

## “The Map Shows Me Where It Is You Are”: Gloria Oden Responds to Elizabeth Bishop Across National Geographic and Rand McNally World Maps

**Adele J. Haft**  
*Department of Classical  
 and Oriental Studies  
 Hunter College  
 The City Univ. of New York  
 695 Park Avenue  
 New York, NY 10065  
 ahaft@hunter.cuny.edu*

African-American poet Gloria Oden was among those inspired by Elizabeth Bishop's seminal poem "The Map" (1934). In honor of Bishop, Oden wrote two poems about reading maps: "A Private Letter to Brazil" (1957) and "The Map" (ca. 1961). Like May Swenson's "The Cloud-Mobile," Oden's poems overtly pay homage to Bishop. Like Howard Nemerov's "The Mapmaker on His Art" and Mark Strand's "The Map," Oden's verses reveal that she shares in Bishop's understanding of the mapmaker's art: its imaginative power and limitations, its technical achievement and arbitrary nature. Yet Oden's two poems are far more politically and historically nuanced than Bishop's "The Map"—or than any of the other map poems written shortly after Bishop won the 1956 Pulitzer Prize for her collection opening with "The Map" (*Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring*). Furthermore, unlike her peers, Oden found inspiration in Bishop's poem *and* in an identifiable contemporary map. By comparing both of her poems to Bishop's original as well as uncovering, with the help of Oden's own words, the identity of her maps, this paper will demonstrate how Oden's penetrating critique of two popular 1950s wall maps helped her connect not only with Bishop but also with the world she found reflected in, or absent from, the map.

**Keywords:** American Poetry, African-American Poetry, Gloria Oden, Elizabeth Bishop; Twentieth-Century World Maps, National Geographic Society, Rand McNally & Company

**O**n New Year's Eve of 1934, Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) composed "The Map," arguably the seminal twentieth-century poem about maps and mapmakers:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.  
 Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges  
 showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges  
 where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.  
 Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,  
 drawing it unperturbed around itself?  
 Along the fine tan sandy shelf  
 is the land tugging at the sea from under?

*Initial submission, June 30, 2008; final acceptance, September 5, 2008.*

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.  
 Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo  
 has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,  
 under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,  
 or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.  
 The names of seashore towns run out to sea,  
 the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains  
 —the printer here experiencing the same excitement  
 as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.  
 These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger  
 like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,  
 lending the land their waves' own conformation:  
 and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,  
 profiles investigate the sea, where land is.  
 Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?  
 —What suits the character or the native waters best.  
 Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.  
 More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers'  
 colors.

Bishop subsequently opened several works with this poem, including her 1955 collection *Poems: North and South—A Cold Spring*.<sup>1</sup> After that volume won the 1956 Pulitzer Prize, "The Map" inspired other American poets—Howard Nemerov, May Swenson, Mark Strand, and Gloria Oden—to reflect upon the uses and meanings of maps. In "The Map-maker on His Art," Nemerov wryly compared a writer/cartographer to the explorer whose notes he "translate[s]" (Nemerov 1957, 54; Nemerov 1958). In "The Cloud-Mobile" (1957), Swenson suggested that clouds and sky form "a map of change" reflecting the slower transformations of the continents and ocean they resemble (Swenson 1958; Swenson 1994, 174 and 237). Strand followed both Bishop and Nemerov in recognizing an intimate connection between poets and mapmakers (Haft 1999, 36-38; 2001, 37-65). In his "The Map" (1960), Strand contrasted the world beyond his window with the unified, unchanging, idealized version of his map and poem (Strand 1963, 30; Strand 1964).<sup>2</sup>

Gloria Oden (b.1923) went a step further, penning two map-poems in tribute to Bishop: "A Private Letter to Brazil" (1957) and her own poem "The Map" (ca. 1961). Unlike her peers, however, Oden uses such explicit detail in her verses that we can actually identify the maps that helped shape her words. These maps, in turn, not only were contemporary with her poems but were also the products of two great American cartographic rivals—the National Geographic Society and Rand McNally & Company.

It is no coincidence that Oden felt drawn to Bishop. A John Hay Whitney Fellowship (1955-1957) awarded to Oden following favorable reviews of her first collection, *The Naked Frame: A Love Poem and Sonnets* (1952), led, indirectly, to the older poet. Although she had read Bishop and owned a copy of her 1946 collection, *North & South*, not until her fellowship did Bishop's poetry suddenly "click." As Oden later recalled in a 1977 interview with J. Saunders Redding:<sup>3</sup>

When the very next day [May 8, 1956] *The New York Times* announced that she had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for 1956 in poetry, I sat down and dashed off a letter to her in Brazil never expecting a reply. But she did reply and even asked to see my poems. In her second letter she asked if I knew about Yaddo. I hadn't. (Oden 1978a, 17).

*"After Elizabeth Bishop's volume won the 1956 Pulitzer Prize, 'The Map' inspired other American poets—Howard Nemerov, May Swenson, Mark Strand, and Gloria Oden—to reflect upon the uses and meanings of maps. Gloria Oden (b.1923) went a step further, penning two map-poems in tribute to Bishop: 'A Private Letter to Brazil' (1957) and her own poem 'The Map' (ca. 1961). Unlike her peers, however, Oden uses such explicit detail in her verses that we can actually identify the maps that helped shape her words."*

*"A Private Letter to Brazil' . . . reveals Oden's gratitude and admiration for Bishop."*

Bishop not only offered to recommend Oden, but even contacted her own mentor and friend Marianne Moore on Oden's behalf; their support, along with that of Saunders Redding and Arna Bontemps, insured her acceptance. Oden's 1956 residency at Yaddo, the prestigious poetry center in Saratoga Springs, was pivotal in introducing the budding African-American poet to a "literary world" (Oden 1978a, 12) and, later, to the wealth of poets, courses, and readings available in New York City. "A Private Letter to Brazil," written sometime after her stay at Yaddo and first published in 1959, reveals Oden's gratitude and admiration for Bishop.<sup>4</sup>

#### GLORIA ODEN'S "A PRIVATE LETTER TO BRAZIL"

The map shows me where it is you are. I  
am here, where the words NEW YORK run an inch  
out to sea, ending where GULF STREAM flows by.

The coastline bristles with place names. The pinch  
in printing space has launched them offshore  
with the fish-bone's fine-tooth spread, to clinch

their urban identity. Much more  
noticeable it is in the chain  
of hopscotching islands that, loosely, moors

your continent to mine. (Already plain  
is its eastward drift, and who could say  
what would become of it left free!) Again,

the needle-pine alignment round SA,  
while where it is you are (or often go),  
RIO, spills its subtle phonic bouquet

farthest seaward of all. Out there I know  
the sounding is some deep 2000 feet,  
and the nationalized current tours so

pregnant with resacas. In their flux meet  
all the subtlety of God's great nature  
and man's terse grief. See, Hero, at your feet

is not that slight tossing dead Leander?

In "A Private Letter to Brazil,"<sup>5</sup> Oden carries on a poetic dialogue with Bishop. Though the poem opens by addressing a nameless "you," Oden's lines "where it is you are (or often go), / RIO..." clearly allude to Bishop, who had moved to Brazil in 1951 and was living at the time in Petrópolis, just north of Rio de Janeiro (Oden 1978a, 16). "A Private Letter to Brazil" is also a meditation on a map in the tradition of Bishop's poem. As if to strengthen her debt, Oden devotes the first five stanzas to the image of mapped names exceeding their bounds: "The coastline bristles with place names. The pinch / in printing space has launched them offshore" to produce "the needle-pine alignment round SA." (Oden abbreviates "South America" here to maintain the *aba, bcb* rhyme scheme of the demanding *terza rima* measure, illustrated by "plain-say-again," "SA-go-bouquet.") In 1959, the same year she published "A Private Letter to Brazil," another of Oden's poems first appeared in print. Its title, "' . . . As When Emotion

*"In 'A Private Letter to Brazil,' Oden carries on a poetic dialogue with Bishop."*

Too Far Exceeds Its Cause," is a direct quote from the second stanza of Bishop's "The Map," where Bishop refers to the excitement the printer experiences in breaking the rules of scale to accommodate place names—"as when emotion too far exceeds its cause" (Bishop 1983, 3, line 17).<sup>6</sup> Years later, when Robert Hayden reprinted "A Private Letter to Brazil" in his 1967 anthology, *Kaleidoscope*, he compared Oden to Bishop:

Miss Oden's poems appeal primarily to the intellect, which is not to say that emotion is lacking in them but that feeling tends to be subordinated to ideas. She has an eye for the vivid detail, and she combines the literal and the symbolic, the real and the fanciful, in a manner similar to that of Elizabeth Bishop. (Hayden 1967, 180)

The beauty of "A Private Letter to Brazil" is that a map connects Oden to Bishop, both geographically and spiritually: "The map shows me where it is you are." Oden composed her poem in New York City, where Bishop had lived and written "The Map" a generation earlier. The words "NEW YORK" touch those of "GULF STREAM," while the West Indies become "the chain of hopscotching islands that, loosely, moors / your continent to mine." The map also serves as an alternative means of travel, allowing Oden to visit Bishop's home vicariously. (Oden has told me that she prefers not to travel, that maps help satisfy her fascination with life in other places and periods of history.) And the map has a political significance as well, one that further demonstrates what Oden and Bishop shared. Though American-born, both poets had deep emotional ties to continents south of the Equator. Bishop lived in South America for twenty-three years (1951-1974), while Oden regards Africa as her ancestral home (Oden 1978a, 24). That continent's importance to Oden becomes evident when she imagines the West Indies' attraction to Africa: "Already plain is [its] eastward drift, and who could say / what would become of it left free?"

By the poem's end, the relationship between poets gives way to an exploration of the fragility of human relationships. Racial issues become more explicit. Consider Oden's description of the depth of the continental shelf off RIO—"Out there I know / the sounding is some deep 2000 feet, / and the nationalized current tours so / pregnant with *resacas*" (emphasis mine). Oden "know[s]" the losses endured during the Middle Passage (Doreski 1999). On slave ships bound for the Americas, nearly two million Africans found watery graves: some perished from the sea's violence or the squalid conditions below deck; others were cast overboard because they'd "mutinied" unsuccessfully, or because they were "dying" from illness and mistreatment, or because their captain feared capture by enemy vessels or by patrol ships after slavery had been abolished; still others committed suicide in the belief that, by drowning, they would not only escape their plight but even return home in death to their loved ones (Rediker 2007, 4-5, 39-40, 288-290, 301-303, 343-347). And the treacherous *resacas* or "undertows," in turn, bring to mind another tragedy. Though muted by time and myth, it is the story of Hero's suicide upon finding the body of her beloved Leander, drowned in the Hellespont/Dardanelles while braving, to reach her, the currents between two other continents: Asia and Europe.

For the classically trained Oden, Hero and Leander symbolized her own isolation. Although she had been writing poems since she was six (Oden 1978a, 10), not until Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) began publishing his poetry in the 1960s did Oden know any other African-American poet (Oden 2008a, [3]). The map in "A Private Letter to Brazil" records not only her geographical distance from Bishop, but also her fear of never

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really connecting, through poetry, with her own race or any other. Yet as this daughter and granddaughter of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion ministers gazes on her map of the Western Hemisphere, she detects “the subtlety of God’s great nature” beyond “man’s terse grief.” Perhaps the so-called “real” world that the map allows us to imagine is no less a “reflection” than the map itself.

### The Map Behind “A Private Letter to Brazil”

But *which* map? Answering such a question might help literary historians settle the poem’s chronology. But it could also demonstrate how maps are read, responded to, and discussed by readers—including creative artists like Oden and scholars like Doreski (1999), whose analysis of Oden’s word choice and capitalization might be even more nuanced had she recognized that Oden was responding not only to Bishop’s poem but to a specific map’s features and typography. Unfortunately, like Bishop, Oden never names the map she consulted while writing her poem. In later years Bishop recalled only “a red map” (Monteiro 1996, 66), while Oden began conflating the map that had inspired “A Private Letter to Brazil” with the one that she later used when composing her poem “The Map” (see below). During a recent telephone conversation with the author, however, Oden wondered aloud whether the map might have come from a *National Geographic* magazine (14 September 2007). That clue, along with Oden’s recollection of having composed “A Private Letter to Brazil” in 1956 or 1957, led to two supplementary maps: the first, “Atlantic Ocean,” inserted into the December 1955 issue of the magazine; the second, “The World,” into the March 1957 issue.<sup>7</sup> Upon viewing both, Oden conceded that the 1957 map “does tug at me” (Oden, personal email to author, March 28, 2008) and immediately recognized the detail that I had pulled from the world map (fig. 1). Though the same team of cartographers created both maps, differences between them suggest not only that the 1957 National Geographic Society “World Map” is the cartographic model for “A Private Letter to Brazil,” but also that 1957 is the probable date of the poem’s composition.

At the center of the 1957 “World Map” lie both Americas, the traditional focus of National Geographic Society world maps until 1975 (Schulten 2001, 187). Striking as this image is, however, the map includes several other illustrations of the two continents that figure so prominently in Oden’s poem. The legend, for instance, located beneath “South Pacific Ocean,” sports the Society’s former logo—a tiny globe featuring the Western Hemisphere, with North and South America surrounded by the words “National Geographic Society \*Incorporated A.D. 1888\*.” Below the legend, at the bottom of the truncated oval map, four inset maps straddle the Weddell Sea. Though displaying different aspects of the world, each reveals the similarities between North America and South America—particularly Brazil and northeastern United States, where Bishop and Oden were then living. Consider the left-hand pair. The first, titled “The United Nations,” pictures the two continents clothed in yellow to represent their common membership in the U.N.; by contrast, only a few African countries appear in yellow and the rest of the continent remains unaffiliatedly white. The interior inset, marked “Population Density,” drapes the northeastern part of the United States and the coast of Brazil in pink to indicate large population centers, while New York and Rio blush a deeper shade. On the right-hand pair of insets, the “Land Classification” map pictures these same cities in yellow (ironically, the color of farmland and prairies), then surrounds them in regions of forest green. To its right, the bold

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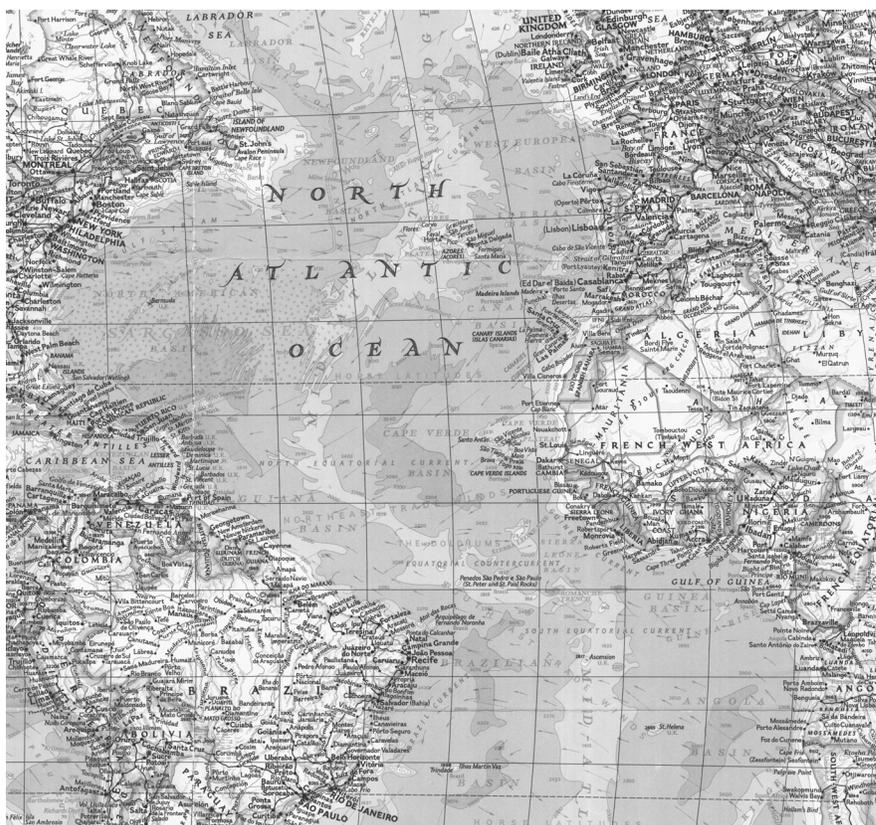


Figure 1. Detail of the National Geographic Society World Map (1957), Washington, D.C. The legend announces that this supplementary map was “compiled and drawn . . . for *The National Geographic Magazine*,” while the words on the top right indicate that the map was included in the December 1957 issue (vol. CXI, No.3). “*The World*” appears on the Van der Grinten projection used on National Geographic world maps from 1922 to 1988 (Schulten 2001, 195); measures 28 1/2 by 42 inches (72.5 cm x 107 cm) from one edge of the paper to the other; and is scaled 1:39,283,200, one inch equalling 620 miles at the Equator. At top center-left, the map lists James M. Darley as chief cartographer. C.E. Riddiford is responsible for typography; Apphia Holdstock, for oceanography; and A. Hoen & Company (bottom left), for lithography. (The same team produced the December 1955 “Atlantic Ocean” map, which this detail of the world map closely resembles.) A notice in the lower right corner indicates that additional maps could be purchased for 75 cents, and that “a special edition . . . , enlarged to 47 x 68 [was] also available at \$3.00 a copy.” Courtesy of the Robinson Map Library of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (3200 1957 .N3) and of the National Geographic Society. (see page 72 for color version)

verticals of “International Time Zones” reveal Rio to be two hours ahead of New York and at least two hours behind Africa, the homeland toward which Oden imagines the West Indies drifting. Moreover, on the map itself, the United States and Brazil are outlined in the same pale green to distinguish them from other countries on their respective continents.

What clinches the identification, however, is the extent to which “A Private Letter to Brazil” echoes the oceanographic detail on the map. It’s not just that the names of cities have been “launched . . . offshore”; that the Caribbean’s “chain of hopscotching islands” “bristles with place names”; that such names form a “needle-pine alignment round SA”; or that “NEW YORK” and “RIO” are capitalized on the map and in Oden’s poem. It’s that her “fish-bone’s fine-tooth spread” aptly describes the slight curve given by the typographer to the names as they extend outward like fish spines or ribs. It’s that “NEW YORK” nearly does “run an inch / out to sea,” then arches downward toward the red capital letters of “GULF STREAM.” It’s that “Rio de Janeiro” is so long that the place name crosses over shallower waters—marked white (less than 100 fathoms), pale blue

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(100-999 fathoms), and blue (1000-1999 fathoms)—before extending into the deep blue ocean (2000-2999 fathoms): “out there I know / the sounding is some deep 2000 feet.”<sup>8</sup> Just above Rio’s name are the red capitals of “Brazil Current”—“the nationalized current tours so / pregnant with resacas.” And warm ocean currents, shown as blood-red arrows, circle counterclockwise so regularly around the South Atlantic, and clockwise so regularly around the North Atlantic as to remind Oden of the shipping routes that, for almost four hundred years, brought more than twelve million African slaves to the New World (Rediker 2007, 5): “In their flux meet / all the subtlety of God’s great nature / and man’s terse grief.”

There are reasons why Oden must have used the 1957 edition rather than an earlier world map. The tenth such National Geographic Society map since 1900 (Buxbaum 1962, 223), it differs markedly from the one previously issued in December 1951. Because the 1951 world map contains only two insets, “United Nations” and “International Time Zones,” North and South America are duplicated only four, rather than six times. “New York” is less than a half-inch on the slightly smaller 1951 map, which measures 26 1/2 by 41 inches (67 x 104 cm). Neither “New York” nor “Rio” has full caps. More important is the lack of oceanographic detail on the 1951 world map. Although its legend announces that “elevations and depths are in feet,” soundings are all but invisible; the currents and their names appear in a nearly transparent tan; prevailing winds are not represented; neither the Atlantic nor the Pacific are subdivided into “North” and “South”; and, most telling of all, the seas merge into a single shade of blue—far from the six shades, ranging from white to dark gray, on the 1957 world map.

In fact, the years after 1951 were crucial for producing the map that inspired “A Private Letter to Brazil.” During this period, Bruce Heezen and Marie Tharp were completing their first “Physiographic Diagram” of the Atlantic Ocean (1956), featuring breathtaking images of deep-sea mountains and basins mapped by continuous echo-sounding traverses and precision depth recorders (Lawrence 1999, 36-43).

These advances are evident on the 1955 National Geographic Society “Atlantic Ocean” map. Published two years before the 1957 world map, this supplementary map appeared in December 1955 (volume CVIII, number 6). Measuring 39 1/2 by 27 3/4 inches (100.5 x 70.5 cm) and scaled at 1:20,000,000, it covers a bit more area than the detail of the 1957 map shown in Figure 1, for “Atlantic Ocean” embraces nearly all of Scandinavia and South America, then extends from the Galapagos Islands east to the Belgian Congo. There is no logo, and only one insert: in the lower right, a globe labeled “Submarine Topography of the Atlantic” displays the mountainous ocean floor empty of water and identifies the island peaks that rise above the surface. North and South America appear on the main map and on the inset. Rio’s capitalized name also appears twice, while the name Petrópolis, absent from the world map, lies directly north of Rio’s bold, Federal-District name, and (rather disconcertingly) west of Rio’s serifed urban name. Neither of Rio’s names, however, extends into the bluest blue that identifies waters of “2000+ fathoms” lying just beyond the final “o” of “Janeiro.” Yet another feature distinguishes this map from the later world map. “Atlantic Ocean” is covered by explanations, in red type, of discoveries, settlements, geographical facts, and scientific advances. One, by Woods Hole, Massachusetts, is unabashedly self-congratulatory even as it suggests why the oceanographic detail of this map is so sophisticated: “Scientists from here explored the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, 1947-8, in expeditions sponsored by the National Geographic Society, Woods

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Hole Oceanographic Institution, and Columbia University." Among the most famous scientists were Tharp and Heezen, whose revolutionary and evolving work at Columbia University's Lamont Labs helps explain why the 1955 and 1957 maps could devote such "tremendous attention to detail—both on land *and in the oceans*" (Maps.com 2008, emphasis mine). Oden's "A Private Letter to Brazil," unlike her subsequent poem, reflects the oceanographic discoveries of her time.

#### GLORIA ODEN'S "THE MAP"

Sometime around 1961, Oden wrote "The Map"—her second poem inspired by Bishop *and* by a contemporary map. Two years later, Arna Bontemps published it in his anthology *American Negro Poetry* (Bontemps 1963, 161-63). Then, in 1964, "The Map" resurfaced in Langston Hughes's *New Negro Poets: U.S.A.* (Hughes 1964, 47-49), from which our text—with minor revisions—derives:<sup>9</sup>

My rug is red. My couch, whereon I deal  
in dreams with truths I never live, is brown;  
a shading more intense than that by my  
skin declared. Richer it is, too, than of  
any of the eight clear hues coloring  
my wide, world map soldiering the white wall  
there behind it. This map is of the world.  
It says so. In type 1/2" high: WORLD;  
and with what I know of maps I do, in-  
deed, believe it—though over it, in type  
now smaller by one-half, I read the word  
"COSMOPOLITAN," and over that, in  
type yet smaller by one-half, these gentle  
modifiers "RAND McNALLY."

The seas  
square off in blue. Or, ought the word be "sea"?  
Uniformly bright, planed by a tone so  
mild you might suppose the North Sea twinned the  
South and that the Moskenstraumen was (for  
the most part) Poe (quote) *Sailing directions  
for the northwest and north coast of Norway*  
(unquote) to the contrary; seven diminishes  
to one, where none arrests attention.

Not  
so the land. Flowering forth as spring in  
May will settle down to deed, it woos us  
with such yellows, pinks and greens as would, I'm  
sure, lure the most selective butterfly;  
and each trim hue is sized the living room  
of nations.

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America (U.S.) is  
 daffodil; Canada carnation; while  
 leaf-like as an elephant ear, Greenland  
 hangs indifferent to those arctic winds parching  
 the cell-like bounds of Russia (here halved and  
 showing both to the left and right of this  
 our hemisphere—indeed, as is a good  
 part of the orient split, some even  
 to doubling appearance.)

Europe (also)  
 lies fragmented; though from nature's—not the  
 mapmaker's—division. Ireland off-  
 set from England, offset from France (feigning  
 oasis beside the rot-brown fill to  
 Germany) supplies one awkward revel  
 of abstraction as that gross bud of Spain  
 (with Portugal) patterns another; not  
 to mention Italy's invasion of  
 the sea.

Norway, Sweden, much as giraffes  
 must bend, towards Denmark group in restricted  
 covenant; yet, though this canvas—Europe—  
 at its center holds, such unity rests  
 more upon imagination than that,  
 let's say, of Africa islanded in  
 those deeper latitudes.

There, it is the  
 green (again) I think. In candescent flood  
 like the dead reckoning of spring; at four  
 points edging sea; it seems a fever of  
 the mind within that broad head housed (it shapes  
 —Africa—a head to me!) which in its  
 course will blaze the length of continent as  
 now it fires breadth.

And who will say it  
 won't? Not the mapmaker, surely, who must  
 exact truth. Not I, high hoisting same to  
 state whirlwind. Will you, because you might not  
 particularly care to see it so?

Composed four years after "A Private Letter to Brazil," Oden's poem "The Map" is even more obviously a tribute to Bishop. Not only does Oden use the same title, but her apparently spontaneous critique of a map also bears the hallmarks of Bishop's classic (see Haft 2001, 40-49). First, there's the arbitrary use of colors, especially the seductive hues of countries. These, in turn, contrast with the "uniformly bright" blue that unites seven so-called "seas" while pacifying the Moskenstraumen. Norway's treacherous two-and-a-half-mile-wide whirlpool, the Moskenstraumen was not only an iconographic staple on early maps (see Haft 2003, fig.2), but also terrorized the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's *Descent into the Maelström* (1841: see Poe 1965). When describing mapped colors and patterns, Oden imaginatively conjures up flowers (daffodils, carnations), animals

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Figure 2. Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World on Mercator's Projection, [1955?], New York: Rand McNally and Company. This folded and dissected wall map measures 34 3/8 x 52 inches (87 x 132 cm) with a scale of ca. 1:37,000,000, one inch representing 583 statute miles at the Equator. Mounted on cloth, it folds into 12 parts, each part measuring approximately 13 by 11 inches (33 x 28 cm). Patrick Morris, Map Cataloger and Reference Librarian at the Newberry Library, suggests that the Newberry's copy of the Cosmopolitan World Map—given its simple black binding, cloth mounting, metal grommets, and obvious wear—may have been a traveling sample. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago (Rand McNally Collection, Map5C G3200 1955 .R3 (PrCt)), and of Rand McNally & Company. (see page 73 for color version)

(butterflies, elephants, giraffes), even a human head: "(it shapes /—Africa—a head to me!)." Like Bishop, she animates both earth and water. But whereas Bishop's land "leans," "lifts," "draws," "tugs," "takes," "runs," or "investigates" the increasingly "quiet" sea (Parker 1988, 78), Oden's land "flowers forth," "lures," and "woos us" even as her seas betray their violence with words like "square off," "uniform(ly)," and "arrests" (cf. Oden's threatening *resacas* in "A Private Letter to Brazil"). Both poets analyze the map as a work of visual art. Bishop refers to Labrador's "oiled" yellow, the glass under which the map is viewed, and the printer's excitement; Oden portrays her map as a "canvas" on which "each trim hue is sized." In her enigmatic final line, Bishop underscores the imaginative aspects of mapmaking: "more delicate than the historians' are the mapmakers' colors." Oden too recognizes that when mapmakers "exact truth," such "truth" is both relative and subjective: "with what I know of maps I do, in- / deed, believe it—though . . ." Both poets make ironic use of their title's definite article since every map—including their own—invites multiple interpretations of its "facts" and can offer only a generalized, simplified, and selective view of the world.

Yet despite Bishop's influence, Oden attempts to deal with the world, not simply the North Atlantic. For that reason, she fills her seventy-line poem with some twenty place names in contrast to Bishop's lonely three (Labrador, Newfoundland, Norway). And, in the end, Oden's poem is far more overtly personal, political, and didactic than Bishop's—as her treatment of Africa makes clear.

In the first stanza alone, she specifies where Bishop generalizes or only hints. Although we know that Bishop composed "The Map" while home with the flu, the poem itself doesn't indicate where she was when gazing at her map. Oden, on the other hand, not only invites us into her apartment, but also immediately identifies the map decorating her living

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*“When Oden was living in New York City, a Rand McNally wall map like this one hung behind her couch from the late 1950s to the early 1960s.”*

*“Omitted from the legend and, for that matter, from the map itself is any reference to publication or copyright date. Rand McNally was notorious for leaving maps undated . . .”*

room. It is a wall map with the elegant title “Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World.” A “match” can be found at Chicago’s Newberry Library, which has housed the Rand McNally Collection since 1988 (Akerman 1989). This “Cosmopolitan Map of the World” is indeed “wide” at 34 3/8 by 52 inches (87 x 132 cm), significantly larger than the 1957 National Geographic Society World Map, which measures only 28 1/2 by 42 inches (72.5 x 107 cm) (fig. 2). When Oden was living in New York City, a Rand McNally wall map like this one hung behind her couch from the late 1950s to the early 1960s (Oden, telephone conversation with author, September 14, 2007).<sup>10</sup>

The legend, near the bottom center of the Cosmopolitan World Map, shows precisely what Oden is describing: print size can be manipulated to minimize the participation of mapmakers—anonymity cloaked in the “gentle modifiers ‘RAND McNALLY’” (fig. 3). Print size also highlights the apparently impartial title, “WORLD.” Measuring the different fonts confirms Oden’s calculations: the word “WORLD,” its graceful cursive script rubricated within black lines on a white background, is indeed a “1/2” high; “COSMOPOLITAN,” capitalized and framed with double black lines, is 1/4”; and the unadorned capitals of “RAND McNALLY” are only 1/8”. Although Oden does not mention other elements in the legend—its copyright notice, for example, or the lines symbolizing “Air Distances” and “Water Routes,” the map’s Mercator projection does become a focus of her next stanzas.

Omitted from the legend and, for that matter, from the map itself is any reference to publication or copyright date. Rand McNally was notorious for leaving maps undated (Koenker 2002a and 2002b), a savvy commercial policy that allowed the company to reprint “up-to-the-minute” maps from the same printing surface. Our only clue comes from the letters “NYC901,” located in the lower right corner<sup>11</sup> (fig. 4). For twenty years, from 1942 through the spring of 1962,<sup>12</sup> Rand McNally used this code to identify its “Cosmopolitan Map of the World” *no matter how many updates this popular wall map underwent.*

While some Rand McNally catalogs list it as a “general reference map of the world” (Rand McNally 1957, 31; 1958a, 30; Wing Modern MS, RMcN

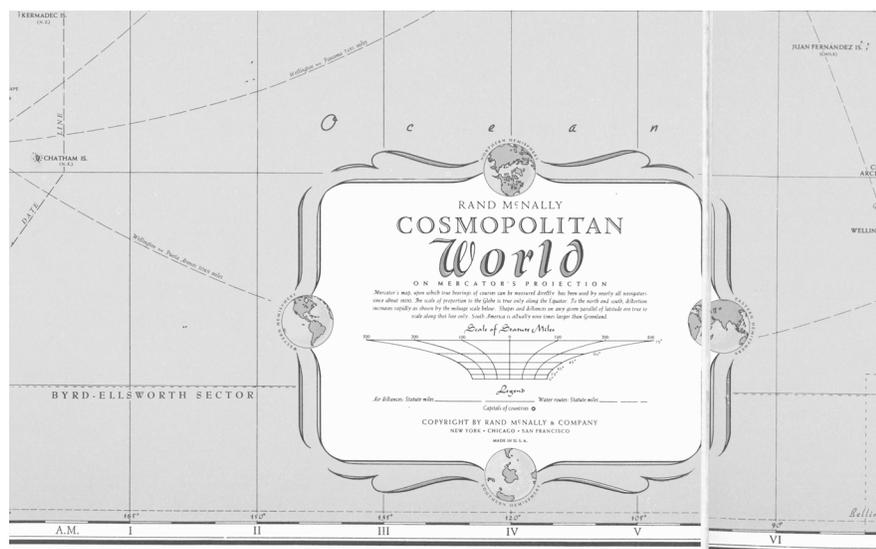


Figure 3. Legend of the Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World Map, (1955?): detail of Figure 2. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago (Rand McNally Collection, Map5C G3200 1955 .R3 (PrCt)) and of Rand McNally & Company. (see page 74 for color version)

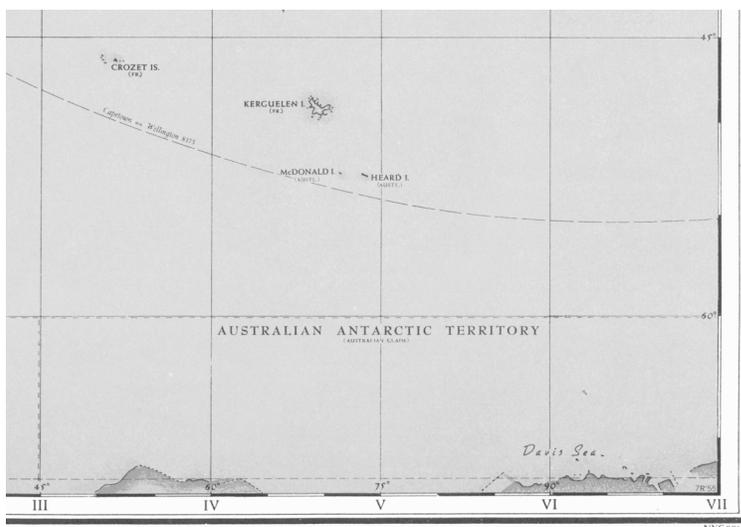


Figure 4. The code “NYC901” from the lower right corner of the Rand McNally *Cosmopolitan World Map*, (1955?): detail of Figure 2. Although the Rand McNally Collection has yet to yield its secret to this code, researching this paper has revealed that “90” identifies the map as a world map. (See note 11 for more on the code.) Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago (Rand McNally Collection, Map5C G3200 1955 .R3 (PrCt)) and of Rand McNally & Company. (see page 74 for color version)

Collection,\* Series 4, Box 5, folder 52), another contrasts the *Cosmopolitan World Map* with “school-type wall maps” that sacrifice detail for legibility at a distance (Rand McNally 1955a, 34; Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 52). That catalog entry goes on to boast:

Because it is unusually attractive and decorative, this up-to-the-minute, new world map, showing latest world boundaries [sic], is particularly suited to hang on the wall in the home or office. It is printed in eight colors, which, in combination, give fifteen distinct tints. Countries are shown in rich contrasting colors and water areas in blue. The selection of types and symbols used on the map are also particularly pleasing and a handsome compass rose adds to its charm. This is a Mercator map, with North and South America in the center to emphasize their relation to the rest of the world. There is a 45° overlap at the east and west ends of the map to help maintain continental relationships.

*“Narrowing the date of Oden’s long-missing map, on the other hand, proved more difficult.”*

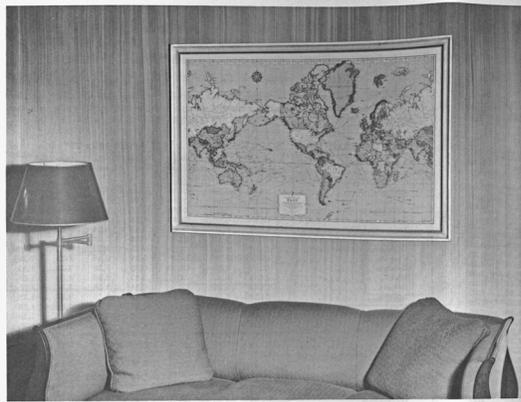
No wonder Oden displayed a map like this over her couch (fig. 5).

Narrowing the date of Oden’s long-missing map, on the other hand, proved more difficult. Was her map the same edition as the one in the Newberry? If so, does the Newberry’s wall map—originally catalogued as “1958?”—reflect the political divisions of that date? Answers to these questions required a reassessment of the Newberry’s tentative date for its wall map. Ultimately, research on Oden’s cartographic inspiration would result in the Newberry’s re-cataloguing its *Cosmopolitan Wall Map* as “1955?.”

Here is how it happened. Examining Rand McNally’s 408-page *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* revealed that the Newberry’s Wall Map does resemble the double-page world map in the 1958 atlas (Rand McNally 1958b, 2-3). Obvious differences are small or cosmetic. The atlas world map has no

\*The citation “Wing Modern MS RMcN Collection” (Newberry Library) will be shortened henceforth as “Wing.”

World Maps Rand McNally



**Rand McNally**  
**COSMOPOLITAN**  
**MAP OF THE WORLD**

**An attractive new world map—designed for utility and beauty**

Distinctively different, this beautiful map is as useful as it is decorative for it not only enhances its surroundings but serves as a fascinating, reliable, and up-to-date source of geographic reference.

Printed in eight soft colors which in combination give fifteen distinct tints. The type and symbols used on it are particularly pleasing and a handsome compass rose adds to the map's charm. It is richly framed in a handsome, hand-rubbed, hard-wood frame, finished in a modern light-gray tone that blends beautifully with every background.

The Cosmopolitan Map of the World is drawn on a Mercator projection with North and South America in the center to emphasize their relation to the rest of the world, and a 45° overlap at the east and west ends to help maintain continental relationships. The detail shown includes all country boundaries and names; over 2,000 principal cities; rivers, lakes, and islands. All changes in territories and names resulting from World War II are included.

Mounted and framed 55 x 38 inches.  
1" = 583 miles at Equator.

**Ideal for home or office use . . .**

Whether it be used for decoration, reference or both, the Cosmopolitan Map will fit perfectly into every home or office.

Shown in detail to the right, this attractive map provides reference material that should be at the fingertips of every executive, as well as every person in the home.

To provide greater clarity, country borders only are presented; local boundaries that would detract from the legibility and beauty of the map are not included.

Country boundaries are shown in ribbons of a deeper tint of the same color that defines the country itself; this clearly sets out the borders and creates an unusual blending of colors.



NO.	TITLE	PAPER SHEET	CLOTH MOUNTED	ROLLER CASE	FRAMED BOARD	WASHABLE SURFACE
NYC901	Cosmopolitan Map of the World . . . . .	\$3.00	\$7.75	\$14.25	\$27.25	\$3.25

20

Figure 5. *The Cosmopolitan Map of the World*—“designed to grace the walls of a tastefully furnished living room or library”—is pictured above a couch in this advertisement from an undated, unnumbered catalog titled “Rand McNally Maps, Atlases, Globes, Guides” (Wing Modern MS, RMcN Collection, Series 4, Box 5, folder 50, page 20: FMP 4856). Followed by nearly identical catalogs in 1951 (Cat.251), 1953 (Cat.353), and 1954 (Cat.354) (Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folders 50-52), this one presumably dates to 1949, for it declares the *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* “completely new and strikingly beautiful, . . . reveal[ing] for the first time a truly modern picture of today’s world” (Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 50, page 20). Intriguingly, the catalog entry on pages 20-21 assigns no code to the *Cosmopolitan wall map*, as if suggesting that this “attractive new world map” is completely new to the market rather than part of a series that dates back at least seven years. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Special Collections, and of Rand McNally & Company.

*“Yet in one respect crucial for Oden, the Newberry’s Cosmopolitan Map of the World bears an even greater resemblance to the world map in the 1955 Cosmopolitan World Atlas: specifically, in regard to the names of countries in Africa.”*

ornamental compass rose or legend, and it differs from the wall map in size, scale, hue, and projection. Not only are its dimensions and scale smaller (14 x 22 inches/35 x 55 centimeters and 1:90,000,000, with one inch equaling 688 miles at the Equator); but it also presents the United States as green rather than “daffodil,” employs the Mercator-based Miller cylindrical projection, and confines its overlap to between 60° and 70° east longitude.

Yet in one respect crucial for Oden, the Newberry’s *Cosmopolitan Map of the World* bears an even greater resemblance to the world map in the 1955 *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*: specifically, in regard to the names of countries in Africa (fig. 6). Furthermore, the discovery of three similar wall maps, this time at the New York Public Library, demonstrated that Rand McNally did, in fact, produce a *Cosmopolitan World Map* closely resembling the 1958 *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* in its depiction of political divisions in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Equally important, the New York Public Library’s updated world map represents Germany as green, rather than the “rot-brown fill” that Oden describes. Since all the colors mentioned in “The Map” mirror those found on the Newberry’s map, Oden must have owned a *Cosmopolitan World Map* dating ca. 1955, Rand McNally’s centennial year. We even know what she might have paid for it: the “flat paper sheet” cost \$3.00; cloth mounting ran to \$9.65; and a “framed board with washable surface” brought the price up to \$31.65 (Rand McNally

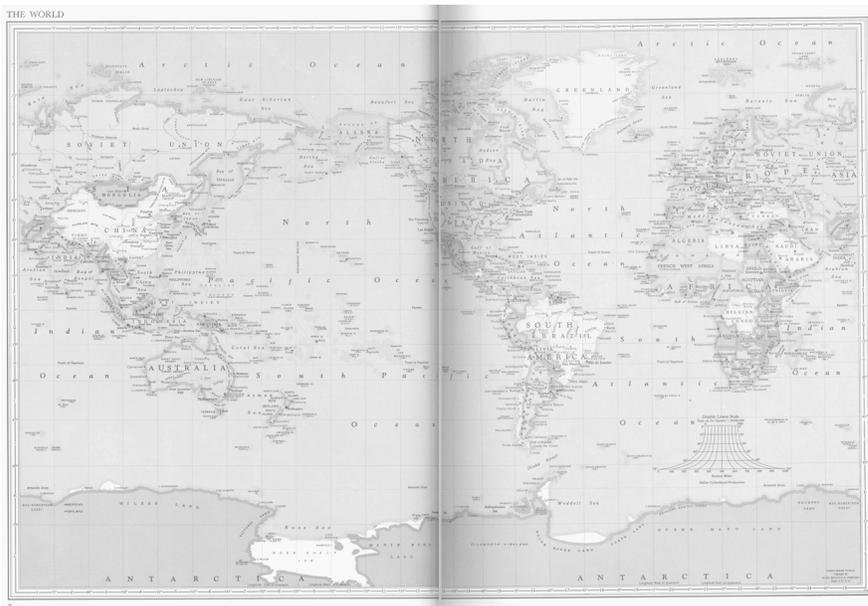


Figure 6. The "World Map" (1955). In Rand McNally's *Cosmopolitan World Atlas: Centennial Edition*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1955, 2-3. This double page, 14 by 22 inch (35 x 55 cm), world map from the 1955 centennial edition of the atlas resembles the *Cosmopolitan World Map* pictured in Figure 2. On both, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia sport different colors; Algeria, Tunisia, and most of Morocco are swathed in green; and the Sudan is called "Anglo-Egyptian." By the 1957 atlas, however, Rhodesia is united; Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco appear in different colors; and "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan" has become "Sudan." Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Special Collections (folio Rand McNally Atlas .C77 1955: FMP 4857), and of Rand McNally and Company. (see page 75 for color version)

1955a, 34; 1957, 31; 1958a, 30: Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 52). By contrast, the *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* cost \$13.95 (Rand McNally 1955, 40; 1957, 34; 1958a, 36: Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 52.).

But before Oden turns to Africa, the first stanza of "The Map" suggests that the colors in her living room—red, brown, white—are as significant as those on the map where "each trim hue is sized the living room / of nations." The "white wall" provides a neutral background. Yet "white" also describes the complexion of the majority population in North America, around which the map is centered. (Although the American firm Rand McNally labels its nation "United States," in her fourth stanza Oden initially calls her country "America," as if highlighting its appropriation of a name equally applicable to either continent in "our hemisphere"; South America, in fact, receives no mention in Oden's "The Map." And by parenthesizing "U.S.," she identifies her nation with US, her main readers.) The "intense" brown of her couch—"whereon I deal / in dreams with truths I never live"—is "richer" for Oden than the map's pacifying "eight clear hues," since it is also the color of her "skin declared." And the red of her rug, a detail that opens "The Map," alludes to the bloody struggles that those of African-ancestry have had to endure in order to achieve their freedom in the U.S. and their independence in Africa. While Bishop reveals herself only through a single "we" and the disconcerting questions she poses throughout "The Map," Oden wants her readers to have no misconceptions about her own biases, or ours.

As an African-American, Oden recognizes how culturocentric a map can be. What first attracts her attention is the title: "COSMOPOLITAN" suggests that this "WORLD" map is international and sophisticated. At the inception of its long-heralded *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* in 1949, Rand

*"As an African-American,  
Oden recognizes how  
culturocentric a map can be."*

McNally put out a brochure entitled "The Rand McNally Cosmopolitan World Atlas: How and Why it was Made." It began:

This really modern atlas enables the contemporary observer to see a true picture of today's world....  
... The title was chosen with that end in view, for "Cosmopolitan" aptly describes the distinctive quality of this work as an "atlas of the world" rather than an "atlas of nations." (Rand McNally [1949], [1-2])

Like Oden's sprawling poem, the world map opening the atlas supposedly epitomizes this message. Yet, the arrangement of the landmasses belies its cosmopolitanism. That the Americas appear in the middle of "The World" might have satisfied Rand McNally's primary audience—the Americans to whom its 1955 "Business and Reference" catalog (quoted earlier) proclaimed, "North and South America [are] in the center to emphasize their relation to the rest of the world" (Rand McNally 1955a, 34; Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 52); since 1850, in fact, we had grown accustomed to seeing our hemisphere so centered (Henrikson 1980, 79). It also underscores the commercial importance to us of both the Atlantic *and* the Pacific during the twentieth century (Schulten 2001, 233)—all the while asserting the emergence of the United States as "the geostrategic center of the world" following World War II (Henrikson 1980, 86).

*"When Oden's 'The Map' reappeared in the popular textbook Probes: An Introduction to Poetry, William Harlan 'illustrated' the poem with a simplified world map that placed Asia in the center and cut the United States off at both margins. Under the map were the provocative words 'Your Map Says a Lot About How You See the World and Shape It'."*

Yet, the central placement of the United States and Canada necessitates that other areas be "fragmented . . . [by] the mapmaker's division." Oden illustrates her words by depicting her mapped world not as one unified stanza but as several, each severed mid-line from the next. Some might argue that the Rand McNally world map marginalizes what Oden calls "Russia" and "a good part of the orient" by splitting them at the map's edges. In fact, when Oden's "The Map" reappeared in the popular textbook *Probes: An Introduction to Poetry*, William Harlan "illustrated" the poem with a simplified world map that placed Asia in the center and cut the United States off at both margins. Under the map were the provocative words "Your Map Says a Lot About How You See the World and Shape It" (Harlan 1973, 132).

Others, however, might protest that the "Western Hemisphere" seems menaced by the vast drab expanse of the Soviet Union. Enlarged forty-five degrees by the repetition, on either side, of the area spanning from 60° to 105° East Longitude, "the cell-like bounds of Russia" do seem to stretch ominously like an iron curtain toward the map's center. This "doubling appearance," noted by Oden, may help readers understand how the right and left sides of the map fit together. But neither the 1951 nor the 1957 National Geographic Society world map resorted to overlapping east and west. Moreover, the duplication of such an enormous tract as that extending from Afghanistan to central China, as well as the placement, along the top of the map, of more than twenty-four international time zones, ultimately reveal the representation for what it is: *a disorienting fiction*.

In contrast to a divided Asia, Greenland appears to Oden "leaf-like as an elephant ear" on the map's popular Mercator projection. Greenland's name and obligingly green color on the map disguise its icy terrain and make it appear "indifferent to those arctic winds parching . . . Russia." Because of its high latitude, Greenland's area is wildly exaggerated. Meanwhile, Scandinavia leans giraffe-like over Europe, and the United States deceptively dwarfs the larger Brazil (Greenhood 1964, 128). Africa also looks smaller than it should because it lies "in the deeper latitudes" near the map's Equator, where scale is truer and so less stretched (Hall 1992, 380). Gazing at a Mercator projection, a naive map-reader would assume

that Greenland is approximately the same size as Africa and certainly larger than South America. But Oden has read the text squeezed, on the legend, between the title and the flaring graph that indicates “Scale of Statute Miles”:

The scale of Projection to the Globe is true only along the Equator. To the north and south, distortion increases rapidly as shown by the mile-age scale below . . . . South America is actually nine times larger than Greenland.

Framing the legend, four small globes illustrate the same message in graphic form. No wonder that Rand McNally’s school catalogs advertised the Cosmopolitan World Map as suitable only “for libraries and school offices” (Rand McNally [1946?], 25) and withdrew the map entirely from its educational offerings after about 1953 (Rand McNally [1953?], 33).<sup>14</sup> As the publisher of *Goode’s School Atlas* since 1923, Rand McNally had been touting the merits of other map projections not only to students and educators, but later, in the opening pages of their *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*, to the general public as well. Yet even as map readers were “confronted with multiple ‘truths’—projections of all kinds that reconfigured the earth in startling ways” (Schulten 2000, 14; see Schulten 2001, 186-195), Mercator-style projections would remain immensely successful “because of their historical power and their narrative power to contain the world within a single view . . . . This is the world we recognize. This is the world that is familiar” (Schulten 2001, 242).

Confusing the landscape with its mapped representation is exactly what Oden means to discourage. Not only is the Rand McNally wall map biased and potentially racist, Oden suggests, but it is also outdated. A traditional political map, the Cosmopolitan World Map belongs to a popular older genre increasingly challenged by the likes of the National Geographic Society world map, which—with its attention to the physical as well as the political world (Schulten 2000, 17)—had helped inspire Oden’s “A Private Letter to Brazil.” In “The Map,” however, Oden tackles what she sees as an antiquated *world order*. Europe, the subject of the next two stanzas, illustrates her point with its profusion of colors as well as its natural and political divisions. For Oden, Europe’s fragmentation and history of conflicts represented a failure to create an enduring social “covenant” benefiting more than an elite minority or region. Oden’s condemnation is particularly apparent in her description of the Axis coalition and its sympathizers. In contrast to the flowery adjectives she uses when portraying the colors assigned by Rand McNally to the U.S. (“daffodil”), Canada (“carnation”), and Greenland (“leaf-like”), Oden’s France is a “feigning oasis” of green beside Germany’s “rot-brown fill.” Italy’s protrusion into the Mediterranean becomes an “invasion of the sea.” And Franco’s Spain resembles a “gross bud.”

Worse still, Europe had imposed its own divisions upon Africa, the focus of Oden’s final stanzas. Divvied up by the European powers between 1880 and 1912, the continent had acquired political boundaries that bore little or no relation to its physical geography or to the socio-political organization and practices of its diverse peoples. (Earlier, Oden’s phrase “world map soldiering the white wall” suggests one way that imperialists impose their maps and sovereignty on others. And her hyphenated lines “with what I know of maps I do, in- / deed, believe it—though . . . .” suggest that a map can function as a “deed,” conveying territorial rights to the claimants whom the mapmakers serve.<sup>15</sup>) Look at Rand McNally’s “Political Portrait of the World” (fig. 7). Unique to the first edition of the

*“Confusing the landscape with its mapped representation is exactly what Oden means to discourage. Not only is the Rand McNally wall-map biased and potentially racist, Oden suggests, but it also out-dated.”*

*“In ‘The Map,’ however, Oden tackles what she sees as an antiquated world order.”*

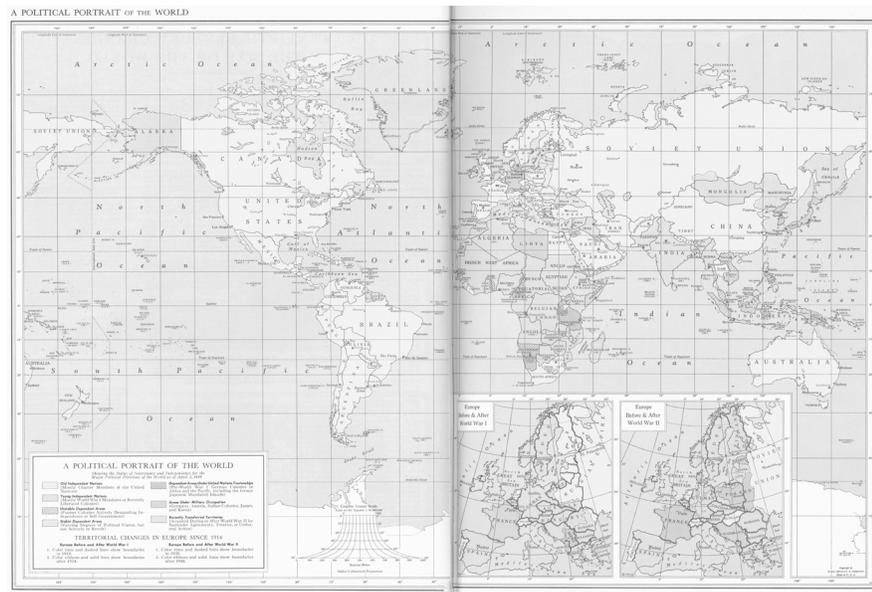


Figure 7. "A Political Portrait of the World" (1949). In Rand McNally's *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1949, xiv-xv (14 x 22 inches/35.5 x 56 cm). The atlas is prescient in noting that the "Portrait" "should also serve as an historical reference map with which to measure the political changes and developments which are still to come" (xiii). In Africa, the washed-out orange shading much of the continent represents "stable dependent areas" with "varying degrees of political unrest, but not actively in revolt." Washed-out orange with red diagonal stripes indicates "dependent areas, under United Nations Trusteeships" (e.g., Togo, Cameroon, South West Africa, Tanganyika), while lavender cautions "areas under military occupation" (e.g., Libya, Somaliland, Eritrea). On the other hand, sage green signals "young independent nations—mostly World War I mandates or recently liberated colonies" (e.g., Ethiopia) and yellow celebrates "old independent nations—mostly charter members of the United Nations" (e.g., Egypt, Liberia, Union of South Africa). Courtesy of the Rand McNally Collection, Newberry Library (folio Rand McNally Atlas C77 1949 copy 1: FMP 4858), and of Rand McNally and Company. (see page 76 for color version)

*"Snapshots of these changes are apparent in successive editions of Rand McNally's Cosmopolitan World Atlas. During the 1950s, the maps entitled 'Africa' show most of the continent still clothed in green, representing France, or 'carnation,' representing Britain. For Oden, the most obvious changes occurred in those countries originally shaded French green."*

*Cosmopolitan World Atlas* (Rand McNally 1949, xiv-xv), this map illustrates the profound changes that the First and Second World Wars had wrought upon Europe's political boundaries. (The "Europe before" and "Europe after" insets, bottom right, display angry red lines slashing through boldly colored countries.) But the map also displays the "dependent status" that continued to shackle much of Africa—depicted in washed-out orange—to its European colonizers. From 1950 on, however, growing African nationalism compelled the colonial powers to begin granting independence to many territories in North and Central Africa, and then, from the early 1960s on, to Algeria [1962] and to territories south of the Equator.

Snapshots of these changes are apparent in successive editions of Rand McNally's *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*. During the 1950s, the maps entitled "Africa" show most of the continent still clothed in green, representing France, or "carnation," representing Britain. For Oden, the most obvious changes occurred in those countries originally shaded French green. "There, it is the green (again) I think," she writes while contemplating the political revolutions that were already rendering her map out of date. Three years before she penned "The Map," the map of Africa in the 1958 *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* depicted as French those countries that would become autonomous that very year (1958) and independent in 1960 (Rand McNally 1958, 41) (fig. 8). "French West Africa" and "French Equatorial Africa" would have been prominent names on Oden's wall map. But the map of Africa in the 1962 *Cosmopolitan World Atlas* shows countries like Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Cameroon, Gabon, and the Central

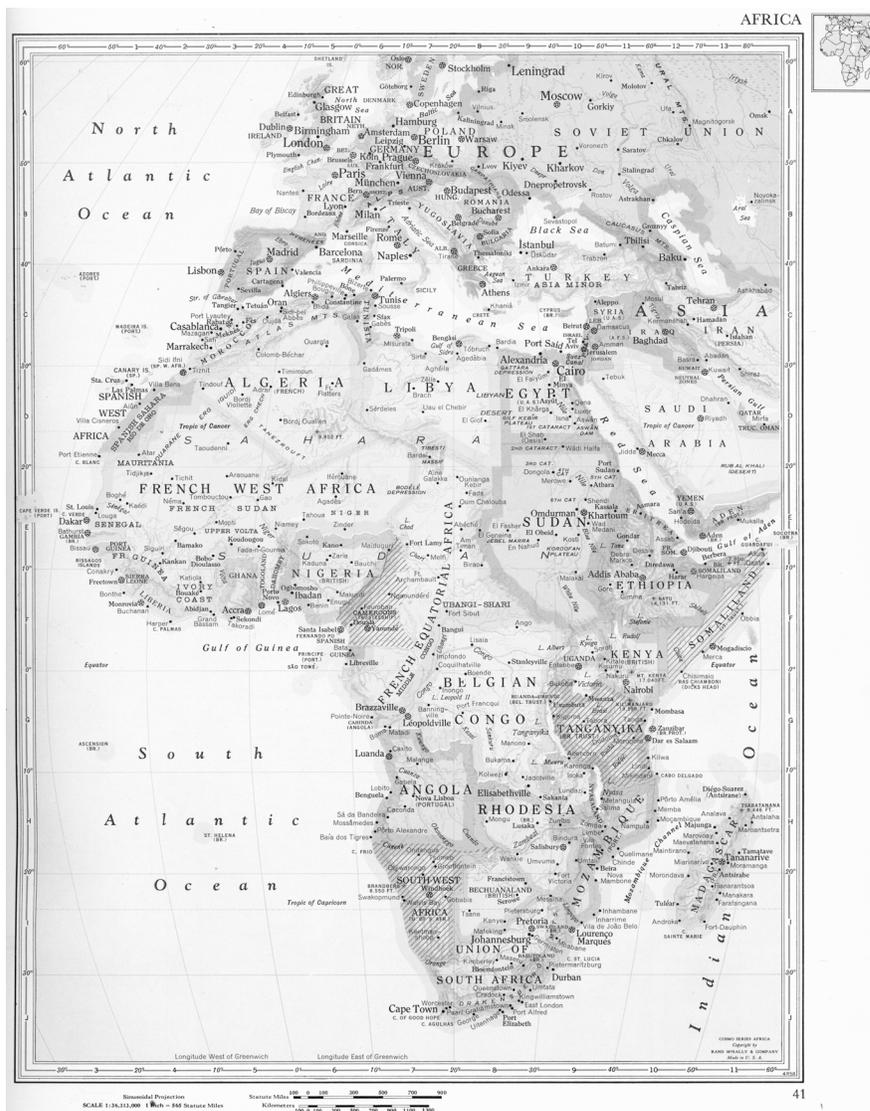


Figure 8. "Africa" (1958). In Rand McNally's *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1958, 41. Measuring 14 x 11 inches (35.5 x 28 cm), this sinusoidal projection is scaled 1:36,313,000, with one inch equaling 565 miles. Courtesy of the Rand McNally Collection, Newberry Library (folio Rand McNally Atlas .C77 1958 copy 3: FMP 4859), and of Rand McNally and Company. (see page 77 for color version)

African Republic as independent and sporting their own colors (Rand McNally 1962b, 42) (fig. 9).

Because the British held onto most of their carnation-colored colonies into the 1960s and the Portuguese would only belatedly relinquish their purple-hued colonies in the 1970s, Oden views "green" as prophetic for Africa. The color presages the "spring" of African independence, a "fever of the mind . . . which in its / course will blaze the length of continent as / now it fires breadth." Oden even imagines the continent as offering a social paradigm for the future. And she invests that "broad head"—her own as well as Africa's (fig. 10)—with the same hope that would give birth to the Organization of African Unity in 1963: the dream that the entire continent would someday achieve unity. Having revealed her biases and desires, in her final lines Oden makes us confront our own: "And who will say it / won't? Not the mapmaker, surely, who must / exact truth. Not I, high hoisting same to / state whirlwind. Will you, because you might

*"... Oden views 'green' as prophetic for Africa."*

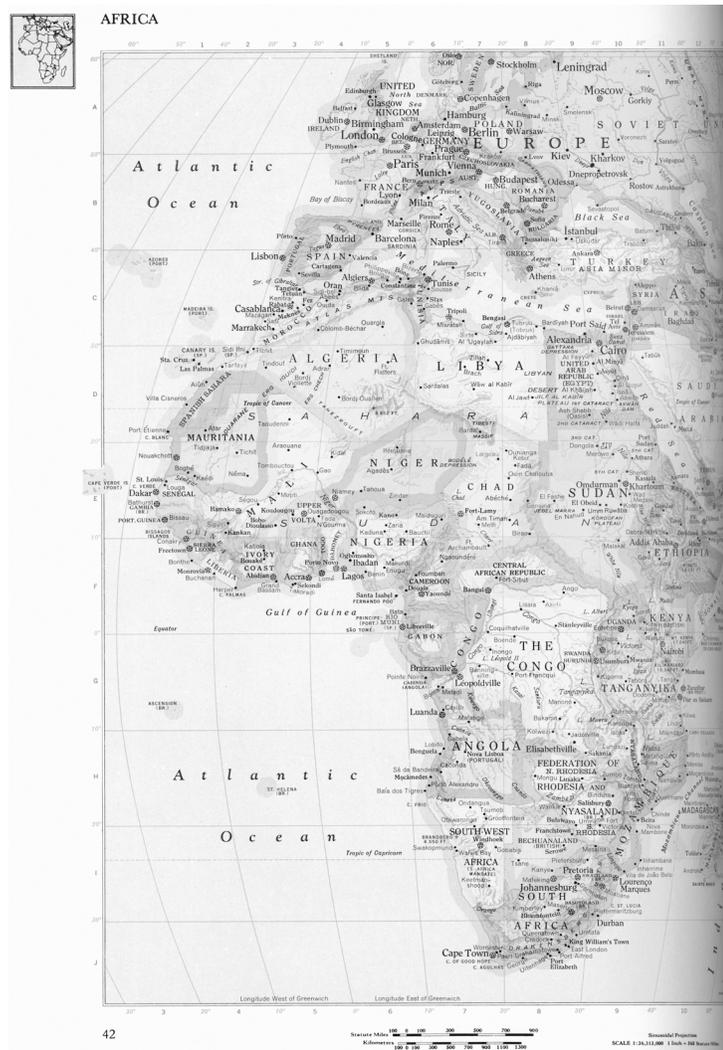


Figure 9. "Africa" (1962). In Rand McNally's *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1962, 42. Measuring 14 x 11 inches (35.5 x 28 cm), this sinusoidal projection is scaled 1:36,313,000, with one inch equaling 565 miles. Courtesy of the Rand McNally Collection, Newberry Library (folio Rand McNally Atlas .C77 1962, copy 2: FMP 4860), and of Rand McNally and Company. (see page 78 for color version)

not / particularly care to see it so?" Raising the map of Africa to affirm that continent's heady changes, Oden ends with a question—not of confusion, as in Bishop's "The Map"—but of challenge.

#### Aftermath

*"The Cosmopolitan World Map became so popular that in 1959 Rand McNally began offering a 'giant' version too."*

The *Cosmopolitan World Map* became so popular that in 1959 Rand McNally began offering a "giant" version too. Transparently coded "GCW901," it measured 50 by 76 inches (127 x 193 cm) and cost between \$4.95, for a paper sheet, and \$85.00, for map board backing mounted in a wood frame (Rand McNally 1959, back cover: Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 53). In 1963, the year that Oden's "The Map" was first published, a reduced version of the map also made its appearance. A mere 21 by 32 inches (53.5 x 81.5 cm), it bore the code 4908 and joined the giant and regular editions, now labeled 4910 and 4912, respectively (Rand McNally 1963, 22: Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 54).



Figure 10. *Africa as Two Heads* (1980). Front cover of the British edition of Ingoapele Madingoane's poetry collection *Africa: My Beginning*, London: Rex Collings, 1980. Although the cover artist is unnamed, Madingoane describes Egypt as the head of Africa in his epic poem "Black Trial," which occupies most of the collection (15-16).

Meanwhile, even as the giant version the *Cosmopolitan World Map* disappeared, the regular 34 by 52 inch version morphed by 1975 into map 21912-X (Rand McNally 1975, 22: Wing, Series 4, Box 6, folder 58) and by 1986 into map 813161-5 (Rand McNally 1986, 18: Wing, Series 4, Box 6, folder 65). The reduced version, now coded 83437-C (with frame) or 80712-C (for fiberboard backing), appeared as late as spring 1994 in the "Rand McNally Gift Atlas," the last catalog to be found in the Rand McNally Company Records at the Newberry (Rand McNally 1994: Wing, Series 4, Box 6, folder 65). Today, Rand McNally's bestselling "Classic Edition World Wall Map" is centered on *Africa*. Not only are the continents presented whole, but the map's Gall stereographic projection also minimizes distortion and shows them "truer to their relative size" (Rand McNally Store [Online]).

As for the *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*, once "touted as the most expensive atlas in history" (Schulten 2001, 229) after its initial publication had been delayed ten years because of World War II, it too underwent several revisions, including one in 1962, and continued to be published until 1996.

The 1957 National Geographic World Map, in turn, was so successful that it was reprinted in 1962 and 1963 (Buxbaum 1971, 256), even after the National Geographic Society put out a smaller 19 by 25 inch (48.5 x 63.5 cm) world map in November 1960 as part of its Atlas Series (1958-1968; Buxbaum 1971, 259, and also 234, 257-266). In February 1965, a different world map appeared. Measuring 29 1/2 by 49 1/2 inches (75 x 126 cm), it updated and replaced the 1957 map. Taking a cue from its rival, Rand

*"As for the Cosmopolitan World Atlas, once 'touted as the most expensive atlas in history' (Schulten 2001, 229) after its initial publication had been delayed ten years because of World War II, it too underwent several revisions, including one in 1962, and continued to be published until 1996."*

*"Today, not only are the National Geographic Society and its ever-popular magazine still going strong, but the Online Store also advertises a world map that, on first glance, looks remarkably similar in design to its fifty-year-old incarnation."*

*"Meanwhile, Oden's poems—'A Private Letter to Brazil' and 'The Map'—were reprinted in several anthologies between 1963 and 1974, the nineteenth printing of the revised American Negro Poetry anthology having been reissued as recently as 1996."*

McNally, the National Geographic Society offered an enlarged 47 by 68 inch (119.5 x 172.5 cm) version of its 1965 map—just a bit smaller than the "giant" Cosmopolitan World Map that had been available for the past six years. Another update came in December 1970 when a world map, backed by a "Pollution Painting," was issued as part of the Wall Map Series (Buxbaum 1971, 268). Today, not only are the National Geographic Society and its ever-popular magazine still going strong, but the Online Store also advertises a world map that, on first glance, looks remarkably similar in design to its fifty-year-old incarnation (National Geographic Online Store 2008).

Meanwhile, Oden's poems—"A Private Letter to Brazil" and "The Map"—were reprinted in several anthologies between 1963 and 1974, the nineteenth printing of the revised *American Negro Poetry* anthology having been reissued as recently as 1996. But neither in her 1952 debut, *The Naked Frame*, nor in her three subsequent collections has Oden showcased her thoughts on Africa, or on maps. By the 1960s, too many other poets had begun focusing on Africa; and Oden, unlike many contemporary black poets, never felt comfortable being a "crusader" (Oden, telephone conversation with author, August 9, 1995) or writing "off-the-skin" (Oden 1978a, 8). Oden never visited Africa or South America; half a century after she wrote her map poems, the online "Map of Freedom" shows most of South America in green—the color of freedom—but most of Africa in the yellow of "partially free" or the glaring purple of "not free" (Freedomhouse.org, 2007). Nor did Oden correspond with Bishop after 1956, although she met her mentor briefly some fifteen years later (Oden, telephone conversation with author, August 9, 1995). Nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in Poetry (Galbus 2006), Oden's 1978 collection *Resurrections* dealt instead with the unsolved double-murder, in their Washington, D.C. home, of her eldest sister, a physician, and her eighty-seven-year-old mother (Oden 1978a, 26; Kessler 1980). Her 1980 volume *The Tie that Binds* also focused on family.

Then came twenty-three years of silence until *Appearances* surfaced, full of love poems and Oden's unabashed joy at rediscovering her poetic voice at the age of eighty. This article celebrates Gloria Oden's "return" and offers tribute to a generous, private woman who once trained as a lawyer, then went on to become a poet, an editor for scientific institutes and publishers, a professor of English and creative writing, an excavator of early African-American lives, a former Vice President of the Poetry Society of America, the surviving voice of a proud American family, and a superb reader of maps.

#### NOTES

1. Elizabeth Bishop's "The Map" (copyright 1979, 1983 by Alice Helen Methfessel; reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC) originally appeared in Winslow 1935 (78-79), a collection introduced by Marianne Moore. "The Map" later appeared in Bishop 1946, 1; Bishop 1955, 3; Bishop 1969, 3; and the definitive Bishop 1983, 3. Bishop's poem and commentary are also online at <http://www.geography.wisc.edu/histcart/broadsht/brdsht5.html>.

2. In a telephone conversation on May 17, 2001, Mark Strand told me that he had composed "The Map" in 1960.

3. J[ay] Saunders Redding—the esteemed African-American writer, professor, and literary critic who also helped promote Oden's early career—provided much of the detail in this paragraph (see Oden 1978a, 9-21). However, in regard to Oden's composition of her poems, owing Bishop's *North*

& *South*, and recollection of Bishop's communication with Moore—these details come from telephone conversations I had with Oden on August 9, 1995, and September 14, 2007, or from an email from her on March 3, 2008.

4. The same year "A Private Letter to Brazil" appeared in print, Oden's poem "With Love to Miss Marianne Moore" was published in *The Muse* (Autumn 1959). Shortly before her residency at Yaddo, Oden met Moore at a writer's conference and began corresponding with her. Moore had written her only map poem, "Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns," in 1924—a decade before Bishop composed "The Map" (see Haft 2003, 28-64, 77-80).

5. "A Private Letter to Brazil," copyright Gloria Oden, reprinted by permission of Gloria Oden. The poem was originally published in *The Galley Sail Review* (Oden 1959, 7). With minor changes, the poem reappeared in several anthologies, including Bontemps (1963 and 1974, 158-159), Hayden (1967, 185), Hughes and Bontemps (1970, 383-384), and Raff (1973, 32). Our text derives from Hughes 1964 (91). With Oden's consent, however, I have modified the 1964 text by removing the capital "f" in "Farthest," the initial word of line 16, and by changing "meets" to "meet" in line 19 to preserve the rhyme scheme and the agreement between verb and dual subject. (Portions of my critique on Oden's "A Private Letter to Brazil" appear in Haft 2007.)

6. "... As When Emotion Too Far Exceeds its Cause" first appeared in *The Canadian Forum* (Oden 1959, 13), and was reprinted—with Bishop's name now inserted after the title to identify the quotation's source—in Bontemps (1963 and 1974, 160-161), Hayden (1967, 183-184), and Bell (1972, 96-97). The poem concerns flight—physical, emotional, and meta-physical. In it, Oden focuses on birds and angels, who trust their wings, so we're told, though Oden suspects that only air supports them. She ends by describing a dead bird, who "in love's celestial venturing / . . . once trusted air / that plunged me down. / Yes, I!")

7. All the National Geographic Society maps discussed in this paper may be viewed online (see Maps.com. 2008).

8. The legend offers the following symbols: tan arrows for prevailing winds, red arrows for warm currents, blue arrows for cold currents. Black numbers indicate elevations in feet; blue numbers, "depth curves and soundings in fathoms." Oden uses "feet" instead of "fathoms" to satisfy meter as well as both internal and external rhyme.

9. "The Map," copyright Gloria Oden, reprinted by permission of Gloria Oden. The poem subsequently appeared in Hughes and Bontemps (1970, 385-387), Bell (1972, 97-99), and Harlan (1973, 132-134). With Oden's consent, "covenant" has been changed to "covenant," at line 53; and a comma has been inserted after "let's say," at line 56.

10. During our telephone conversation on August 9, 1995, Oden revealed that a small map of Madagascar also had graced the walls of her apartment. While a graduate student at New York University, she had purchased the map after discovering that in the eighteenth century the island was the original home of Phillis Wheatley, the first known African-American poet. Oden's Madagascar map has long since disappeared, along with the National Geographic and Rand McNally world maps.

11. Researching this paper has revealed at least one clue to the opaque code NYC901: namely, that “90” means “world map.” Beginning in December 1937-1938, the earliest mention of codes in any of the Rand McNally catalogs housed at the Newberry, several world maps—no matter how centered or on what projection—display “90” in their code. (See, for instance, the list “Maps of the World” on page 21 of “Rand McNally Maps, Atlases, Globes, Guides” [Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 50]; for this catalog’s probable date, see Figure 5, below.) The rest is speculation. “NYC” obviously means something different from the lonely “N” that identifies Rand McNally roadmaps made in 1932. (For roadmap codes, see Koenker 2002a.) Instead, “NYC” probably indicates the New York City office, which had been open since around 1933; and, more specifically, the “drafting rooms in Lower Manhattan” (McNally 1956, 19) that may have played a prominent role in the map’s creation and/or production. Finally, “1” could refer to “the year the base map was drafted” (Koenker 2002b) since “1941” is the latest date that appears on the *Cosmopolitan World Map* owned by the author. On that (perhaps earliest) edition of the map, “1941” can be found in areas most recently occupied during the war; for example, under the black capitals of “Italian West Africa,” the typographer has written—in a difficult-to-read red—“occupied by the British, 1941.”

12. Rand McNally 1942, 34, through Rand McNally 1962, 37 (Wing, Series 4, Box 4, folder 47, through Box 5, folder 53). The *Catalog of Copyright Entries* lists July 16, 1942, as the copyright date of the “Rand McNally *Cosmopolitan World on Mercator’s Projection*” (F17511), the 713<sup>th</sup> map entry listed since January 1, 1942 (Library of Congress 1942).

13. All three Rand McNally wall maps at the New York Public Library are the same size and have the same code as the Newberry’s. One is identical to it, though not cloth-mounted and somewhat deeper in color, having perhaps been exposed less to light. In terms of Africa’s political divisions, the other two resemble one another *and* the double-page map in the 1958 *Cosmopolitan World Atlas*. Moreover, the date “Sept. 1958” is handwritten across the legend on one of these two: namely, the map made by Rand McNally for the American Foreign Insurance Association and, hence, the only one of the three not titled “Rand McNally *Cosmopolitan World on Mercator’s Projection*” (New York Public Library, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division: World Backlog Catalog—Uncatalogued Maps, B-260).

14. Dating these catalogs is tricky. Catalog 520 has no copyright date or datable code; however, an approximate year is offered by the handwritten “sent 1946” on the front cover of the Newberry’s copy (Wing, Series 4, Box 4, folder 49). Although Catalog 553 also has no copyright date or datable code, it is followed by similar catalogs that do (e.g., Cat.554, 1954; Cat.555, 1955; Cat.557, 1957 (Wing, Series 4, Box 5, folder 52). The earliest educational catalog featuring the *Cosmopolitan World Map* is Catalog 508, “Rand McNally School Maps, Globes & Atlases.” On page 13, “NYC901A” is offered as an available map measuring 48 x 63 inches (122 x 160 cm), the largest map with this code prior to 1959. Catalog 508 could date anywhere from 1945 to 1948, since Catalog 503 was printed in 1942, and a letter in Catalog 505 indicates that its listed prices would change effective August 1, 1943 (Wing, Series 4, Box 4, folder 47).

15. See, for instance, Lobban 1997 (32) for the 1884-1885 map made in Leipzig and “exemplifying the cartography of Africa following the Berlin Congress.”

My research gained enormously from Gloria Oden’s memory, enthusiasm, and generosity. I am also hugely indebted to the staff of the Newberry Library, in particular, to Patrick Morris and John Powell for the hours they devoted to this project. To those in the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Library, especially Alice Hudson, Nancy Kandoian, and Matt Knutzen from the Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division. To Hunter College’s Norman Clarius, magician of interlibrary loan; Jennifer Jaiswal, Steve Giovino, and Shad Ali, computer wizards of the Technology Resource Center; and the Thomas Hunter Honors students in my “Maps and Twentieth-Century Literature” seminar at Hunter College (Fall 2006). To Matthew H. Edney, Director of the History of Cartography Project at University of Wisconsin-Madison, who not only invited me to submit the History of Cartography broadsheet for 2007, but also helped track down the 1957 National Geographic Society world map. And to Fritz Kessler and Jim Anderson, Editor and Associate Editor (respectively) of *Cartographic Perspectives*, and the three reviewers whose suggestions for expanding the scope of this work I hope to take up in my book. In addition, a Fall 2006 Presidential Travel Award from Hunter College of the City University of New York helped fund the presentation of an early version of this paper to the North American Cartographic Information Society (see Haft 2006). Hunter College also provided the venue for my presentation to the Society of Woman Geographers on March 20, 2008, and granted the sabbatical leave in which to begin my research.

This paper is dedicated to Gloria Oden—with admiration and affection.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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