

Introduction

American Invaders

The “American Invasion” preoccupied many Britons in 1902. Against the backdrop of Queen Victoria’s death, the British Army’s parlous performance in the Boer War, and a fierce debate over “national efficiency” raised by the mass poverty of Britain’s slums, several influential books sounded the alarm at the threatened American economic competition. William T. Stead, Frederick MacKenzie, John Hobson, and Benjamin Thwaite described the transformation of British domestic life by American consumer goods, industrial materials, the power of its “trusts,” and superior managerial organization.¹ “America has invaded Europe not with armed men, but manufactured products,” declared MacKenzie.² At the vanguard were emigrant salesmen, financiers, and advertisers, who cultivated new tastes for American products amongst British consumers. “With these Americans who settle in our midst,” wrote Stead, “the Old Country will become the new home of the American colonists.”³ For all these writers, the anxiety over Britain’s dependence on the United States ran deep. “We are absolutely spoon-fed from day to day by the Americans,” Stead exclaimed.⁴

How was it that by the turn of the twentieth century Britons had come to fear Americanization, when for much of the nineteenth US citizens feared Anglicization? Historians of nineteenth-century Anglo-American relations arm us with a formidable set of frameworks for understanding this diplomatic shift: a “great rapprochement” laid the groundwork for the “American Century,” underwrote a global imperial transition, and

opened the way to the “Americanization” of the world. These models tell us more about the perceived centrality and disproportionality of US power and expansion to global affairs after 1945 than they do the United States’ place in the nineteenth-century world. They are models of US projection into, not interaction with the world.⁵ But to immerse oneself in the mechanics of the “American Invasion” is to uncover a new perspective on Anglo-American relations. Beneath reports of the onward march of American exports is a hidden world of Americans overseas. This was a world of travelling salesmen, merchants, and financiers working hard to drum up interest in US investments and commerce; a world of socialites and genteel Americans joining headlong the rush of the London social “Season” and seeking introductions to a foreign sovereign; a world of social clubs and national celebrations at which to debate the meaning of residence abroad and the global role of the United States.

LEAVING THE UNITED STATES

At first glance, telling the history of American economic development, nationalism, and imperialism from the vantage point of American emigrants may seem puzzling. The United States is, after all, generally perceived as a migrant destination, not a departure point. US emigrants have only a minor role, if any, in the major narrative histories of the nineteenth-century United States. Taking center stage instead are the massive and dramatic human influxes of immigrants that convulsed American politics, transformed its cities, and “peopled” the North American continent. Recent scholarship suggests that only a small—less than 1 percent—although steadily increasing proportion of American citizens travelled abroad between 1820 and 1900.⁶ Of what significance could a handful of elite migrants be?

More puzzling is the assumption that American citizens were static against this backdrop of human crossings and connections. Powerful national tropes upholding the United States as a nation built by immigration, settlement, and assimilation have left little room to even consider that those who emigrated could have anything to do with its national development; they had, after all, left the national-territorial framework of the American past.⁷ One piece of the puzzle is the transformation in the concept of expatriation since the nineteenth century, when it was synonymous with *becoming* American. The ability to transform British subjects into citizens was central to American claims to independence, which meant countering arguments that subjects owed

“perpetual allegiance” to their sovereign.⁸ As one lawmaker put it, “emigration and expatriation are practical declarations of independence of the individual citizen.”⁹ The United States repeatedly reaffirmed this stance while around Europe an “Exit Revolution” lifted restrictions on citizens’ right to leave in one country after another.¹⁰ Yet American opinion on the expatriation of US citizens was far from settled. Throughout the century, the State Department struggled to establish the principles of expatriation, rarely kept reliable records of its citizens overseas, and was at times hostile to Americans resident abroad.¹¹ According to one consul in Central America, expatriated American citizens represented a “class of persons who have never become identified in spirit and feeling with the ideas our government represents,” contributed “little or nothing to its welfare,” and lent “nothing to its support.”¹² It was not until the 1907 Law of Expatriation that the United States made explicit the conditions under which Americans could lose their citizenship overseas, part of a proliferation of treaty- and law-making in which the state policed the boundaries of citizenship across borders through extradition, extraterritoriality, and exclusion.¹³

As American consular officials found, pinning down American emigrants is challenging. The term “emigrant” was rarely employed by Americans overseas in the nineteenth century, but it better captures the subjective experiences and shifting political valences attached to transatlantic mobility than the more delimiting legal status “expatriate.” Many Americans overseas moved into and through the categories of traveler, settler, and serial migrant, and are not easily separated by occupation, as with professionally itinerant sailors or soldiers. Emigrant communities contained men and women in the professional and service trades, such as merchants, sales agents, and financiers; state employees found in consulates and legations; enterprising entrepreneurs and inventors; and restless journalists, socialites, and reformers. Some hoped to return home, while others enjoyed long lives overseas and threw themselves into organizing social clubs and celebrating national anniversaries; still other Americans, black and white, hoped to use their presence overseas to exert moral pressure on domestic institutions. Placing emigrants center stage unambiguously focusses attention on their ongoing connection with the United States, their offshore creation of national communities and spaces, their relationships with foreign elites, and how those relationships affected Anglo-American relations. This ongoing interplay between residence overseas and nation-building at home is best characterized as “emigrant foreign relations.” Although they had

left the United States, emigrants kept in touch via correspondence, journal articles, travelogues, and the wealth of goods and money they remitted to family, friends, and customers. They did not simply sever ties with the nation, but connected it to the world and to foreign peoples in new ways. Their offshore lives were sometimes viewed as a form of informal ambassadorship, sometimes feared as a dangerous method of denationalization or vector of moral and anti-republican contagion, and at others denounced as a drain of valuable human capital and an evasion of the obligations of citizenship. Through their conspicuous presence abroad, as we shall see, emigrants raised troubling questions about the relationship between nationhood, nationality, and foreign connection.

American emigration is only surprising if we think in terms of contrasts with the incoming nineteenth-century mass migrations to the United States. If we relocate our point of comparison, American emigration is neither surprising nor unique. In fact, American emigrants resemble the many internationally mobile professionals, officials, and sojourners who worked in a variety of specialist occupations in ports and capital cities around the world and who ensured the smooth operation of commercial, communication, and transportation networks between nations.¹⁴ Foreign merchant communities populated the United States' own cities, like New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and San Francisco.¹⁵ A steadily growing body of scholarship has shown that the variety of American communities abroad was wide. American merchants directed international trade from port cities around the globe;¹⁶ European capitals hosted American artists, socialites, businessmen, and sojourners;¹⁷ students acquired new learning at European technical schools and ancient universities;¹⁸ entrepreneurs and engineers scoured the world for profitable opportunities;¹⁹ and evangelists proselytized among the peoples of the Americas and the Pacific World.²⁰ The presence of manifold emigrant enclaves around the world does not equate to a mass movement, but their distribution does reveal the disproportional role of emigrants in determining the scope of the United States' overseas and overland connections. Recently, historians of the United States' continental empire have linked emigration directly to the colonization of the west and to a longer history of American settlement of non-US spaces.²¹ Throughout its history, Brooke Blower has strikingly argued, the United States has been a "nation of outposts," connected to a multitude of non-American territories by continental and globetrotting migrants whose travels laid the pathway for the United States' twentieth-century empire of military bases.²²

By leaving the United States for Britain, this book argues, American emigrants became the necessary counterpart of American nation-building and identity formation, and integral to its foreign relations. American overseas emigration is best understood in the light of the ongoing and open-ended development of the American Union and the British Empire. Just as American historians have begun to recapture how US nation-building was shaped by the pressures of other empires and the industrial revolutions that took place in the world economy, so British imperial historians now depict a sprawling, improvised British imperial world of permeable external borders, exposed to world trade and indigenous and non-British cultural movements.²³ Contemporaries thought deeply about the entangled development of these unfinished empires. In the United States, controversy was aroused over almost every facet of this entanglement. As historians we might ask on what axes of race, class, party, and gender discussion of these entanglements turned. How did transatlantic political, social, and commercial exchanges work in practice, and how did this change over time? Did Americans simply use pre-existing networks, or were they central to the creation and management of new mechanisms of transnational exchange? How could the United States maintain its independence when so many of these networks were dominated by an expansive and ambitious British Empire? How might British power be co-opted or leveraged to the advantage of different groups of migrant Americans? And, in a society dominated so extensively by British cultural production, how could one maintain an American identity? *Made in Britain* takes up these questions.

TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTORS IN A BRITISH WORLD

American emigrants in Britain generated, managed, and sustained many of the United States' foremost transnational linkages and were the front-line of the relationship with its largest trading partner and the world's most powerful empire. In their daily working lives, they acted as intermediaries in Atlantic commerce and finance by inspecting goods and assessing credit-worthiness; they were key brokers of commercial and political intelligence; and they managed the mechanisms that shaped the movement of goods, capital, and people across the Atlantic. They were, in short, connectors.²⁴ These activities anchored the United States *in* the world, expanding the scale of the nation's trade, information, and communications networks and its integration with the commodity and capital markets of Britain. In turn, patterns of American emigration were

sensitive to the changing nature of the world's transnational networks and especially to the dramatic technological changes that characterized the final third of the century.

American emigration to Britain began as an anxious outflow to reconnect the lifelines of Atlantic trade and capital so central to the new nation's prosperity and security.²⁵ The leading role in restoring Atlantic trade was played not by the government in Whitehall nor by the provisions of the Articles of Confederation, but by transatlantic migrants who travelled between both nations as sales agents, and founded and managed the overseas branches of merchant and financial houses. Shortly after peace was concluded in 1783, David Ramsay reported from Charleston, South Carolina that "The genius of our people is entirely turned from war to commerce. Schemes of business & partnerships for extending commerce are daily forming."²⁶ Migrants were responsible for a wide range of daily activities required to keep trade flowing, such as loading cargoes and organizing payment, sending commercial intelligence to partners in the United States, and opening new lines of transatlantic credit. American migrants were active in trade organizations such as Liverpool's American Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1801 by the American tobacco merchant and United States Consul James Maury to lobby Parliament in the interests of Atlantic commerce and mitigate the risk of war. Through regular correspondence and the relationships they forged with fellow merchants, American emigrants continually reinforced the underlying community of trust so essential to the smooth operation of long-distance trade. The transformation these migrants oversaw was as rapid as it was dramatic. By 1790–92, the total tonnage of American trade with Britain was perhaps 50 to 80 percent above what it had been before the Revolution.²⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, the United States was the most significant consumer of British goods in the world.²⁸ Migrants also reinforced the economic interdependence of the United States and Britain, raising troubling questions for nationalist political economists. As Edmund Morford put it in his 1806 *Inquiry into the Present State of Foreign Relations of the Union*:

Although three thousand miles of boisterous waters divide us from Europe, yet, the events of one continent affect the concerns of the other so intimately, that space is swallowed up in the mutuality and comixing of wants, dependencies and interests. Nothing is now done in any quarter of the globe, which does not bear upon its farthest limits; and it behoves the people of the United States, composing as they do the great division of the political world, and ranking second among commercial nations, to keep a steady, watchful eye

upon the restless potentates of Europe We cannot exist an isolated member of the grand community of nations. Our commerce touches the jealous rivals of the old world at every point, and they are always ready to find or to make reasons, which, to rapacity, are sufficiently just for plundering and abusing us.²⁹

This ongoing dualism between independence and interdependence (to be “isolated” or a part of the “mutuality” of trade and connection, as Morford portrayed it) was central to how migration was understood throughout the nineteenth century.

By the 1830s, what began as a movement to restore transatlantic lifelines and tastes became one to sustain booming transatlantic traffic. Britain’s American-born population grew steadily, to almost eight thousand by 1861, as merchants and financiers, socialites and travelers flocked to the world’s commercial and financial hub. The four decades between 1830 and 1870 were the critical phase of Britain’s transformation from a sprawling web of mercantilism, old plantation colonies, and treaty-ports into the world’s banker and shipper. British exports rose in value from £38 million in 1830 to £60 million in 1845 and, following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, to £122 million by 1857.³⁰ Just as important was the world-changing cotton revolution in the American South. In the mid-1780s, the United States produced less than 0.2 percent of the raw cotton imported into Britain.³¹ By the late 1850s, this figure had risen to 77 percent of the 800 million pounds of cotton consumed annually by British mills.³² American emigrants were at the center of these transformations and, by managing the international networks of the American economy, sped its integration into Britain’s worldwide empire of commerce.³³ Two partnerships were of paramount importance. The first was between cotton and Liverpool, home to 2,800 Americans in 1861, and the second was between credit and London, with an American-born population of 1,910 in the same year.³⁴

Liverpool, gateway of the Atlantic, was the epicenter of the overlapping Empires of Cotton and Free Trade (see figure 1). The Stars and Stripes were “prominent among the dock’s foremasts, pleasing proofs of the increasing commerce of the rising empire of the United States,” in the estimation of one visitor’s guide.³⁵ Roughly four of every five tons of shipping arriving from the Northern United States in Liverpool was carried by US-registered ships, and the figure for Southern ports was not far behind.³⁶ Thousands of American sailors landed in Liverpool every year, but alongside these transient workers was a permanent community of US merchants and cotton brokers, mostly from the Northern states.