THE BRITISH LIBRARY

BRITISH TRAVELLERS REPORT ON THE WHITE CONQUEST OF THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI WEST 1865-1905

by

R. A. BURCHELL
Director of the David and Mary Eccles Centre and Professor of American Studies at the University of Manchester

First Annual Lecture July 1993

THE DAVID AND MARY ECCLES CENTRE
FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

ISBN 0 7123 4403 9

It ***was*** somewhat surprising that when Oscar Wilde returned from his visit to North America in 1882 he did not immediately publish his ***Impressions*** which had to wait twenty-four years before being printed, and then, supposedly, in Sunderland. British and Irish writers had been hurrying into print on their return from North America since the eighteenth century and by the end of the nineteenth were assured of the market for their reminiscences.[1] You may recall a characteristic passage of Wilde's eventually published work, where he writes of his visit to Leadville. Leadville, he says, had ***'the reputation of being the roughest [city in the world], …[where] every man carries a revolver. I was told that if I went there they would be sure to shoot me or my travelling manager. I wrote and told them that nothing that they could do to my travelling manager would intimidate me.'"***[2]

In this passage, unknown to himself, Wilde was performing a cultural service. He was helping to establish one of the great North American myths, that out west weak social institutions were counterbalanced by rugged, self-reliant individuals, through whose efforts, sometimes with pick-axe, sometimes with plough, often with the revolver, a great experiment was conducted and realised. He also helps to give us three themes for this lecture. First, that images of the North American Far West, often believed in the late nineteenth century to be the most quintessentially American region of the continent, were produced, reproduced and distributed by non-North Americans. Second, that levels of accuracy were variable, with some visitors taking great pains to amass factual detail and to come to an individual and objective view and others ready to repeat what had been said before them without the slightest questioning of assumptions. The third theme is that gathering and analysing accurate information is vital to ensure that we are as well-informed as possible on the manners and customs, goals and activities, beliefs and values, of other societies especially of North America, which has always had a special place in the British imagination.

The volume of publications on North America in Great Britain and Ireland in the late nineteenth century suggests that there was then a strong sense of a single North Atlantic community. Though patterns of trans-Atlantic migration were changing, drawing in increasing numbers of Poles, Italians, Russian Jews and Slavs, increasingly diversifying the North American populations, it was still possible in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s to think of North America as a cultural adjunct of the British Isles, an obvious place for the British to visit and interpret. Furthermore, after 1865, steamships and an ever-growing railroad network made travel far less hazardous than heretofore, while a very satisfactory exchange rate of five dollars to the pound took the edge off expense. Consequently, the late nineteenth century became the golden age of travel to and through North America, travel in a sense not met with today, leisurely visits that could last for a year or more, while the traveller exhausted attractions and gathered material for the often far from slim volumes to be published on return.

North America was particularly attractive in the late nineteenth century as it seemed balanced between two ages. First, travellers were drawn to a rapidly disappearing past, symbolised in part by the parlous state of the Native American and the buffalo alike. Second, travellers went to see the future, to discover where their societies might be tending, and in many cases to warn very strongly against allowing some tendencies to appear at home, even as contemporary observers visiting Los Angeles do.

As I have said, visits to North America after 1865 became simpler to organise than ever before. They were also safer. As Henry Morford in his ***Short-Trip Guide to America (United States and Dominion of Canada),*** 7th edn.1877, told readers, ***'steam-transit between the two continent'*** had become '***so rapid and reliable that the ocean-passage .. ./was/ little more than that of a ferry.'*** It was a simple matter, his Guide said, to ***'avoid any considerable anxiety as to the voyage being a prosperous***

one, by first remembering that more than an hundred runs are made without a single accident, and more than five hundred without the total loss of a vessel.'[3] One of the great carriers of the day, the Inman Line, added its reassurance pointing to the care it habitually took '***to avoid northern latitudes, icebergs and collisions.'[4]***

And there was a further reason why travellers could depart with a light heart. It was now an easy matter to arrange both Accident and Life Assurance to steady the nerve. As today, travel agents and insurance companies were intimately connected. Morford's Guide, perhaps understandably, spoke warmly of one company in particular. ***'In intimate connection with the subject of Life insurance',*** it said, ***'comes that of Accident Insurance, in which detail.. .America offers one of the noblest examples, in the Travelers' Insurance Company, of Hartford, Connecticut'.*** Nervous readers might not be entirely delighted to hear that '***The Travelers (sic) has been for years doing a noble work, meeting with very great and deserved success, and paying out immense sums to the families of those killed by accident, or to the disabled...'[5]*** But it was now possible to be well-prepared.

It was also possible now to prepare oneself for departure by reading Morford's Guide on how to behave at embarkation. ***'If possible'*** said the Guide, ***'make any extended tender farewells earlier and elsewhere than on the crowded deck of a steamer; at the last moment, when everybody is in the way of everybody else, when the officers naturally wish to throw overboard all the whiners, and when there is a probability of the grief of departure being added to by the worry of having wife, sister; child or friend tumbled into the river at the landing-stage, or dropped over between tender and steamer as the two separate.'[6]*** Departure should be decorous and controlled by forward planning.

Thereafter, Morford's Guide was also invaluable if firm on proper behaviour afloat. ***'Don***'t***,'*** it stressed, ***'attempt to "help" at any time, except in the rare event of an accident, and thus "keeping out of the way", without losing any chance of observation and enjoyment, secure the friendship of the officers, the respect of the crew, and the gratitude of all concerned'.[7]***

The well-advised would therefore act with restraint, and settle down with something like ***The Englishman's Guide Book to the United States & Canada, with Gazetteer of the Principal Hunting and Fishing Grounds,*** published by Longmans and in its seventh edition by 1880, to prepare themselves for life after landing. Here they might learn important details: that the Railroad House at Evanston, Wyoming, could offer accommodation for seventy-five guests at four dollars a night; or that Hamilton, Ontario, offered a choice of the Royal, charging three dollars or the Derby charging two. They could learn with satisfaction that ***'The fares by railway and steamer are less in America than in any other country';*** that ***'Fees to servants are rarely given, and do not form, as in Europe, an appreciable item in the travellers' expenses';*** and, perhaps disappointingly, that by 1880 the buffalo were ***'becoming rare, and as the express train passes through the old buffalo country after dark, it is hardly probable that the traveller will be able to procure even a distant view of this rapidly disappearing denizen of the prairies.'[8]***

But these Guidebooks were performing two roles simultaneously. They may have appeared to be offering factual knowledge but they were also preparing readers for what should be the proper reactions to North American culture and society, establishing in advance what and how the traveller would perceive. Take, for instance, the great topic of violence in the North American West already introduced by Wilde. By the 1870s guidebooks were telling the shipboard reader that in the past violence had unhappily reached extraordinary levels, but now the era of lawlessness was gone. As ***The Englishman's Guide Book*** said of Laramie, Wyoming: ***'Like all western railroad and mining towns of mushroom growth, this has had its dark days, its sunshine and storms. But the lawless characters that sapped the moral life of the community in its incipient stages were, by a few determined and well disposed men, summarily driven from the field. A steady and***

substantial prosperity has since attended this people, and now a more intelligent and refined population is not to be met within any similar western town.' One reason might be that ***'Die Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Catholics have elegant churches.'***[9]

The emphasis on past violence but a peaceful present is instructive. Twentieth century historians have laboured, largely in vain it seems to me, to show that the nineteenth century West was not, comparatively speaking, a violent place, but have been as much the victims of the nineteenth century desire to see a progress from disorder to order as the nineteenth century travellers were, whose repetitions helped establish the myth of disorder. Few, apart from land and other speculators who needed the accent put on present peacefulness to attract investors, were served by the falsification of history and many ***were*** misled.[10] It is worthwhile now looking at how a number of writers dealt with the theme of violence to make a simple point: understanding of the past as of the present requires accurate information, intelligently assessed. It was not and will not be forwarded by the repetitious promotion of unexamined prejudices.

You will recall the description of Laramie, Wyoming, I have just given. Isabella L. Bird, who published her ***A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*** in1881, described suspiciously comparable events that had taken place eight years earlier but in Cheyenne. Cheyenne when she was there was peaceful she said, but there had been ***'a perfect pandemonium'*** some time before. This had aroused a Vigilance Committee which had tried a number of the worst desperadoes ***'by a yet more summary process than a drumhead court-martial,'*** strung them up and buried them ignominiously. ***'I have,'.*** Bird reported, '***been told that 120 ruffians were disposed of in this way here in a single fortnight.'*** How purveyors of rope must have been pleased, but how Ms Bird was misleading her public.[11]

Now it is true there were Vigilance Committees in some western communities and they did hang a number of wrongdoers. But the numbers were small, certainly nowhere near those described by Bird; nor were bodies left hanging for long periods as described by another, and very prolific writer on the North American West, Paul Fountain, whose work, closely read, can suggest that the nearest he ever got to Cheyenne was Clapham. But according to him on a visit to the Californian mines in the 1850s ***'as we neared a place called "Dry Camp", we saw six "boys" hanging on one tree - the result of a trial by "Judge Lynch". '*** And if that was not enough, ' ***the road almost swarmed with travellers on their way up-country to the diggings, and before we cleared their track we passed several more corpses lying by the side of the road, having died apparently in duels or free-fights. All their companions had been in too much hurry to push on and secure a good claim to stop and bury them; or perhaps they were robbers who had been shot in self-defence by some wayfarers…'***

These exaggerations contained in his ***The Eleven Eaglets of the West,*** published perhaps instructively in the late year of 1906, only differ in degree from other descriptions of western lawlessness.[12] There were many ready to theorise on the matter without examining it including F. Barham Zincke, who when he was not writing on North America doubled as Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen. '***The fact is,'*** he wrote in l868, to become one o***f t***he founding fathers of his school of interpretation, ***'that the ordinary method of administering law is quite impracticable in a place where you can get no policemen, no constables, no lawyers, no juries, no jails, no judges; and where, if it were possible to get the apparatus of justice, it would be next to impossible to work it…'*** By contrast Lynch law, ***'is a system which has no officers or jails, which costs nothing, and is very terrifying to evildoers by the rapidity and certainty with which it acts, and the mystery with which it is involved.'***[13] The fact was, however, despite what the Chaplain thought, that almost the first act of every territorial and state legislature was to found a court system since it was imperative to defend both life and property and that complex legal systems arrived with the first settlers. Nor did

newcomers leave their notions of right and wrong at the Mississippi, sinking gratefully into a guiltless barbarism.[14] Most white men living in the late nineteenth century west were non-violent and could hardly have practised the code Zincke went on to outline without massive depopulation. Zincke, fearlessly overstating, wrote: ***'Every man in the West goes always armed'*** as ***'it is one of the most imperative of the laws of Western society, that, if a man insults you in any way, you are bound then and there to shoot him dead. Society requires you to do it, and if you do not, you will be shot yourself...'***[15]

Someone appears to have seen the Reverend coming, or at least told him what he wanted to hear. Another visitor who appears to have been ready to believe all he heard was Major W Shepherd, R.E., who in his ***Prairie Experiences in Handling Cattle and Sheep,*** published in 1884, found it easy to repeat the story told by persons met on the road to Weeksville, Montana.

'***Weeksville is very lively,'*** travellers told him. ***'Nine men had been shot or hung by the Vigilants during the past fortnight'.*** William A Bell in his ***New Tracks in North America*** published in 1869, also felt impelled to suggest a lawless West in its southern region, and reported that in Trinidad, New Mexico, all was far from normal. ***'There are,'*** he said, ***'no police, no magistrates, no military; so the people take the law into their own hands, and deal out summary justice to all offenders. Horse-stealing and cattle-lifting are punished, as a matter of course, by death.'*** [16]

Some travel writers appear to have deliberately extended the bounds of credibility, perhaps to see how credulous the audience was. Francis Francis, Jr, in his ***Saddle and Moccasin*** of 1884, spoke of public reaction to Judge Lynch as follows: ***'A jury of fat store-keepers, saloon proprietors, and rancheros, without romance or remorse in them, but all more or less interested in preserving unimpeded the rolling of the dollar, sits in judgement over [the accused],... and if the case admits of it, and the offenders are too poor to buy themselves off, glibly sentences them to be hung by the neck until dead.'*** The tone of western society, he implied, could be judged from the fact that ***'the populace, instead of rising en masse to rescue the heroes, as might have been the case formerly, rush en masse to buy copies of that journal which gives the most intimate and repulsive details of their execution***.'[17]

Isabella Bird apparently had no problem in recounting the story of the man who had ridden through Truckee, California, only the evening before she had arrived, with a chopped up human body in a sack behind his saddle; or in stating categorically that ***'At the mining towns...(of Colorado) nobody is thought anything of who has not killed a man.'*** She reported how, ***'[Her landladies had] had a boarder; only fifteen, who thought he could not be anything till he had shot somebody, and they gave an absurd account of the lad dodging about with a revolver; and not getting up courage enough to insult any one, till at last lie hid himself in the stable and shot the first Chinaman who entered.'***[18] Conlon South, in his ***Out West: Or; from London to Salt lake City and Back,*** 1884, also suggested that violence extended to the young. He remembered reading '***of two little boys who quarrelled over a game of marbles. One drew a revolver and killed the other - the elder was only nine.'*** This led him to observe: '***Such is life in the far West: the very children seem*** to ***be educated in the use of firearms, and impregnated with the shooting mania.'***[19]

But it is Paul Fountain who produces the most grandiose, inflated accounts of Western lawlessness, with veritable armies of dangerous villains criss-crossing the West, creating havoc and destruction in such amounts as to make it commonplace, ***'injuries from bullet and knife*** in Idaho, he wrote, ***'are of such common occurrence that nobody notices them unless they terminate fatally.'*** Society was plagued by '***the loafing, worthless rascals, who haunt the neighbourhood of every mine, and wander from ranch to ranch, living by alternate stealing and begging (and) who are at the bottom of all the mischief. Fights between them and the miners and cowboys are of daily occurrence, resulting from attempts of the rogues to cheat - in some form - the honest men.'*** In Wyoming, he could report, the situation

was far worse, for ***'Felons come hither from cities and towns many hundreds of miles distant; and every now and then they organise their raids, like the Indians, come for thin bodies, and do much mischief to the honest settlers. Even as long ago as the time of my first journey in this region,'*** he said, '***it was asserted at the settlements on the Green River that there were several hundred outlawed scoundrels lurking in the bad-lands.'*** Anyone who has visited northern Wyoming or can recall that in the 1870s there was a certain Native American presence in the area, might wonder how these desperadoes kept themselves alive, but Fountain's purpose is not to give information but to excite wonder. In speaking of Montana, supposedly in the 1860s, he surpasses himself. Here, '***Men at the placer mines were openly seized in broad daylight, and their gains taken from them. If they resisted, they were Derringered or Bowie-knifed without remorse or mercy. The few soldiers stationed in the territory, most of whom were German ragamuffins, were engaged in watching the Indians; but when a small party of them came up in response to an appeal from the respectable portion of the miners, the rowdies set them at utter defiance, and so overawed them that, a spectator told me, he saw one scoundrel wipe his nose in the long-skirted uniform-coats of several of them, a deliberate insult they were too weak to resist.'***[20]

Fountain is possibly too easy a target for those hoping for reasoned, serious-minded description, but he symbolises the majority approach of nineteenth century writing on the West, particularly in his stress on institutional weakness.

Fortunately, there are alternatives to Fountain, though perhaps fewer than would be liked. One writer who took a quite different view of the state of Western societies was Wallis Nash who concluded ***Oregon: There and Back in 1877,*** by writing, ***'Although of course there are many rough customers about, disregard for and defiance of law seem very rare. Even in the wildest part the State's writ runs.'***[21] And Maurice O'Connor Morris, late deputy Postmaster General of Jamaica who rambled in the Rocky Mountains with a visit to the Gold Fields of Colorado in 1864, was forced to write:

'From what I had always heard of the "rowdy proclivities" of dwellers in gold regions, I expected that Denver would have proved no exception, considering its origin and its remoteness from the soidisant regions of civilization; but I confess that since my arrival - though that period embraces the great American carnival, the 4th of July - I have seen nothing approaching to turbulence or disturbance of any kind: indeed, I have not seen a drunken man yet, which is saying a great deal for a country where "smiling" is the general rule, and where the means of intoxication are so ready and so cheap; in fine, I think the famous despatch may be parodied into "Order reigns in Denver City".'[22]

It is interesting, however, that even he cannot believe that the gold-seekers are personally law-abiding and feels they must have been forced to be so. Almost inevitably he has to write:

'In the earlier days of the town, no doubt, there were many scenes of violence and homicide enacted, and horse-stealing, the great crime of the West, was very rife; but when the evil became intolerable, "vigilance committees" arose, and dealt so sternly and summarily with the criminals, that the slower process of law is sufficient for the requirements of society, and vindicates the majesty of justice whenever such majesty is supposed to be outraged.'[23]

Paradoxically there was one kind of violence in the West which most travellers ignored or misunderstood and that was the violent relations between incoming whites and Native Americans. It is, unfortunately, almost impossible to show that the British traveller had a better or more objective understanding of what was happening to the Native American or how the situation could be improved; partly of course because the problem of how to mediate between two hostile communities was insoluble, and partly because British travellers very quickly came

to adopt the white American view that the only answer was the disappearance of the Native American. As Isabella Bird put it:

'The Americans will never solve the Indian problem till the Indian is extinct. They have treated them after a fashion which has intensified their treachery and "devilry" as enemies, and as friends reduces them to a degraded pauperism, devoid of the very first elements of civilisation. The only difference between the savage and the civilised Indian is that the latter carries firearms and gets drunk on whisky. The Indian Agency has been a sink of fraud and corruption; it is said that barely thirty per cent of the allowance ever reaches those for whom it is voted; and the complaints of shoddy blankets, damaged flour, and worthless firearms are universal. "To get rid of the Injuns" is the phrase used everywhere. Even their "reservations" do not escape seizure practically; for if gold "breaks out" on them they are "rushed", and their possessors are either compelled to accept land farther west or are shot off and driven off. One of the surest agents in their destruction is vitriolised whisky. An attempt has recently been made to cleanse the Augean stable of the Indian Department, but it has met with signal failure, the usual result in America of every effort to purify the official atmosphere.'[24]

Lord Russell of Killowen in his ***Diary of a Visit to the United States of America and Canada*** in 1883, reported that in the Canadian West the Native Americans were ***'falling away (but not very rapidly) before the advance of what the Whites call civilization,'*** so there, perhaps, disappearance was bringing the solution. He saw some possibility of survival through the mixing of the races, for as he put it '***To a slight extent (Native Americans) ... are absorbed by the white population; and, as half-breeds some of them rise to power and distinction. Indeed the present Prime Minister of the Province of Manitoba-Mr Knockway - is a half-breed. But this did not seem to be the general fate***.'[25]

British travellers helped create the image of the Native American in the later nineteenth century in part by ignoring cause and stressing consequence. Native Americans were savage, ignorant, dirty, unable to cope. Isabella Bird was hardly extreme in her description of what she called the Digger Indians.

'***They are perfect savages, without any aptitude for even aboriginal civilisation, and are altogether the most degraded of the ill-fated tribes which are dying out before the white races... The clothing of both sexes was a ragged, dirty combination of coarse woollen cloth and hide, the moccasins being unornamented. They were all hideous and filthy, swarming with vermin... A few had fishing-tackle, but the bystanders said that they lived almost entirely upon grasshoppers. They were a most impressive incongruity in the midst of the tokens of an omnipotent*** civilisation.'[26]

Wallis Nash used very similar language in describing the Native American she saw while also crossing Nevada by train: ***'at every station',*** he wrote, ***'some of the miserable squaws and children came to the train to beg; while their lords and masters, in the cast-off clothes of the white men, with a gaudy blanket draped round the shoulders of each one, squatted under the shadow of the station fence, or lounged along the platform... The dirty, haggard, unkempt squaws had no English words to beg with, and mutely held up their hands, sometimes with a battered meat-tin or broken pot, for the fragments of bread and meat and half-eaten fruit which were thrown to them from the windows of the train.'***[27]

According to William Bell, the Araphoes he met in 1867-8 were little better, the women reminding him of the witches in Macbeth, while Russell's view of the Crow women was little different.[28] There is little hint in British travellers' descriptions of the remnants of the northern tribes, of the noble savage that had captured the European imagination in the eighteenth century.

Most British visitors accepted the local white view that the Native Americans were their own worst enemies, in that they were deliberately refusing the benefits of white civilisation. As Major Shepherd said: ***'However we may feel on the subject before entering on a Western life, one soon joins the opinion of the majority that the Indian is in the way; he is, however, doing his best and removing himself as quickly as the least considerate could fairly ask of him.'***[29] The Native Americans' major problem, it was argued, stemmed from their refusal to give up the life of the hunter-gatherer and to take up that of the pioneer farmer, but some doubted whether Native Americans were capable of becoming farmers. William Bell felt that, '***A few of these people can be taught to attend to cattle; but it is a hopeless task to try to teach them agricultural pursuits. The hatred of labour is in their blood, and it cannot be eradicated: their extinction therefore is only a matter of time.'*** [30] Reginald Aldridge admitted that the Native Americans, ***'can hardly be expected, after so many centuries of wild and unfettered existence, to overcome their hereditary instincts and settle down to earn an honest livelihood with the sweat of their brow,'*** but he did not think therefore they should be allowed to retain their old ways. Rather, as he asked rhetorically, '***Why should not the American people be allowed to utilise the land...?***[31]

Wallis Nash, visiting an Oregon reservation, reported that he asked the agent, Mr Bagley, ***'whether he had succeeded in influencing the Indians much. He told us that he found the greatest difficulty in getting them to settle to any pursuit; that some thirty or forty of them had little farms, but only one of them had taken to cultivating the ground well. The majority of the men employ themselves in horse-raising and selling when they are at home; many of them go about hiring themselves to this farmer or that for odd farming jobs'*** [32]

The obvious result of the destruction of Native American economics was the dependence of Native Americans by the latter part of the nineteenth century on the federal government and on local whites. As Lord Russell of Killowen reported of the Crow, they were ***'practically pensioners of the United States Government which (granted) them .... (a) large reserve and besides supplies them with food. They do no regular work. The reserve is little better than a poor-house from which they will assuredly be expelled as soon as the necessity if not the convenience of the all-grasping white man requires it.'***[33]

Some felt uneasy when faced with begging Native Americans and reacted by convincing themselves that all Native Americans were thieves. Major Shepherd recorded that, '***The Indians constantly visited our camp, and were very impudent and persistent beggars; our main dread was lest they should steal cups, or knives, or articles we could not easily replace.'***

Indeed his suspicion led to embarrassment for, missing a bag, he accused the visitors of theft. In response, he writes, ***'a line of some ancient and smoke-grimed crones...soon found the bag, which had been carried out of camp by a dog or cayote (sic), who had been attracted by a piece of jerked meat within. Our faces were accordingly covered with shame for our wrongful accusation, and the old ladies let us have an expression of their views on our conduct. We immediately distributed biscuits and coffee, and made peace. It was abominable on our part to suspect them; but'*** he rationalised, ***'if the nobility of the land enjoy a doubtful character; are dirty, unkempt, bundled in rags, and sit around your camp-fire chattering after you have all gone to bed, the suspicion naturally follows.'***[34]

There were some who managed to retain an independent view of what dependency was doing to the Native American. James Aitken, in his ***From the Clyde to California*** (1882), reported of Native Americans he saw at Evanston, Utah, that they ***'did not beg, but there was vacant stare in their countenances which told its own tale; when anything was offered them, they took it as if with reluctance, and turned their faces away, putting one very much in mind of the look of a dog to which you had offered a large piece of bread.'***[35] Robert Louis Stevenson in his ***Across the Plains*** (1879), made a

similar point but added moral indignation. He went west by emigrant train but saw as he wrote ***'no wild or independent Indian; indeed, I hear that such avoid the neighbourhood of the train; but now and again at way stations, a husband and wife and a few children, disgracefully dressed out with the sweepings of civilization, came forth and stared upon the emigrants. The silent stoicism of their conduct, and the pathetic degradation of their appearance, would have touched any thinking creature, but my fellow-passengers danced and jested round them with a truly Cockney baseness. I was ashamed for the thing we call civilization. We should carry upon our consciences so much, at least, of our forefathers' misconduct as we continue to profit by ourselves.'***[36]

Perhaps reflecting something of the views of men like Aitken and Stevenson, British writing did help the concept of the noble savage to survive in its descriptions of the Native Americans of the southwest who were still successfully repelling white incursions into the 1880s. Undefeated, they could still appear noble, if not entirely attractive, as William Bell's descriptions of the Papagos will suggest: ***'As a race, they are the finest specimens of man, physically, I have ever seen. On one occasion I met five of them at a ranche, and not one of the party measured less than six feet two inches. If they were not so very dark in complexion, their features would be pleasing, for they have the steady, intelligent eye, and straightforward manners of their more northern brethren, the Pimas.'*** And the Pimas, for Bell were as different ***'as light from darkness'*** from the northern Plains ***I***ndians.[37]

Francis Francis Jr. eulogized the Apache in similar terms: ***'Superior in endurance and physique to any other Indians in the States, ... in intellectual power, prudence, subtlety, and tactical skill, they are probably unrivalled, the world over, amongst savage races***.' They were ***'wise as serpents, prudent as elephants, well armed, and intimately acquainted with every canon, cave, and water-hole in the country they infest.'***[38] Francis's choice of this last word is revealing. Russell was unusual in not taking away with one hand what he had given with the other. For him the Sioux set the standard, '***physically not inferior to Whites as to size, muscularity, etc.'***[39]

But as the implications in these descriptions suggest and indeed as the concept of the noble savage must do too, nobility was limited by savagery; potential by race. Although Francis admired the Apache he saw no long-term future for them, any more than any other tribe. In the end, as he said, the southwestern tribes like all ***'Savages are always interesting as links with the past-interesting as dusky shadows that linger to tell us of a phase in the history of man obscured now in the twilight of ages - interesting as belated wayfarers in the race of human development which they will never live to finish.'***[40]

In general British writers appear to have been less willing than many contemporary Americans to allow that the Native American had any right to resist white encroachments.[41] It is clear that some were worried about the moral implications of whites using superior technology to overcome the Native Americans, but they eased their doubts by stressing Native Americans' savagery, and in particular one aspect of that, the brutality with which the Native American waged war.

As Reginald Aldridge put it, ***'there may be sometimes an excuse for [Indian] outbreaks...in the want of consideration for real grievances occasionally shown by the Government, or in the misconduct of some of their agents, who are only caring to feather their own nests at the expense of the Indian. Nevertheless, the cold-blooded cruelty displayed by a tribe on the war-path is such that any sympathy one may have felt for the wrongs of the red man is apt to be swallowed up in horror and disgust at his brutality.'*** William Bell gave details of Native American brutality, ***'not,'*** as he was keen to protest, '***for tile sake of creating a sensation, but because it is characteristic of a mode of warfare soon - thank God! - to be abolished; and because the mutilations [perpetrated by Native Americans] have...most of them some meaning, apart***

from brutality and a desire to inspire fear.' Accordingly Bell included in his work not only a description of a mutilated Segeant Wylyams, but a photograph as well to prove his point, adding interesting biographical detail on the victim. ***'He was an Englishman,'*** he said, ***'educated at Eton, and of good family, but while sowing his wild oats, he had made a fatal alliance in London, and gone to grief. Disowned by his family, he had emigrated to America, joined the army, and was daily expecting promotion out of the ranks'*** when he was killed and mutilated.[43]

In the end, then, British writing on the Native American disappoints in that it does little more than repeat conventional opinions. It shows very little understanding of what was happening to the indigenous people and therefore fails to pass much on either. Readers have to hunt for clues as to why the Native Americans did not in fact die out as expected. Modern scholars are very aware of the role that European diseases had in undermining Native American cultures and their ability to resist invaders. Wallis Nash appears to have been the only traveller I have studied to discuss disease perhaps because he visited the Siltz reservation in Oregon where there was a doctor. He was told that births were exceeding deaths '***now that the purchase of spirits is impossible, and…their children are properly attended to in sickness.'*** Overall, he was informed, ***'diseases of all sorts were diminishing in intensity on the reservation; which was a matter of the greatest*** *importance*.'[44]

It is possible, reading between the lines of British writers to see that some Native Americans were making relatively successful accommodations to white society. Some, for instance, had become involved in the white economy, like these who sold strawberries to TS Hudson as he scampered through America in 1882, or those Kickapoos who as early as 1864 possessed farms that impressed Maurice O'Connor Morris.[45] Reginald Aldridge reported that the Osage '***had rather a bad reputation for black-mailing any passing herd'*** of cattle by claiming one or two head from any that crossed their reservation, but perhaps all this showed was that the Osage had embraced the market economy.[46] British travellers, however, were unable to interpret what they saw even as they were generally unable to question prevailing assumptions about the past, present and future of the Native Americans. Their writings remind us how limited a perception one people may have of another and how important it is to take steps to broaden understandings.

The writings of British travellers could be further used to discuss attitudes to the Chinese, to the Mormons, to miners, cowboys and cattlemen but since this is a North American occasion I should like to draw to a close by asking whether those that read these travellers' accounts would have been more or less likely to have gone north or south of the forty-eighth parallel. Taken in isolation, some accounts should certainly have repelled those thinking of settling in the western United States. Isabella Bird was far from happy with what she had found there. For her the new settlements were ***'altogether revolting, entirely utilitarian, given up totally of dollars as well as to making them, with coarse speech, coarse food, coarse everything . . This hard greed, and the exclusive pursuit of gain, with the indifferences to nil which does not aid in its acquisition, are eating up family love and life throughout the West.'*** She maintained further, ***'One of the most painful things in the Western States and Territories is the extinction of childhood. I have never seen any children, only debased imitations of men and women, cankered by greed and selfishness, and asserting and gaining complete independence of their parents at ten years old.'***[47] So much for the effect of western life on soul and spirit.

Robert Louis Stevenson thought little more of the western United States for the materialist. To him ***'there was no El Dorado anywhere; and till we could emigrate to the moon, it seemed as well to stay patiently at home.'*** He had to admit that the signs of eventual failure were there even before he and other emigrants reached their destinations, for, as he said, '***as we continued to steam***

westward toward the land of gold, we were continually passing other emigrant trains upon the journey east; and these were as crowded as our own. Had all these return voyagers made a fortune in the mines? Were they all bound for Paris, and to be in Rome by Easter? it would seem not, for; whenever we met them, the passengers ran on the platform and cried to us through the windows, in a kind of wailing chorus, to "comeback". On the plains of Nebraska, in the mountains of Wyoming, it was still the same cry, and dismal to my heart, "Come back!" That was what we heard by the way "about the good country we were going to". And at that very hour the Sand-lot of San Francisco was crowded with the unemployed, and the echo from the other side of Market Street was repeating the rant of demagogues.' [48]

But was Canada any better a destination? Mrs Howard Vincent pursuing her forty thousand miles over land and water in 1886 exclaimed of her visit to Canada, ***'It may have been prejudice, but we thought that the country bore signs of greater prosperity than over the American border.'*** [49] Lord Russell remarked from Winnipeg, ***'But all we have yet seen in Canada seem well fed and well clad. Except amongst some wretched Indians there is not the slightest appearance of want.'*** [50] By contrast, though. Major Shepherd described how, '***A number of Canadians, and emigrants who had first tried the new Canadian provinces, were to be met throughout the northern part of the States; from what they said work was easier to find here than there... There is no doubt a good deal of impatience among the new settlers of Canada that their prosperity does not advance with equal strides to that of the American territories; and they perhaps consider the panacea for their trouble is a union with the States.*** But ***'Their real trouble,'*** said the Major flatly, ***'seems to me a matter of climate***.' [51]

F. Barham Zincke had a somewhat unflattering comparison to make between Americans and Canadians. ***'The American,*** he said, ***'is the hardest worker in the world, never sparing himself, but always toiling on, in the faith that he will soon be able to bring all things right; and he generally succeeds in doing so. These are not yet the characteristics of the inhabitants of Upper Canada***.' Recalling that he was the Queen's Chaplain in Ordinary, his next remark, on the potential of Canada, may be of interest: '***The product, however; of Canada, which most attracts the attention of the traveller; and is likely to make the strongest impression upon him, is the complexion of the Canadian ladies.'*** [52]

Perhaps this is the note to leave this comparison of North and South of the border, but with one additional remark from Colon South whose vision of the future in the United States and Canada might well have repelled from both. ***'There will come,'*** he prophesied, ***'a great national upheaval, and a division of the continent into two separate Eastern and Western Republics. The huge partition wall of the Rocky Mountains will become the natural line of demarcation. There are signs afloat of this coming struggle.'*** [53]

There are no contemporary counterparts to the late nineteenth century travel writers. Today those wishing to keep abreast of North American affairs rely on the media, with all the implications of that word. Information comes as short news items or at best through an extended essay. Context is often ignored, history forgotten. Yet there are profound social and cultural changes taking place in North America today which must affect trans-Atlantic relations in the next century. I said earlier that time and again late nineteenth century travellers assumed a basic affinity, a social and cultural congruence, between Britain, the United States and Canada. It sometimes appears, not least in reflections on Special Relationships, as if many in Britain today still see the United States and Canada as slightly aberrant versions of the Mother Country. But Mexico is the Mother Country for the largest group of immigrants in the United States, today; with Asia and Latin America producing four out of five of those arriving to seek a new life.

In these demographic circumstances it becomes even more important that the British understand the United States and Canada as they are; are aware, for example, that the present

Governor General of Canada is not of British extraction and that the number of Rhodes Scholars in the United States government, broadly defined, would scarcely fill two cricket teams, certainly not three baseball. Since the late 1940s the United Kingdom has been fortunate in seeing the development of an American Studies movement, reinforced in the 1970s by one for Canadian Studies. During the 1980s there were fears that the study of North America was suffering in what appeared to be a deliberate assault on the Humanities and from the rise of European Studies. But 1992 has come and gone without a triumph for the European Movement, while the numbers studying North America have continued to rise. The David and Mary Eccles Centre for American Studies in The British Library represents the strength of the American Studies movement in the United Kingdom today and in its work reflects the awareness of the importance of sustaining and extending trans-Atlantic relationships. I would like to urge all of you here tonight to travel widely in North America; to keep copious notes as you so do; and to publish your accounts on return, just as men and women used to do. But since there are no longer five dollars to the pound; since it is now hardly possible to travel in state by train or to hunt the buffalo with a clear conscience, I should perhaps end by exhorting you instead to support this Centre and allied bodies, to show your sense of the importance in the 21st century of relations between the United Kingdom and North America, and ask that if anyone here does publish an account of travels in late twentieth century North America, try to avoid the worst excesses of its ancestors.

Notes:

(1) General studies of British travellers in North America include Richard L. Rapson, *Britons view America: Trawl Commentary 1860-1935* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1971); Jane Mesich, *The English Traveller in America, 1785-1835* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922); Max Berger, *The British Traveller in America, 1836-1860* (New York: P.S. King and Staples, 1943); Allan Nevins, *America Through British Eyes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948); Robert G. Athearn, *Westward the Briton* (New York: Scribner, 1953).

(2) Oscar Wilde *Impressions of America* (Edited, with an introduction, by Stuart Mason). (Sunderland: Keystone Press, 1906), pp.30-1. Oscar Wilde's grandson, Mr Merlin Holland, tells me that contrary to its claims this hook was neither produced in Sunderland nor by a Keystone Press.

(3) Henry Morford, *Morford's Short-Trip Guide to America (United States and Dominion of Canada)* (7th edn., London and New York: n.p., 1877). pp.8, 30-1

(4) *ibid;* p.291

(5) *ibid;* p.310

(6) *ibid;* pp.28-9

(7) *ibid;* p.36

(8) The Englishman's Guide Book to the United States & Canada, with gazeteer of the principal hunting and fishing grounds (7th edn; London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1880), pp.3, 10, 80.

(9) *ibid,* p.84

(10) On western violence see Richard Maxwell Brown, *The American Vigilante Tradition,* in Hugh David Graham and Ted R. Gurr, eds. *Violence in America,* vol.1 . (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Printing Office 1969), 121-80; Robert R Dykstra *The Cattle Towns* (NY: Knopf, 1968), W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York: OUP, 1974); Frank R Prasser, *The Western Peace Officer: A Legacy of Law and Order* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1972).

(11) Isabella L. Bird, *A* Lady's *Life in the Rocky Mountains* (4th edn., London: John Murray, 1881), p.29

(12) Paul Fountain, The *Eleven Eaglets of the West* (London: John Murray, 1906), pp.l8-19.

(13) F. Barham Zincke, Last Winter in the United States: being Table Talk collected during a tour through the late southern confederation, the far west, the Rocky Mountains, etc., (London: John Murray, 1868), pp.216, 216-7.

(14) John P. Reid, *Law for the Elephant: Property and Social Behaviour on the Overland Trail* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1980); Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (New York: OUP, 1978), pp.41-63.

(15) Zincke, *Last Winter,* p.218.

(16) Major W. Shepherd, R. E., Prairie Experiences in Handling Cattle and Sheep (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), p.115; William A. Bell, New Tracks in North America: A journal of Travel and Adventure Whilst Engaged in tile Survey for a Southern Railroad to the Pacific Ocean During 1867-8 (2 vols: London: Chapman and Hall, 1869). 1. 90-1

(17) Francis Francis, Jun., *Saddle and Mocassin* (London: Chapman and Hall, Limited, 1887), p. 128.

(18) Bird, *Lady's Life,* pp. 19, 209-9.

(19) Colon South, *Out West: Or*, *From London to Salt Lake City and Back* (London: Wyman & Sons, 1884), p.155.

(20) Fountain, *Eleven Eaglets,* pp. 127, 156, 197.

(21) Wallis Nash, Oregon: *There and Back in 1877* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878), p.207.

(22) Maurice O'Connor Morns, *Rambles in the Rocky Mountains: with a visit to the Gold Fields of Colorado* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1864), pp.86-7.

(23) ibid-, p.87

(24) Bird, *Lady's Life,* pp.215-6.

(25) Charles Lord Russell of Killowen, *Diary of a Visit to the United States of America in the Year 1883* (New York: The United States Catholic Historical Society, 1910), p.56.

(26) Bird, *Lady's Life,* pp.4-5.

(27) Nash, Oregon: There and Back, pp.30-1.

(28) Bell, *New Tracks,* 1.109; Lord Russell of Killowen, *Diary*, p.73.

(29) Shepherd, Prairie Experiences, p.26.

(30) Bell, *New Tracks,* 1.110.

(31) Reginald Aldridge, *Ranch Notes in Kansas, Colorado, The Indian Territory and Northern Texas* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1884), pp.125, 130-1.

(32) Nash, Oregon: There and Back, p.174.

(33) Lord Russell of Killowen, *Diary,* p.71

(34) Shepherd, *Prairie Experiences,* pp.83-4.

(35) James Aitken, *From the Clyde to California with Jottings by the Way* (Greenock: William Johnston, 1882), p.48.
(36) Robert Louis Stevenson, *Across the Plains with other memories and essays* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, Ltd; n.d.) p.67.
(37) Bell, *New Tracks,* 1:158, 168-175.
(38) Francis, *Saddle and Mocassin,* p.202.
(39) Lord Russell of Killowen *Diary,* p.56.
(40) Francis, *Saddle and Mocassin,* p.210.
(41) One may doubt whether a British man or woman could have written, as Helen Hunt Jackson did, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with some of the Indian Tribes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), or that many had read George W. Manypenny, *Our Indian Wards* (Cincinnati: Clarke & Co., 1880).
(42) Aldridge, *Ranch Notes,* p. 131.
(43) Bell, New Tracks, i.62, 64.
(44) Nash, Oregon: There and Back, p. 175.
(45) T. S. Hudson, *A Scamper Through America or, Fifteen Thousand Miles of Ocean and Continent in Sixty Days* (London: Griffith & Farran, 1882), pp.122-3; Morris, *Rambles,* p.36.
(46) Aldridge, *Ranch Notes,* p.112.
(47) Bird, *Lady's Life,* pp.39, 53, 77.
(48) Stevenson, *Across the Plains,* pp.61-2.
(49) Mrs Howard Vincent, *Forty Thousand Miles over Land and Water: The journal of a Tour Through the British Empire and America* (2 vols., 2nd edn., London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1886), 1.25.
(50) Lord Russell of Killowen, *Diary,* p.54.
(51) Shepherd, *Prairie Experiences,* pp.117-8
(52) Zincke, *Last Winter,* pp.273, 274.
(53) South, Out West, p.240.