D. Lowenthal and L. Comitas, 'Emigration and depopulation: some neglected aspects of population geography', *Geographical Review*, 52 (1962), 195–210.

⁹⁸D. Lowenthal (ed.), *The West Indies Federation: Perspectives on a New Nation* (New York, 1961); Lowenthal, 'The social background of West Indian Federation'.

⁹⁹D. Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (New York, 1972).

colonialism, to transform vitality, élan, and creativity into a viable sense of identity.¹⁰⁰

In doing so, he acknowledged: ‘In the West Indies, as elsewhere, there are indeed things only an insider can know, approaches only an insider can take, errors only an outsider is prone to make.’¹⁰¹

Colin Clarke found David’s writing ‘imaginative, flexible, evocative but always penetrating and beautifully crafted. He allows West Indians to speak for themselves through contemporary poetry and prose ... This material is backed up with an astonishing depth of reading and maturity of understanding which few Caribbeanists can equal.’¹⁰² Roger Abrahams praised David’s ‘brave book. It attempts—and generally succeeds—in bringing together very diverse reports from over fifty insular societies and making some sense out of them’, but he regretted that David’s ‘generalizations all too often are derived from studies of the island elites or middle class’.¹⁰³ That last criticism was further elaborated by Susan Craig, who bitterly complained: ‘The book is written in true “expert” tradition—the author might have learnt from the writings of others; certainly he has nothing to contribute’ apart from ‘the massive bibliography’.¹⁰⁴

Together with anthropologist Lambros Comitas, David then edited four volumes of essays under the collective title *West Indian Perspectives*.¹⁰⁵ Of the seventy-two items in the four volumes, forty-five came from West Indians and the remainder from North American or British scholars. Anthony Bryan stated that this was ‘a decent start’ but argued that ‘future collections ... may be enhanced by relying even more on Caribbean sources and less on metropolitan scholarship’.¹⁰⁶ Donald Innis found the volumes ‘valuable’ but lamented that their essays reflected ‘middle-class views of West Indian problems. Too many authors seem to assume that the poorest and blackest people are some kind of inchoate proto-humanity with no viewpoint of their own.’¹⁰⁷ Back in the UK, David was instrumental in founding the Society for Caribbean Studies, to whose members he was guide, friend and source of inspiration for many years.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. xiii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. xv.

¹⁰² C. G. Clarke, ‘West Indian Societies’, *Geographical Journal*, 138 (1972), 503–4.

¹⁰³ R. Abrahams, ‘West Indian Societies’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 53 (1973), 355–6.

¹⁰⁴ S. Craig, ‘West Indian Societies’, *Social and Economic Studies*, 23 (1974), 138.

¹⁰⁵ D. Lowenthal and L. Comitas (eds.), *West Indian Perspectives* (4 vols) entitled: *Slaves, Free Men, Citizens; Consequences of Class and Color; Work and Family Life; and The Aftermath of Sovereignty* (New York, 1973).

¹⁰⁶ A. Bryan, ‘West Indian Perspectives’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 55 (1975), 329–30, 330.

¹⁰⁷ D. Q. Innis, ‘West Indian Societies’, *Geographical Review*, 64 (1974), 437.

Appreciation

As well as writing, teaching and giving conference presentations, David served as advisor to a wide range of national and international heritage organisations and museums, especially during his retirement years. The heritage organisations included UNESCO, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the National Trust (UK), the National Trust for Historic Preservation (USA) and the National Trust Australia, while connections with museums included the International Council on Museums, the Getty, London's Science Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum (1990–5) and the British Museum. Just as importantly, through his works and lectures David also influenced cohorts of heritage and museum staff.

His books earned David a run of distinguished prizes. The Association of American Geographers gave him awards for both the original 1958 version of *George Perkins Marsh: Versatile Vermonter* and the 2001 revised version, *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation*. The 1985 edition of *The Past is a Foreign Country* received both The University and Professional Publication (UK) Award and the Historic Preservation (USA) Prize, while the 2015 revised version of the book was given the British Academy Medal (2016). In addition to these prizes, David was the recipient of many professional accolades that included the Victoria Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society in 1997, the Cullum Geographical Medal of the American Geographical Society (1999) and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society Medal (2004). In 2001, David was elected a Senior Fellow of the British Academy.

John Western characterised David as 'urbane, erudite, a conversationalist, a man of humour. He brought renown to academic geography.'¹⁰⁸ Of course, his target audience was broader than geography and history, as befitted a scholar who 'hated disciplines' and was 'constantly crossing boundaries'.¹⁰⁹ After being informed of David's death, Jacquie Burgess replied: 'I shall always remember him as one of the most erudite and witty people I've ever met. And his wicked grin! Especially after a couple of his martinis which could easily blow your head off.'¹¹⁰ His friend, art historian Charles Saumarez Smith, declared: 'David Lowenthal was old and wise, unbelievably well read on every topic, and fascinatingly unclassifiable as a man of learning—like his books.'¹¹¹ His insatiable curiosity, incisive analysis and critique, wit as a storyteller and unfailing kindness will be sorely missed by friends around the world. Polymath David insisted: 'Discussion is vital: for the world to be sustainable, it must first be

¹⁰⁸ Personal communication, John Western, 11 November 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Personal communication, Sverker Sörlin, 4 December 2018.

¹¹⁰ Personal communication, Jacquie Burgess, 10 October 2018.

¹¹¹ Charles Saumarez Smith, message 19 September 2018.

conversable.¹¹² In the very last essay he wrote, David reflected on the evanescence of all things both animate and inanimate: ‘All of us, not only curators, confront mortal dissolution ... Yet efforts to overcome entropy are fleeting and fugitive.’¹¹³ Be that as it may, David used enormously well the scrap of time given to us all, his efforts less fleeting and fugitive than those of many.

Acknowledgements

For advice and information we are most grateful to Jacquie Burgess, Colin Clarke, Claudette Edwards, Peter Seixas, Sverker Sörlin, John Western, members of the Lowenthal family on both sides of the Atlantic, and especially Mary Alice Lowenthal who generously read and commented on the final draft of this essay. A long interview with archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis was recorded in David’s London home on 28 January 2017; it is transcribed at Lowenthal and Hamilakis (2017) and is available as a video at <https://vimeo.com/246465145> (accessed 20 September 2019). David’s early years are presented in an unpublished manuscript, revised in 2018: ‘David Lowenthal: childhood, schooling, army.’ His wartime experiences are described in that text and in a second manuscript: ‘From infantry to intelligence in wartime France, 1944–45.’ A third manuscript, ‘Jean Gottmann: war and peace memories’, was published in French.¹¹⁴

Note on the authors: Trevor Barnes is Professor of Economic Geography, University of British Columbia; he was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy in 2014. Hugh Clout is Professor Emeritus of Geography, University College London; he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1997.

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¹¹²D. Lowenthal, ‘Postscript [to the Lowenthal Papers]’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93 (2003), 885.

¹¹³D. Lowenthal, ‘A sea-change rich and strange’, in H. Hölling, F. G. Bewer and K. Ammann (eds.), *The Explicit Material: Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures* (Leiden, 2019), p. 17. The editors dedicated their book to David Lowenthal, ‘with gratitude for his wisdom and friendship’.

¹¹⁴Lowenthal, ‘Mémoires de temps de guerre et de la paix’.

