

**From Social History to Political Economy:
The Changing Registers of Class and Capitalism in American History: Part I**

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*“When I see so many things around me, which have come from distant countries, and travelled, as I suppose, a great distance, perhaps over great seas, to get here, I sometimes wish they could speak, and give me some account of their first homes, and the places through which they have travelled.”*¹

In the opening weeks of 1826, a shipment of 6,351 lbs. of Buenos Aires wool arrived in New York City in search of a buyer. Striking “a very desirable” deal, a local merchant house snapped up the wool on behalf of the Ware Manufacturing Company, one of the many enterprises seeking to produce textiles alongside New England’s waterways. The news from New York got better: the first stage of processing the wool for making cloth might be accomplished in the city for a pittance. The inmates of the almshouse were available for hire at a fraction of the pay necessary to convince free people to pick burrs and other debris from raw fleeces. “It is very dirty work and the inmates of the almshouse dislike it very much,” reported the merchants who negotiated the 10¢ daily rate for New York’s poor to clean Buenos Aires wool en route to manufacture in Massachusetts. Just a few years earlier, Boston investors had incorporated the Ware Manufacturing Company in the central part of the state where a sizable portion of the population had already traded the insecurities of subsistence agriculture for those of factory labor. There, men, women, and children carded, spun, warped, and wove imported wool into a workaday fabric that would soon be sent back to New York City for sale. Indeed, the same merchants who had purchased the Buenos Aires wool and contracted its cleaning at the almshouse would now vend finished cloth to customers who wouldn’t be able to pay for another six or eight months: slaveholders seeking to provision their human property sufficiently to ensure the next season’s cotton harvest. The directors of the Ware Manufacturing Company must have been gratified to learn that “Some of our Southern customers who are now here approve very much of the style of your negro cloths!” Such an endorsement guaranteed that Buenos Aires wool, cleaned by New York City paupers and manufactured by New England operatives, would end up on the backs of enslaved men and women in places like South Carolina and Mississippi.²

¹ Emma Willard, *Geography for Beginners, or, the Instructor's [sic] Assistant in Giving First Lessons from Maps...* 2nd ed., (Hartford, Conn.: O.D. Cooke, 1829), 9.

² Pickering, Kendall, & Pope to Thomas A. Dexter (12 January 1826) and Col. A. Olney (28 February 1826), Ware Manufacturing Company, Ms. 412, Box 3, folder 27, Osborne Library, American Textile History Museum, Lowell, Mass.

This short vignette might be redirected in dozens of additional ways relating to the histories of class and capitalism. Wouldn't we like to know more about the liberal trade policies of Argentine president Bernardino Rivadavia and their consequences for sheep ranchers increasingly grazing their herds on lands owned by British investors?³ Was the vessel that picked up the wool in Buenos Aires returning from a Pacific voyage, its hold laden with the furs and skins that integrated Russian trappers and Aleut hunters into the global economy? Or perhaps silks and porcelain from Canton to decorate the homes of the New York elite? This particular voyage had actually bankrupted its owners, which was one of the reasons the wool could be gotten cheaply in New York. But surely the burden of mercantile failure fell heavily upon the ship's crew, a cadre of men we might see as radicalized members of an international maritime proletariat, as nationalist agents of American "soft power" abroad, or as anguished husbands and fathers whose families might find themselves at the almshouse door as a consequence of lost wages.⁴ It would not be difficult to connect the fluctuating price of wool on the docks of New York to the tenuous prospects of American woolens manufacturing in the 1810s and 1820s; the cost of raw wool was the primary variable in the success of early textile enterprises, which is precisely why Congressmen seeking to poison the 1828 Tariff Bill loaded it up with prohibitive duties on the low-grade wool imported from Buenos Aires and Smyrna to make kerseys, plains, and linsey-woolseys in New England.⁵ A deeper investigation into the management practices of the Ware Manufacturing Company might reveal a story to rival that of Rockdale, the contemporaneous Pennsylvania mill village where pious owners wielded Christianity as a blunt instrument of social discipline. The treasurer of Ware was none other than Lewis Tappan, which might further situate the firm's negro

³ Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 81-111; Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 57-60.

⁴ David Iglar, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming); Matthew Taylor Raffety, *The Republic Afloat: Law, Honor, and Citizenship in Maritime America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁵ Elizabeth Hitz, "A Technical and Business Revolution: American Woolens to 1832," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1978), 201.

cloth in abstract questions of capitalism, humanitarianism, and complicity.⁶ Of course, Ware's textiles were only "negro cloth" when vended to plantation markets, and they also adorned consumers in the mid-Atlantic and trans-Appalachian west who probably entertained hope that being white and being free meant being clad in fabric qualitatively different than what was issued to Louisiana slaves. It would be an easy step from exploring the early republic's consumer culture to posing comparative questions regarding the material conditions of slavery and freedom—questions with their origins in the political contests of the era itself and which today translate anthropometric data into uncomfortably ambiguous answers.⁷ Most scholars here (I presume) would be more comfortable recovering the micropolitics of plantation provisioning and the multiple meanings that enslaved people and their legal owners brought to the semi-annual distribution of coarse woolen clothing.⁸ And these examples are only a small sample of where this paper's opening anecdote might lead.

To see a world in a ~~grain of sand~~ bag of wool. The narrative and analytical possibilities of such an approach are well known, harking back to fictional genre that brought eighteenth and nineteenth-century readers into conversation with talking bank

⁶ Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (1969; reprint Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), 23, 38. Interestingly, Tappan supported the tariff on raw wool in hopes of supporting American sheep grazers, but domestic wool was usually considered too good (in terms of the length of the staple) to deploy in the manufacture of coarse fabrics.

⁷ Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Contest, 1830-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Philip D. Morgan, "The Poor: Slaves in Early America," in *Slavery in the Development of the Americas*, eds. David Eltis et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 288-323; Richard H. Steckel, "A Peculiar Population: The Nutrition, Health, and Morality of American Slaves from Childhood to Maturity," *Journal of Economic History* 46 (Sept. 1986): 721-741; Michael R. Haines, Lee A. Craig, and Thomas Weiss, "Did African Americans Experience the 'Antebellum Puzzle'? Evidence from the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War," *Economics and Human Biology* 9 (2011): 45-55; Scott Alan Carson, "The Body Mass Index of Blacks and Whites in the United States during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 42 (Winter 2012): 371-391.

⁸ Kathleen M. Hilliard, *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange: Power's Purchase in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Katie Knowles, "Fashioning Slavery: Slaves and Clothing in the U.S. South, 1830-1865," (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2014).

notes, cork-screws, embroidered waistcoats, and (to cite a 1751 title) a “very unfortunate goose-quill.”⁹ These “novels of circulation”—or more frequently within the current scholarship “it-narratives”—share a sensibility with the foundational work in material culture studies: namely the presumption that things possess a social life; that things accrue meaning through their interactions with people and circulation in physical space; and ultimately that things are not merely passive objects constituted via human action, but rather actors in their own right whose stubborn refusal to follow direction warrants their central place in the stories we tell about the human experience.¹⁰ Historians have not generally adopted the narrative strategy of ventriloquizing material artifacts (with the exception of Ken Alder whose keynote address at the 2013 annual meeting of the History of Science Society told the biography of Marie Curie in the voice of her bicycle). Yet there is little doubt that a singular object—Hannah Barnard’s cupboard, a French-made copper kettle, a portrait of a woman in a silk dress—can in fact illuminate the operations of power within a given culture and across societies separated by great distances.¹¹

Scholars of the economic past have more frequently been drawn to categories of goods that moved from sites of production through sites of processing to sites of

⁹ Mark Blackwell, ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, NY: Bucknell University Press, 2007); Blackwell, “The It-Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Animals and Objects in Circulation,” *Literature Compass* 1 (2004): 1-5; Christina Lupton, “The Knowing Book: Authors, It-Narratives, and Objectification in the Eighteenth Century,” *Novel X* (Summer 2006): 402-420.

¹⁰ This bibliography almost always begins with Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Skipping several generations ahead, recent influential work includes Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 101 (Winter 2009): 67-94; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationship between Human and Things* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Bjorner Olsen, Michael Shanks, Timothy Webmoor, and Christopher Witmore, *Archaeology: The Discipline of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

¹¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “Hannah Barnard’s Cupboard: Female Property and Identity in Eighteenth-century New England,” in *Through A Glass Darkly: Defining Self in Early America*, eds. Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobal, and Fredrika J. Teute, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 238-273; Laurier Turgeon, “The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object,” *Ethnohistory* 44 (Winter 1997): 1-29; Zara Anishanslin, *Fashioning Empire: Hidden Histories of Labor, Landscape, and Luxury in the British Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

consumption. The commodity study is an established genre within the field, with a particularly strong presence in the early modern Atlantic. Indeed, wool might be the most important Atlantic commodity to lack a recent historical study; might it warrant the attention that has already been lavished on sugar, cotton, wheat, mahogany, coffee, rice, and madeira?¹² Commodity studies display a range of scholarly concerns, from the racialization of knowledge (in the case of Judith Carney's studies of rice) to the functioning of business networks (as in David Hancock's study of madeira). They may take their cues from work in critical geography touting the political imperative to tie together the lives of remote consumers and producers in ecological, economic, and ultimately moral relationships. This sensibility has become a salient feature of the bourgeois shopping and dining experience, as Michael Pollen's *Omnivore's Dilemma* has seemingly called into existence the lengthy biographies of farm-to-table guanciale and artisanal kombucha gracing restaurant menus and mocked on "Portlandia."¹³ Often focused on that which can be planted or harvested, commodity studies raise many of the same questions of sustainability that inform environmental history—a conversation that wool might develop further, whether in the particularities of grazing as a demanding ecological regime (in terms of the land required per pound of fiber) relative to planting cotton or flax, or in the dynamics of an atypical animal-human economy in which the death of the former is not necessary to produce the desirable commodity (usually protein or pelts) for the latter.¹⁴

¹² Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985); Jennifer Anderson, *Mahogany: The Costs of Luxury in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Brooke Hunter, "Wheat, War and the American Economy during the Age of Revolution," *WMQ* 62 (July 2005): 505-526; Michelle Craig McDonald, "The Chance of the Moment: Coffee and the New West Indies Commodities Trade," *WMQ* 62 (June 2005): 441-472; David Hancock, *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹³ Ian Cook et al., "Follow the Thing: Papaya," *Antipode* (2004): 642-664.

¹⁴ Grazing figures in such work as Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For an ecological comparison of wool and cotton, see Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present*, 3rd ed., (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2013), 260; of course a book like Walter Johnson, *River of Dark*

Historical commodity studies have an analogue in contemporary development economics, as attention to the “global value chain” highlights the vast and geographically-distributed deployment of energy (organic and mineral), capital, violence, enterprise, and expertise required to bring a product to market. Whether one is studying eighteenth-century plantation hoes or twenty-first-century jars of Nutella, the scale quickly shifts from micro-level choices made at a forge or in a grocery store to macro-level considerations of international political economy that seem to mock the very notion of “local” anything.¹⁵ In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith had attributed so lowly a product as the day laborer’s woolen coat to “the assistance and co-operation of many thousands,” beginning with the shepherd and proceeding to “the sorter of the wool, the wool comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, [and] the dresser.” Many had been “employed in transporting the materials from some of those workmen to others who often live in a very distant part of the country,” and many more— including “ship-builders, sailors, sail-makers, [and] rope-makers”— were involved “in order to bring together the different drugs made use of by the dyer, which often come from the remotest corners of the world!”¹⁶ The long history of the global division of labor could certainly be brought to bear on a story involving Argentine shepherders, New York City paupers, Massachusetts mill-hands, and Mississippi field-

Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013) forces a significant recalibration of our understanding of what we mean by “ecologically demanding.” On the political economy of animals and the human history of “how to use them, eat them, avoid them and wear them,” see Alan Mikhail, “Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt,” *American Historical Review* 118 (April 2013): 317-348.

¹⁵ Perhaps owing to the secondary role of manufacturing in the Atlantic economy before the nineteenth century, historians have not explicitly brought “global value chain” analysis to eighteenth-century goods. Exceptions include Anderson, *Mahogany*; Chris Evans, “The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69 (January 2012): 71-100. For present-day accounts, see the remarkable www.followthethings.com and Thomas Thwaites, *The Toaster Project: Or a Heroic Attempt to Build a Simple Electronic Appliance from Scratch* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s 2012 report “Mapping Global Value Chains” devoted attention to a jar of Nutella. Kevin Ashton’s *How to Fly a Horse: The Secret History of Creation, Invention, and Discovery* (Doubleday, 2015) will see humanity’s enduring ingenuity in a can of Coke, perhaps in line with the classic libertarian version, “I, Pencil: My Family Tree as told to Leonard E. Read,” (1958), <http://www.econlib.org/library/Essays/rdPnc11.html>.

¹⁶ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, i, 11.

hands. At every moment we would be confronted by negro cloth's widening web of connections. No simple pasture-to-loom account is possible. For Smith, the shepherd's shears were exemplary: "The miner, the builder of the furnace for smelting the ore, the feller of the timber, the burner of the charcoal to be made use of in the smelting-house, the brick-maker, the brick-layer, the workmen who attend the furnace, the mill-wright, the forger, the smith, must all of them join their different arts in order to produce them." Along such lines, should we think differently about the labor of New England handloom weavers when we place it not at the start of a value chain, but squarely in the middle of a process that stretches backwards and forwards? There is always another link in the chain: the fact that Mexican farmers harvested the fustic that New England textile workers used to dye yarn for making slave clothing; the fact that South Carolina slaves gathered cane to make reeds to fit into the beater bars of New England looms. Every pass of the shuttle acknowledged the global division of labor.

The question becomes where we chose to draw the line, initially in terms of the geographical scales of our accounts. "Entangled histories" have brought remote consumers and producers into shared analytical frames. Exemplary accounts include Jeremy Prestholdt's study of "direct reciprocity in global networks" and the "interconnectivity" of Zanzibar, Bombay, and Salem, Massachusetts in the nineteenth century; and Daniel Rood's reconstruction of the Richmond-Rio circuit as "a brand-conscious Brazilian bread-baking sector transformed the built landscape of the Piedmont region of the state [of Virginia]."¹⁷ Chronological scales might also expand, especially as our understanding of the economic past ties more closely to energy regimes, environmental sustainability, and the concept of the Anthropocene.¹⁸ Yet the scale might

¹⁷ Jeremy Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism," *American Historical Review* 109 (June 2004): 755-781 (quote on 755); Daniel Rood, "Bogs of Death: Slavery, the Brazilian Flour Trade, and the Mystery of the Vanishing Millpond in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of American History* 101 (June 2014): 19-43 (quote on 30). "Entangled History" seems to enter the American historiography with Eliga H. Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *American Historical Review* 112 (June 2007): 764-786, which opens with a microhistorical incident that illuminates the shifting structures of global geopolitics.

¹⁸ Will Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 369 (2011): 842-867; Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

also grow to include the non-human, using the notion of “entangled” put forward by the archaeologist Ian Hodder to “move beyond the confines of material culture and social theory in order to incorporate mechanical, molecular things with their own temporalities and interactions with each other.” As Hodder explains, “things have primary agency in that they act in the world as a result of processes of material interaction, transformation and decay. Materials and the forces that flow through them afford humans certain potentials and constraints. In these ways, things are actors.” The implications of such a perspective might guide our attention to proteins that give each woolen fiber a spiral helix structure and determine the absorbency, elasticity, and warmth of spun yarn. Such extreme materiality might seem in fact immaterial to our concerns as historians, until one considers the ramifications of those qualities as they combine to shape the lived experience of someone wearing “negro cloth” pants. If slavery has a haptic history, it might begin by understanding the effect of an iron sulfate mordant on the sunlight resistance of woolen fibers and a fabric’s ensuing vulnerability to abrasion on the rough stem of a cotton plant. To heed Walter Johnson’s call to “understand enslaved people’s actions and ideas” within “the material conditions of their enslavement,” then we might in fact require a history that documents the countless “transactions” between humans, plants, and animals, beginning with the inadequate diets of Argentine sheep whose short-staple fleeces left enslaved workers in tattered rags and exposed to the elements, and set the contours of plantation struggles over adequate provisioning—a topic, it should be added, that figured prominently in abolitionist critiques and compelled slaveholders into ever bolder declarations of slavery’s benevolence.¹⁹

To follow an 1826 wool shipment down these several investigative avenues is ultimately a response to the putative problem posed in the title of this paper: *From social history to political economy* is an obvious invitation to tell a story of declension, as the study of (finance) *capitalism* has overwhelmed the study of the (working) *class* in the scholarship and threatened social history’s purpose of placing those “who built America”

¹⁹ Hodder, *Entangled*, 207. On slavery’s haptic history, see Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006); Walter Johnson, “Agency: A Ghost Story,” in *Slavery’s Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation*, eds. Richard Follett, Eric Foner, and Walter Johnson, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 28.

at the center of the national narrative. I voiced such concerns in a review essay on the recent collection, *Capitalism Takes Command*, a volume that lacks a contributor writing in the traditional vein of labor history. *Capitalism Takes Command* devotes its attention to commodification and financialization, but pays little heed to the classic process of capitalism's ascent, proletarianization. Such an emphasis need not obliterate class as an analytical framework (for it still strikes me as worthwhile to consider class as shorthand for the social relations of capitalism); but it seemingly has—and not merely in the *Capitalism Takes Command* volume, but in the scholarship more broadly. Please correct me if I am wrong, but I don't have the sense that early Americanists (which I'll define as those in the orbit of the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the *Journal of the Early Republic*, *Early American Studies*, and the *Journal of the Civil War Era*) have spent much of the last decade foregrounding class as an organizing concept, even when writing about impoverished and laboring people. The 2008 volume *Class Matters: Early North America and the Atlantic World* does not seem to have launched a thousand ships (filled with wool, naturally), any more than did a 2004 special issue of *Labor* or a 2005 symposium in the *Journal of the Early Republic*. It is still exceptional to see something like the 2012 “Women on the Edge: Life at Street Level in the Early Republic” special issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic*.²⁰

Still, I did not come here to tell a declension story. Instead, it has been my goal to promote—even in the most vaguest terms—a methodology for keeping class and capitalism, and social history and political economy, in vibrant conversation. It is to focus on the materiality of something like the Ware Manufacturing Company's negro cloth and

²⁰ Seth Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34 (Fall 2014): 439-466; Simon Middleton and Billy G. Smith, *Class Matters: Early North America and the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Gary Kornblith, Seth Rockman, Jennifer Goloboy, Andrew Schocket, and Christopher Clark “Symposium on Class in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Winter 2005): 523-564; Simon Middleton and Billy G. Smith, eds., “Class Analysis in Early America and the Atlantic World: Foundations and Future,” special issue of *Labor: Studies in Working-Class Histories of the Americas* 1 (Winter 2004). Gloria Main, “Women on the Edge: Life at Street Level in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (Fall 2012), 331-347, and articles by Ruth Wallis Herndon, Monique Bourque, Tim Lockley, Katie Hemphill, and John E. Murray. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Emily Merrill, who has mentioned class on *The Junto* blog. I'd also be curious to hear if the 2013 “On the Anvil of Labor History in the Revolutionary Era: Billy G. Smith and Fellow Artisans” conference at the McNeil Center generated new enthusiasm for class-driven scholarship among graduate students and fellows.

to recognize it as the agglomeration of numerous kinds of social knowledge “made durable.” By this I mean the converging possibilities of shepherds, weavers, merchants, policymakers, and consumers in dialogue with each other and the properties of the materials themselves who (to use a productive anthropomorphism) behave as if they had minds of their own. I would define expertise and knowledge as broadly as possible, heeding Nina Lerman’s call for a history of technology that does not “blind us to the ongoing importance of small things and ordinary tools.”²¹ I would consider the cloth being made in Ware as a collaboration across great distances. While we have easy access to the entrepreneurial New York merchant, the “scientific” planter in search of lasting provisions, or the Congressman pontificating about “coarse woolens,” we must look harder for the tacit knowledge of the Massachusetts farm girl who winds warps in between other tasks or the consumer preferences of the enslaved seamstress whose voice might only faintly be heard in a letter sent from Georgia to Massachusetts with an order for another 500 yards of woolen cloth. But it is the instinct to look that matters, for the entanglements at the center of this paper are hardly unique; and I’ve tried to suggest, the bigger challenge is placing a limit on the scale and scope of our analysis since a world might indeed be found in a bag of wool. And if represented well in our scholarship, that world might comfortably hold social history and political economy together as part of a single story.

²¹ Timothy Webmoor and Christopher L. Witmore, “Things are Us! A Commentary on Human/Things Relations under the Banner of a ‘Social’ Archaeology,” *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 41 (2008): 64; Nina E. Lerman, “Categories of Difference, Categories of Power: Bringing Gender and Race to the History of Technology.” *Technology & Culture* 51 (October 2010): 893-918.