

Anglo-worlds in transit: connections and frictions across the Pacific*

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Abstract

The emerging cultures of late nineteenth-century steamship mobility can be distinguished broadly by ocean basin and by specific route. In the Pacific, a steamship connection between Sydney and San Francisco was envisaged to forge and sustain strong bonds between regional 'branches' of the Anglo-Saxon race. This article moves beyond the rhetorical purchase of assumed affinities, to explore the more layered ways in which difference was articulated in transpacific encounters, and the attendant uncertainties and frictions in these evolving relations. When compared to routes bridging the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, with familiar imperial hierarchies and formalities behind them, British and colonial travellers in the Pacific were frequently unsettled by the more democratic and republican attitudes of the American crews and passengers they encountered. At the same time, Britain's long-standing supremacy on the high seas provided a benchmark against which American enterprise and power in the Pacific could be assessed and found wanting.

Keywords Australasia, British empire, Pacific, steamship route, United States, whiteness

The rise of industrial transportation and communication technologies in the second half of the nineteenth century underpinned new imaginings of a world made small. Perceived to compress time and space in binding far-flung locales more tightly together, steamships, along with rail and the telegraph, inspired visions of global unity, reshaping attitudes to the spatial scale of community formation and political association.

Yet, at sea, in attenuating the long ocean passages more common under sail, steam unfolded to a multiplication of fragmented networks. There was no uniform 'steamship globalization'. No shipping company girded the globe; company operations were ocean- and route-bound, constrained by the politics, logistics, and expense of shipbuilding, manning, and

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coaling. This was often surprising to those who took to the sea, even the more ‘worldly’ among them. When embarking on a world tour in 1885, for instance, the British journalist George Augustus Sala had anticipated that it would be ‘only a long ocean voyage out and a long ocean voyage home’. What he endured instead were many ‘short, snappish trips on the briny one after another’, and on steamers ‘good, bad and indifferent’. In the process he made acquaintance ‘with all sorts and conditions of skippers, pursers, stewards and cabin boys’.¹ The seaborne industrial capitalism of the late nineteenth century was ‘increasingly arduous to visualize’, as Cesare Casarino remarks, ‘the more multiple, interconnected, and global it became’.²

This article explores the ways in which specific sea routes generated distinct cultures of mobility. While key political and intellectual advocates tended to stress their value as binding forces, typically in undifferentiated and sometimes indistinguishable terms, I want to consider their impact in a particular oceanic arena. My focus is on the Pacific, and on contestations around a new steamship route that connected British settler colonies in Australasia with the United States from the 1870s.

A transpacific bridge between Sydney and San Francisco linked two countries that shared the same language, the recent experiences of mass migration spawned by mid-century gold rushes, and a rising tide of white settler nationalism. Unlike networks across the Indian, Atlantic, and even North Pacific oceans, the connection between Australasia and the US was never envisaged as a primary migration pathway, largely because ‘there are new countries at either end’, as an imperial enquiry into regional shipping later put it.³ Nor did this route promote the opening of new or ‘waste’ lands for production, or facilitate the characteristic metropole–colony exchange of manufactured goods for primary products or the mass transportation of cheap ‘coloured’ labour between colonial sites. A Sydney–San Francisco link, effectively at the margins of empire, was peripheral to these global processes, even if celebrated as completing the ‘steam circuit of the globe’.⁴

In contemporary promotional literature and political advocacy, this pathway was envisaged to forge and sustain strong bonds between the Pacific ‘branches’ of the Anglo-Saxon race and, more broadly, to foster the unification of the English-speaking peoples of the world. Travelling along it in the southern hemisphere summer of 1886, the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault celebrated that ‘it is by such practical bonds as these’ that the English-speaking races will ‘become amalgamated – not *federated*. I hate that diplomatic term! Peoples cannot be tied together with red tape, but by common interest, by good understanding born of cohabitation, of personal passenger intermixture. These are the ties the peoples make – and they are treaties that are not broken.’ On this basis, he concluded, the English, American, and Australian governments ‘should collude in establishing this route in preference to any other’.⁵

This emphasis on embodied encounters qualified the larger-scale and abstracted territorialization of ocean space. Boucicault proffered a more intimate ‘people’s history’ of the

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- 1 Robert Dingley, ed., *The land of the golden fleece: George Augustus Sala in Australia and New Zealand in 1885*, Canberra: Mulini Press, 1995, p. 101.
 - 2 Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in crisis*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 10; also cited in Paul Giles, *Antipodean America: Australasia and the constitution of U.S. literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 152.
 - 3 Imperial Shipping Committee, *The possibilities of a British passenger and cargo service between western Canada and Australia–New Zealand*, London: HMSO, 1936, p. 19.
 - 4 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1889, p. 6.
 - 5 ‘The maiden trip of the Mararoa’, *Auckland Star*, 9 February 1886, p. 2, emphasis in original.

shifting terrain of the Pacific world, perceiving that ships plying new routes were potentially formative sites rather than merely functional bridges between communities on shore. He argued that interpersonal encounters in transit promised enduring implications for collective belonging and the forging of international solidarities. In this article I explore this line of argument, but in doing so seek to move beyond the rhetorical purchase of assumed affinities between populations identified variously as Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking, or white, to explore the more layered ways in which difference was articulated in encounters between them.

In what follows I examine routes and ships as mutually imbricated in the reconfiguring of the Pacific. The first section explores some possible ways to think through mobile entanglements in relation to an emergent Anglo-Pacific arena. The second section centres on the opening, operation, and representation of the Sydney–San Francisco route, both with respect to the places it linked and in relation to a wider imperial seascape. The third and final section pieces together the micro-site of the ship as a concentrated period and space of encounter, where travellers – both crew and passengers – explored selves and relations with others, and where, in the comparative absence of racial difference, other markers of identity might come to the fore as a basis of difference and negotiation.

Transpacific identities and itineraries

Recent studies have probed the meaning and global import of the ‘powerful mythology’ of Anglo-Saxonism encompassing Britain, its white settler empire, and the United States in the late nineteenth century.⁶ Anglo-Saxons, the ‘English-speaking races’, perceived themselves as possessing a unique capacity for self-government, championing traits of energy, liberty, order, and progress, and were adept at ‘extending and sustaining vast empires’.⁷ Even along violent imperial frontiers ‘the language of liberty flourished’, as Paul Kramer charts, and it was in the colonial world, characterized by ‘the more and more frequent rendezvous between Americans and Britons’, and not just in transatlantic exchanges, that Anglo-Saxonism gained particular traction as a global racial identification.⁸

A narrower variant was the idea of Greater Britain, which celebrated a spatially dispersed racial community binding settler colonies with each other and the metropole.⁹ While a sense of kinship and destiny knitted together Greater Britain and the United States, British observers were also wary of America’s potential as a future leader of the Anglo-Saxon race, overshadowing – if not directly threatening – Britain within its own empire and on the world stage. Duncan Bell observes among political and intellectual figures of the late nineteenth century an ‘uneasy combination of envy and disdain, fortified by an insidious sense of anxiety’, and a growing discomfort as America appeared to be ‘charging into the future’.¹⁰ James Belich

6 James Belich, *Replenishing the earth: the settler revolution and the rise of the Anglo-world, 1783–1939*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 5; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: white men’s countries and the question of racial equality*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008.

7 Belich, *Replenishing the earth*, p. 63; Paul A. Kramer, ‘Empires, exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: race and rule between the British and United States empires, 1880–1910’, *Journal of American History*, 88, 4, 2002, p. 1322.

8 Kramer, ‘Empires’, pp. 1322, 1327.

9 Duncan Bell, *The idea of greater Britain: empire and the future of world order, 1860–1900*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007; Penelope Edmonds, ‘“I followed England around the world”: the rise of trans-imperial Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, and the spatial narratives of nineteenth-century British settler colonies of the Pacific rim’, in Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, and Katherine Ellinghaus, eds., *Re-Orienting whiteness*, New York: Palgrave, 2009, pp. 99–115.

10 Bell, *Idea of greater Britain*, pp. 258–9.

argues that Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis of 1893 might be read as a 'declaration of cultural independence', which replaced 'Anglo-Saxon virtues with those of America's own frontier'.¹¹ Similarly, the frontier's extension into the Pacific promoted an anti-imperial national exceptionalism, positing American expansionism as benevolent, spreading republican institutions and tutelage in self-government, unlike oppressive British colonial rule.¹² Indeed, Kornel Chang posits that the Pacific Ocean had been remade 'into a vast American lake by the late nineteenth century, superseding the British'.¹³

As a prominent convergence zone surrounded by four 'Anglo-Saxon families' in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, the Pacific might serve as a theatre of collaborative Anglo-Saxonism as much as an arena for autonomous American engagements.¹⁴ Political and intellectual figures in Australia increasingly identified with their counterparts in the US, reflecting their hopes of the Pacific elevating the settler colonies on the world stage. In seeking also to balance heavy-handed treatment from metropolitan officials, they claimed a status as 'white men', as Marilyn Lake has explored, distinct from 'imperial subjects' within a hierarchical and multiracial imperial order.¹⁵ 'White' was increasingly used interchangeably with Anglo-Saxon, but it was more adaptable to 'places of racial conflict and stress', as Warwick Anderson posits, notably 'on the fraught margins of European advance' in the settler colonies.¹⁶

Visions of tighter transpacific ties, however, did not necessarily relegate Britain to the sidelines, as Boucicault recognized. Whereas studies of transatlantic worlds have traditionally been bound by the literal space of the Atlantic, the transpacific, as the literary historian Paul Giles stresses, 'involves wider and more complicated geopolitical juxtapositions', with Australasia and America relating to each other and in triangulation with Britain.¹⁷ Both locations had a formative relationship with the imperial metropole, while Britain, having settled New South Wales after the loss of its American colonies, now faced the US 'transpacifically as well as transatlantically' through its possessions in the southern hemisphere.¹⁸ One consequence of this, in the view of British female traveller Winifride Wrench, on an empire tour with her brother, Evelyn, to promote the Over-seas Club founded by him in 1910, was a perception of the Americans as 'our "trans-Pacific cousins" – as the Australians call them'.¹⁹

These complex three-way dynamics were perhaps most pronounced in the maritime realm, a crucial yet largely overlooked arena for the making and remaking of an Anglo-Pacific world. When compared to the Indian and Atlantic oceans, liner networks came 'late' to the Pacific.

11 Belich, *Replenishing the earth*, p. 482.

12 Kramer, 'Empires', pp. 1340–1, 1350. American elites might still rank Britain above other European empire-builders: see Andrew Priest, 'Imperial exchange: American views of the British empire during the Civil War and Reconstruction', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16, 1, 2015, https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/toc/cch.16.1.html (consulted 11 March 2016).

13 Kornel Chang, *Pacific connections: the making of the US–Canadian borderlands*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012, p. 10.

14 The Protestant clergyman Josiah Strong, cited in Kramer, 'Empires', pp. 1334–5.

15 Marilyn Lake, 'White man's country: the trans-national history of a national project', *Australian Historical Studies*, 34, 122, 2003, pp. 346–63. See also Marilyn Lake, "'The brightness of eyes and quiet assurance which seem to say American": Alfred Deakin's identification with republican manhood', *Australian Historical Studies*, 38, 129, 2007, esp. pp. 42–3; Marilyn Lake, 'British world or new world? Anglo-Saxonism and Australian engagement with America', *History Australia*, 10, 3, 2013, pp. 36–50.

16 Warwick Anderson, 'Traveling white', in Boucher, Carey, and Ellinghaus, *Re-Orienting whiteness*, p. 66.

17 Paul Giles, *Antipodean America*, p. 37.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

19 British Library, Add. MS 59571, Wrench Papers, vol. 31, New Zealand and the South Sea Islands, 17 October 1912–19 March 1913.

Britain, the leader in industrial shipping, was naturally invested in routes that converged directly on its ports. No British metropolitan firms engaged in transpacific shipping in this period, which opened up space for the entry of entrepreneurs in Britain's settler colonies and also in the US. The route between Sydney and San Francisco was not contained or enclosed by these two ports, however, but represented one leg on a global imperial circuit, connecting the Australasian colonies with Britain via America, an alternative pathway to existing Indian Ocean connections. Britain's global maritime ascendancy also cast a long shadow across the Pacific, with American engagements found wanting by comparison, unsettling any neat depiction of the Pacific as an 'American lake'. Even so, many British and colonial passengers travelled on American ships and related encounters with American crew, and more sporadically with American passengers. They typically brought to these ships and encounters expectations and impressions from prior experiences of empire routes on other oceans. Without the central impulse of the British metropole and the more familiar imperial hierarchies and formalities behind it, they often struggled to locate and narrate their place within this oceanic realm. These oceanic crossings, then, provide insights into the mutual dependencies of British and American imperialisms in the region, but also encounters charged with the tensions and uncertainties of an Anglo-Pacific in the making.

Steamships crossing between Australasia and North America were not wholly Anglo-worlds, however. People of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds also routinely moved between San Francisco and Sydney in a period of unprecedented global mobility. Indeed, they were expected to (with one company ensuring that new ships on the line could be fitted up at short notice for any influx of 'inferior passengers', as it designated Chinese and Japanese clients).²⁰ Indigenous residents of various Pacific Islands regularly travelled along sections of the route and established contact with one another through them, some reports speaking for instance of Maori in northern New Zealand enquiring of Auckland port officials about the arrival of 'Honolulu native strangers' on transpacific steamers.²¹ At sea, however, white passengers seem to have had comparatively limited contact with non-Anglo-passengers, with indigenous and Asian populations in ports of call (where steamers often stayed only long enough to exchange mails), or with the Chinese crews who were employed, for a time, on American transpacific steamships. Their extended encounters and interactions (at least as recorded) appear to have been more with one another. Such encounters, ostensibly along lines of racial affinity, are my focus in this article.

British, Australasian, and American were obvious markers of identity in these encounters. However, while the power and importance of national identifications should not be discounted, they rarely sufficed as stable or universal registers through which people on the move could negotiate difference. Entangled concerns of imperial and colonial subjectivity, social class, gender, and religion were also in play, as well as broader assessments of a certain 'worldliness' articulated through one's level of ease at sea and depth of knowledge and experience of mobility beyond the Pacific. Some of these other evocations of difference and their accompanying frictions, irritations, and ambivalences – in other words, the smaller-scale

20 University of Otago, Hocken Collections (henceforth HC), Cameron family papers, Box 7, James Mills to John Darling, 5 September 1896. Some ships enumerated Chinese passengers according to a separate 'Canton list', as referred to in ship arrivals listed on <http://mariners.records.nsw.gov.au/> (consulted 11 March 2016).

21 National Archives of New Zealand (henceforth NANZ), BBAO A78 5544 Box 18, 1878/918, Auckland branch, Customs Service, Huirama Moanau, Waiuku.

preoccupations and more vernacular sensibilities and articulations of ordinary people on the move – interrupt and offer interesting perspectives on elite meta-narratives attempting to construct a white or Anglo-Saxon Pacific. Even in Boucicault's telling, shipboard exchanges might unsettle the prospect of happy union between the English-speaking races. When challenged by an American man on why the Irish did not rise up against the British, Boucicault assured him that the force of public opinion would eventually 'restore us self-government'. He was exhorted instead to kick them off 'like a man' and kick them out 'like a brother!', a radical (yet fraternal) sensibility which left Boucicault 'musing'.²²

While some passengers were prospective migrants, most people who crossed the Pacific in this period were travelling in pursuit of short-term engagements, typically for familial, religious, business, political, or touristic ends. Americans travelled in large numbers between San Francisco and Honolulu, yet comparatively few ventured farther south to New Zealand and Australia before the First World War. In Auckland and Sydney, Sala observed, it was 'bitterly lamented' that the bulk of American passengers peddled 'American quack nostrums or "Yankee notions"', merely aiming to fleece unsuspecting Antipodeans before returning home again.²³ Metropolitan British and colonial travellers crossed the Pacific to a greater extent than Americans (with the colonial predilection for travel renowned in both the US and Canada by the early twentieth century).²⁴ My sources reflect the uneven national and imperial character of transpacific travel in this period. I draw on about twenty-five accounts written by British and colonial passengers (three of whom were female), and only one by an American man, travelling in first and second class. Steerage class is textually silent, a limitation with which Martin Dusinger grapples in his contribution to this special issue.²⁵

This unevenness also reflects the fact that the Sydney–San Francisco route was regarded as of most import initially to Australasians as an improved connection to Britain. Travellers often felt compelled to record their impressions of the voyage for local readers in order to familiarize and popularize the route as a viable alternative to Suez. These accounts record the arguably trivial and mundane experiences of individual transit. Such impressions, it was acknowledged, 'however full of meaning to the voyagers themselves', were normally of 'the least possible interest to other people'.²⁶ Indeed, even the Oxford historian James Anthony Froude's preoccupation with the trivialities of 'everyday occurrences on steamers', as related in *Oceana, or England and her colonies*, irritated contemporary audiences, with the New Zealand politician Edward Wakefield dismissing it as the work of a 'bore'.²⁷

Yet these travel texts illustrate the contemporary preoccupation with giving the Pacific new meaning through this particular crossing. For if strong flows were not just the result of available shipping, but propelled by networks of intelligence, familial ties, and so on, as scholars of the North Pacific passage have suggested, we might see these writings as opening up that process in other directions, albeit in very uneven and patchy ways.²⁸ By comparison,

22 'Maiden trip of the Mararoa', p. 2.

23 Dingley, *Land of the golden fleece*, p. 110.

24 As remarked on in E. W. Howe, *Travel letters from New Zealand, Australia and Africa*, Topeka: Crane & Co., 1913, p. 55; E.W.S., 'My Australian diary', *The Western Call* [Vancouver], 18 February 1916, p. 7.

25 See Martin Dusinger, 'Writing the on-board: Meiji Japan in transit and transition', pp. 271–94 in this issue.

26 'From Sydney to Kandavu, en route to San Francisco', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 1874, p. 6.

27 As reviewed in *The nineteenth century*, reprinted in part in 'New Zealand and Mr Froude', *Nelson Evening Mail*, 22 September 1886, p. 3. For an assessment of Wakefield's critique, see Lydia Wevers, *A country of writing: travel writing and New Zealand, 1809–1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002, pp. 149–50.

28 Henry Yu, 'The intermittent rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific', in Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *Connecting seas and connected ocean rims: Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and China Seas migrations*

a parallel service which opened later between Sydney and Vancouver, thereby also bridging the Anglo-Pacific, generated far fewer reflections on shipboard dynamics across these decades. A shared sense of imperial kinship may have precluded this, along with smaller passenger lists and the absence of American commercial competition in the operation of that service. I focus principally on the connection between Sydney and San Francisco, the more heavily utilized and textually rich route as far as passengers' travel accounts in this period are concerned, with its more pronounced triangular setting.

The 'modern route': bridging Sydney and San Francisco

Predictions of a great future for transpacific shipping between the 'two great gold countries' of Australia and America were aired from the mid nineteenth century.²⁹ The initial drive for a scheduled steamer service lay with the Australasian colonies of New South Wales and New Zealand. A transpacific bridge promised a saving of a few days in their communications with Britain over routes via the Indian Ocean. From 1852, the British Admiralty subsidized the first imperial steam lines to Australia via the Cape of Good Hope and the 'overland route' via Suez, as it was known before the opening of the Canal in 1869. Concurrent proposals for a transpacific link centred first on Panama (rather than San Francisco) to connect with the isthmus railroad which opened in 1855, but it was not until 1866 that a regular transpacific connection opened. The route was abandoned two years later, after operational difficulties and frequent quarantine delays at Panama.³⁰

Following the completion of the transcontinental rail across the US in 1869, schemes settled on San Francisco as the interchange port. The *Alta California* celebrated the fact that, whereas the American continent once stood as a barrier between Australia and Great Britain, now San Francisco 'lies almost on a direct line' between them.³¹ With the arrival of a steamer in San Francisco in 1870 from Sydney, 'bound for the Old World via the New', this route was seen to represent 'one more strengthening link' in the 'Trans-Pacific chain that is to join the interests of Great Britain's colonies in union indissoluble with the United States'.³² British and colonial travellers also perceived its value in similar terms. John Dunmore Lang, a colonial advocate of Australian federation and republicanism, saw great promise in a transpacific route to Britain precisely because it opened the US to colonial travellers, an opportunity that he believed the Australian colonies 'would not forgo'.³³ Within decades, travelling to England via America was hailed 'the modern route', as the British journalist Leonard Henslowe enthused in 1906, for 'America, one of the greatest nations of the earth, should be seen by every traveller'.³⁴

from the 1830s to the 1930s, Leiden: Brill, 2011, pp. 393–414; Mae M. Ngai, 'Western history and the Pacific world', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 43, 4, 2012, pp. 282–8. Writing during sea travel might equally serve as a way of managing the body: see Tamson Pietsch, 'Bodies at sea: travelling to Australia in the age of sail', pp. 209–28 in this issue.

29 'Shipwrecks in the Pacific', *Empire*, 12 April 1853, p. 2.

30 For more on the inauguration and early political debates, see Frances Steel, 'Re-routing empire? Steam-age circulations and the making of an Anglo Pacific, c.1850–90', *Australian Historical Studies*, 46, 3, 2015, pp. 361–8.

31 *Daily Alta California*, 26 January 1870, p. 2.

32 'Our American letter', *Daily Southern Cross* (Auckland), 16 July 1870, p. 3.

33 John Dunmore Lang, *Brief notes of the new postal route from Sydney to England, by San Francisco and New York*, Sydney: William Maddock, 1875, p. 65.

34 'Australia to England', *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), 29 September 1906, p. 37.

However, this route was not so easily achieved. In contrast to Indian and Atlantic links between the British metropole and its settler colonies, the transpacific connection was at the mercy of colonial divisions and rivalries. Britain did not directly subsidize the San Francisco route and no large metropolitan shipping firms extended their operations to the Pacific. While two groups of American promoters – one led by the commercial agent for the US in Sydney, Hayden H. Hall, and the other by the New York shipbuilder William H. Webb – drove the first initiatives in the early 1870s, the US itself similarly did not offer subsidies. The Australasian colonies were left to raise financial backing among themselves in a climate of intercolonial competition. Short-lived coalitions and partnerships compounded uncertainties, while unsuitable ships were chartered from other trades rather than being built especially for transpacific conditions.³⁵ In 1875 the service was put on a more secure footing through a ten-year contract between the New South Wales and New Zealand governments and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company of New York. Established in 1848, Pacific Mail had greater experience in regional shipping, operating routes from San Francisco to Panama and ports in Asia. Recognizing the challenge of this new venture, it shared the risk with Scottish shipping interests, celebrating the ‘combination of English and American capital, skill and energy’, one practical expression of Anglo-world partnership ‘in the quest for global progress’.³⁶ It also held out the chance for Australia to share equally in this vision: ‘England and America and Australia: *Tria juncta in uno* should not merely be a dream of the enthusiast, but a practical measure for their mutual progress and for the peace of the world.’³⁷

Citing the unprofitability of the venture, Pacific Mail did not re-tender for the service when contracts came up for renewal in 1885. But the American interest endured in the form of the Oceanic Steamship Company of San Francisco, this time in partnership with British settler interests in New Zealand, represented by the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand (USSCo.). The USSCo. already operated a network of services around New Zealand, across the Tasman Sea to eastern Australia, and to islands in the western Pacific. Decried by some as the ‘Southern Octopus’ for its monopoly over regional shipping, it looked to expand operations across the Pacific.³⁸ The Oceanic Company was established in 1881 as a branch of the Hawaiian sugar empire of the German emigrant planter Claus Spreckels.³⁹ Oceanic’s monopolistic tendencies were also revealed early, ousting Pacific Mail from the San Francisco–Honolulu trades, with related tensions spilling into its transpacific operations.⁴⁰

The mixed service was unsatisfactory, insofar as British-registered ships did not qualify for US subsidies for the carriage of American mails. Oceanic’s director, John Spreckels (Claus’s son), attempted unsuccessfully to block USSCo.’s involvement after their initial

35 L. G. Churchward, ‘American enterprise and the foundation of the Pacific mail service’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 3, 11, 1945, pp. 217–24; David M. Pletcher, *Diplomacy of involvement: American economic expansion across the Pacific, 1784–1900*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001, esp. ch. 4; Steel, ‘Re-routing empire?’, pp. 363–72.

36 Pacific Mail Steamship Company, *Handbook of information for passengers and shippers*, Sydney: Geo. Loxon and Co., 1883, p. 21; Bell, *Idea of greater Britain*, p. 257.

37 Pacific Mail Steamship Company, *Handbook of information*, p. 21; Steel, ‘Re-routing empire?’, pp. 370–1.

38 Frances Steel, *Oceania under steam: sea transport and the cultures of colonialism, c.1870–1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

39 For labour politics on Spreckels’s plantation, see Dusinberre, ‘Writing the on-board’.

40 Jacob Adler, ‘The Oceanic Steamship Company: a link in Claus Spreckels’ Hawaiian sugar empire’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 29, 3, 1960, pp. 257–69. For details on the 1885 changes, see Gavin McLean, *The southern octopus: the rise of a shipping empire*, Wellington: New Zealand Ship and Marine Society and the Wellington Harbour Board Maritime Museum, 1990, pp. 70–3.

three-year contract expired in 1888, in order to qualify for the US bounty.⁴¹ Contracts were then renewed on an annual basis, with colonial governments reluctant to commit to longer terms after rumours circulated of an imminent rival service between Sydney and Vancouver following the completion of the Canadian transcontinental railroad in 1885. Without contract commitments of at least five years, neither Oceanic nor Union could embark on shipbuilding programmes to meet demands for improvements in the trades.⁴² The New Zealand and American governments both sought to bring the service under one operator; Spreckels quipped to his USSCo. counterparts that ‘A great country can afford to do things which a weak one cannot safely imitate’, predicting an inevitable rise of American dominance in the commercial life of the Anglo-Pacific.⁴³

The rival Sydney–Vancouver service was confirmed in 1893. Known as the Canadian Australian (CA) Line, it was part of a wider motivation to encircle the globe with an ‘All Red’ (all-British) network via rail and sea, which would pass solely through British territory. The Australasian colonies supported the transpacific segment of the network and the sentiment behind it, but did not view it as a replacement for the San Francisco connection. In any case, it was never exclusively ‘all red’ in that it called at Honolulu, while New Zealand’s omission from the itinerary until 1911 meant that the colony continued to depend on a route via the US for efficient communications with Britain.⁴⁴

Changes at the turn of the century led to greater division and national competition in the transpacific trades. The American annexation of Hawai‘i in 1898 and the subsequent declaration of Honolulu as a coastal port of the US meant that only American-owned ships could trade between Honolulu and the mainland, the most remunerative leg of regional shipping. As if confirming his own prediction of American ascendancy, in 1900 Spreckels negotiated a ten-year contract to be performed exclusively by ships under American registry in accordance with the Hanna-Payne Shipping Subsidy Bill 1899 in aid of rejuvenating US merchant shipping.⁴⁵ These challenges combined to force the USSCo. off the San Francisco route, and Oceanic continued the service alone.

Continued colonial subsidization of a foreign company and the promotion of a non-imperial route sparked intermittent popular opposition in the Australasian colonies. Dissatisfaction stemmed largely from Oceanic’s continued poor handling of the service (‘the Americans have shut us out’, lamented the Sydney journalist Robert McMillan, leaving colonials to ‘suffer’ by travelling by Oceanic). However, Australasian supporters and promoters of the Sydney–San Francisco route variously stressed that America was only ‘one big British colony’ and, as Americans were ‘a branch of the Anglo Saxon race’, Oceanic could not be considered foreign in the more conventional sense of the term. The company’s New Zealand agent emphasized that, as the shortest service, the San Francisco connection was, after all, the ‘geographical route’ and of long-standing import as ‘the old gate-way’

41 McLean, *Southern octopus*, pp. 74–5.

42 HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/031, John Spreckels to James Mills, 11 November 1891; AG-292-005-004/035, Spreckels to Mills, 7 January 1893; NANZ, AAME W5603 81106, Box 69, ‘New Zealand Post Office: a short history of the Ocean Mail services’.

43 HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/031, John Spreckels, 19 August 1891.

44 Frances Steel, ‘The “missing link”: space, race and transoceanic ties in the settler-colonial Pacific’, *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*, 5, 3, 2015, pp. 49–67.

45 NANZ, AAME W5603 81106, Box 69, ‘A short history of the Ocean Mail services’; *San Francisco Call*, 7 January 1899, p. 6.

to England.⁴⁶ Oceanic's advertising also played on its role in facilitating imperial traffic, enthusing to an Australasian audience: 'If not through America, why not!'⁴⁷

In any case, Oceanic's operations were suspended following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the contraction of American subsidies. In the meantime, the USSCo. assumed the operation of the rival CA Line in 1901, after the insolvency of its previous operator. Seeing the value of a direct service to the US, the company also circumvented the American navigation restrictions from 1910, connecting Sydney with San Francisco via Tahiti in French Polynesia rather than Honolulu. In 1912, Oceanic re-entered transpacific trading in opposition. On the eve of the First World War, then, three routes – two from Sydney to San Francisco (one of them broadly British operated by the USSCo. and the other American operated by the Oceanic) and a third from Sydney to Vancouver (operated by the USSCo.) – bound together Australia, New Zealand, and North America. An early trend of cooperation and mutual dependence in the 1870s and 1880s had gradually given way to an operating environment of increasing divergence and competition, paradoxically about the same time that the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon unity appeared to be making headway.

The Indian Ocean linked the white settler colonies with 'home' via the dependent non-white empire. For many travellers it represented a familiar arena marked by imperial spatial and racial hierarchy, where they might easily locate themselves. Indeed, for some Australian passengers the route was almost a rite of passage.⁴⁸ Thus McMillan in 1902 pondered as his ship steamed out of Colombo en route to London from Sydney: 'Why are we the masters of the earth? Why are we sailing half round the world and forever calling at British ports? ... What is the secret of England's greatness?'⁴⁹ The route's 'extraordinary "Britishness"' impressed metropolitan consumers too. Travelling a decade later, Edward Harding, a member of the Dominions Royal Commission, took pleasure in the fact that his ship repeatedly entered British-looking ports ('in all but the houses and population'), well-stocked with British delights such as picture postcards and whisky. It 'ought really to be called "The Imperial Piccadilly"', he asserted.⁵⁰

Such tropes were not as available on the Pacific between Sydney and San Francisco. Island port calls chopped and changed, and were embedded variously within empire (Auckland and Wellington), only nominally within imperial spheres of control (Galoa Harbour at Kadavu in the Fiji Islands), contested by multiple powers (Pago Pago in Tutuila, the Samoan Islands), controlled by an indigenous monarch (Honolulu), or within the domain of a rival power (Papeete in French Polynesia). The 'All Red' route rhetoric attempted to overwrite these entanglements through its promotion of a chain of 'free communities' joined by 'lines of rapid modern transit to the heart of the Empire'.⁵¹ The conviction that the Hawaiian Islands (at least before American annexation) 'might safely be counted upon as neutral in the event of hostilities' undercut Honolulu's anomalous status.⁵² Yet the port was especially disorienting for

46 'The San Francisco mail route', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1902, p. 8; 'Our mail services', *Evening Post*, 18 October 1901, p. 2; *Marlborough Express*, 23 May 1907, p. 6.

47 Steel, 'Missing link', pp. 59–60.

48 Angela Woollacott, "'All this is the empire, I told myself': Australian women's voyages "home" and the articulation of colonial whiteness', *American Historical Review*, 102, 4, 1997, pp. 1003–29.

49 Robert McMillan, *There and back; or notes of a voyage round the world*, Sydney: William Brooks & Co, 1903, p. 64.

50 Stephen Constantine, ed., *Dominions diary: the letters of E. J. Harding, 1913–1916*, Halifax: Ryburn, 1992, p. 54.

51 'Mr Winston Churchill's views', *Wanganui Herald*, 24 June 1908, p. 5; Steel, 'Missing link'.

52 *Fiji Times*, 3 July 1895.

British imperial subjects. As the New Zealander William Hepburn, travelling in 1879, remarked, Honolulu was ‘more foreign than anything in the colonies’.⁵³ For the Brisbane colonist Walter Wilson, crossing the following year, it was ‘more like a bazaar than a town’.⁵⁴ Travelling shortly after the designation of Honolulu as US territory, the Auckland councillor Jim Parr wrote to his wife, ‘this is a town peculiar in many ways. Americans, Chinese, Negroes & Natives, half castes, Japs &c elbow their way along.’⁵⁵ This sort of diversity would not have fazed imperial subjects transiting the Indian Ocean ports reassuringly under British control. By contrast, the Pacific was more obviously an ocean of fractured, competing, and mutually dependent engagements through to 1900 and beyond, where passengers could be confronted by seemingly autonomous indigenous actors, or where they found themselves making comparative, if fleeting, assessments of the respective ‘progress’ of British, American, and French tropical colonialism.⁵⁶

Britain’s less secure foothold in the Pacific, notably before the opening of the CA Line, might, however, leave British travellers particularly receptive to the American presence. Thus Froude enthused from a Pacific Mail steamer in 1885, ‘we were under the “stars and stripes”, a flag always welcome to Englishmen when they cannot have their own’.⁵⁷ Other travellers were gratified that Americans farewelled steamers at Honolulu by playing ‘God save the Queen’, especially as ‘there are so few English in Honolulu’.⁵⁸ At the same time, Britain’s long-standing supremacy on the high seas provided a benchmark against which American endeavours in the Pacific were complacently assessed and found wanting. Crossing on an Oceanic ship, the British industrial manufacturer Richard Tangye took pleasure in pointedly relating that the voyage ‘furnished a very excellent means of comparison between the much-vaunted Yankee superiority in everything mechanical over England’. The ship lacked necessary amenities, with insufficient seats on deck, limited handrails, and no cabin space to stow belongings, while the toilets were placed so close together as to be common to first and second class. ‘All that I can say is, that this ship, a new one, built at Philadelphia, is not equal to a third-class British ship.’⁵⁹

Britain’s premier metropolitan firms did not engage directly in the region, leaving the settler colonies, notably New Zealand, tasked with maintaining imperial communications across the Pacific. American observers might be equally struck by the divergent projection of state power in the oceanic domain. Travelling in 1886 with Boucicault on the maiden voyage of the new USSCo. vessel *Mararoa*, said to rival Atlantic steamers in comfort if not in size, an American passenger apparently exclaimed: ‘What right has New Zealand with a boat like this? What a piece of extravagance!’⁶⁰ During the operation of their combined service between 1885 and 1900, passengers could choose between USSCo. and Oceanic steamers. With each company

53 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (henceforth ATL), fMS-Papers-3948, diary of William Arnold Hepburn, 1879.

54 Walter Horatio Wilson, *The Pacific route: Brisbane to New York*, Brisbane: Gordon and Gotch, 1884, p. 9.

55 Auckland City Library (henceforth ACL), George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Christopher James (Jim) Parr, Letters to his wife Ethel, during an overseas trip – SS *Ventura* across the Pacific, 6 March 1902.

56 For example, Lang, *Brief notes of the new postal route*, pp. 17, 24.

57 James Anthony Froude, *Oceana, or England and her colonies*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1886, p. 199.

58 ATL, MS-Papers-2010, Arthur Filmer, ‘Log of a voyage’, 1876. For more on Hawai’i’s British connections, see James Haley, *Captive paradise: a history of Hawai’i*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 2014; Merze Tate, ‘Great Britain and the sovereignty of Hawai’i’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 31, 1962, pp. 327–48.

59 Richard Tangye, *Notes of my fourth voyage to the Australian colonies*, Birmingham: White & Pike, 1886, p. 90.

60 ‘Maiden trip of the *Mararoa*’, p. 2.

entitled to hold on to its own ship's earnings, however, Oceanic repeatedly sought to discourage passengers from booking with the USSCo., yet ultimately could not overcome the poor reputation of its own fleet for unseaworthiness, incivility, and poor catering. The USSCo. revelled in the fact that Honolulu people tended to 'hang back' for its ship.⁶¹ Even San Francisco residents 'shrug their shoulders' at the mention of Oceanic's fleet.⁶² Closer to home at Sydney, however, the USSCo. feared being tarnished by its association with Oceanic, for the latter's ships were mere 'pigmies' when berthed alongside P&O and Orient Line vessels on the Suez route, it being 'almost absurd' to run such steamers in competition to them.⁶³

Ships were therefore unreliable barometers of American progress and influence in the Pacific. As 'slow old tubs', they posed no threat to British maritime dominance.⁶⁴ Even after Oceanic resumed transpacific trading in 1912, the contrast with other regional powers was striking; 'We have a wonderful country in the United States', the retired editor of the *Kansas Globe*, E.W. Howe, reflected on his 1913 crossing to Australasia, 'but we pay very little attention to ships'. He went on: 'I heard the captain say at dinner today that the United States sends only twelve passenger ships to foreign countries', whereas 'England sends eleven thousand. Germany comes next with five thousand, and little Japan has five hundred.'⁶⁵ Prominent on the seas in the first half of the nineteenth century, operating sailing packets and clipper ships around the world, British steam lines experienced rapid growth from the 1840s which cut into the American market significantly, and early American steamship companies were not strong competitors. The US disengaged from liner operations largely because of the Civil War and a preoccupation with the terrestrial frontier. In the decades preceding the First World War, there was a widespread attitude that ocean transportation was not an industry in which American labour and capital could profitably compete.⁶⁶ During and after the war, however, the US embarked on a programme of shipbuilding and launched liners on the Pacific in the early 1930s that quickly became new standard bearers of luxury, a reversal in fortunes which is outside the scope of this article to address.⁶⁷

Britain relied heavily on its Asian empire in the Indian Ocean for crewing its mercantile fleet, with low-wage, non-white, colonized labour maintained on the basis of supposed innate racial capacities for particular kinds of work, and perceived docility and tractability in comparison to unionized British labour. Their collective presence bolstered images of British maritime supremacy. 'It was splendid to find on board a British built, British owned, British officered' ship, the personnel 'of an Arab dhow', delighted Sala, travelling from Melbourne to Britain on the P&O *Massilia*. This was a kind of cross between the 'British Jack Tar and the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, in full Oriental costumes and all barefooted', an orientalized

61 HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/022, Frederick Jackson to James Mills, 8 February 1892; AG-292-005-001/046, Mills to Head Office, 5 July 1899. For complaints about Oceanic steamers, see AG-292-005-001/031, Henry Gibbs to Mills, 28 May 1891 and 26 June 1891; AG-292-005-001/018, E. P. Houghton to Mills, 16 July 1889.

62 ACL, George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Parr, Letters, 12 March 1902.

63 HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/022, Frederick Jackson to James Mills, 1 February 1892 and 14 March 1892.

64 *Timaru Herald*, 16 September 1896, p. 4.

65 Howe, *Travel letters*, p. 16.

66 Edward W. Sloan, 'Shipping: United States', in John B. Hattendorf, ed., *The Oxford encyclopedia of maritime history*, vol. 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 634–5; Edmund E. Day, 'The American merchant fleet: a war achievement, a peace problem', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 34, 4, 1920, p. 576.

67 Greg Kennedy, 'American and British merchant shipping: competition and preparation, 1933–39', in Greg Kennedy, ed., *The merchant marine in international affairs, 1850–1950*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 107–54; Imperial Shipping Committee, *Possibilities of a British passenger and cargo service*.

shipboard atmosphere which G. Balachandran has deemed a mobile display of 'exotic trophies of imperial conquest', underscoring P&O's image as the premier firm 'East of Suez'.⁶⁸

Such networks and cultures of maritime recruitment, which embraced the Indian subcontinent, were not transposed to the Pacific, which in turn created a raft of challenges for Australasian and American shipping. Britain's settler colonies diverged sharply from the metropole, waging battles from the 1870s to uphold white labour supremacy in the mercantile marine, notably to oust Chinese and Pacific Islander crews of local firms trading between ports in Australia, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. By the time that the USSCo. entered transpacific shipping in 1885 it had conceded to union agitation and employed only British and colonial crews.⁶⁹

In the first decades of the San Francisco service, Pacific Mail and Oceanic both recruited Chinese stewards and engine-room and deck crew, with senior positions reserved for whites. Chinese were favoured for their trustworthiness, captains swearing against English, Scotch, Irish, and Americans as 'there is no getting along with them'.⁷⁰ African American crew were on occasion employed in the service roles of barber and table servant, while on one vessel the head steward was black, 'and it was curious to note how he lorded it over the white stewards', a rare instance of an inverted racial hierarchy and a racially mixed department.⁷¹ In Sala's rendering, at least, the Chinese crew whom he encountered on a Pacific Mail ship en route to Sydney diminished or sequestered their 'exoticness' in part by wearing the 'garb of European or American mariners' and eating their meals out of sight of the passengers.⁷² His comparative assessments were probably coloured by his long-anticipated consumption of P&O patriotic travel between Australia and Britain (for the first time, at the age of fifty-nine), yet Chinese maritime employment could not epitomize empire in the same way that Indian crewing did, and was not used to bolster or celebrate American maritime prowess on the Pacific.

Instead, it became a target of protest, as settler colonial labour demands extended to American vessels, much to Spreckels' disgust. He insisted he would use the labour 'that suits me best'. As he informed the USSCo., 'it surprises us here to see how people in the Colonies have yielded from time to time to every demand made upon them by laborers'.⁷³ He opposed hiring white crews in Sydney as they would probably desert at San Francisco, a high-wage port, while a scarcity of white labour in San Francisco offered little recourse. He also believed that he was being targeted unfairly, given the multiracial manning on P&O boats to Australia.⁷⁴ By 1889, however, legislation passed on both sides of the Pacific combined to force Spreckels' hand. New South Wales included stipulations in its renewed mail contract that only European crews were to be employed, while the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act 1888 prohibited Chinese crew from landing at San Francisco after they had left that port (although crews in

68 Dingley, *Land of the golden fleece*, pp. 193–4; G. Balachandran, *Globalizing labour? Indian seafarers and world shipping*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 6.

69 Ann Curthoys, 'Conflict and consensus', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus, eds., *Who are our enemies? racism and the Australian working class*, Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1978, pp. 48–65; Steel, *Oceania under steam*, pp. 98–105.

70 As related to Froude, *Oceana*, p. 203.

71 Richard Tangye, *Reminiscences of travel in Australia, America and Egypt*, London: Sampson Low, 1883, p. 115. William Hepburn also mentions black servants: see ATL, fMS-Papers-3948, diary of William Arnold Hepburn, 1879. For the shifting status of African American seamen, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black jacks: African American seamen in the age of sail*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, esp. pp. 222–5.

72 Dingley, *Land of the golden fleece*, p. 193.

73 HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/016, John Spreckels to James Mills, 7 March and 22 September 1888.

74 *Ibid.*, Spreckels to Mills, 7 March 1888.

North Pacific trades to Asian ports remained mixed).⁷⁵ Chinese steamship employment was curtailed as maritime union agitation folded into wider political battles against ‘Asiatic’ immigration around the Pacific.⁷⁶ This would eventually encompass maritime cultures on the Indian Ocean, too, after Australian Federation, with the passage of the Post and Telegraph Act 1901 containing a preferential white labour clause for all boats under a federal mail contract.⁷⁷ These debates and demands exemplified the boundary work of whiteness, mobilized to ‘justify claims of privilege and possession’ in settler colonies, unlike ‘Anglo-Saxon’, a term that was seldom deployed along ‘racial borderlands’.⁷⁸ Although Oceanic did not seem to share or sympathize with the labour platform of an assertive colonial nationalism, Spreckels’ biographer would later celebrate him as a “square” fighter and a “white” man’.⁷⁹

Even as white labour claimed transpacific steamers as their exclusive preserve, they were still low status in many workers’ estimation. There were continued problems securing stewards in San Francisco ‘as young men only take the position as a “snake shift”’. Between sailings, boats were laid up for three weeks. Men were paid off and seldom re-employed on the same vessels, which meant that they were perceived to have little investment in the ships or the passengers.⁸⁰ Oceanic also had to resort to carrying workaways to replace stewards who jumped ship in Sydney, a form of temporary crewing opposed by the Pacific Coast union.⁸¹ On the other side of the Pacific, the USSCo. similarly struggled to attract crew to the transpacific trades. Stewards preferred the coastal routes and the shorter trans-Tasman runs between New Zealand and Australia, where large passenger lists ensured high tips. On these routes they pooled earnings, but on the long transpacific runs ‘it was each man for himself’.⁸²

Encounters in transit

White labour on both sides was indifferent to the transpacific trade and employers regarded them with equal distaste, yet passengers perceived colonial stewards as more deferential and respectful than their American counterparts. Americans, one author suggested with reference to transatlantic steamships, ‘had not crossed the ocean in steerage for them to be subservient to the rich or titled’, proffering a sort of levelling ‘steerage effect’ that endured, to be transposed later to shipboard service cultures. Perhaps more suggestive was his recognition that British naval hierarchies mediated working life on transatlantic steamers.⁸³ In such perceptions, a stratified

75 Andrew Markus, *Fear and hatred: purifying Australia and California, 1850–1901*, Sydney: Hale & Remonger, 1979, pp. 168–70; Steel, *Oceania under steam*, p. 101.

76 Matthew Guterl and Christine Skwiot, ‘Atlantic and Pacific crossings: race, empire, and “the labor problem” in the late nineteenth century’, *Radical History Review*, 91, 2005, pp. 40–61; Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line*, esp. ch. 1.

77 Oceanic was still heavily dependent on non-white crew, including Hawaiians and Mexicans, especially as coal passers. American ships were dismissed as the ‘worst’ for discipline by Sydney port officials. See ‘A first class pandemonium’, *Evening News*, 5 September 1906, p. 3.

78 Anderson, ‘Traveling white’, p. 68; Steel, *Oceania under steam*, esp. ch. 4.

79 H. Austin Adams, *The man, John D. Spreckels*, San Diego, CA: Press of Frye & Smith, 1924, p. 134.

80 HC, Cameron Family Papers, Box 3, James Mills to Angus Cameron, 5 April 1890.

81 Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, Marine Cooks and Stewards Association of the Pacific Coast minutes, 1910–1931, BANC MSS 2004/178 c, vol. 2:2.

82 As related to Siegfried Eichelbaum: see ATL, MSX-7860, Chapman, Eichelbaum and Rosenberg families: Papers, Travel diary, 1 March 1912.

83 Cited in Ray W. Coye and Patrick J. Murphy, ‘The golden age: service management on transatlantic ocean liners’, *Journal of Management History*, 13, 2, 2007, p. 183.

Atlantic, dominated by the British companies Cunard and White Star and still bearing traces of empire, contrasted with a more democratic Pacific, where expected hierarchies and boundaries did not appear to hold.

This could be unsettling for British and colonial travellers alike, who as a result felt themselves at the mercy of crew behaviour that appeared idiosyncratic or inexplicable. For well-heeled British subjects entering the US via the Pacific route, American vessels could provide a foretaste of a land of possible tension or conflict, where familiar codes of deference and civility no longer applied. Entangled with the mediating power of historical memory of independence from Britain, a certain radical republican attitude seems to have perceptibly trumped any recognition of a shared English-speaking heritage or deeper 'familial' bonds.

Considerations of class, refinement, norms of civility, and social order jostled in the 1891 voyage account of the Australian Congregationalist minister Reverend Joseph Barry, travelling from Sydney to San Francisco on an Oceanic steamer, *Mariposa*. He relayed an incident involving a 'quiet gentlemanly man, and head of a large English firm known all over the world' and 'by no means a blustering globe trotter with imperious disagreeable ways':

The steward was removing his plate and knife before he had finished his supper. Passenger – 'don't take that knife away. I have not done with it'. Steward – 'I have orders to clear this table, and I will. You are not in a d—d British ship now'. Another steward standing by, 'Yes, we licked them once, and we could do it again'.

The passenger reported the matter to the purser, '(another American), who merely remarked that so-and-so "Must have been drunk" but no apology has been tendered'.⁸⁴ The friction continued, coming to a head on leaving Honolulu, when two 'stalwart' passengers manhandled a steward out of the saloon for 'an outburst of impudence' in 'the presence of ladies'. The captain chastised them for interfering, but placed the steward in chains for the rest of the voyage. For Barry, the whole experience was 'peculiar', accustomed as he was to 'the civility usually enjoyed on the Union boats'.⁸⁵

Stewards on American ships came across as figures of some authority, running the saloon almost as their own fief, determined even to override the authority of officers and the captain. When the Sydney journalist McMillan requested that second-class passengers be allowed to join first-class passengers in their Sunday observance, 'as I am always anxious to see people able to worship something else besides dollars', the stewards insisted that such mixing was not permissible. McMillan approached the captain, who had no objection; 'I was glad', McMillan remarked, 'because the ship was better than the stewards thought'. But the captain soon withdrew his favour, honouring instead the stewards' objections. This incident only served to further convince McMillan that 'British people should travel under the British flag'.⁸⁶ Similarly, when Cornelius Burnett, a solicitor from New Zealand, crossed on an Oceanic ship in 1902, his saloon steward refused the passengers permission to hold Sunday observance: 'he says we have quite enough of it ashore'. Burnett went on to characterize his steamer as 'a ship of negatives'. Not only was there no Sunday service, but there was also no piano, no bar,

84 'To Washington and back', *Press*, 15 September 1891, p. 5.

85 'To Washington and back', *Otago Daily Times*, 14 October 1891, p. 3. Barry's travel narratives were published anonymously, with USSCo. officials making enquiries about the identity of this 'scribbler' in order to alert Spreckels: HC, USSCo. records, AG-292-005-001/031, George McLean to John Spreckels, 3 November 1891.

86 McMillan, *There and back*, pp. 364–6.

no sweeps on the run, no coffee in the morning, no visit from the captain or any officer of the ship, no social hall, no smoking room, and no entertainment committee – in short, none of the basic social comforts found on board British ships.⁸⁷

His experiences in the Pacific led Richard Tangye to reflect on shipboard interactions with the crew and on the advantages of assuming a special persona adapted to sea travel. Meekness was ‘about the worst quality one can have’, because ‘your request is disregarded if not actually resented’ – ‘so I go in finally for self-assertion on board ocean steamers’.⁸⁸ Yet colonial passengers might have felt caught in the middle, between the democratic sensibilities that American crews laid claim to and the imperial airs that British travellers cultivated: ‘Some of our English passengers do not deserve the kindness shown to them’, a traveller from Nelson remarked; ‘they make one feel ashamed of them, they do grumble so unmercifully’.⁸⁹ Subsequent Atlantic voyages might also underline the refreshing contrast of their Pacific experiences. Thus the Auckland councillor Parr remarked when crossing the Atlantic that he and his travelling companions began to miss the ‘autocratic and surly’ American stewards on the Pacific, for the ‘young Britisher’ who waited on them ‘is much too deferential’.⁹⁰

In interactions between passengers, social class was also a powerful interpretive framework, which again developed typically through comparisons with travel on other oceans. As long-distance shipping came later to the Pacific than to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans (with twenty-eight weekly transatlantic steamer lines in operation by 1875, the year that Pacific Mail assumed the San Francisco–Sydney service), seasoned travellers were apt to reflect on the ways in which emerging mobility cultures on the Pacific differed from elsewhere. The transpacific saloon companions of the New Zealand businessman James Kirker were ‘a strange medley’ and ‘not nearly as nice’ when compared to those of P&O and Orient Line vessels plying between Britain and the colonies. Furthermore, the American women on his ship appeared ‘very matter of fact with not much refinement about them’.⁹¹ The company on Burnett’s boat was ‘very fair’ but ‘not equal’ to the Canal or direct steamers, even in the absence of the ‘element of genteel vulgarity’ more common to the Suez route.⁹²

To some, nevertheless, by comparison with the Atlantic, Pacific ships could appear more open and sociable. Shorter transatlantic transits (one week compared to three weeks on the Pacific in the late nineteenth century) and larger passenger lists presented less opportunity for wide-ranging encounters, and allowed only a limited ‘form of acquaintance’ with a ‘select few’ to develop. In the Pacific, by contrast, there was a ‘peculiar social spirit, seldom found on the Atlantic liners’. It was more typical to mix ‘with the whole of the company’.⁹³ This was also perhaps a commentary on the more socially differentiated clientele on the Atlantic, where class divisions were stronger and more deeply etched. For instance, while Parr’s fellow first-class passengers on the transpacific passage made up a ‘motley and interesting crowd’ and a ‘mixture of all sorts’ – the Oceanic, as he did not fail to note, permitted a more diverse range of people into first class than other shipping companies were wont to do – his transatlantic travelling companions were ‘all staid and respectable’.⁹⁴

87 ATL, MS-Papers-1454-038, Burnett family papers, outward correspondence, 1902.

88 Tangye, *Notes of my fourth voyage*, p. 92.

89 ‘A Nelsonian’s visit to the United States – No. II’, *Colonist*, 13 June 1882, p. 3.

90 ACL, George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Parr, Letters, 6 May 1902.

91 ATL, MS-Papers-10821-03, Kirker, James Papers, Travel diary, 1889–90.

92 ATL, MS-Papers-1454-038, Burnett family papers, 1902.

93 Trumbull White, *Pacific tours and around the world*, Chicago, IL: Passenger Department Santa Fe Route (American and Australian Line), 1900, pp. 24, 154.

94 ACL, George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Parr, Letters, 8 May 1902.

Masculinity and class were entangled in observations relating to the everyday use of shipboard space, yet there appeared to be few stable norms that determined acceptable masculine behaviour. The first-class passengers who queued for their baths each morning in ‘gorgeous dressing-gowns’, as Froude delighted, asserted an informal claim over space which challenged more authoritative boundaries separating public from private.⁹⁵ An Englishman’s insistence on showing his pyjamas ‘all over a ship’ was, however, perplexing to the Kansas journalist Howe in its effeminacy.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, British and colonial passengers were quickly irritated by Americans’ easy domination of communal shipboard spaces, notably the smoking room, which became ‘almost uninhabitable’ through their persistent poker-playing.⁹⁷ Here the Atlantic was held up as ‘propriety itself’, as James Francis Hogan, an Irish-born Australian journalist, attested, for there ‘was none of that systematic gambling for high stakes’ so common on the Pacific boats.⁹⁸

Bodily habits and functions also marked out gradations of appropriate manliness. Spitting seems to have been a common practice among American men. Colonial observers, however, regarded this as perverted class behaviour met by frequent complaints of ‘objectionable Yankees’.⁹⁹ Similarly, Americans were judged to fall well short of civilized norms through their open displays of sea-sickness (Tangye informing his American cabin mate that British travellers ‘don’t “throw up” ... we go up and lean over the lee side’).¹⁰⁰ Illness served as another trope in the comparative assessment of maritime capacity, enabling British travellers to easily dismiss Americans as ‘not good sailors’, just as they dismissed Oceanic’s ships as third-rate and posing no real threat to British shipping.¹⁰¹

While ‘the nation’ did not speak to or channel these embodied traits in any coherent way, there were occasions when it seemed strategically useful to mobilize it to performative ends. British and colonial passengers appeared far more invested in this than their American counterparts. In fact, as if to counter their own forebodings, they often attempted to draw their fellow passengers’ views on political and economic questions. During shipboard debates (such as ‘free trade versus protection’), American passengers were ‘moderate’ in their opinions, let others ‘have their way’, or simply failed to engage at all, saying ‘nothing about politics’. This invariably led to happy appraisals of Americans as easy-going and ‘really jolly fellows’.¹⁰² However, in ‘10 minutes’, as Parr proudly related, he had made the ‘miserable Texan man’ who spoke ‘disparagingly of *little New Zealand*, not knowing it was represented’, feel ‘sorry he spoke’. Parr berated him with a lengthy commentary about New Zealand’s superior natural resources, labour laws, and scenic wonders, and its success in avoiding strikes, poverty, and ‘noxious trusts and corners’, rounding it all off by presenting the Official Yearbook. He ‘[has been] most respectful ever since’, Parr boasted to his wife, in urging her to spread the story at home and thereby giving his interjection a performative context that went well beyond the

95 Froude, *Oceana*, p. 293.

96 Howe, *Travel letters*, pp. 72, 112.

97 Dingley, *Land of the golden fleece*, p. 16.

98 James Francis Hogan, *The Australian in London and America*, London: Ward & Downey, 1889, pp. 14–15.

99 ‘The home trip’, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 22 December 1894, p. 2; ATL, MSX-7860, Eichelbaum, Travel diary, 10 February 1912.

100 Tangye, *Reminiscences of travel*, p. 128, emphasis in original.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 129; Mary Boyd, *Our stolen summer: the record of a roundabout tour*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1900, p. 332; ATL, MS-Papers-7496-10, diary of Joseph Rowe Gard, June–December 1871.

102 Samuel Smiles, ed., *Round the world, including a residence in Victoria, and a journey by rail across North America. By a boy*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871, p. 231; ‘A Nelsonian’s visit to the United States – No. II’, *Colonist*, 13 June 1882, p. 3.

ship.¹⁰³ This exaggerated response illustrates further Tamson Pietsch's insights into the ship as a site of many encounters against which people shaped and articulated their own sense of identity, frequently falling back on notions of nation and home – here as articulated through the protective armour of a seemingly indisputable tally of resources, statistics, and laws.¹⁰⁴

An argumentative preoccupation with politics might mark out colonials as insecure and weak. Staying quiet or unruffled when challenged to debate on deck or in the saloon might, by contrast, communicate a sense of gravitas or self-assurance. It was precisely these traits that so inspired the Australian politician Alfred Deakin on travelling through the US in the 1880s. Americans appeared to exemplify a powerful 'republican manhood' to which Australians might aspire.¹⁰⁵ Yet, in other ways, such manly composure might be seen to reflect relative colonial (mis-)fortunes rather than distinguish 'colonial' insecurities from free, 'republican' manliness. Travelling on a CA Line boat in 1905 between Sydney and Vancouver, an Australian Methodist minister observed that 'disgust with Australian politics among Australians themselves is bitter and loud on every deck and that its politics are driving people from Australia finds abundant proof'. He opined that the Australian 'knows that the world thinks he is failing; he half suspects himself of failure', yet the quiet Canadian 'knows he is succeeding and knows why ... and he knows the world takes him seriously and contemplates him with respect'. He went on: 'the only Australasian who does not apologise for himself is the New Zealander'. New Zealanders had a 'fine robust and even aggressive self-respect' and were 'inclined to pity the Australian'.¹⁰⁶

This ship also carried a group of eighty 'failed' Australian settlers beginning their pilgrimage to Zion City in Chicago as followers of John Alexander Dowie, a Scottish evangelist active in both Australia and the United States. Many common transpacific travellers in this period were adherents of new syncretic religions, including notably Mormonism and Spiritualism. The literary historian Sebastian Lecourt argues that religious diversity was important in conveying the power of Anglo-Saxonism as a globalizing force, for, rather than ideas of 'purity' of blood, language, and culture as articulated by elite empire travellers, the strength of an imagined global Anglo-Saxon civilization lay in its 'capacity for hybridity and eclecticism'. Thus revisionist Victorian accounts celebrated Salt Lake City in Utah as 'a great vanguard movement of Anglo-Saxon settler colonialism', spreading civilization, albeit one marked by a 'generative otherness', in a remote wasteland.¹⁰⁷

These religious adherents attracted rather unfavourable assessments en route, however, with the Methodist minister suggesting that the loss of the 'Dowietites' to Australia was 'perhaps, not very great'.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, fellow passengers attempted to grapple with the motivations and collective outlook of the believers of what to them were new and strange sects. When 'a colony of Mormons' joined the ship at Honolulu and attempted to preach to steerage passengers, 'their doctrines did not meet with sympathy' but, as a result, as the Queenslander A.G. Stephens remarked, 'debates on religious questions, in which twenty or thirty took part, became the order of the long sea-day'.¹⁰⁹ A Nelson passenger adjudged the Mormons on his

103 ACL, George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Parr, Letters, 25 February 1902, emphasis in original.

104 Tamson Pietsch, 'A British sea: making sense of global space in the late nineteenth century', *Journal of Global History*, 5, 3, 2010, pp. 433, 442.

105 Lake, 'Brightness of eyes'.

106 'The all red route', *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1905, p. 12.

107 Sebastian Lecourt, 'The Mormons, the Victorians, and the idea of greater Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 56, 1, 2013, pp. 86, 87.

108 'The all red route', *Brisbane Courier*, 29 July 1905, p. 12.

109 A. G. Stephens, *A Queenslander's travel-notes*, Sydney: Beatty, Richardson & Co, 1894, p. 8.

ship a 'queer looking lot' and on talking with some Americans he concluded that the women ('poor wretches') would endure 'a particularly wretched time of it to the end of their days'. After conversing directly with them, however, he followed up an invitation to visit Salt Lake from their elder, who impressed him as 'a strapping fellow'.¹¹⁰ There appear also to have been some limits to Mormonism's spread around the Pacific, with twenty adherents and an elder returning to Salt Lake from New Zealand in 1893, for 'your land laws could not retain them'.¹¹¹

If the Mormon frontier instanced a successful and providential white settlement taking root in the US, the interchange at Honolulu appeared to mark out a more troubling boundary, where Anglo-Saxon virtues were sullied by the tropical frontier. During their short lay-over in port, Australasian and British travellers generally recorded their enjoyment of a promising foretaste of American energy and enterprising modernity, even when confronted by the racially mixed population.¹¹² This served as a kind of threshold or entry point to a new way of thinking and looking at the world. Yet empire travellers typically made less favourable assessments of the passengers who joined the boat at Honolulu, who were widely seen as lacking in 'reserve'.¹¹³ Perceptions of these passengers as morally depraved challenged other perceptions of quiet and assured republican Anglo-Saxon manhood. Parr hoped that the Americans who joined his ship there and turned the smoking saloon into a '*gambling hell*' were 'the *very hottest crowd* I ever me[e]t', and 'not fair samples of the citizens of the great Republic – as if they are I have had enough of them'.¹¹⁴ Passengers were warned against card sharpers joining the ship at Honolulu, while the spirit of private gain that seemed to come on board there was observed to extend beyond the smoking room. Officers pocketed up to US\$200 from Honolulu passengers (who 'had evidently plenty of money') for securing the crew's berths on already-crowded vessels.¹¹⁵

Beyond the enthusiastic pursuit of wealth, to harsh British eyes Americans also appeared to have degenerated from prolonged residence in the islands. The sight of a group huddled unselfconsciously around a cooking pot on deck, sharing the consumption of its contents 'native' style, aroused disparaging comments. The tropics, with their suggestion of contamination and racial slippage, penetrated the ship in other ways, such as centipedes dropping from bananas strung up along the promenade deck overrunning the ship.¹¹⁶ The Pacific frontier experiences of some passengers also seemed to have hardened American attitudes against Britain. Tangye was confronted by one man bearing a grievance related to some dispute with the British in the Samoan Islands, accompanied by a 'Yankee journalist of a most anti-British type'. When he stormed out of the saloon as 'God save the Queen' was sung at the end of a concert, half a dozen men followed suit.¹¹⁷ Noting such pointed and assertive behaviour, even along a maritime corridor over which the US claimed exclusive rights, would appear already to suggest a degree of unease and disquiet among a class of British passengers about America's intentions in the region and the reach of its influence.

110 'A Nelsonian en route for San Francisco', *Colonist*, 9 May 1882, p. 3.

111 'The S. S. Monowai', *Auckland Star*, 24 June 1893, p. 2.

112 For more on these contrasts, but for a later period, see Anne Rees, 'Ellis Island in the Pacific: encountering America in Hawai'i, 1920s–1950s', unpublished paper for 'Australasian–Pacific travel, magazines, and the middlebrow imagination 1925–1950' symposium, James Cook University, Queensland, 29 November 2013.

113 Boyd, *Our stolen summer*, p. 331.

114 ACL, George Grey Collections, NZMS 1315, Parr, Letters, 10 March 1902, emphasis in original; ATL, MS-Papers-7496-10, diary of Joseph Rowe Gard, June–December 1871.

115 'A Nelsonian's visit to the United States – No. II', *Colonist*, 13 June 1882, p. 3; also noted by Estelle Nolan, travelling in 1898: see *The Nolan family*, Auckland: C. Russell, 1976, unpaginated.

116 Tangye, *Reminiscences of travel*, pp. 127–8.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Conclusion

The cultures of steamship mobility that emerged and cohered by the late nineteenth century might be distinguished broadly by ocean basin, characterizations that derived from the interplay of environment, the imprint of the peoples and places that specific routes linked, and the corporate cultures and expectations of the shipping companies that plied them. The ‘modern route’ between Sydney and San Francisco was peripheral to the Indian and Atlantic ocean trunk routes with their denser traffic of people, goods, and capital that underpinned the reach and consolidation of global empires. Yet, in promoting ties between the new world communities and branches of the Anglo-Saxon race on either side of the Pacific, this network was mobilized to articulate with broader visions for the unification of the English-speaking peoples of the world.

In reconfiguring oceans through new lines of force, even a singular route could be complex, mixed, and changeable. The operation of the service from Australia to the US was initially a collaborative endeavour, shared by shipping entrepreneurs in Britain, its colonies, and the United States. As white settler states around the Pacific consolidated, they imposed restrictions on shipping, extending the protection of coastal trades to newly annexed islands and inserting restrictive labour clauses in mail contracts. Such policies that demarcated boundaries also fractured the operation of the transoceanic networks that linked them. The newly competitive environment encouraged comparative assessments of maritime capacity and other dimensions of power. While the Pacific revealed the global limits of Britain’s imperial reach, with only a nominal foothold by the late nineteenth century and increasingly overshadowed by America’s extra-territorial push, in this period Britain still had an edge over the US in matters related to shipping.

British and colonial travellers en route to England dominated transpacific passenger lists in this period, and they frequently depended on American ships and crews to cross the ocean. Unlike the more familiar imperial pathways across the Indian Ocean, norms of civility, deference, and respect were loosened, seemingly in the presence of a more democratic, republican spirit. Codes of social class may have lent a coherence and assured a measure of order on British ships in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans that US companies in the Pacific appeared to lack. These transpacific encounters were novel, but they also had the edge of the unexpected and were often disconcerting and at times confronting, leaving travellers uncertain as to where the empire ended and America began. So, while the transpacific steamship was rhetorically useful as another putative site of Anglo-Saxon togetherness similar to the route, it was also a unique site of extended encounter revealing attitudes that otherwise remain elusive. These attitudes were very different from what visionaries of the Anglo-world represented or imagined it to be. The more layered and complex subjectivities and attendant frictions and negotiations revealed through these smaller-scale, everyday interactions challenged easy assumptions of inherent Anglo-unity, and underscore the ideological and political work that still awaited its protagonists attempting to cement the global reach and power of an Anglo-world.

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