Celebrity and the national body: Encounters with the exotic in late nineteenth-century America

Caroline Carpenter Nichols

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the American Literature Commons, and the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons

Recommended Citation


https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-423p-zt32

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Celebrity and the National Body:
Encounters with the Exotic in Late Nineteenth-Century America

Caroline Carpenter Nichols
Niagara Falls, New York

Master of Arts, The College of William and Mary, 2001
Bachelor of Arts, Davidson College, 1996

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary
May, 2008
This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Caroline Carpenter Nichols

Approved by the Committee, April, 2008

M. Lynn Weiss
Committee Chair
Associate Professor M. Lynn Weiss, The College of William and Mary

Maureen Fitzgerald
Assistant Professor Maureen Fitzgerald, The College of William and Mary

Arthur Knight
Associate Professor Arthur Knight, The College of William and Mary

Professor Keith Garda, Northern Illinois University
This project uses the remarkable careers of anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing, stunt reporter Nellie Bly, anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, and war correspondent Richard Harding Davis, as well as literary texts by Davis and Henry James, to frame a set of questions about the politics and implications of cultural crossover at the end of the nineteenth century. Through their work as participant observers of racial, ethnic and social Others, these reporters, reformers, and authors were gradually transformed into charismatic exotics. More than simply mediating between a mainstream (usually white, middle-class) audience and a more exotic people or place, these individuals inserted themselves into the story and ultimately became its star. Putting their own bodies to work in this manner—as evidence and even spectacle—often meant transgressing the limits of what was socially acceptable for their gender, race, or class. The ensuing scrutiny and speculation, together with their efforts to manage this precarious celebrity, provide insight into the complex cultural tensions underlying America’s emergence as a modern nation and imperial power.

As a white man who appeared to "go native," Cushing struggled to reaffirm his status as a serious scholar and dispel rumors that he had succumbed to the intoxicating pleasures of playing Indian. The divergent personas he adopted to describe his experience living as a Zuni suggest that the role of a Smithsonian scientist in primitive drag was an inherently unstable one at this moment. By blurring the boundary between “savage” and "civilized," Cushing threatened to disrupt the self-Other dichotomy which lay at the heart of America’s emerging relationship to the exotic.

Despite the titillating social dislocations that her undercover stunts entailed, Bly, unlike Cushing, maintained a coherent performance of self and empathic bodily presence. By filtering all experience through the lens of her own consciousness and asserting her middle-class femininity, Bly forged what I term personality armor, enabling her to float through the metropolis as an untainted observer while mesmerizing readers with a seemingly unabashed display of self.

Davis’ work chronicling America’s burgeoning empire posed little threat to his social standing, instead linking him to the gentlemen explorers who populated his fiction. While deeply implicated in the nation’s outward imperial drive, Davis also sought to reassert boundaries, particularly those that protected the male body. To see him, as I do, as a proto Boy Scout, allows us to appreciate how freighted his early adventures were with the burden of future expectations.

Seizing upon the new visibility of spectacle lynchings, Wells adeptly manipulated the mechanisms of the exotic to “other” the white South before an external, international audience during and after her two British lecture tours. In addition to advancing the anti-lynching cause, the tours marked a turning point in Wells’ sense of her own authority as a public figure. Her reception abroad as an American Negro lady, an oxymoron in the Jim Crow South, paradoxically emboldened her to adopt tactics more suited to a race man.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .......................................................... ii
Acknowledgments ................................................... iii
List of Illustrations ................................................... iv

Introduction:
Bodies, Boundaries, and the Politics of Cultural Cross-Over ................... 1

Spectacle, Celebrity, and the African American Body:
Ida B. Wells' Anti-Lynching Crusade ................................... 28

Intimacy, Erasure, and the Other:
Frank Hamilton Cushing's Volatile Performance of Self ................... 116

At Home in the City and the Colony:
Nellie Bly's Personality Armor ........................................ 181

A (Boy) Scout for American Empire:
Richard Harding Davis and His Kit ..................................... 269

Conclusion:
Cultural Cross-Over in the Age of Terror .............................. 323

Bibliography ................................................................ 330

Vita ............................................................................. 346
To Tyler, my fellow traveler.

Of all the places we’ve been and all we have yet to see, the best spot in the world will always be the one next to you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Contrary to its reputation as a solitary endeavor, a dissertation is rarely completed without incurring a variety of personal and professional debts. My committee members, Maureen Fitzgerald, Arthur Knight, and Lynn Weiss, have been a source of guidance and support throughout this sometimes tumultuous process. As director, Lynn’s enthusiasm for the project provided much needed sustenance when my own was flagging. Rich Lowry, my original advisor in the Program, set me on this path years ago with an independent study on travel and tourism, where my interest in the relationship between home and away, self and Other, first took shape. He was instrumental in conceptualizing this project and his fingerprints are visible throughout.

I have also benefited immensely from the friendship and intellectual companionship of other students in the Program, especially Tim Barnard, Seth Bruggeman, Amy Howard, Helen Wang, and Andrea Westcot. Their smart questions, nudging encouragement, and personal examples have made the journey more stimulating and more fun than seemed possible. Jen Blanchard and Roxane Pickens, my fellow Scribbling Women, deserve special mention in this category. Your loving support put this tiara within reach!

Finally, to my friends and family who watched this curious initiation rite from the outside: thank you for your patience. Thank you for asking (not too often) how the dissertation was progressing. Thank you for listening to me sort out my ideas. Thank you for occasionally distracting me from whatever I was supposed to be reading. Thank you, Dad, for reading nearly every chapter and keeping me focused on the big picture. Thank you all for your faith in me.
List of Illustrations

1. Thomas Eakins, *Frank Hamilton Cushing*, 1895 ....................... 3
2. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Studio Portrait, 1879 ........................ 4
3. Title Page of *An Eye for An Eye* ..................................... 50
4. Frank Hamilton Cushing in Zuni Attire ............................... 168
5. Nellie Bly Bids Fogg Good-Bye, Advertising Card .................... 258
6. Robert Clay from *Soldiers of Fortune* ................................. 291
Introduction: Bodies, Boundaries and the Politics of Cultural Cross-Over

In 1905, the Brooklyn Museum opened a new exhibition devoted to the American southwest. Its centerpiece was a collection of some 6,500 objects from the Zuni pueblo in present-day New Mexico. Designed by Stewart Culin, the Museum’s inaugural curator of ethnology, the display reflected Culin’s desire to convey anthropological information while giving visitors an evocative sense of the region. Objects were consequently arranged in a visually pleasing manner, surrounded by watercolors depicting the southwest; Zuni costumes were presented on mannequins based on plasters casts of a pueblo resident. Looming over this suggestive scene was Thomas Eakins’ monumental portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing, a Smithsonian anthropologist who had spent nearly five years living among the Zuni (figure 1). Cushing’s contributions to Anglo knowledge of Zuni culture were substantial, but his prominent place in the gallery derived more from his unusual method of research than its considerable results. Unlike his peers, Cushing immersed himself in the daily life of the pueblo, adopting the traditional Zuni diet, language, and mode of dress in an effort to more fully understand their culture. Eakins’ 1895 painting, which places the anthropologist in a makeshift kiva, a sacred underground chamber, surrounded by prayer plumes and war implements, alludes to Cushing’s intimacy with Zuni ways and the rich knowledge resulting from his intensive participation in the pueblo’s ritual life. More explicitly, the portrait documents the dramatic effect of this process on Cushing’s body. In place of the fresh-faced young scholar who sat for a studio portrait in 1879 on the eve of his departure stands a solemn individual whose gaunt features and pock-marked skin reflect the ravages of Zuni
foodways on an already frail constitution (figure 2). The gentlemanly attire of the earlier photograph has been replaced by full Zuni regalia; large hoops now dangle from his ears; his once well-trimmed hair has grown long and is held back by a pania.¹ The result of this transformation, which Eakins’ portrait so precisely captures, was the coexistence of Frank Cushing, noted Smithsonian scientist, and Té-na-tsa-li, First War Chief of the Zuni, in a single white body.

Thomas Eakins was one of many Americans enthralled by Cushing and “the undoubted romance of his life of research among [the] ‘wild’ Indians.”² For those, like Stewart Culin, who saw Native Americans as a disappearing race whose ancient knowledge would soon be lost, Cushing’s unusual status as “The White Indian” held out the promise of unprecedented access to a vanishing resource. Culin’s decision to include Eakins’ painting in the Zuni exhibition might be interpreted as a tribute to the professional dedication of his friend and colleague, one which also served to heighten the mystique of the southwest. However, the placement of Eakins’ canvas within an anthropological exhibit also suggests another reading: Cushing was himself an object of ethnography, subject to the gaze his discipline honed on native peoples like the Zuni. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett astutely observes, objects must be invested with ethnographic interest by the conventions of anthropology and the conditions of their

¹ As William Truettner explains, the costume was initially assumed to be that of a Zuni War Chief, but was in fact Cushing’s own creation drawn from several southwestern sources. That Cushing did not merely adopt the traditional dress of the pueblo and instead developed a hybrid costume may reflect a desire to convey sartorially his unique position in the tribe. Without discounting the significance of Cushing’s invented tradition, for the purposes of his public reception in the early 1880s, it is important to keep in mind that Anglo audiences generally saw this attire as one of many signs that Cushing had been converted to Indian ways. William H. Truettner, “Dressing the Part: Thomas Eakins’s Portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing,” in The American Art Journal (Spring 1985): 49. Pania is the Zuni term for this headband.

² Charles F. Lummis, “The White Indian,” Land of Sunshine 13 (June 1900): 11. Cushing was also known as the Washington Zuni.
Figure 1. Thomas Eakins, *Frank Hamilton Cushing*, 1895. Oil on canvas. Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma.
Figure 2. Frank Hamilton Cushing, Studio Portrait, 1879. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (NAA INV 02644400).
Such interest is not inherent, but created. The anthropologist is typically an invisible presence in this process; the attention of museum visitors is instead directed toward the carefully staged objects, which have been organized and labeled to reveal their purported significance. In the Gilded Age, that significance was often a variation on the progress narrative, further elaborating Anglo-Saxon civilization's presumed superiority to the more "primitive" cultures on display. Cushing's pioneering research method effectively disrupted this dynamic. His submersion in Zuni ways blurred the boundary between "savage" and "civilized," turning Cushing into a spectacular body and upending the clear demarcations between self and Other that nineteenth-century anthropology sought to instill.

While Cushing's experience as a Smithsonian scientist in "primitive" drag was exceptional, it is emblematic of the case studies comprising this dissertation—a diverse group of reporters, reformers, and authors whose work as participant observers of racial, ethnic and social Others both propels their celebrity and threatens to undermine their claims to respectability. To varying degrees, all confront the possibility of becoming tainted by their intimacy with the exotic. The project uses the remarkable careers of Cushing, stunt reporter Nellie Bly, anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, and war correspondent Richard Harding Davis, as well as literary texts by Davis and Henry James, to frame a set of questions about the politics and implications of cultural crossover at the end of the nineteenth century. More than simply mediating between a mainstream...

---

(usually white, middle-class) audience and a more exotic people or place, these individuals inserted themselves into the story and ultimately became its star. Putting their own bodies to work in this manner—as evidence and even spectacle—often meant transgressing the limits of what was socially acceptable for their gender, race, or class. The ensuing scrutiny and speculation, together with their efforts to manage this precarious celebrity, provide insight into the complex cultural tensions underlying America's emergence as a modern nation and imperial power.

Beyond these broad outlines, the four individuals considered here encountered the exotic on very different terms. Each brought a unique set of resources and liabilities, which shaped their engagement with the Other, the extent to which they were able (or willing) to deviate from the social expectations attendant upon them as raced and gendered bodies, and the way in which their work was received by a variety of audiences. As educated, white middle-class men, Cushing and Davis enjoyed much greater latitude in their personal behavior than their female counterparts. Bly managed to uphold the core tenets of middle-class femininity while turning her more minor violations into signs of a modern American womanhood. Ida B. Wells faced far greater constraints in her crusade against lynching. As a light-skinned African-American woman speaking candidly about sexual relations between white women and black men, Wells was always already tainted by her association with the exotic.

The professional context of these encounters was also a decisive factor in determining the nature of each person's celebrity, particularly the delicate balance between sensation and scandal. Whereas Cushing's decision to immerse himself in the lives of his subjects had no precedent in anthropological research, Nellie Bly and Richard
Harding Davis benefited from the development of New Journalism with its emphasis on story-telling and first-person narratives. Wells seized upon the growing opportunities for women in the black press, but ultimately surpassed the limits of that niche.

Finally, the intensity of their contact with the Other strongly influenced their public reception. Cushing’s intimacy with the Zuni touched nearly every aspect of his daily life and profoundly altered his appearance; his Zunification stopped short only at the prospect of inter-marriage. Although Wells was never involved in an inter-racial relationship or directly implicated in a lynching, her membership in a marginalized group rendered her “Other” from the start. Bly and Davis, in contrast, had far more superficial encounters with the exotic that were less transformative, shorter in duration, and often buffered by the established patterns of tourism.

While the distinctions between these border-crossers, which the chapters further elaborate, are instructive, they also share a few vital similarities. All are performers who calibrate their display of self according to shifting audiences and contexts. In print and in public, they sought to frame their encounters with the exotic to best advantage. Some were more adept than others at manipulating their public personas, but none could afford to ignore the penetrating curiosity their unusual careers attracted. Given that much of this attention focused on their bodies—where those bodies had been, what privations they were subjected to, and with whom they came in contact—gender is, in every case, a critical component of this performance. However, the ways in which it plays out are often surprising. Cushing’s representation of his body, which is so deeply implicated in his Zuni encounter, is startlingly volatile; his personas range from a hyper-masculine ethnographic adventurer to a passive, feminized child—and several permutations in
between. Davis’ masculinity is in many respects amplified by his reportorial experiences abroad, yet he is deeply concerned with seemingly feminine domestic matters: what accommodations will he endure in the field and will they keep his body “comfortable, clean and content?” \(^4\) At a time when masculinity was becoming more tightly bound to the male body, these protective measures suggest that even the iconic Dick Davis perceived some risk in his foreign travels.\(^5\) Wells and Bly depict their bodies quite differently, but both rely on traditional notions of bourgeois femininity to offset their boundary-stretching activities. Moreover, both display behaviors that are explicitly un-feminine. Wells adopts tactics more suited to an African American man, even presuming to ventriloquize for the men of her race, while Bly plays the tomboy, carelessly mocking the gentlemen travelers who serve as her unofficial companions during her solo trip around the world.

The complexly gendered nature of these performances makes any expansive comparison difficult. What is important is their reliance on the discourse of gender to shape public perceptions of their work and character. By the same token, gender was also the language most often used to criticize or praise their exploits. Davis’ most memorable characteristic, well into middle-age, was his boyishness. Bly was typically described as a “plucky American girl.” Wells’ reception in the African American community was consistently gendered; she was famous for writing like a man but received accolades for maintaining her femininity as a leader of the anti-lynching


Yet, as Wells’ earliest foray into activism—a lawsuit contesting her removal from the all white Ladies’ Car on a southern railroad—illustrates, the discourse of gender never operates in isolation. It is, in Laura Wexler’s formulation, “a delivery system for race and class distinctions” such that the “consciousness of gender difference implicates the entire order of difference.” What prevented Wells from being recognized as a respectable woman who deserved to travel unmolested was not her performance of gender codes, which was likely impeccable, but her race. In the Jim Crow South, ladyhood and blackness were mutually exclusive attributes. Likewise, Bly’s girlishness and Davis’ boyishness were emphatically raced identities, as are the designations of “primitive” and “civilized” that circled around Cushing.

How does “the exotic” relate to these various registers of difference? The interpenetration of gender, race and class, as well as ethnicity and sexuality, provides the foundation for a handful of overarching discourses—like “the exotic”—which bundle already potent identity categories together. Consider the more familiar example of civilization, one of the most pervasive tropes of the late nineteenth-century that was frequently intertwined with notions of the exotic. Much of civilization’s discursive power stems from its fluidity, which allows individuals and institutions to reinterpret its meaning, injecting new connotations over time according to their personal and collective needs. Gail Bederman’s work on the various permutations of manliness and civilization

---

6 For instance, on 25 August 1894, the Indianapolis Freeman offered this complimentary assessment of Wells’ work: “To our mind, therein lies one of the chief charms of Miss Wells’ crusade in that she has not permitted the cares and labors of the same to unsex her. The full blown rose of a blameless womanhood abideth within her.”

7 This incident is discussed in the next chapter, beginning on page 34.

aptly illustrates this plasticity. Indeed, for all the energy directed toward elevating civilization as the pinnacle of human development in these decades, its apparent opposite, the "primitive," took on an increasingly positive valance in many circles. Even before Modernism's deep infatuation with the "primitive" took hold in the early twentieth century, civilization already contained the possibility of excess, evident in anxieties about the enervating effects of over-civilization. The fluidity of these bundled discourses, coupled with the ever-shifting relations between their component registers of difference, makes their deployment a slippery—and fascinating—object of study. While there are recurring themes and patterns, those who tangle with the exotic often defy expectations and predictions as the following case studies amply demonstrate.

Circuits of the Exotic

Putting aside individual encounters with the exotic for a moment, what functions does this bundled discourse serve at the turn of the century? First and foremost, the exotic works to identify and categorize various Others, building an interpretative edifice upon some actual or perceived deviation from the center's definition of normal. As these designations are incorporated into economic, legal, and social structures, the exotic also contributes to the subordination of such marginalized groups. Concurrently, the exotic functions to police so-called normal bodies through its delineation of what is permissible

---


and what is unacceptably deviant. To the extent that their work highlights such titillating differences, these individuals certainly participate in that process of Othering—or, in Wells' case, critique it. However, in addition to the creation and fortification of social boundaries, which is a well-recognized function of the exotic, these border-crossers also point to a more subtle set of consequences. The proliferating opportunities to encounter the exotic during this period were not only a means of ostracizing the culturally rejected; they were also a form of inoculation and, often, a source of pleasure. Such carefully controlled doses of the exotic are crucial to the formation of a resilient, expansive whiteness at the dawn of the twentieth century. Although tracing this development is beyond the scope of my study, the case studies do suggest connections between the deployment of the exotic and the emergence of both white mass culture and the modern colonial project. Whether they threatened to disrupt America's emerging relationship to the exotic, as Cushing and Wells did, or significantly advanced it, like Bly and Davis, border-crossers provide insight into the delicate nature of this inoculation.

During these decades, a disparate groups of institutions, practices and literary genres offered opportunities to come into contact, usually in vicarious and highly spectacularized ways, with those deemed racially, ethnically, culturally, or physically Other. Despite the diversity of forms and settings, which encompassed the realms of science, entertainment, literature, journalism, and reform work, the crux of the experience—encountering the exotic in a controlled setting designed to reaffirm the viewer's or reader's sense of identity—remained fundamentally the same. The increasing prevalence of such encounters suggests that such contact answered a deeply felt need. Staging these encounters again and again in a variety of contexts was a way for the
hegemonic white culture, on both an individual and a societal level, to negotiate its developing relationship to the exotic. While the bourgeoisie may have felt this need most acutely, and they orchestrated many of these encounters, Victorian fascination with the exotic was by no means restricted to that class.¹¹

This process of expulsion, importation, scrutiny, and subordination resembles that of abjection. While Freud first theorized that civilization was founded on the repudiation of certain pre-Oedipal pleasures and incestuous attachments, Julia Kristeva has more recently argued that these disavowed elements can never be fully expelled. Instead, they become the self’s “inner constitutive boundary,” pushed to the outer limits but always threatening the purified self with disruption or even dissolution.¹² In Imperial Leather, Anne McClintock extrapolates this theory of self-formation to understand social formation, calling abjection “a formative aspect of modern industrial imperialism.” Just as undesirable bodily elements and actions (vomit, excrement, incest, masturbation) are renounced on the individual level, imperial society pushes certain undesirable groups (slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, and the insane) to its edges.¹³ These disavowed Others, “the rejected from which one does not part,” are critical to maintaining the

¹¹ Understanding these encounters with the exotic as revisiting the border between accepted and disavowed elements of society connects these institutions and practices with tourism. Ellen Strain defines the tourist experience as bringing the Western subject face to face with the spectacle of difference. Many of the most popular tourist sites of the antebellum era indicate a deep fascination with boundaries. Niagara Falls was interpreted as the sacred realm erupting into the secular world, while Mammoth Cave represented a temporal border that allowed visitors to go back in time. More generic sites also facilitated contemplation of these borders—the cemetery (life/death), asylum (sane/insane), parks (city/country). See John Sears for a more detailed treatment of these sites. John F. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989). Ellen Strain, “Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes: Touristic Viewing and Popularized Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century,” Wide Angle 18, no. 2 (April 1996).

¹² Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995), 71.

¹³ Ibid., 72.
economic, social, and ideological structures of modern industrial society.\textsuperscript{14} Their labor fuels the engines of “progress,” while their meticulously catalogued differences are instrumental to the hegemonic culture’s self-perception. Repeatedly encountering the exotic in highly circumscribed formats, obsessively revisiting the boundary between accepted and disavowed, can thus be seen as part of a larger process in which bourgeois Americans worked out what it meant to be “modern” and “civilized” in a rapidly changing social order.

These sweeping transformations, including urbanization, immigration, industrialization, and the legacy of Reconstruction, touched nearly every aspect of American life, creating a sense of excitement, opportunity, and anxiety. Among the most disconcerting aspects of this tumultuous era was the instability of identity categories. The seemingly secure boundaries that had organized relationships between racial and ethnic groups, differentiated the genteel from the merely respectable, and separated foreigners from citizens, were suddenly up for debate. Even the most seemingly natural of social relations, those between men and women, were undergoing considerable change due to women’s growing public presence through paid employment, reform work, expanding educational opportunities, and the creation of new spaces for consumption and leisure in the city. Increasing foreign entanglements, evident in the global pageantry of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition and the Spanish-American War five years later, further complicated long held notions about the character of the nation and its people. As those who had once been considered definitively Other, whether immigrants, imperial

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 71. For an interesting reading of lynching victims as culturally abject, see Robyn Wiegman, “The Anatomy of Lynching,” in \textit{American Sexual Politics: Sex, Gender, and Race since the Civil War}, eds. John C. Fout and Maura Shaw Tantillo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 223-245.
subjects, or African Americans, were gradually incorporated into the national body, defining what constituted an American became an ever more urgent task. Establishing who did not belong was an alternative means to the same end.

The institutions offering the most highly organized encounter with the exotic were the new museums and world’s fairs. While the narrativized context in which these displays were mounted was exceptional, the worldview they inculcated and the visual technologies they institutionalized could be found elsewhere. Most importantly, these venues conveyed in a more explicit way the anthropological theories that formed the scientific basis for notions of the Other. Gilded Age museums were premised on what Steven Conn calls an “object-based epistemology,” which held that objects, if properly arranged and studied, could yield vital knowledge about the natural world and human societies. Organizing representative objects in this way not only made individual pieces comprehensible, it also unlocked the meaning of the system itself. Museum visitors, while unable to glean as much from the displays as trained observers, could still grasp the positivist, progressive and hierarchical view of the world the exhibits embodied.15

By the 1850s the races of the world were seen as forming a natural but static chain of being. Darwin’s theories of evolution, as Americans interpreted them, lent scientific legitimacy to the long-held view that there were higher and lower races. Few initially grasped natural selection’s utter indifference to progress and instead took it as confirmation that the higher races were meant to govern the less advanced.16 The Family


Tree of Man, a familiar image of the day, neatly captures this perspective. The tree imagines human history as "naturally teleological, an organic process of upward growth, with the European as the apogee of progress."\textsuperscript{17} Although they share the same historical moment, each race occupies its own branch, corresponding to the evolutionary stage they have achieved.\textsuperscript{18} Since every race passes through the same stages, Anglo-Saxon encounters with "primitive" peoples were understood as an opportunity to step backward in time, glimpse one's past and measure the progress made. By subordinating historical discontinuities to the logic of time in this manner, the tree turned racial hierarchy into a product of nature while obscuring the impact of human actions, such as economic and sexual exploitation.\textsuperscript{19}

Anthropology's ordering of space and time thus carved out a secure position for the Western spectator and a fixed site from which to perceive the world's diversity.\textsuperscript{20} In particular, the "metanarrative of evolutionary progress" that characterized so many of these exhibits provided a powerful interpretive frame that operated both inside and outside the museum's walls. Because each object stood in metonymically for a larger context, the well-organized collection enabled the museum visitor to grasp, almost at a glance, the entirety of the globe.\textsuperscript{21} This privileged vantage point, which coincided with a position atop the evolutionary ladder, imbued the viewer with a sense of mastery and

\textsuperscript{17} McClintock, 37.

\textsuperscript{18} Contemporary evolutionary thought admitted the possibility that those located on the lower levels might continue to progress, but the tree image made it seem unlikely they would ever "catch up."

\textsuperscript{19} McClintock, 37.

\textsuperscript{20} Ellen Strain, 80.

\textsuperscript{21} Strain, 79. See also Susan Stewart, "The Collection, Paradise of Consumption," in On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 151-70.
helped them locate their position in a rapidly diversifying social order.²² Such displays were, in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s terms, “productive,” but the ideas they conveyed were hardly original. The notions of progress, evolution and racial hierarchy that framed anthropological exhibits circulated, in one form or another, throughout Victorian society, making the museums one part of a larger ideological network. While museums gave these ideas scientific legitimacy, their displays’ efficacy depended upon an audience primed to accept them.

Similarly, the visual technologies employed by museums and world’s fairs, though innovative, emerged out of the society that created them. These meaning-making technologies, argues Donna Harraway, “are time-slices into the social organism that made them.”²³ Not surprisingly then, museum displays had much in common with the techniques employed in America’s burgeoning consumer culture. Bursting with goods arranged in panoramic displays, the new department stores typically featured overlooks or atriums that allowed shoppers to take in the whole mesmerizing spectacle.²⁴ These seemingly disparate realms converged at the world’s fairs, where consumer goods,

---

²² The narrative of progress also helped fill the void of waning religious faith and functioned as a substitution for the narrative of salvation.


²⁴ Stuart Culin’s career provides a telling example of the aesthetic and ideological overlap between these two new institutions. Culin introduced display techniques pioneered in commercial spaces to the museum with his 1925 “Rainbow House” gallery at the Brooklyn Museum, offering a radical departure from previous methods of staging ethnographic objects. While developing that exhibition, he also served as art consultant to the “Palace of Fashion” exhibit in Philadelphia, which was to be part of the upcoming Sesquicentennial Exposition. Culin’s role, according to Women’s Wear Daily, was to help “glorify the American ready-wear industry.” The magazine went on to proclaim Culin as “the ultimate fashion dictator or America, the czar of the fashion designers.” Women’s Wear Daily, 7 December 1925; quoted in William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 325.
ethnographic objects, and primitive peoples blended together in a dazzling pageant of national progress. Conflating racial groups with raw materials and the latest products, the fairs reinforced the consumer culture's message that the world exists for the buyer's visual and material pleasure.  

Further down the social ladder, working-class entertainments also shared some display patterns and social functions with the museum. Theatrical performances, particularly the short sketches of early vaudeville, often relied on ethnic and racial stereotypes as a source of humor, drawing on the stock characters popularized through blackface minstrelsy and newer images of the immigrant "greenhorn" discombobulated by the big city. These types of amusements helped unite a diverse urban audience by highlighting their shared difference from the caricatured groups on stage.  

Freak shows, building on P.T. Barnum's wildly successful formula, continued to flourish during the Gilded Age. Beginning with his sensational exposition of Joice Heath, purported to the 161-year-old "mammy" of George Washington, Barnum's humbugs tapped into American hunger for extravagance, knowledge and mastery.  

---


expansive collections, the freak show employed other tactics to impose specific interpretations upon the individuals displayed. The staging, pitchman’s spiel, scientific testimony, and written narrative “fixed the mute freak as a figure of otherness upon which the spectators could displace anxieties and uncertainties about their own identities.”

By framing bodies that blurred fundamental categories (man/woman, human/animal, black/white) as an extraordinary aberration, the freak show comforted spectators that such boundaries remained essentially in tact.

Rosemary Garland Thompson points to additional parallels between these carnivalesque displays and nineteenth-century science. Both flourished in an era of unbounded confidence in human ability to perceive the truth through sight. At the most basic level, the freak shows served the same function for the masses as natural history exhibits did for the emerging elite—both provided “an opportunity to define oneself in terms of what one was not.”

At a time when immigration, emancipation, and the increasing participation of women in public life “confounded previously reliable physical indices of status and privilege,” the freak show attracted its largest audiences among those whose social rank was most tenuous, including immigrants, urban working class, and the rural poor. The “extravagant and indisputable otherness of the freak’s physiognomy reassured those whose bodies and costuming did not fully match the fully enfranchised and indubitably American ideal.” As “collective cultural rituals,” the

---

28 Ibid., 62.
29 Ibid., 59.
30 Ibid., 65.
freak show's "dilemmas of classification and definition" helped spectators hone the skills needed to tame a rapidly changing world.31

Beyond the more formal settings of the museum, freak show, and entertainment venue, America's burgeoning cities provided numerous opportunities to encounter the exotic. For those who preferred to examine the urban Other vicariously, writers operating in several genres documented the vibrant costumes, strange customs, and unusual accents of the metropolis, particularly the slum districts that were home to recent immigrants. Depending on their audience and orientation, this group produced lighthearted virtual tours of ethnic neighborhoods, titillating exposés of vice and crime, or a combination of the two. Reform-minded journalists and settlement house workers took a different tone, often attempting to explain what seemed to be immoral or irresponsible behavior among tenement dwellers as a product of their harsh living conditions, but covered much of the same ground. Jacob Riis' How the Other Half Lives (1890) exemplifies the convergence of these two modes of exploration. Widely credited with galvanizing support for tenement reform, Riis' somber tour through New York's most notorious precincts, which devotes much attention to the corrosive effect of slum life on children, is a panoply of human suffering. That this display is mobilized in the name of reform makes it no less voyeuristic. Riis' pose as a guide through the city's back alleys, including asides to readers advising them not to "stumble over the children pitching pennies," and his appreciation for the slum as spectacle, which is especially evident in the accompanying photographs, link his text with the slum tours then gaining popularity.32

31 Ibid., 59.
32 Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 38. On the importance of Riis' photographs to his touristic approach, see
Indeed, Richard Harding Davis, whose early literary hits included several slum stories, escorted so many elite guests through the infamous Bowery district that the precinct captain finally declined to accompany his parties, saying the dashing reporter was so well known as to be safe on his own.33

Entertainments that rehearsed white-native encounters, particularly incidents of native defeat, were also very popular. Thrilling encounters between western pioneers and fierce Indians, in which the white hero always prevailed, were a staple of dime novels and sensation journalism. The first performance of what became known as Buffalo Bill’s Wild West was held on July 4, 1882, only a few months after Cushing returned to the East with a party of Zuni in tow. The show’s feats of horsemanship and animal performances were gradually overshadowed by its historical re-enactments, which narrated a compelling account of the winning of the west. These incidents, which included William F. Cody’s well-publicized scalping of Yellow Hand, Custer’s Last Stand, and an attack on a stagecoach, depicted Native Americans as savage aggressors and rationalized the violence of whites as protecting family, property, or civilization itself. The Wild West shows offered the thrill of danger without any unpleasant consequences. At the close of the show the Indians who had been “killed” reappeared to wave at the cheering crowd. That many of the native performers were participants in the original events and now appeared playfully rehearsing their defeat reinforced the show’s message that westward expansion was a shining example of American progress. These moments of bloodshed had fostered the courage of American men and tamed the once-


savage Indian. Indeed, returning to the moment in which the wild was subdued was a trope permeating every segment of the social spectrum. Dime novels, sensational journalism, and melodramas may have differed in tone and audience, but they shared core similarities with elite depictions of Native Americans’ subordinate status and inevitable demise. Museum collecting efforts intensified in the 1880s largely because native groups were expected to disappear through extinction or assimilation very soon. Contemporary paintings, such as Tompkins H. Matteson’s *The Last of the Race* (1847), presented a nostalgic view of native groups supplanted by the inexorable march of civilization, rather than the effects of U.S. Indian policy.

Together, these institutions, practices, and media helped train Americans at every socioeconomic level how to interact with the dizzying array of people and cultures with which they increasingly came in contact. Whereas visceral encounters with the exotic

---


36 The popularity of local color writing, which exoticized seemingly mundane regional differences, might also be considered part of this larger trend. Tales of regional eccentrics, quaint customs, and lively dialect narrated by sophisticated urban visitors were a staple of both middlebrow and genteel monthlies. Just as the more “primitive” cultures of Africa were envisioned as existing in an earlier evolutionary time, virtual visits to these pre-modern cultures were often framed as a trip into America’s past. Likewise, Stephanie Foote argues that the genre’s formal concerns with assigning different kinds of people a place in relation to the standard, national culture demonstrates that regional writing was a powerful method of understanding not just the “place” where certain people lived but also the “place” they inhabited in a social hierarchy. Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 11. Other incisive readings of the local color genre, the development of distinct regions, and touristic practices include Richard H. Brodhead, “The Reading of Regions,” in *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 107-41; Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997);
were once the exclusive province of elite tourists, explorers, and colonial functionaries, the far corners of the globe were fast becoming more accessible through literal and virtual travel in the last decades of the nineteenth century. With the expansion of commercial networks, increased mobility, and the growth of touristic literary genres and visual technologies such as the stereopticon, foreign bodies and sights were becoming part of many Americans’ everyday experience. Even those with limited resources could come “face to face with spectacle of difference, the exotic landscape full of ‘alien’ creatures” thanks to the influx of immigrants reshaping American cities.³⁷ Additionally, the growth of monthly magazines, newspapers, and inexpensive fiction, which introduced readers to new social worlds in distant corners of the country and the world, expanded virtual mobility at almost every socioeconomic level. In this environment, understanding how to interpret the exotic was a crucial tool. The carefully circumscribed encounters created by these sites helped solidify the current social order, affirmed faltering identity categories, and underscored the logic of progress.

However, as is clear from the predominance of entertainment venues and leisure activities among these sites, Victorians’ attraction to the exotic was more than a simple coping mechanism. The display techniques and interpretative framing brought to bear in these encounters fostered a particular gaze that not only defused the threat of overwhelming difference but also eked pleasure out of it. Intertwining perspectives inscribed in science, tourism, and capitalism, this gaze decisively separated the viewer from the spectacularized Other on display, as Ellen Strain describes.


³⁷ This is Ellen Strain’s description of the touristic experience. Strain, 72.
The capitalist view of the world as a reservoir of products, raw materials, and experiential pleasures melded with scientific understandings of the universe and a technological confidence on the part of the West. One outcome [of this world view] was the learned pleasure of the touristic as defined by the visual objectification or the conversion of the cultural Other into spectacle; the separation of the tourist from the toured; and the identification of the tourist with a figure of mastery, such as the explorer, colonialist soldier, or anthropologist. In other words, touristic pleasure made possible the creation of a safety zone within which the exhilaration of geographical proximity with the Other could exist without compromising other less literal forms of distance.\textsuperscript{38}

Strain’s explanation is important because it acknowledges the role of pleasure in these new ways of seeing the world, and connects that pleasure to the viewer’s identification with a figure of mastery. Ordinary Americans, the incipient tourists in Strain’s formulation, gradually learn to derive pleasure from their interactions with the exotic by modeling their experience on the presumably more intense encounters of anthropologists, explorers, and colonial functionaries, who are charged with “mastering” the Other in a foreign environment while acting alone or in small groups. This identificatory link is critical to understanding the celebrity of the four border-crossers under consideration here.

Among the many critical approaches to celebrity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, almost all assume some level of identification between the reading and viewing public and the celebrity, regardless of whether the celebrity is a political leader, military hero, artist, writer, theatrical performer, or some combination of these in the mold of P.T. Barnum or Thomas Edison. The precise contours of this identificatory process naturally vary depending on the character of the particular celebrity and the audience to whom he or she most appealed. More broadly, notes Charles Ponce de Leon, as the range of individuals eligible to become celebrities expanded and the publicity surrounding them

\textsuperscript{38} Strain, 72-3.
intensified, courtesy of a national mass media capable of quickly identifying, shaping, and circulating the latest notables, there was a shift from lionizing individuals of exemplary character to emphasizing exceptional personalities.\textsuperscript{39} The short, didactic biographies of prominent figures popular in the antebellum era, which stressed admirable qualities over personal idiosyncrasies, gave way to a form of celebrity journalism focused on penetrating the public persona to reveal an authentic self.\textsuperscript{40} Turn-of-the-century celebrity profiles still emphasized accomplishments, but framed these achievements as an expression of a person's individuality; the root of their success was finding a way to express and thereby fulfill this unique self in an increasingly regimented society.\textsuperscript{41} Readers, who might have little chance of achieving celebrity status themselves, could nonetheless aspire to a more fully developed self. Thus despite the new focus and the underlying shift in selfhood that precipitated it, the expectation of emulation remained.

Ponce de Leon's work underscores a common thread running through the secondary literature on celebrity. From Leo Braudy's interest in the relation between fame and "Western ideas of what an individual is," to more recent treatments of specific figures, such as Thomas Baker's work on Nathaniel Parker Willis, celebrity frequently


\textsuperscript{40} Ponce de Leon positions the antebellum biographies within the broader culture of character and its hero, the self-made man. The subjects of these texts were not necessarily great men (and they were overwhelmingly men), but principled men who had worked to develop their character and represented the epitome of bourgeois values. Ponce de Leon, 21-3.

\textsuperscript{41} Ponce de Leon, 40.
serves as a lens into changing conceptions of selfhood. Any attempt to account for the popular acclaim surrounding a particular celebrity involves delving into what contemporaries found compelling about that individual, but even more general treatments of the subject presume some level of identification between audience and celebrity. No matter how exceptional they appear during their lifetimes, celebrities in historical perspective are rightly regarded as in some respect representative of the culture which produced them.

In the case of Cushing, Bly, Davis and Wells, their encounters with the exotic crystallized one of the most pressing issues confronting Americans at the turn of the century. While readers were unlikely to replicate their most thrilling adventures, the border-crossers’ efforts to understand, interact with and “master” the Other, whether physically or rhetorically, was all too familiar. Their experiences suggest how the self-Other relation, instilled by the museum and its ideological brethren, might function outside these highly narrativized, tightly scripted spaces in the messier environment of the “real” world. Combining extraordinary activities and ordinary cultural concerns in this fashion engendered a type of celebrity with substantial potential for audience identification. For instance, the (usually) commanding perspectives of Bly and Davis in narrating their encounters with the exotic provided readers with a reassuring—and presumably pleasurable—site for identification. Their breezy confidence and humorous asides embodied a sense of optimism that characterized the American 1890s. Not


surprisingly, these two explorer figures were often regarded as national bodies, representative of their gender, race, and country. Of the four, their celebrity proved to be the least problematic, in part because their work—and the public personas they created—tended to advance America’s developing relationship with the exotic, further inculcating the perspective that Strain describes.

Cushing offers a more complicated example. That the anthropologist should be cited as a figure of mastery is hardly surprising considering the cultural work performed by the field; in addition to creating “a home for Western society within an ordered cosmos” through its organization of space and time, anthropology helped to institutionalize the subject-object dichotomy inherent in this gaze. Cushing’s Zunification, however, threatened to undermine this work. Although he did adopt a forceful narrative presence on occasion, this stance became untenable as he sought to describe his increasing intimacy with Zuni ways. Instead of a figure of mastery, this anthropologist often appeared as a passive object. Moreover, by occupying the categories of “savage” and “civilized” simultaneously, Cushing/Tenatsali suggested to observers that the primitive might lie within, that they might not be so different from these Others after all. For those not enchanted by his ability to inhabit two cultures, Cushing’s blurring of the self-Other divide made identifying with the anthropologist more difficult, an obstacle he struggled to overcome through various interventions into his uncertain reputation.

Bierce and Richard Harding Davis,” in The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 166-84.

44 Strain, 80.
In spite of the constraints attendant upon her social position as an African American woman, Wells nonetheless assumes a position of mastery within her anti-lynching texts. She identifies and condemns the "primitive" behavior of a uniquely American subculture, exposing the myths used to justify its violent rituals to devastating effect. Yet the Other in Wells' work is not an already exoticized, marginal population, but a seemingly mainstream segment of the American public whose brutality was tacitly condoned by much of the country. As a result of this reversal, Wells' crusade incited hostility more than identification among white readers reluctant to see themselves in such a role. If Wells' activism was more favorably received among blacks, her celebrity within the African American community was still somewhat problematic. Her accusations threatened to upset the delicate balance of race relations in the South, exacerbating the risks faced by those the exiled Tennessean had left behind. Her status was further complicated by the gender dynamics of race leadership in the post-Reconstruction era, in which black women were expected to play a secondary role while black men represented the race before white America. Wells is unique among these border-crossers in that she not only participated in the Othering gaze that Strain describes, but was also subject to it, and, most importantly, critiqued it. By turning this gaze against those who had wielded it, Wells' anti-lynching crusade exposes the mechanisms of the exotic in a startling way. She is the ideal place to start this encounter with the exotic.
Of the many thrills on offer at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, perhaps the most widely indulged was the opportunity to become part of the spectacle; setting foot upon the fairgrounds inevitably meant becoming the object of another’s gaze. While most of the Fair’s 27 million visitors could expect to play the most minor of roles in this fantastic display, blending into the crowd as one face among many, anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells had little chance of being so inconspicuous. The few non-white bodies incorporated into the Exposition served as a counterpoint to the White City’s celebration of American cultural and material progress, making the racial component of that progress visible.

From her post in the Haitian Building, where she distributed copies of a pamphlet entitled *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition* (1893), Wells was sandwiched between two of the Fair’s most popular displays of racial difference. At the far end of the Midway Plaisance lay the Dahomey Village, in which visitors could speculate about rumors of cannibalism and relish the Dahomeys’ “barbaric ugliness.”¹ If the Dahomeys represented the not-so-distant evolutionary past of America’s former slaves, the Fair’s depiction of present-day African Americans was little better. The most notable African American presence within the White City was Nancy Green, who was hired by the Quaker Oats company to embody its Aunt Jemima brand. Green, a resident of Chicago who had been born into slavery,

periodically emerged from her giant flour barrel with a jubilant cry of "I’se in town, honey" to sing songs, share her "memories" of the plantation, and make pancakes. In bringing the Mammy cult to life, Green's performance crystallized the Fair's vision for African American participation in the new consumer culture: caricature, commodity, entertainment.

Wells' presence at the Exposition was calculated to counter the prevailing notions of blackness represented by the Dahomey and Aunt Jemima. She appeared at the Haitian Building under the auspices of revered race leader Frederick Douglass, who had served as ambassador to the island nation. The essays contained in The Reason Why, including Wells' own rigorous analysis of the lynching epidemic, not only protested the official exclusion of African Americans from the Fair, but also demonstrated their fitness for inclusion in the national body. Finally, Wells' dignified appearance and comportment, in keeping with the strict standards of middle-class respectability, contrasted sharply with Green and the Dahomeys. Yet for all that set her apart, the visual and ideological dynamics of the White City registered her affinity with the Other on display above all else.

While the Columbian Exposition's landscape of wish fulfillment and imperial aspiration is undoubtedly an exceptional moment in American culture, it is suggestive of

---


3 Douglass was given this position not by the American organizers of the Exposition, but by the Haitian government. The exclusion of African Americans from the Fair was overwhelming, yet not total. After much protest, one African American man was appointed to the national planning commission as an alternate. The New York State board also included one black woman. The paid staff did not include any African Americans above the level of clerk. African American exhibit proposals were screened through all-white state committees, the vast majority of which were not accepted. Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Irving Garland Penn, and Ferdinand L. Barnett, The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature, ed. Robert W. Rydell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 70, 75, 80.
Ida B. Wells’ tangled relationship to the exotic. Unlike the other figures under consideration here, Wells cannot be said to “cross over.” There is no moment at which her intimacy with a foreign people or place jeopardizes an otherwise secure position in society. Instead, she offers devastating insight into the majority culture from a minority perspective. In her pamphlets and lectures, Wells functions as an ethnographic informant on the white South, providing an insider’s view of the region’s more “primitive” customs. Wells herself played on this anthropological parallel; concluding her description of a particularly gruesome quintuple lynching in Mississippi, Wells noted with characteristic sarcasm: “Had [the lynchings] occurred in the wilds of interior Africa, there would have been an outcry against the savagery which would so mercilessly put men and women to death. But it was an evidence of American civilization to be passed by unnoticed, to be denied or condoned.”

Despite her mocking tone, Wells was keenly aware that her stance as a rogue informant was a dangerous one. As an African American woman, Wells could not depend upon the presumed respectability that to some extent shielded white border-crossers like Cushing, Bly, and Davis. While their increasing intimacy with the Other entailed personal and professional risks, all began their encounters with a certain measure of privacy, one of many privileges bundled together under the mantle of whiteness. Wells, in contrast, had no such buffer. Long before her anti-lynching crusade, she was already subject to an intense level of scrutiny and speculation about her moral standing.

Public perception of African American women at the turn of the nineteenth century had advanced little since the end of slavery. Old notions of black lasciviousness,

---

which had been used to justify the master's sexual domination of his female slaves, now served to deny the continued assault of free black women. Since black women's sexual appetite knew no bounds, so went this logic, there could be no rape. The widespread poverty among African Americans during this period often reinforced these assumptions. Women who worked in the fields, or in any kind of manual labor that entailed exposing bare limbs, were accused of lacking feminine delicacy and modesty. Poor living conditions also reflected negatively on African American women. In an era when domesticity indexed family character, a tenant farmer's cabin impugned far more than a woman's housekeeping skills. Although social class was important to the perpetuation of these stereotypes, all African American women, regardless of their wealth, education, and manners, were to some degree affected by these entrenched notions. Indeed, middle-class and elite blacks frequently expressed frustration that whites made no distinctions within the race.\(^5\)

In addition to these entrenched stereotypes, Wells had to contend with the suspicion attached to single black women during the critical years of her campaign. At a time when "single-blessedness" was becoming increasingly acceptable for white women engaged in reform work or other suitable careers, African American women had considerably less latitude. Marriage was considered a much-needed mark of legitimacy, status, and adulthood in the black community and, consequently, the social space available to single black women was quite narrow. Attending public events often required escorts, yet maintaining non-romantic relationships with men was extremely

difficult and entertaining multiple suitors was even more treacherous. For a woman without a spouse or older male relative to vouch for her chastity, Wells' antilynching activities—extensive travel, speaking engagements, and a wide correspondence with both men and women—clearly stretched the bounds of acceptable conduct.

Beyond social location, Wells also differs from the other figures in this dissertation in her relationship to the exotic realm that she investigates. Part of the excitement for readers following Cushing's growing intimacy with the Zuni or Bly's feigned descent into madness was the sense that these participant-observers were crossing a cultural gulf; Wells had no such distance from her material. Her writing intensifies already existing connections to the violent, sexually-charged world she exposes. Wells was a light-skinned woman writing—without condemnation—about voluntary sexual relationships between white women and black men. Although never linked to a white suitor, critics figured Wells' body as "tainted, marked by and capable of further race mixing," and therefore tagged her as an advocate of miscegenation. Wells had a personal connection to lynching as well. Her close friend Tom Moss was one of three men lynched in Memphis in 1892, and Wells was deeply involved in the black community's response to the murders, using her newspaper to encourage a boycott of the city's streetcars and a mass exodus to the Oklahoma Territory.

Finally, whereas the other figures considered here use whites' fascination with the Other to attract readers, Wells placed that fascination at the center of her analysis,

---


7 Patricia Schechter, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 105. Schechter also notes that critics sometimes cast her antilynching work as a form of prostitution, speculating that Wells' true goal was personal wealth, or at least a wealthy husband.
stripping away the benign curiosity evident in travel writing and museum displays to expose raw sexual desire. By documenting white lust for black partners among both men and women, Wells threatened the racial and gender constructs that formed the ideological foundation for white domination in the South.

Given this context—explosive subject matter, personal connections to the topic, and a minoritized subject position—Wells would seem the least likely figure to "survive" an encounter with the exotic. Yet, for the most part, she does. Although there has been much critical debate as to the success of her crusade, in light of her social location and confrontational tactics, Wells' longevity as an activist was itself a notable accomplishment. Her influence declined over time, due in part to the changing nature of reform work and the ascendance of male-dominated national organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but Wells remained a viable woman in public. Not only did Wells navigate the landscape of the exotic without becoming irreparably tainted, she manipulated it to her own advantage, advancing the anti-lynching crusade and easing the constraints placed on her by both black and white communities. Her two British lecture tours, which lie at the heart of this chapter, are the lynchpin of that process.

Wells' re-reading of the lynch narrative uses the apparatus of the exotic to "other" the white South. In later pamphlets like The Reason Why and A Red Record (1895), Wells deflects attention away from victimized black bodies to their white aggressors. By framing the lynchers themselves as a spectacle for British audiences, Wells seizes control

---

8 Lynching was not restricted to the South, however, the proportion of lynchings that occurred in that region increased with each decade after the Civil War. For instance, 82% of lynchings occurred in the South in the 1880s, but the figure rose to more than 95% in the 1920s. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Introduction," in Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 4.
of a key mechanism of the exotic: the gaze. She also takes advantage of England’s status as the epicenter of civilization, playing upon America’s nagging insecurities about its position relative to the mother country. In publicizing British support for the anti-lynching cause, Wells made certain that American audiences fully appreciated their acceptance of her as well. That British audiences regarded her as an “American Negro lady,” and confirmed that perception repeatedly through the discourse of etiquette, undermined the logic of black inferiority then being codified through Jim Crow legislation. In addition, this reception gave Wells’ ever-fragile reputation a much needed boost, and she returned from the tours more confident and more aggressive.

Paradoxically, being validated as a lady by the British emboldened Wells to act in ways more suited to a man. Beginning with her leadership of the fundraising for The Reason Why, which placed her at odds with influential elements of the black community, including her mentor Frederick Douglass, Wells embarked on a new phase of her crusade. By the time of her second tour in 1894, when the mainstream (i.e. white) American press finally began to take notice, Wells had adopted more confrontational tactics and sharpened her rhetoric to a razor’s edge. When skeptics in England questioned her claim that America’s moral and religious leaders refused to condemn lynching, Wells did not hesitate to name names and soon became embroiled in a bitter public feud with Frances Willard, leader of the powerful Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Upon her return to the states, Wells penned her most caustic pamphlet to date. With its withering sarcasm, sweeping claims, and righteous indignation, A Red Record

---

shows Wells taking a new, decidedly unfeminine, stance toward her audiences—both black and white. She rebukes white readers for condoning (or perpetrating) “the lynching evil,” yet she also chides black men for failing to defend themselves. At several key points in the text, Wells goes so far as to ventriloquize (for/as) the black man. During this critical period at the height of her international celebrity, Wells uses her experiences abroad to carve out a new role for herself, a hybrid space between “race man” and “race woman.”

Before the Crusade: Wells’ Experience as an African American Woman in Public

Among the many factors that distinguish Ida B. Wells’ stint as a participant-observer is her complex relationship to her audience. To a much greater degree than Cushing, Bly, or Davis, Wells had to consider how her work would be received by multiple audiences. Even if these audiences are cast in the most simplistic terms—as the black community and the white community without regard to regional, gender, class, or national divisions—balancing their overlapping yet sometimes contradictory expectations would have been a delicate task. Wells the international activist could hardly afford to alienate any potential supporters.

However, by the time of her crusade, Wells had gained valuable experience walking this particular tightrope. As a middle-class African American woman, Wells was expected to adhere to a code of conduct rooted in the white ideals of True Womanhood and enforced by black community members determined to demonstrate the race’s progress since Emancipation. Although gender performance was only one of many ways to evaluate African Americans’ progress in the post-Reconstruction South,

10 Wells, Crusade, 4.
the ideological linkages between gender and civilization made it an especially charged
measure. In an era when many whites viewed the former slaves and their descendants as
little more than animals or perpetual children, fulfilling middle-class gender roles was an
indicator not only of socio-economic status, but full humanity. Many African Americans
hoped that upholding these standards, as well as those of thrift, sobriety and Christianity,
would lead to a modicum of social access and empowerment for the black community. 11
Both genders had a role to play in this process, of course, but women’s contributions
were paramount. According to the dictates of True Womanhood, it was the wife or
mother who served as the family’s moral compass, creating a proper home environment
and inculcating appropriate values in the children. 12 With the race’s progress dependent
on their character, black women’s behavior was closely monitored. Their reputations
were meted out by black (and white) men, so much so that mounting a defense against
rumor or innuendo invited further suspicion. 13

Wells learned how socially vulnerable black women were at an early age. After
her parents perished in a yellow fever epidemic, sixteen-year-old Wells insisted that she
could care for her siblings alone, rather than dividing the children among family friends
in Holly Springs, Mississippi. An innocent conversation with a white doctor about the
money her father left for his family soon sparked rumors that Wells was soliciting
payment for sexual services and that she had sought to keep the family together in order

11 Patricia Schechter, “Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells Against Lynching, or, How Antilynching
Got Its Gender,” in Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel

12 Although the black community did adapt the tenets of True Womanhood to reflect the social and
economic constraints faced by its members, women’s moral leadership remained a core belief. For a longer
discussion of the influence of True Womanhood among African Americans during this period, see Beverly
Guy-Sheftall, Daughters of Sorrow, 10-12, 60.

13 Schechter, Reform, 58-9.
to have free rein of the house. Wells was stunned to learn how the local gossip mill
construed her decision to assume this responsibility, but without an older male relative to
vouch for her chastity, it would be the first of many such incidents.14

Even as an adult, Wells had little recourse against these rumors. When an
acquaintance snidely reported that he had heard “bad things” about the young school
teacher while traveling in Memphis, she was infuriated. As her diary recounts, however,
she quickly realized there was nothing to be done: “I was so angry I foamed at the mouth,
bit my lips & then realizing my impotence—ended in a fit of crying.”15 The rare
occasions when Wells did directly confront the accusations against her illustrate the
precarious position black women occupied in both their own communities and the
broader Jim Crow South.

The first of these incidents is quite well known. While riding on the Chesapeake,
Ohio & Southwestern Railroad in 1883, Wells was told by the conductor that she would
have to leave the Ladies’ Car to sit in the second-class car. Having paid the full fare,
Wells refused and the conductor attempted to remove her forcibly. She braced herself
against the seat in front of her, bit the conductor’s hand, and finally exited the train rather
than submit to his request. Once she returned to Memphis, Wells filed a suit against the
railroad, which she eventually won.16

14 Wells, Crusade, 17. Wells was born 16 July, 1862 in Holly Springs, Mississippi. She began
teaching in a nearby country school soon after her parents’ deaths, then in 1881 moved to Memphis to work
in the city schools.

15 Ida B. Wells, The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a

16 A second suit against the same company was initially successful, with Wells being awarded
$500, but later overturned by the Tennessee Supreme Court. The second case was covered by both black
and white papers. Linda O. McMurray, To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells (Oxford:
Wells' defiance at this moment, when Jim Crow statutes were not yet consistently enforced and blacks in Memphis enjoyed a more favorable racial climate, suggests confidence in African Americans' equality in the marketplace and an expectation that the law would protect their rights as consumers. Yet those factors cannot fully account for the ferocity of her response. The conductor's demand should also be understood as an attack on her status as a respectable woman, someone who deserved to ride in the Ladies' Car unmolested. In fact, when the conductor offered to treat her as a lady if she would change cars willingly, Wells tellingly replied that if he "wished to treat me like a lady, he would leave me alone." 

While well-behaved white women could reasonably expect to be politely ignored in a railcar, African American women had no such assurances. A black woman's refined manners and stylish dress might just as easily incite angry reactions among white travelers anxious to uphold Jim Crow's "spatially grounded signifiers of black difference and white belonging." 

According to Grace Elizabeth Hale, the drive toward segregation in the South was not exclusively a product of Reconstruction or racial animosity. Born out of a desire to create collective identities that would replace older, more localized groundings for the self, segregation was also a response to the disjunctures of modernity. Creating separate, value-laden spaces for blacks and whites served the broader goal of producing two distinct racial identities. However, as Hale notes, the whiteness produced through segregation was always contingent and fragile. Because Jim Crow grounded identity in

---

17 McMurray, 26.


19 Hale contends that segregation was only one part of this process. The creation and circulation of spectacles of racial difference, from minstrel shows and advertising cards to mass public lynchings, were also crucial. See the Introduction to Making Whiteness.
particular spaces, any blurring of that divide threatened the whole system. Ambiguous spaces where racially unknown individuals came into contact, such as the train, therefore required constant vigilance. If restricting even the most well-heeled, well-mannered black person to “colored” spaces proclaimed that racial inferiority trumped any individual achievement, then allowing African American women to ride in the Ladies’ Car made the opposite statement. For black women to occupy this contested space suggested their parity with white women and declared that being a “lady” was not incompatible with blackness. Given this environment, in which African Americans’ claims to respectability were politically charged, Wells’ fierce determination to remain in the first class car, and subsequent legal efforts to defend her right to be there, is perhaps more understandable.

The second confrontation, involving a more personal attack on Wells’ character, underscores the obstacles black women faced when trying to preserve their reputations even within the black community. In 1891, Wells embarked on a tour of the Mississippi delta to drum up subscriptions for the Memphis Free Speech, in which she owned a one-third interest. Upon learning that an African American minister with whom she had stayed in Vicksburg was making derogatory comments about her, Wells returned to Mississippi and arranged a meeting with “this preacher of the gospel.”20 The minister’s wife had found a piece of a letter in Wells’ room that suggested she had lost her teaching position that fall under suspicious circumstances.21 This discovery led him to disparage

---

20 Wells’ Memphis Diary demonstrates just how seriously she took attacks against a woman’s reputation, viewing them as a matter of life and death. After recounting a story about an adulterous woman whose brother killed her lover after he “boasted of his conquest” in several cities, Wells commented, “It seems awful to take human life but hardly more so than to take a woman’s reputation & make it the jest and byword of the street; in view of these things, if he really did them, one is strongly tempted to say his killing was justifiable.” Memphis Diary, 131-2.

21 Wells’ teaching position was not renewed in the fall of 1891 after she published an editorial in the Free Speech criticizing the conditions of the city’s black schools and the qualifications of many of their
not just Wells, but all “southern girls,” showing how quickly one black woman, particularly a prominent figure like Wells, could be made to stand in for the entire race.

Wells’ indignant defense also acknowledged this analogy.

I told him that my good name was all that I had in the world, that I was bound to protect it from attack by those who felt that they could do so with impunity because I had no brother or father to protect it for me. I also wanted him to know that virtue was not at all a matter of the section in which one lived; that many a slave woman had fought and died rather than yield to the pressure and temptations to which she was subjected. I had heard many tales of such and I wanted him to know at least one southern girl, born and bred, who had tried to keep herself spotless and morally clean as my slave mother had taught me.

Not content to silence the minister’s wagging tongue, Wells also demanded that he issue an apology from the pulpit, publicly declaring her to be a lady. Wells’ powers of persuasion, though considerable, were only partly responsible for securing the minister’s cooperation. She also brought to the meeting five male friends as “silent bodyguards and witnesses.” With so little authority of her own, the key to Wells’ redemption in Vicksburg lay in leveraging the community policing power held by black men.\(^{22}\)

Wells’ entry into journalism brought a new set of gender-inflected challenges, as well as considerable rewards. She began her career in 1884 with an account of her railroad suit in a local church newspaper, but soon began publishing articles under the pen name “Iola” in a variety of African American publications well beyond Memphis. Her work was warmly received, and by 1886 she was widely quoted and praised.\(^{23}\)

Wells’ appearance at the 1887 National Colored Press Association meeting was a highlight of the gathering; she was elected first assistant secretary of the organization the teachers. Wells suggested that some of these women had benefited from illicit friendships with white members of the school board. Schechter, Reform, 72-3.

\(^{22}\) Wells, Crusade, 42-5.

\(^{23}\) McMurray, 99.
Although Wells privately questioned her abilities as a writer, she relished the opportunities journalism afforded her. In addition to extensive travel and a modest supplement to her teaching salary, Wells derived much satisfaction from her expanding circle of (mostly male) correspondents which, she noted in her autobiography, "gave me an outlet through which to express the real 'me.'" She also took great pride in having successfully turned the *Free Speech* into a profitable endeavor following the loss of her teaching post.

At the time Wells began her journalistic career, black newspapers were dominated by male editors who routinely traded barbs with one another, sparking personal and professional disagreements. Although the ranks of women in the press were growing, they rarely tackled the variety of subjects—from traditionally feminine issues to contentious political debates—that Wells did. Nor did they express their opinions as forcefully as "Iola." Wells may have been crowned the "Princess of the Press," but she was largely famous for writing like a man. Her masculine style was noted by supporters and detractors alike, suggesting that both camps felt a certain ambivalence about her prominence in the press. As her celebrity grew, Wells faced snide comments and outright attacks from jealous male colleagues. These scuffles, as well as the manner

---

24 McMurray, 99-100.


26 Ibid., 41-2.

27 Wells was widely known as Iola, the "Princess of the Press," by 1889. McMurray, 102.

28 Jacqueline Goldsby notes that in contrast to her female peers, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Frances E. W. Harper, and Victoria Earle Matthews, who published "intense but refined fiction about mob violence," Wells cultivated a plain, even blunt style that often highlighted the "gross" details of lynching scenes. Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 63.
in which her defenders responded, reveal the thorny gender politics of race leadership at
the turn of the century.

T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the influential New York Age and an early ally,
wrote of Wells, "She has become famous as one of the few of our women who handle a
goose-quill, with diamond point, as easily as any man in the newspaper work. If Iola
were a man, she would be a humming independent in politics. She has plenty of nerve,
and is as sharp as a steel trap." Wells considered Fortune's assessment, even with its
suggestion of bending gender roles, to be a compliment, and proudly included it in her
autobiography. However, the same observation could easily be turned against her. In
1890, the Indianapolis Freeman responded to criticism from Wells and Fortune with a
savage cartoon depicting them as small dogs yipping at a much larger dog, labeled the
Freeman. As if depicting an African American woman as a dog was not bad enough, an
inset box featured Wells dressed as a dandy under the words, "I would I were a man." The
attack brought a barrage of complaints from other male editors, some of whom had
previously sparred with Wells. In its defense, the Freeman argued that Wells could not
have it both ways; she may have been "petted and spoiled" in the past, but as a member
of the press "she must sometimes take a man's fare." Contrary to the Freeman's

29 Quoted in I. Garland Penn, The Afro-American Press and Its Editors (Springfield, Mass.: Wiley

30 Indianapolis Freeman, 19 April 1890; reprinted in McMurray, 117. Both Sojourner Truth and
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper were accused of being men in disguise during their careers as public
speakers. Truth famously responded to the query by baring her breasts to the audience. See Alison
Piepmeier, Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill:
University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 125. On Harper, see Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing
Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University

31 Indianapolis Freeman, 10 May 1890; quoted in McMurray, 116. McMurray concedes that there
was a grain of truth in the Freeman's accusation. In responding to criticism, which was often patronizing in
contention that it was simply treating Wells like her male colleagues, the cartoon precisely targeted Wells' vulnerability as a woman in public. Her defenders also played to this weakness. Their chivalric stance, which cast Wells as a damsel in distress protected by valiant men, effectively reasserted traditional gender roles.

Wells' struggles to find a niche within the journalistic fraternity were part of a broader debate about appropriate gender roles in the black community, particularly women's participation in reform work and race leadership. The black press, long an important site for defining the race, served as a highly public forum for this discussion. While it was generally accepted that women's primary service to the race would come through their work as wives and mothers, the question remained as to how they might contribute to racial progress beyond the individual family unit. Activities that merely extended the mother's role into the larger community, such as ministering to the poor, were easily justified; if these efforts were overseen by the male leadership of a local church, so much the better. Women who assumed more prominent positions, say through writing or other forms of advocacy, could minimize criticism by sticking to traditionally feminine issues or speaking from a gender-specific subject position. The debate grew contentious, however, when women's activism threatened to usurp men's primacy as race leaders. Such public deviation from conventional gender roles violated the most fundamental tenets of True Womanhood, which was extremely influential in shaping social expectations for the post-slavery generation.

tone, Wells did sometimes couch her responses in the language of wounded womanhood. See chapter six of To Keep the Waters Troubled for a full discussion of Wells' complicated position in the black press.

Perhaps more importantly, these missteps were visible beyond the black community. As DuBois' concept of “double consciousness” reminds us, whites were always presumed to be watching and passing judgment. With little direct access to political or economic power, African Americans in the late nineteenth century recognized that their leaders needed to command respect from whites. Race leaders were thus expected to be representative, not in the sense of typicality but rather as ambassadors to an external audience. Modeling appropriate gender roles, which were considered a measure of a race’s evolutionary progress, was a crucial component of that performance. In this context, black women exhibiting masculine behavior, whether verbal combativeness or assuming an inappropriate leadership role, reflected poorly on both sexes. Their lack of femininity foreshadowed the race’s moral decline while also signaling that black men had abdicated their manly duties. To keep this sort of insinuation at bay, Wells strove to offset her “manly” writing style and choice of topics with an unimpeachable femininity. This balancing act often faltered and, particularly in the early years, constrained her effectiveness as an activist.

Memphis’ 1892 triple lynching decisively changed Wells’ status in the black community. Prior to that event, Wells was a journalistic celebrity, to be sure, but hers was not considered the definitive authority on any particular topic, nor was she well known among whites outside of Memphis, which

---

33 Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes that Frederick Douglass, hardly a typical former slave, was widely referred to as the representative colored man of the nation during his lifetime. His speeches and writings were an opportunity to revise the public face of the race in an era when prevailing images of African Americans were grotesque caricatures. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” in The New American Studies: Essays from Representations, ed. Philip Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 319.

limited her influence. The deaths of Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart, which bore no resemblance to the classic lynch narrative of black sexual aggression against white womanhood, spurred Wells to re-examine all lynchings and turn a skeptical eye on the mainstream press. Her conclusions, first revealed in a brief but incendiary editorial in the *Free Speech* several months later, would lead to the paper's destruction, Wells' permanent exile from the South, and the beginning of her crusade.\(^{35}\)

The Memphis murders were rooted in economic competition between black and white men; no despoiled maidens were involved.\(^{36}\) A scuffle between black and white boys over a game of marbles escalated to an adult conflict in which the white owner of a grocery store swore vengeance against a competing black grocery. After consulting an attorney to determine how they might legally defend their property, the African American owners of the People's Grocery positioned armed allies at the back of the store to repulse the expected attack. When several white men were spotted entering the rear door, they were quickly fired upon. Only later was it revealed that the armed, un-uniformed men were "deputy sheriffs," allegedly serving a warrant for Thomas Moss' arrest issued after the earlier dustup.

Fueled by speculations about a coming race war in the press, white Memphis mounted a hysterical response to the March 5\(^{th}\) incident. Over thirty African Americans were arrested in the next few days, as whites began stockpiling weapons and enforcing a curfew for black residents of the Curve, the suburb where both groceries were located. Once it became clear that the men injured in the shootout would survive, the black

\(^{35}\) Wells returned to the South only once after leaving Memphis—in disguise. She traveled to Arkansas in January 1922 to investigate a riot that started after black farmers refused to sell their cotton below market price. Wells, *Crusade*, 401.

\(^{36}\) Schechter provides a detailed account of the triple lynching and its aftermath in *Reform*, 75-9.
community hoped tensions would ease and those who had been guarding the jail for the past two nights ended their vigil. However, about a dozen armed white men entered the jail that night and removed the three owners of the People’s Grocery. Their bodies were found the next day in an empty field about a mile away, shot several times in the head and neck.

Wells was out of town when these events transpired but quickly thrust herself into the black community’s response. The Free Speech immediately denounced the lynchings and urged readers to leave town as quickly as possible. As hundreds of African Americans left Memphis, rental properties stood empty, jobs remained unfilled, and merchandise was left on the shelves. When the white press began publishing negative articles about the Oklahoma Territory to staunch the tide of black emigrants, Wells traveled west to investigate the Territory for herself. She also vocally supported a boycott of the local streetcar system, which placed further pressure on white businesses.

While these efforts stirred white resentment toward Wells and her paper, an unsigned editorial on 21 May brought that anger to the surface. Announcing that “nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women,” the editorial warned that “if Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.” 37 By insinuating that white women were sexual agents whose affections extended to black

---

men, Wells struck at the heart of the South’s intertwined racial and gender mythologies. However, her authorship of the editorial was initially unimaginable. As an attack on white women’s virtue, the editorial was interpreted as a social rape, which could only have been perpetrated by a black man. In keeping with the lynch narrative, the Evening Scimitar vowed to “tie the wretch who utters these calumnies to a stake at the intersection of Main and Madison Sts., brand him in the forehead with a hot iron and perform upon him a surgical operation with a pair of tailor’s shears.” Mr. Fleming, the papers’ co-owner and the most likely culprit, quickly left town and the newspaper was destroyed in his stead.

Wells, who was already traveling when the editorial appeared, was warned never to return to Memphis and decided to remain in the North. She joined the New York Age, which soon published a lengthy, front-page account of the Memphis saga under her new pen name, “Exiled.” In it, Wells corroborated the claims of her infamous editorial with specific examples of voluntary sexual relationships between white women and black men, many of which were documented by white newspapers. The article attracted influential new supporters, such as a group of African American women in New York and Brooklyn who mounted a dinner in Wells’ honor that fall. The proceeds from that event enabled Wells to publish Southern Horrors, a pamphlet expanding on her Age article. With a sensational story to tell and an expanding network of contacts to help

---


39 Alison Piepmeier argues that the “narrative surrounding lynching was so powerful that it imposed black manhood on Wells’ print identity simply because she had posed a verbal threat to the ideology of pure white womanhood.” Piepmeier, 146.

40 Wells-Barnett, Southern Horrors, 30.
garner publicity for her cause, including the venerable Frederick Douglass, Wells’ campaign appeared to be off to a strong start.

Yet Wells soon became frustrated as her message failed to penetrate beyond the black community, which had little chance of staunching the bloodshed on its own. She complained in her autobiography,

> For nearly a year I had been in the North, hoping to spread the truth and get moral support for my demand that those accused of crimes be given a fair trial and punished by law instead of a mob. Only in one city—Boston—had I been given even a meager hearing, and the press was dumb. I refer, of course, to the white press, since it was the medium through which I hoped to reach the white people of the country, who alone could mold public sentiment. ⁴¹

Her sense of frustration was likely exacerbated by other events indicating that African Americans’ prospects were steadily declining. Efforts to secure black representation at the upcoming Columbian Exposition were meeting with stubborn resistance. According to Robert Rydell, many African Americans feared that exclusion from the Fair would bestow “ideological legitimacy on the white supremacist attitudes underpinning the terrorism that had become a way of life in the South” and thereby seal their fate as second-class citizens. ⁴²

At the same time, the lynching epidemic, which claimed a record number of victims in 1892, had taken a gruesome new turn. In February 1893, thousands of people gathered in Paris, Texas to witness the torture and burning of Henry Smith, a black man

---

⁴¹ Wells, *Crusade*, 86. Wells seems to be exaggerating slightly here. While it is true that she had only spoken before one white audience, the white press was not entirely “dumb.” In addition to regular attacks from Memphis’ white papers, McMurray notes that Boston’s white newspapers covered Wells’ 13 February 1893 address at Tremont Temple. Her address, “Lynch Law in All Its Phases,” was also published in the May 1893 edition of *Our Day*. McMurray, 178.

accused of raping and murdering a three-year-old white girl. Before an enthusiastic throng of 10,000 men, women and children, some of whom had arrived via special excursion trains, Henry Smith was seared with hot irons for fifty minutes before being set ablaze. Photographs and detailed accounts of the event written by participants quickly became popular souvenirs. One local realtor packaged his eyewitness account, complete with illustrations and passages from Danté, as an advertisement for the town, urging all like minded folks to relocate to Paris (figure 3). Although he was not the first lynch victim to be burned, Smith's extraordinarily public death marked the beginning of what Grace Elizabeth Hale terms spectacle lynchings. Eagerly promoted beforehand, openly conducted before huge crowds, and then brazenly commemorated afterward, spectacle lynchings signaled the South's increasing acceptance of mob violence. Pushing lynching out into the open, before the gaze of myriad witnesses and flash bulbs would, however, give Wells a new tool in her crusade.

"An open door in a stone wall": Wells’ First British Tour

If anything positive could be said to come out of Henry Smith’s death, it was the international attention generated by the manner of his execution. News of the gruesome

---

43 Wells’ account of the Smith lynching in A Red Record describes the victim, Myrtle Vance, as a four year-old girl and notes that Smith was widely considered to be “weak minded.” She concedes that Smith was probably guilty of the murder, but that the rape cry was added “to inflame the public mind so that nothing less than immediate and violent death would satisfy the populace.” Wells-Barnett, A Red Record, 77.


45 According to Hale, the key features of a spectacle lynching are the use of excursion trains, a publicly sold photograph (often featuring women and children), and a widely circulated, unabashed retelling of the event by one of thelynchers. These lynchings were framed by participants as a community’s collective defense of Southern civilization, although, as we will see with Wells, they were obviously open to other interpretations. Hale, 207.
"AN EYE FOR AN EYE"
OR
The Fiend and the Fagot.
PRICE 25 CENTS.

THE BABY
FOR THE MURDER OF WHICH
Henry Smith
Was Burned at the Stake
February 1st, 1893.
Illustrated and graphically related by an
Eye Witness.
"Dies irae, dies non."

Figure 3. Title page of An Eye for An Eye. Library of Congress.
spectacle in Paris, Texas caught the eye of two British reformers, Isabelle Fivy Mayo and Catherine Impey, who invited Wells to undertake a lecture tour through England and Scotland that spring. A dedicated Quaker activist, Impey published a small journal, Anti-Caste, devoted to ending global racism and had already traveled to the U.S. to investigate race relations. She counted Frederick Douglass and Albion Tourgee among her correspondents. Impey hoped that publicizing American atrocities might lead to a more serious discussion about Britain’s treatment of its own colonial populations.\textsuperscript{46} Mayo, a noted Scottish author, was more of a benefactor. She hosted international students at her home in Aberdeen and provided the funding for Wells’ trip. Wells’ tour was to be the first undertaking of a newly formed organization, the Society for the Recognition of the Brotherhood of Man (SRBM).

For Wells, the tour “seemed like an open door in a stone wall.”\textsuperscript{47} Although she was offered no compensation beyond her expenses, the opportunity to address British audiences was very appealing. Well aware of British influence in the abolitionist movement, she hoped they might play a similar role in her campaign. In addition to tapping into Britain’s moral authority, the tour also promised to cast Wells in a favorable light. She would be following in the footsteps of respected African American activists like Sarah Redmond and Frederick Douglass, both of whom had traveled to England to plead the race’s case for freedom decades before.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Schechter, Reform, 92.

\textsuperscript{47} Peterhead Sentinel and Buchan Journal, 2 May 1893; quoted in Wells, Crusade, 86.

\textsuperscript{48} In fact, Impey’s initial invitation implied that Douglass, who was already well regarded in England, would have been their first choice for a speaker but for his advanced age. After reading Impey’s letter, which arrived while Wells was visiting the Sage of Anacostia, Douglass instructed Wells, “You go, my child; you are the one to go, for you have the story to tell.” Wells, Crusade, 86.
After a few weeks of preparation, Wells made her first presentation at Mayo’s home in Aberdeen on 21 April. As she moved through Scotland and into Britain, Wells accumulated positive notices in the local press. Wells was not a fiery orator, nor did she aspire to be, but her plain spoken descriptions of Memphis’ triple lynching and the deteriorating conditions for blacks in the South moved listeners. Wells also benefited from her association with Mayo and Impey, whose participation in these events implicitly vouched for her honesty. Indeed, one report noted that “Were it not that the facts are spoken by ladies, whose reputation for truth and carefulness is beyond suspicion, one would fain believe that such things could not be in these days of civilization and freedom.”49 Despite these successful beginnings, the tour soured after only a few weeks due to an ugly dispute between Impey and Mayo.50

Impey, then 45 and unmarried, penned a letter confessing her affections for a Ceylonese doctor who had been residing with Mayo in Aberdeen. Confident that Dr. Ferdinands reciprocated her affections, but was too shy to approach her given their racial difference, Impey assured him that she had already informed her family that they would soon be married. Dr. Ferdinands apparently did not share the sentiment and forwarded the letter to his hostess, who quickly lashed out at Impey. Had Impey’s overture become public, it likely would have damaged the fledgling organization and the women who were its public face. Even in progressive reform circles, there was a clear demarcation between advocating civil rights for racial minorities and promoting interracial

49 Ibid., 92.

50 The Impey scandal figures in most accounts of Wells’ association with the SRBM. For a detailed analysis of Mayo’s reaction, see the chapter on Wells in Vron Ware, Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History (London: Verso, 1992), 167-224.
relationships. Nonetheless, the ferocity of Mayo's reaction suggests that she was motivated by more than mere self-preservation.

She pronounced Impey a nymphomaniac, the "type of maiden lady who used such work as an opportunity to meet and make advances to men." Since Impey "was likely to write such letters to others who might strike her fancy," and thus "throw suspicion and ridicule" on the cause, Mayo demanded that she sever ties with the SRBM, even insisting that all copies of Anti-Caste bearing both their names be destroyed. Wells found herself caught between the two women. While conceding that Impey's letter was "indiscreet," Wells could not fault her friend for falling in love across the color line. 51 Nor did she understand why the incident, which was known only to the four of them, could not be overlooked. Mayo's wrath, however, was relentless. When Wells refused to denounce Impey, Mayo angrily ended their association as well. She then wrote letters to Wells' backers in the States, Douglass, T. Thomas Fortune, and Albion Tourgee, and continued to attack Impey surreptitiously through the SRBM's new organ, Fraternity, for the next year.

Without Mayo's connections, the tour quickly lost momentum and Wells returned home in June. 52 Even though her efforts had largely been ignored by the U.S. press, Wells was nonetheless energized by the experience. She had survived a near scandal with her reputation intact and had a sheaf of British press clippings demonstrating

---

51 These quotations are drawn from Wells' account of the incident in her autobiography. Wells, Crusade, 104.

52 The last portion of the tour was especially disappointing. Wells had planned to be in London during the city's busy social and political spring season. However, Mayo insisted that Impey not accompany Wells to London. Since her surrogate companion had few connections, Wells was unable to gain access to most of the meetings taking place in May. Her only significant speech was before the British Women's Temperance Association meeting, which lasted a few minutes. Once the invitations dried up, Wells headed home. Wells, Crusade, 109.
growing international outrage to show for the six-week sojourn. Moreover, her return coincided with the opening of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which offered another opportunity to draw the world’s attention to the lynching problem.53 Wells soon took up residence in the Midwestern capital and threw herself into protesting the Fair’s treatment of African Americans.

New Tactics at Work: Wells and the World’s Columbian Exposition

The debate over how to respond to African Americans’ exclusion from the Columbian Exposition had already been raging for months by the time Wells arrived in Chicago. Some hoped to establish a separate exhibit department that would display the race’s progress, while others argued segregated exhibits would perpetuate notions of second-class citizenship. Many supported the fight, which was largely fruitless, to have an African American included in the Exposition’s prestigious national planning commission. The lone alternate, belatedly appointed, could hardly be considered a victory for black manhood.54 Fair officials often used the lack of a coordinated national effort as an excuse for inaction. For instance, two groups offered to work with the Board of Lady Managers to collect work representative of African American women for the Fair. The Board declared these petitions to be competing factions within the race and deemed it impolitic to recognize either group.55

The proposed pamphlet denouncing African Americans’ absence from the Fair’s exhibits and trumpeting their achievements since Emancipation, which Wells and

53 The Fair opened May 1st and Wells returned about a month later.
54 Wells et al., Reason, 75.
55 Ibid., 69.
Douglass had championed before her departure, appeared to be another doomed effort. The black press had greeted the idea with a flurry of criticism. Those who didn’t dismiss the pamphlet as futile feared its publicity would backfire. Drawing attention to black suffering might inadvertently reinforce the Fair’s assumptions about civilization’s racial foundations, or even stoke white hostility toward African Americans. Moreover, the fundraising drive would siphon much needed resources from African American pockets. Given this reception, little money was raised in Wells’ absence and Douglass himself largely abandoned the failing project, turning his attention to planning the so-called Colored Jubilee Day instead.

Wells forged ahead nonetheless. Newly confident in the power of international scrutiny, she pressed Douglass to stick with the pamphlet and assured him that she would raise the needed funds. Wells turned to the race women of Chicago who, having recently been stung by the Board of Lady Managers’ rebuff, eagerly joined the cause. Together, they organized a series of Sunday afternoon meetings in the city’s black churches featuring Wells and Douglass. Although the original plan to produce the pamphlet in several languages was never realized, these contributions enabled Wells to print 20,000 copies, including prefaces in French and German, a few months before the end of the Fair. 56

Despite Douglass’ continued public involvement with the pamphlet and his contribution of a memorable introduction, its eventual success was widely recognized as

56 Wells, Crusade, 116-7. According to Wells, the church appeal raised $500, which she added to the $50 pledged by Douglass and another $50 pledged by Mr. Frederick J. Loudin, who had been part of the original idea.
Wells’ doing.\textsuperscript{57} Her persistence in “this silly and most humiliating scheme” overstepped the conventional boundaries of race women’s work in several ways.\textsuperscript{58} Wells’ partnership with the Chicago race women bypassed the ongoing national debate about the pamphlet’s merits and ignored the reservations of leading black papers. This lack of consensus was especially problematic since The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition appeared to speak boldly for the race as a whole. Even though Wells was one of several contributors to the pamphlet, her leadership role in resuscitating the project and raising the necessary funds made her authorship loom largest. Thus The Reason Why not only presumed to make pronouncements for the race, but those pronouncements appeared to be coming from a woman. Whatever fluidity there was in the gendered division of race work at this moment, being the voice of the race, representing its aspirations, frustrations, and potential before white America, was still clearly a man’s prerogative.\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, coming in the midst of speculation about who would succeed the aging Douglass, Wells’ assumption of this traditionally male function likely took on even greater resonance. Coupled with her very public friendship with Douglass, which included his writing a complimentary introduction to Southern Horrors.

\textsuperscript{57} McMurray, 203.

\textsuperscript{58} Indianapolis Freeman, 5 August 1893. In another editorial the following week, the Freeman opposed both the Jubilee Day and the pamphlet and insinuated that their organizers were largely interested in their own publicity: “Both designs . . . may add to the evanescent notoriety of certain individuals . . . who thrive and grow robust on such things, and are charmed to see their name in print, [but] will only serve to attract invidious and patronizing attention to the race.” Indianapolis Freeman, 12 August 1893.

\textsuperscript{59} Prior to her experience abroad, Wells had been a prominent player in a limited sphere. Aside from occasional speaking engagements, her work was firmly rooted in journalism. To be sure, Wells’ forceful rhetoric and interest in politics did not neatly conform to existing models for female participation in this male-dominated field. Yet she was not forging an entirely new path. As an authority on lynching, Wells occasionally made sweeping statements about the race, but these were usually closely connected to the lynching epidemic. With the pamphlet and Jubilee Day, however, Wells took on new activities and expanded her sphere of influence beyond her established expertise in lynching.
Wells' prominence during the Fair suggested that she, too, might be jockeying for the position.\(^{60}\)

Wells' vehement opposition to the Colored Jubilee Day lent further credence to this perception. Though hardly alone in her objections, Wells' criticisms put her at odds with influential allies, including former supporters in Boston and Douglass himself.\(^{61}\) Douglass saw the day's programming as an opportunity to showcase the race's accomplishments before an international audience, while Wells felt that participating in the event would signal blacks' acceptance of their exclusion from the larger Fair and argued for a boycott. More broadly, celebrating in the shadow of the White City might provide support for racial apologists who argued that most African Americans were content with their severely circumscribed place in the modern nation. Finding themselves on opposite sides of this debate, both Wells and Douglass were careful not to attack the other in discussions of Jubilee Day.\(^{62}\) Yet even without challenging Douglass explicitly, Wells' advocacy for a boycott was a bold move. An endorsement from Douglass was valuable currency for any African American, but especially one as socially

---

\(^{60}\) Interestingly, the Fair proved instrumental in Booker T. Washington's eventual ascendance. Wells and Douglass participated in the international Labor Congress held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition, along with the relatively unknown Washington, who was then principal of the Tuskegee Institute. During their session on "negro labor," Wells and Douglass disputed many of Washington's assertions about southern blacks' prospects through hard work and self help, but never succeeded in discrediting him. Washington's appearance at Chicago brought him to the attention of Atlanta's civic leaders, who were then planning their own exposition. In exchange for an opening day address and a separate "Negro Building," Washington agreed to help Atlanta's planners sell their idea to Congress. His speech, "The Atlanta Compromise Address," came just months after Douglass' death in February 1895 and sealed his place as the race's leader, at least from the perspective of whites. Robert Rydell, introduction to *The Reason Why*, xxxiii-xxxvii.


\(^{62}\) Wells did boycott Colored Jubilee Day, but when she read of Douglass' address in the papers the following day, she quickly moved to make amends. She recounts in her autobiography that she went "straight out to the fair and begged his pardon for presuming in my youth and inexperience to criticize him for an effort which had done more to bring our cause to the attention of the American people than anything else which had happened during the fair." Presumably, she included the pamphlet in this description. Wells, *Crusade*, 119.
marginalized (and outspoken) as Wells. Whether he was presiding over meetings where she spoke, praising her “pains-taking fidelity” to the facts in *Southern Horrors*, or writing letters of support to British contacts, Douglass’ approval provided a much needed guarantee on Wells’ personal character and her authority to speak on lynching.\(^63\) So, while we cannot know whether she was truly angling to inherit Douglass’ leadership role, Wells’ uncompromising approach to the Fair at the very least suggests that the British tour had expanded her understanding of her role as an activist.

For all their disagreements on strategy, the debate over how to respond to African Americans’ exclusion from the Fair also reveals some important common ground. Uniting these disparate proposals was a shared awareness of the World’s Columbian Exposition as an international stage where representations of the race would be viewed by a skeptical, even hostile, white audience, an enormous group that included not only the multitudes that visited the Fair in person but those who would be touched by the incredible publicity surrounding the event. Consequently, all involved framed their proposals in terms of potential impact on that audience. Indeed, what most troubled Wells about the Jubilee Day was the class of blacks likely to attend the festivities, which she feared would “do more to lower the race in the estimation of the world than anything else.” “The sight of the horde that would be attracted there by the dazzling prospect of plenty of free watermelons to eat,” she lamented in a widely published editorial, “will give our enemies all the illustration they wish as excuse for not treating the Afro-American with the equality of other citizens.”\(^64\) Wells, among others, rightly recognized that the Fair was a battleground of perception. Juxtaposed with the jovial Aunt Jemima


\(^64\) *Topeka Weekly Call*, 15 July 1893; quoted in McMurray, 204.
and the primitive Dahomeys, a “horde” of watermelon eaters would confirm African Americans’ “official” role at the Fair as objects of ridicule, there to amuse white spectators and provide a reassuring contrast with its majestic vision of Anglo-Saxon culture and civilization.

Although the representational power of the World’s Columbian Exposition was exceptional, in some respects the Fair simply crystallized and magnified broader trends in American culture, particularly the circuits through which racial ideas were promulgated. The extensive efforts to legislate race relations through so-called Jim Crow laws dovetailed with an increasing tendency to stage race. The 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* ruling is perhaps the best known example of visible racial differences being replaced by the staging of difference through segregated spaces. Homer Plessey was arrested when he refused to move from a first-class car on the East Louisiana Railway, for which he had a rightful ticket, to the third-class car designated for black passengers. The Supreme Court’s ruling is notorious for upholding the doctrine of separate but equal and allowing the expansion of segregation in public facilities, but what is most noteworthy about the ruling is its racial logic. Because Plessey was an octoroon according to Louisiana’s racial code and not discernibly black, his case raised the crucial question of the color line: what makes a person black or white? The Court’s ruling established the principle that racial differences did not have to be visible to be legally meaningful. As Walter Benn Michaels has observed, the decision proceeds from the assumption that race exists prior to and outside of the law; “the absence of any difference *grounded* in law,” namely the legal apparatus of slavery, “became powerful testimony to the irreducibility of a difference
reflected in the law."65 As African Americans came to look (in dress and manners, if not always in skin tone) more like whites, new mechanisms were needed to demarcate racial, and by extension, social belonging. Identifying particular spaces as racially coded (as opposed to, or in addition to, bodies) reinforced the myth of absolute racial difference, thereby shoring up boundaries that otherwise threatened to dissipate. To give that difference meaning, there was a concomitant drive to exoticize and caricature African Americans, denigrating the race just as its members came to resemble their former masters in legal status, citizenship rights, outward achievements, and family structure. Evidence of this impulse to “other” African Americans, to render them less than human, permeates both popular and high culture, science and politics, nearly every facet of American life in this period.66 While this campaign drew on longstanding stereotypes of blackness and the social insecurities of a volatile era, the speed with which these images saturated the culture cannot be explained by these factors alone. The added potency derived from new technologies of display and repetition rooted in the emerging consumer culture and its close cousin, the culture of spectacle.

The twin engines of market and spectacle, embodied in the Fair’s celebration of modern progress, created and circulated a dizzying catalogue of African American images. However, at the risk of losing some nuances, three categories, broadly drawn,


can be seen as encapsulating most of these stereotypes. To ground these images in a functional context, it is useful to think of them as dioramas or tableaux, complete with a stage, an audience, and some mechanism that obscures the “createdness” of the image, which in turn helps to naturalize it. Reducing the race to a handful of characteristics, these dioramas frame African Americans for an implied viewer in an effort to reaffirm both the whiteness and the superiority of that viewer. Each diorama is also linked to a particular setting or media, though the images certainly migrated beyond those realms.

The “Happy Darky,” epitomized at the Fair by Aunt Jemima, dominated the commercial and entertainment spheres of the 1890s. While the “Happy Darky” was not always a slave, or even a former slave, this caricature was rooted in the cult of the Old South that flourished at the turn of the century. Nostalgia for the bygone plantation society was strongest in the states of the Confederacy, but by no means confined to them. The spirit of regional reunion and ambivalence about the sweeping changes wrought by modernity created a national appetite for popular fiction, travel narratives, and visual art commemorating the genteel Old South. For white viewers, the overwhelming message of the “Happy Darky” was reassurance. With an exaggerated grin and carefree attitude, the non-threatening, often childlike “Happy Darky” seemed to take greatest pleasure in making his audience laugh. Not surprisingly, then, the “Happy Darky” was a mainstay in popular entertainments like the minstrel show and, later, vaudeville and film. The familiarity of minstrel imagery led to its adoption in trade cards, an advertising genre that first appeared in the late 1870s thanks to new printing processes that reduced the cost of

67 The childlike qualities of the “Happy Darky” allude to the widespread belief that African Americans were a less evolved or “immature” race, unlike the more “mature” Anglo Saxon stock. This overlap between the “Happy Darky” and the “Object of Ethnography” illustrates the seepage between notions of blackness in scientific and popular culture.
reproducing color images. Vivid cartoons of laughing "Sambos" and "Pickaninnies" were first used simply to attract potential buyers' attention, and then gradually incorporated into the product pitch. The sheer volume of repetition lent this stereotype an air of authenticity; that some African Americans, like Nancy Green as Aunt Jemima, appeared to be living examples of the caricature gave further credence to that assumption. At the same time, the proliferation of humorous images of blackness throughout popular and consumer culture united a geographically, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse audience on the basis of shared whiteness. "Whiteness," argues Grace Elizabeth Hale, "became the homogenizing ground of the American mass market," critical to the creation of both a mass market and a mass public.

If the "Happy Darky" commodified African Americans, the second image—the object of ethnography—was equally dehumanizing. Strictly speaking, African Americans were seldom the direct subject of this type of scientific inquiry. Research in race science more often focused on contemporary African cultures, although the findings were applied liberally to the former slaves and their descendants by experts and amateurs alike. By the 1890s, the American interpretation of Darwinian evolution had seeped out of the scientific realm and permeated the culture as a whole. While this dissemination worked through a number of different channels, of particular interest here are the venues

---

68 Hale, 155.

69 Hale, 168. David Nasaw makes a similar argument about blacks (or whites in blackface) on stage and in early film in Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
which conveyed those beliefs to the broader public in a visual way. Thus the exemplary tableau for the object of ethnography is the natural history museum.

The very layout of nineteenth-century museums created a gulf between the typically white visitor and the cultures on display. Since primitive peoples were believed to be the link between western civilization and the animal world, their study was relegated to natural history departments. The research interests and methods of the discipline reinforced this sense of difference. Ethnography was rooted at the time in an object-based epistemology. Although some practitioners, such as Frank Hamilton Cushing, took an interest in cultural systems such as family structures, spiritual beliefs, and modes of justice that could provide some sense of shared humanity, most focused on collecting and cataloguing objects. These objects, particularly tools, were often displayed as part of an implicit progress narrative, which illustrated the superiority of American or European technology. With only fragments of a given culture and limited contextualization on offer, natural history exhibits at the turn of the century made it easy to assume that such societies were indeed "primitive."

Black bodies were also reduced to representative components in late nineteenth-century museum displays. The full-fledged museum diorama with human mannequins did not develop until the early twentieth century; plaster casts and bronze molds of human figures were possible but not common. However, skulls were commonly arrayed as part of the popular fascination with craniometry and phrenology, which claimed to

---

assess intelligence and personality traits through the size and contours of cranial bones. When presented within a framework of evolutionary progress, the skulls underscored the disparity between African peoples and the Anglo-Saxon ancestors of museum visitors.

Perhaps the most notorious body part presented to nineteenth-century audiences was the genitalia of Saartjie Baartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus.” When she was first exhibited in 1810, Baartman’s large buttocks scandalized London audiences, who believed the buttocks to be a sexual organ whose size correlated to lasciviousness. This fascination only deepened after her death in 1815 as Georges Cuvier’s widely read autopsy dwelled at length on Baartman’s gentalia, particularly the “Hottentot apron.” Baartman’s buttocks and genitals, which were displayed at the Musee d’Homme in Paris until 1974, became, according to Sander Gilman, the central image of the black female over the course of the century, further cementing the longstanding association between African American women and sexual excess.

Baartman’s fate illustrates the overlap between the live displays of racial Others found on the Midway Plaisance and the more respectable realms of science, whether the museum hall or the autopsy theatre. The Midway may have been more entertainment-oriented, but still had much in common with more explicitly educational spaces. In fact, the Midway’s exhibits were organized under the auspices of the Department of Ethnology and Archeology due to their perceived education value. With its exotic villages organized hierarchically according to the Great Chain of Being, positioning the Dahomey

---

71 While phrenology’s popularity peaked in the antebellum period, its basic concepts continued to circulate at the turn of the century, particularly in the context of criminal anthropology and the influential work of Cesare Lombroso.


73 Rydell, 62.
as far from the White City as possible, the Midway reinforced the world view inculcated in the museum. Like its more carnivalesque incarnation, the freak show, the titillating display of native peoples on the Midway reaffirmed the viewer’s superiority. Moreover, the similar framing in these diverse venues illustrates how technologies of display were migrating in and out of the museum context.

The final image in this constellation is that of the black beast. The black beast appeared in two guises, book-ending the archetypal lynch narrative that was already entrenched by the 1890s. Alive, he was a menacing figure whose animalistic sexual urges made him a threat to white womanhood everywhere. Dead, the black beast’s corpse testified to the vigilance of white manhood, determined to protect feminine virtue at any cost. While the association between Africans, and later African Americans, and uncontrollable sexuality had a long history, the image of the black rapist did not fully emerge until after the Civil War. To explain the apparent increase in black men attacking white women, Southern apologists argued that their region was besieged by “the new issue,” the first generation of African Americans to grow up without experiencing slavery. Deprived of the civilizing influence of white masters, these men had reverted to their “natural,” primitive state. Philip A. Bruce’s influential The Plantation Negro as Freeman (1889) provided a comprehensive articulation of this argument, but the charges were repeated so emphatically by so many seemingly reputable sources that the concept of black degeneracy quickly became conventional wisdom.74 Even well-informed

---

African Americans like Wells and Douglass initially accepted the premise that the escalation in lynchings was due to a corresponding increase in rapes.\textsuperscript{75}

If nothing else, Bruce was correct in tracing the roots of the black beast to the end of slavery. Without the stark division between slave and free to organize southern society, whites struggled to establish—and enforce—a distinction based solely on race. In the social upheaval of Reconstruction, notes Martha Hodes, every exercise of power by black men, from voting to economic independence to protecting a wife’s sexual exclusivity, represented a corresponding loss of power for white men, who had once held sway in all of these areas.\textsuperscript{76} Encroachments that directly threatened white male power, especially perceived overtures toward white women, were even more provocative. Since definitions of citizenship were bound up in definitions of (white) manhood, control over white women was both the source and the sign of their superiority. When African American men demonstrated political agency, then, it was often read as a proxy for sexual agency.\textsuperscript{77} The lynch narrative makes this conflation painfully clear. Lynching, which increasingly included torture and sexual mutilation, purported to be a punishment for rape, but in reality served a political end. As Wells so often noted, only a third of lynching victims were even accused of rape. That the lynch mob’s “justice” might be initiated by even the slightest offense reminded all African Americans that the protections of citizenship did not apply to them. With no defense against perceived transgressions,
lynchings taught that the safest path for African Americans in the South was compliance and docility.

The emergence of spectacle lynchings, which preceded the opening of the Fair by a matter of months, triggered a shift in the typical lynching tableau and its accompanying narrative. A clandestine lynching left only a bloodied corpse as a witness to the crime. Although a victim's innocence occasionally emerged after death, in most cases his (since victims were largely, but not exclusively, male) fate was considered ample proof of guilt. Thus the silent corpse was easily inserted into the archetypal rape myth, creating a powerful opposition between the image of sullied womanhood and that of the slain “black beast.” Like the museum’s skull, the lynched body was an object whose meaning was assigned by its appearance in the lynching tableau. Avenging white manhood was a potent, but invisible force in this drama; African American women were completely absent. Enacting “vigilante justice” by the light of day meant that the perpetrators became more closely entwined with the violence they wrought. Their presence, like that of the cheering crowd, created a distraction from the terrorizing figure of the black beast, which had been the principal visual component of the lynch narrative. Moreover, incidents like the one in Paris, Texas upended the rhetoric of apologists, who painted lynching as a defense against civilization’s disintegration, by exposing their supposedly solemn task as a form of mass entertainment.

Spectacle lynchings, argues Grace Elizabeth Hale, perfected the model of white consumer culture that originated in northeastern cities in the last decades of the century and gradually spread through the country. Using the “Happy Darky” persona and

---

78 Hale’s chapter, “Deadly Amusements: Spectacle Lynchings and the Contradictions of Segregation as Culture,” offers a rich analysis of the interconnections between consumer culture and
related caricatures, contemporary musical and comedic performances, as well as many aspects of visual culture, frequently positioned African Americans as the focus of condescending humor. Since laughing at the “Happy Darky’s” antics confirmed both his inferiority and the audience’s shared sensibility, African Americans’ visibility on stage was as important as their exclusion from the audience. By displaying and ridiculing the Other in this way, a group fragmented by ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic differences could be united on the basis of their common race. Spectacle lynchings intensified this dynamic. While African Americans might participate at the margins of this consumer culture, exemplified by their confinement to segregated sections of entertainment venues, lynching was a form of consumption exclusively available to whites. Likewise, public lynchings took the derisive gaze honed at the minstrel show and directed it toward a deadly new amusement. Despite the official lynch narrative treating the punishment of “black beasts” as part of a momentous battle for white womanhood, in reality these events took on a carnivalesque atmosphere. Interrupting the daily routine and bringing notoriety and visitors to the town, spectacle lynchings generated intense anticipation, a thrilling climax, and apparent pleasure. The popularity of openly sold photographs, narratives and even gruesome bodily souvenirs, which extended popular culture’s commodification of the black body, reflected a desire to commemorate a town’s most

spectacle lynchings, 199-240. Her take on the modern aspects of spectacle lynchings, which contrasts with previous readings of lynching as evidence of the South’s resistance to modern ways, is especially insightful.

79 See Nasaw’s “The ‘Indecent’ Others” for a fuller treatment of the role of African Americans as spectacle and defining absence in popular entertainment during this period, 46-61.
notable event. Merging market and spectacle into a grotesquely modern display, this new type of lynching represented the ugly shadow of the Fair.80

As accounts of spectacle lynchings proliferated and grew more elaborate, embracing the minute agonies of the flesh and detailed descriptions of onlookers’ enthusiastic reactions to such sights, new players in this drama came into focus. More importantly, they often failed to perform the raced and gendered roles assigned to them in the well-worn drama of despoiled virtue and chivalrous restitution. The accumulating newspaper articles, photographs, postcards, and commemorative brochures circulating through local networks and national media captured this ambiguity, creating a rich archive that could be read oppositionally. In The Reason Why, Wells seized upon the instability of the lynching frame, its potential to be mis-read, a tactic that would become increasingly important with the second tour and A Red Record. Considering the 1893 pamphlet alongside the spectacle of the Fair and her earlier, more restrained analysis is

80 While I have highlighted the linkages between spectacle lynchings and the Fair as a representation of contemporary consumer culture, it is also useful to draw out the implications when the Fair is considered as a representation of the national collective. As Frederick Douglass noted in his final address, African Americans’ exclusion from the Exposition and the epidemic of lynching in the South were deeply intertwined. In terms of African Americans’ prospects of the future, “It’s a silent example, to be sure, but it is one that speaks louder than words. It says to the world that the colored people of America are not deemed by Americans as within the compass of American law, progress, and civilization. It says to the lynchers and mobocrats of the South, go on in your hellish work of Negro prosecution. You kill their bodies, we kill their souls.” If the Fair exacted only ideological violence, both were mechanisms designed to set the limits of citizenship at the white body. The extra-legal violence enacted on black bodies, which sheriffs, judges and juries repeatedly condoned by refusing to intervene or investigate or punish, set a boundary for American citizenship. In the absence of citizenship’s privileges, the desecrated black body was effectively expelled from the national collective, as Alison Piepmeier rightly notes. In an era when American identity was an increasingly fluid and contested concept, lynching, coupled with the trend toward legal and economic disenfranchisement, underscored African Americans’ expulsion from the social body. Citizenship discourses like the lynch narrative have a dual function, however. As important as it is to expel certain bodies from the nation, the collective cannot be meaningful unless its members are made to recognize their own belonging. The uniform whiteness of the lynchers and their onlookers, which parallels the pale crowds at the Fair, is crucial to this constitutive function. Unified in purpose, the collective vengeance of the white mob on the black lynch victim registers their shared membership in a racially homogenous nation. Although crowds rather than mobs congregated in Chicago, those gathered were interpellated by a parallel citizenship discourse, which placed the exclusion of African American bodies at its crux. Frederick Douglass, “The Lesson of the Hour” in Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings, ed. Philip S. Foner, abridged and adapted by Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Laurence Hill Books, 1999), 764; Piepmeier, 130, 141.
useful in understanding how Wells co-opted the techniques of the exotic for her own ends.

Wells’ first pamphlet, Southern Horrors, offered a sustained attack on the pernicious rape myth used to justify the surge in lynchings in the early 1890s. By documenting the origins of this accusation, which emerged only after public opinion turned against violent suppression of the freedmen’s political participation, and the inconsistency with which it was applied, Southern Horrors argues that lynching has precious little to do with the chivalrous protection of feminine virtue. To illustrate the two-thirds of cases where rape was not even alleged, Wells devotes ample space to the notorious Memphis triple lynching, dwelling on the victims’ good standing in the black community and the economic competition that provoked the conflict. Wells’ treatment of the Memphis lynchings exposed the South’s willingness to secure white dominance through blatant racial terrorism, yet her direct attacks on the rape myth were ultimately more subversive. Numerous stories, usually drawn from white newspapers, documenting white women’s consensual relationships with black men contradict the rape myth’s assumption that sexual unions between such partners must be the result of assault. In revealing white women’s sexual agency, these anecdotes undercut the idealized image of the pristine Southern lady, whose purity justified the righteous anger of lynch mobs. Parallel tales of white men assaulting black women and girls strike another blow to this narrative, as the Southern gentleman’s fierce chivalry does not extend to outraged feminine virtue if the victim is African American. As Wells bitterly notes, these crimes hardly merit inquiry, much less brutal communal retribution. With its persistent focus on lynching’s victims and the real triggers for such violence, Southern Horrors succeeds in
exposing the flagrant hypocrisies within the lynch narrative while also injecting black women’s suffering into public view.

What is largely absent from Southern Horrors but becomes startlingly prominent in The Reason Why is the practice of lynching itself. A graphic description of another Memphis lynching, which occurred during the Fair in July 1893, dominates the later pamphlet. Unlike the earlier triple lynching, which took place at night with only a handful of (silent) witnesses, the public torture and execution of Lee Walker, who was accused of attempted rape after accosting two women in search of food, provided local papers with a multifaceted display of human depravity. After briefly attempting to defend himself, Walker is quickly reduced to a “carcass” that is repeatedly stabbed, kicked, beaten, spat upon, hung, burned, plundered for souvenirs, and finally dragged through the streets to be mounted before the court house. In the lengthy except from the Memphis Commercial included in The Reason Why, this “wretch-like demon” and his attempted crime are quickly overshadowed by the mob’s unflagging cruelty.

Far from the dispassionate and orderly execution of community justice claimed by some, Walker’s ordeal is a chaotic storm of fists, knives, and blistering flesh. Throughout the article, the reporter calls attention to the lynching’s perversion of the law. Although rumors circulated earlier in the day that there would be a conflict between the mob and the authorities protecting the jail, what comes to pass that night appears to be merely a staged resistance. When the mob attacks the sheriff, knocking him down with a chair, the deputies are not permitted to use force against his assailant. Even after the crowd tramples one of their own, resulting in a fractured jawbone and other injuries, the officers remain on the sidelines. Their refusal to uphold the law, if only to protect other
whites from the mob’s bloodlust, echoes throughout the article. The reporter predicts that tomorrow morning’s jury, all of whom will have been present at the lynching, will reach the same verdict regardless of whether any witnesses come forward. The institutions of civilization have been evacuated of meaning, reduced to props that provide dramatic structure to the well worn lynch narrative.

Contrary to their conservative rhetoric about upholding traditional social structures, spectacle lynchings like Walker’s also showcased perversions of gender and the family. The Commercial article notes that among those cursing and spitting upon Lee Walker as he is dragged from the jail are both men and boys. Worse, the crowd of onlookers includes women and a twelve-year-old girl, brought to this “Negro Barbeque,” as such events were colloquially known, by her parents. As the flames devour Walker’s corpse, the reporter remarks that the scene was calculated to “drive sleep from the child’s eyes for many nights, if not to produce a permanent injury to her nervous system.” Rather than protecting their daughter’s nascent feminine sensibilities, these parents subject her to the sight of a naked, presumably castrated, black man being immolated in the street. Meanwhile, other young women push to the front of the crowd to get a better look. These proper Southern ladies, accompanied—the reporter assures us—by their escorts, are part and parcel of the cursing mob, which laughs as Walker’s body falls in a “ghastly heap.” To the reporter’s amazement, this scene is not “trying to the nerves,” and


82 Wells, et al., Reason, 37.

83 The Memphis Commercial article hints at castration. “The wretch’s clothes had been torn off, and, as he swung, the man who pulled his legs mutilated the corpse.” Ibid., 35.
the enthusiastic crowd instead looks on with “complaisance, if not with real pleasure.”

The chilling image of these laughing women and girls, who display no modesty when confronted with the naked male body, can hardly be reconciled with that of the fragile Southern belle, whose unspoiled virtue was used to excuse the cruelty inflicted on men such as Walker.

This disconnect was precisely what Wells seeks to highlight in *The Reason Why*. She follows the lengthy excerpt from the *Memphis Commercial* with her own account of C. J. Miller’s lynching in Bardwell, Kentucky that same month. Miller, a resident of Springfield, Missouri who was arrested as a “strange Negro” in a nearby town, was accused of mutilating and murdering two white girls and quickly hung by a chain, his body harvested for souvenirs and then burned. After his death, Miller’s whereabouts during the murders were established and his innocence widely reported. This case of mistaken lynching was reported in the Chicago papers over several days during the Fair, allowing foreign and domestic visitors to witness (at least vicariously) American civilization at work.

For Reverend Charles F. Aked, the pastor of Liverpool’s Pembroke Chapel who became an avid supporter during Wells’ second British tour, the horror of Miller’s wrongful death was eclipsed by the realization that millions of Americans failed to be shocked by this gruesome turn of events. Sitting under the Fair’s replica of the Statue of Liberty in Jackson Park reading these accounts until he was “wild,” Aked came to

---

84 Ibid., 36.

85 Ibid., 39.

86 Wells recounts Aked’s speech at Pembroke Chapel in one of her *Inter-Ocean* columns during the second tour. He makes it clear that the Miller lynching transformed not only his view on lynching, but also on Wells. Wells, *Crusade*, 129.
accept that Wells’ claims about lynching, which he had doubted during her first tour, were painfully accurate. International observers like Aked, who were strategically positioned outside of the typical lynching frame, were the perfect target for The Reason Why’s new tactics. From their perspective, the star of this spectacle was not the “black beast.” Nor was it the mob of supposedly civilized Anglo-Saxons wreaking vengeance upon him, whose behavior, while terrifying, might be rationalized as an isolated incident. The true horror for Aked was the wide swath of Americans who had become so inured to this practice that they were now incapable of registering outrage at the death of an innocent man. Milling about the fairgrounds as the press proclaimed Miller’s imminent death, their moral numbness was a chilling—if not visually arresting—sight.

Although Reverend Aked’s conversion to the anti-lynching cause is not included in The Reason Why, the text is designed to provoke precisely that sort of oppositional reading. By focusing on the lynch mob’s behavior in the latter half of the pamphlet, Wells pushes her readers to see the lynching tableau in a new way. The images included in the pamphlet, another new tactic, are a critical component of this re-education process. Interrupting the description of Miller’s death is a grainy photograph of an 1891 lynching in Clanton, Alabama. At the top of the frame, an unnamed black man hangs by a noose from a tall tree. While his body is the focal point of the image, the eye is quickly drawn downward to a solemn crowd of men and boys, alternately gazing up at the corpse or staring straight at the viewer. These Alabamians were not as raucous as the Memphis crowd, but still managed to find some humor in their task. The photograph was sent “With Compliments of The Committee” to Judge Albion Tourgée, an outspoken white critic of lynching. Explaining that this “S-O-B” was lynched for murdering a small boy.
for 35 cents, the Committee sarcastically describes their work as a “good specimen of your ‘Black Christians hung by White Heathens.’” Meant to express unshakable confidence in the justness of their action, the Committee’s inscription reads quite differently in the rhetorical context of Wells’ pamphlet. With Lee Walker’s savage murder fresh in the reader’s mind and evidence of Miller’s innocence presented on the very same page, the intended irony falls flat. Instead of capturing the triumph of Anglo-Saxon civilization over black depravity, the image morphs into one of white society degenerating into lawlessness.

In the years after the Fair, the total number of lynching victims gradually declined. However, the public presence of lynching intensified due to an increase in spectacle lynchings, which generated more ink and images that could be circulated through the nation’s expanding newspaper networks. The prominence of these events—and the tacit acceptance that the perpetrators would not be prosecuted—made spectacle lynchings a more effective tool of intimidation and social control. As lynching began moving north out of the former Confederate states and coincided with a wave of white-instigated race riots in the first decades of the twentieth century, images like the one included in The Reason Why became more and more common. With thousands of potential buyers in attendance, photographers stood to profit handsomely from a local lynching. Their copyrighted souvenir prints and postcards served to advertise the photographer’s skills, boost the town’s profile, and commemorate an individual’s brush with a new kind of celebrity. For instance, one young man penned a postcard to his father depicting the charred remains of Jesse Washington dangling from a telephone pole.
in Waco, Texas. The sender has marked his own place in the image with an X, proudly testifying to his participation in last night's "Barbeque." Even more telling is a postcard showing the massive crowd gathered to watch the 1910 lynching of Allen Brooks in downtown Dallas. Sent to a Dr. Williams in Kentucky as "a token of a great day we had in Dallas," the writer notes that he attended the lynching on his lunch hour and "was very much in the bunch." It is the "bunch" that is clearly on display here; the victim is so nearly lost in the huge crowd that the writer had to draw an arrow identifying his silhouette next to a telephone pole.

Even without these chilling glimpses into the mindset of participants, the photographs exemplify the ways in which spectacle lynchings, more so than their clandestine predecessors, exceed the bounds of safe play with the exotic. Carefully controlled encounters with the exotic ultimately serve to fortify the self-Other binary. By enacting these exposures in a highly narrativized space, the exotic can be rendered not only different, but inferior and even sub-human. Much like an inoculation, safe play with the exotic is a means of colonizing the Other, taming and expelling that difference from the social body. The classic lynching tableau appeared to conform to this formula. For many contemporary observers, lynchings were a regrettable feature of modern life that nonetheless confirmed widely held beliefs about racial types and gender norms. As lynching reached the status of mass entertainment, however, the frame expanded, making visible the larger community's response to it and undermining many of those

---

87 The postcard lacks a stamp or address, so it was most likely never sent. Without Sanctuary, images 25 and 26.

88 Ibid., images 10 and 11. A 1908 amendment to the U.S. Postal Laws and Regulations Postcards banned mailing matter "of a character tending to incite arson, murder or assassination," but the obscurity of the victim's body may have allowed this one to pass through the mail, 195.
In choosing not to intervene, the massive crowds allowed or encouraged vigilante justice to be enacted in their name. Moreover, spectacle lynchings often far surpassed the “necessity” of an execution with hours of torture and mutilation. Even white supremacists recognized that little separated the mob that endorsed this kind of savagery from the “beast” they sought to punish. Much like Cushing’s dangerous Indian play, the spectacle lynching tableau presses the self-Other binary until it threatens to dissolve. It is this blurring line that Wells begins to explore in *The Reason Why* and will further exploit when she returns to England the following year.

**Wells’ Second Tour and the Discourse of Etiquette**

Wells decided to remain in Chicago after the close of the Columbian Exposition and threw her energies into building the city’s newly established women’s club and contributing to *The Conservator*. Chicago’s oldest black newspaper, *The Conservator* was owned by Ferdinand L. Barnett, a well-respected attorney who had contributed to *The Reason Why* and would later become Wells’ husband. Wells was not out of the spotlight for long, however, as her association with *The Conservator* soon came under fire. C. H. J. Taylor, the black editor of the Kansas City *American Citizen*, decried Wells’ addition to *The Conservator* as ruining a formerly “clean” paper and called for the

---

89 As Mary Esteve notes, spectacle lynchings coincided with a multifaceted interest in crowd behavior. This fascination likely created an environment ripe for Wells’ re-reading of the lynching tableau. Mary Esteve, “Vicious gregariousness: White City, the nation form, and the souls of lynched folk,” in *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Crowd in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 127.

90 Although white supremacists believed the violence of lynching reaffirmed white domination and rejuvenated white manhood, according to Sandra Gunning, they sometimes feared that the practice drew the avenger too close to the offender. Gunning, 12.
editor to “put a muzzle on that animal from Memphis.”91 Critics have attributed the attack to Taylor’s jealousy at Wells becoming so closely associated with the anti-lynching crusade, taking credit that should have been his.92 Yet coming just a few months after Wells’ aggressive leadership at the Fair, the “muzzle” incident also suggests that her play for national prominence had exacerbated existing tensions within the black community.

At the same time, the response to Taylor’s vitriol indicates that Wells’ headstrong behavior had done little to extricate her from the gender dynamics of the black press. Fellow editors lambasted Taylor; even those who had been critical of Wells in the past condemned his words as “too vile to be reproduced in a decent newspaper,” and he was eventually shamed into blaming the editorial on an office assistant.93 Wells, in keeping with the notion that African American women had little control over their own reputations, did not respond publicly to the attack, only to the outpouring of support that followed. She thanked her “newspaper brothers” for their “chivalric defense.” Privately, Wells still played the role of victimized woman, but also sought revenge. She wrote to Douglass, “In my distress, wounded to the quick and utterly unable to help myself, I turn to you,” then asked that he punish Taylor by derailing his political aspirations. Douglass refused her request.94

---

91 Kansas City American Citizen, 15 December 1893; quoted in Schechter, 97.

92 McMurray attributes the attack to Taylor’s jealousy at Wells’ growing reputation; Schechter is more attuned to the gender implications of his comments. McMurray, 206; Schechter, 97.

93 McMurray, 207. The Washington Bee reprinted this supportive editorial on 6 January 1894, but did not author it.

94 McMurray, 207.
At the beginning of 1894, then, Wells was still quite vulnerable, dependent on male protectors, and largely isolated from white audiences and the mainstream press. Her second lecture tour, which began in Liverpool later that winter, delivered a much needed jolt to the status quo. Unlike the previous excursion, this tour received ample attention from the press both abroad and at home. From major dailies to religious weeklies, the British press chronicled Wells’ many engagements—totaling more than 100 events—through a stream of articles, editorials, and personal interviews. Although “hardly a day passed” without challenges to her claims appearing in the British papers, the tide was overwhelmingly in her favor. Back at home, African American newspapers celebrated her achievements and the mainstream white press at last took notice, though not always in a positive way. Additionally, Wells arranged to cover herself as a special correspondent for Chicago’s liberal Daily Inter-Ocean, the first African American woman to hold such a post. The series, with headings like “The Nemesis of Southern Lynchers Again in England,” allowed Wells to present British responses to the anti-lynching crusade in the most favorable light. With this level of publicity, Wells and her campaign could no longer be ignored. Her heightened profile brought new and sometimes vicious criticisms, of course, but also forced southern politicians to address lynching and opened white audiences to her for the first time.

In both word and deed, Wells marked the significance of this second tour within the arc of her career. Her preface to Crusade for Justice notes that African Americans owe a special “debt of gratitude . . . to the English people for their splendid help in [the

---

95 Wells, Crusade, 190.
In fact, Wells frequently characterizes her efforts as following "the good work our English friends had begun for us," giving the British primacy of place in the anti-lynching crusade. Nearly a quarter of the autobiography is devoted to this six month period. These chapters, many of which are excerpts from the *Inter-Ocean* articles, show Wells becoming more confrontational in her interactions with critics and doubters, most notably Frances Willard, and using more inflammatory rhetoric. This uncompromising, even combative, stance persisted in her later professional relationships and writings, particularly *A Red Record*, suggesting that Wells drew lasting sustenance from her experience abroad. Throughout this segment of the autobiography, she revels in the approbation lavished upon her cause by British dignitaries, which validates her belief that international audiences have failed to condemn lynching only out of ignorance. Most importantly, Wells emphasizes the uniform kindness with which the British treat her. Their respect marked her campaign as a serious endeavor worthy of public attention, but also provided immense personal satisfaction. As a sign of her gratitude, Wells named her first child after one of these new "English friends," Reverend Charles F. Aked, gushing that "the queen of England herself could not have been treated with more consideration than I was during the whole course of my stay with them." Long before she penned her autobiography, however, Wells was proclaiming the success of her overseas campaign. In the *Inter-Ocean* articles and public comments after her return, Wells celebrated the awakening of Britain’s conscience and predicted that the mother country’s outrage would soon show America the error of her ways. For those

---

96 Ibid., 4.
97 Ibid., 219.
98 Wells’ first son was named Charles Aked Barnett.
watching the tour unfold in newsprint, the feisty Tennessean seemed to be doing just that.99

Yet behind the scenes, Wells did encounter some difficulties. Potential allies were not willing to endorse a relatively unknown “Negro lady” without receiving assurances from trusted sources and Wells was forced to request new letters of introduction from Douglass. His initial response was so cool that she feared their relationship had soured and worked frantically to rectify the situation with a series of missives. In one of these letters, Wells explained that she had been promised a hearing by Members of Parliament at the Lord Mayor’s residence but that the gathering was contingent upon “letters vouching for my testimony and character, to show that I am speaking for my race and not myself, from persons of influence in America.”100

Although Douglass eventually produced the needed letters, helping Wells gain access to England’s elite circles, this incident shows how little standing she had as an individual black woman. A more public setback came in April with the refusal of the National Conference of Unitarians to pass a resolution charging their American brethren with complicity in the lynching epidemic. The Unitarians’ stance was similar to that adopted by other British denominations and reform organizations like the British Women’s Temperance Association; they were more than willing to condemn lynching itself, but reluctant to believe that their fellow Unitarians could ignore, or even condone, such a practice. Reverend Brooke Herford, for instance, dismissed Wells’ accusation that the

99 Schechter notes that this strife never reached most of Wells’ readers in the States. Reform, 103.

100 Wells’ language here underscores the importance of representativeness for race men and race women. While they were expected to be exemplary in character and behavior, they were not to speak as individuals. For more on this incident and other obstacles Wells faced on the second tour, see Mildred I. Thompson, Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of an American Black Woman, 1893-1930 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990), 52-4.
press and pulpit in the southern states encouraged lynching as a “terrible misrepresentation.” Although the Unitarians passed an anti-lynching resolution the following month, along with several other major denominations, having her veracity challenged by one of the Christian organizations whose moral authority she hoped to leverage carried a sharp sting for Wells. The Unitarians’ initial rebuff also illustrates how much the fate of Wells’ campaign depended upon her reception by the British. For public opinion to reach a tipping point, outrage at lynching’s perpetrators was not enough. The civil and moral authorities must be complicit for this to be a truly “national evil,” one that merited England’s intrusion into the domestic affairs of a sovereign nation. To the extent that Britain’s leading citizens accepted Wells’ charges, their conversion to the cause also shored up her authority. Each prestigious gathering that gave Wells a hearing, each fiery editorial that vouched for her credibility, each influential individual who made Wells a guest in his home strengthened both the anti-lynching campaign and Wells’ ability to lead it. If her work in England was to produce any tangible effect on the lynching crisis at home, Wells first had to secure these sorts of symbolic victories.

The Daily Inter-Ocean articles record both British horror at American atrocities and the growing acceptance of Wells as an authority on the issue. Her analysis of the

101 London Inquirer, 28 April 1894; quoted in Wells, Crusade, 192.


103 Observing the persistent gap between the press’ zeal for the anti-lynching cause and the difficulties of securing more substantial political support during the second tour, Schechter notes that “antilynching made better press than politics.” While Schechter contends that Wells emphasized symbolic victories in her Inter-Ocean articles to compensate for a lack of other achievements, I argue that the two are almost inseparable. Both are critical to the success of the anti-lynching campaign. For an account of the Unitarians’ refusal, see Reform, 99-100.
rape myth and the statistics she so often used to debunk it play a relatively minor role in the series. Instead, Wells charts the rising tide of British sympathy, using the most objective measures available to her. Wells catalogues the individuals who have hosted drawing room meetings or presided over public assemblies, the clubs and churches which have tacitly endorsed the cause by opening their facilities to such gatherings, and the number of attendees at each location. She lists the newspapers and magazines that have provided favorable coverage, occasionally even specifying an article’s length or quoting extensively from an especially fierce editorial, lest she be accused of misrepresenting the strength of public sentiment. 104 That is not to say that Wells is merely a passive reporter for the Daily Inter-Ocean; although she initially leaves the finger wagging to the British, her confidence grows as support for her and her cause mounts. The final installment in early July offers a bristling rebuttal to the Memphis Commercial’s latest attack on Wells’ character, which had been sent to England’s newspapers in hopes of discrediting her. Wells smugly notes that the Commercial’s scheme has backfired; since its publication, her supporters have become more ardent and new honors, like a breakfast with Parliament, have been bestowed upon her. 105

Wells’ newfound confidence derived in part from the social acceptance she experienced abroad. Through the discourse of etiquette, Wells documented her reception as an African American lady, an untenable contradiction according to the logic of Jim Crow. To be a respectable woman in Britain’s eyes represented an ideologically potent

---

104 The pleasure British supporters take in their own horror, a clear sign of their moral superiority to their former colonies, is quite notable.

105 See chapter 23 of Wells, Crusade, 181-7.
form of inclusion—one that Wells clearly savored. Not only did this kind of acceptance buttress Wells’ authority as a public figure, it also undercut the assumptions about race and gender used to justify both lynching and African Americans’ second class status more generally.

The injustice of the color line is a recurring theme in the Inter-Ocean articles. In addition to the disparities in the American justice system, Wells drew particular attention to segregation’s corruption of Christian organizations like the YMCA and WCTU, which deprived African Americans of their beneficial influence in order to appease their Southern members. She also delighted in receiving “only the most courteous treatment” in railroad cars, restaurants, cultural institutions and churches, noting that “To a colored person who has been reared in the peculiar atmosphere which obtains only in free (?) America it is like being born into another world.” In England, Wells briefly experienced a sense of public ease that, in the United States, belonged to white women exclusively. A well-mannered, well dressed white woman could reasonably expect to enjoy a certain measure of privacy and protection in public since, according to the tenets of nineteenth-century etiquette, her comportment dictated how others would behave in her presence. For African American women in a mixed race setting, however, good

---

106 Nicole King persuasively argues that Wells’ British tours should be understood in the context of Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. The imperative on Wells to be received and interpreted as a respectable woman was overwhelming, but her blackness and salacious subject matter made it easy for her to be read otherwise. She was therefore inevitably concerned with what Butler calls “corporeal style,” recognizing, to some degree, that she needed to perform True Womanhood before British audiences. Nicole King, “'A Colored Woman in Another Country Pleading for Justice in Her Own': Ida B. Wells in Great Britain,” in Black Victorians/Black Victoriana, ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 93.

107 Wells, Crusade, 135.

108 Etiquette manuals’ repeated assurances that properly behaved women would not be accosted in public implied that those who were subject to these sorts of insults had in some way provoked the offense.
behavior was no guarantee of respectful treatment. An anecdote from Nellie Bly’s solo trip around the world perfectly illustrates this discrepancy. In preparing for her journey, Bly explained that she chose not to squeeze a pistol into her single piece of luggage because “I knew if my conduct was proper I should always find men ready to protect me.”\textsuperscript{109} Wells could have no such assurance—at least not in America.

Even more than the kindness of strangers, Wells savored her experience as an honored guest of the British elite, which attested to her own merits as well as the more enlightened social customs of her host country. In both the \textit{Daily Inter-Ocean} and additional chapters about the tour in \textit{Crusade}, Wells used the language of etiquette to amplify the special honors bestowed on her. In describing her visit to an aristocrat’s country seat, for example, Wells notes that Lady Jeune had given orders that she was not at home, but upon receiving the card of Wells’ eminent companion, invited the pair in to take tea with her and her children. Wells so impresses her hostess that Lady Jeune offers to hold a drawing room meeting the following week in order that her friends might learn “the Negro race is not the degraded one she had been led to believe.”\textsuperscript{110} Lady Jeune was one of many civic and religious leaders who opened her home to Wells to speak, to dine or to reside. While meetings like these frequently resulted in favorable press notices, resolutions in support of the crusade, or pointed inquiries to the American churches and reform organizations Wells accused of condoning lynching through their silence, it is

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{110} Wells, \textit{Crusade}, 159. Wells’ meeting with Ellen Richardson, who had purchased Frederick Douglass’ freedom years before, follows a similar pattern. The elderly woman “rarely sees visitors at all,” yet Wells is granted the privilege of spending “the whole of the morning with her.” Ibid., 162.
\end{flushleft}
clear from Wells’ account that such political victories depended on the initial extension of hospitality. However compelling the evidence of America’s indifference toward lynching, the success of Wells’ appeals also rested upon her performance as a respectable black woman whose social graces attested to her race’s prospects for advancement.

Wells also uses the language of etiquette to underscore the contrast between the refinement of British society, a privileged circle in which she can now include herself, and the savagery of the American South. Her description of the breakfast meeting with members of Parliament, at which she occupied the honored position to the right of the host, highlights this disparity. As a gruesome lynching photograph is passed around the “beautifully decorated tables,” Wells declares, to the amazement of her distinguished listeners, that “such a gathering for any purpose tendered to a colored person could only happen here in monarchical England—that it would be impossible in democratic America.” The breakfast was a particular point of pride for Wells since it was arranged after the Memphis Commercial inundated the British press with copies of its latest salvo against the “Negro Adventuress.” The “coarse” tone of the attack confirmed Wells’ statements about America’s moral degradation and “brought warmer friends and stronger supporters to the anti-lynching cause” as a result. That British publications largely ignored the Commercial’s vitriol suggested that Wells’ circulation through the drawing rooms of polite society had insulated her, to some extent, against such indignities.

111 Ibid., 178.
112 Ibid., 168.
113 Ibid., 183.
To be regarded as an “American Negro lady” in the epicenter of civilization plainly undermined segregation’s ideological foundation, but Wells wisely recognized that this sort of political capital could only be traded discretely. While her dispatches to the Daily Inter-Ocean describe the social acceptance she enjoyed in Britain, they do so in a neutral tone. However, in returning to this critical period in her autobiography, whose readership was presumably more sympathetic, Wells addressed the implications of British hospitality more candidly. A dinner at the House of Commons, which she had presented to Daily Inter-Ocean readers as honoring Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Kohlsaat, a visiting Chicago couple, and only secondarily “your humble servant,” becomes in the retelling a “magnificent” occasion celebrating Wells.\textsuperscript{114} The revised account reads like a Cinderella story rich in racial inversions. After Wells’ hansom has been ushered though the gates of Parliament, “almost as if I had been a member of royalty,” the esteemed guests collectively rise upon her entrance. Even the American visitors, who had been belatedly added to the dinner “already arranged for me,” participate in this gesture of respect since “not to have done so would have been discourtesy to [their] host.” Mr. Kohlsaat is “as courteously attentive” in taking Wells’ coat and seating her in the preeminent position to right of the host “as if we had always been accustomed to doing that very thing.”\textsuperscript{115}

Concluding her reflections on this “delightful dinner,” Wells tellingly remarks, “It was indeed the most enjoyable feature of my nearly two years’ association with the

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 176, 211. Mr. Kohlsaat was an editor at the Chicago Inter-Ocean and, according to Wells, “one of the best friends to our people.” He was not, however, responsible for her stint as a correspondent for the paper. Although she had met Mr. Kohlsaat before, Wells notes that “of course, I had not met Mrs. Kohlsaat or the young lady accompanying them, since there was no social association in our country between white and black.” Ibid., 212. Wells’ second son was named Herman Kohlsaat Barnett.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 211-2.
British people—the absolute courtesy with which they treated those whom they considered worthy of being their guests.” 116 The opportunity to associate “for once” with those who “pay tribute to what they believe one possesses in the way of qualities of mind and heart” was a welcome respite from America’s relentless emphasis on race. 117 More importantly, to be judged “worthy” according to the principles of etiquette enabled Wells to assert a new kind of authority, grounded in the rhetoric of civilization and her own status as a respectable woman. Considering the importance of etiquette to social interactions during this period together with Wells’ use of this discourse in both the Daily Inter-Ocean and Crusade for Justice reveals the personal and political advantages she derived from her warm welcome abroad.

Wells regarded the guest/host relationship with great seriousness. 118 In recounting her conflict with Frances Willard in her autobiography, which will be discussed in detail shortly, Wells recognized that her criticisms would be perceived as an attack not only on the temperance leader, but also on her hostess, Lady Henry Somerset. Indeed, Lady Somerset, with whom Willard resided for two years, immediately threatened to use her influence to prevent Wells from being heard in England. 119 However, she gives her fullest treatment of the subject in a much earlier chapter describing her friendship with Frederick Douglass, devoting several pages to the black community’s resentment toward Douglass’ second wife, who was white. After her first

---

116 Ibid., 175, 212.
117 Ibid., 212.
118 To introduce her new friend Reverend Aked to American audiences, Wells invokes the guest/host relationship, noting that Aked had been the guest of Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, the well-known abolitionist minister’s widow, during his recent visit to the United States. Ibid., 130.
119 Ibid., 203.
visit to their home, Douglass pointedly thanked Wells for the respect she had shown Helen Pitts Douglass, noting that she was “the only colored woman save Mrs. Grimke” who had “come into [his] home as a guest” and treated Helen “as a hostess has a right to be treated by her guest.”\textsuperscript{120} Wells’ response to this compliment positions her as a humble guardian of social decorum.

And you tell me they had the bad taste and worse manners to come into Helen Douglass’ home and act so boorishly? Oh, Mr. Douglass, I am so sorry to hear that the women of my race committed such a breach of good manners. . . . Mrs. Douglass was my hostess and more than old enough to be my mother. I certainly deserve no special credit for what I have been taught is ordinary good manners. The fact that Mrs. Douglass is white had nothing to do with it.\textsuperscript{121}

While surely embellished from memory, the emphatic language Wells uses to describe her reaction to a social breach helps to explain why British social acceptance had such a profound effect on the young activist.

As a discourse of respectability, etiquette is deeply implicated in notions of race, gender and, of course, class. In keeping with America’s pluralistic, relatively fluid, democratic society, nineteenth-century etiquette writers emphasized “symmetrical assurances of mutual respect,” rather than the strict displays of deference associated with aristocratic Europe.\textsuperscript{122} Contrary to the national rhetoric of a classless society, however, this “mutual respect” did not extend to all members of the citizenry.\textsuperscript{123} The manuals included instructions for interacting with one’s social betters, but generally assumed a

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{122} Kasson, 64.
\textsuperscript{123} As interactions with strangers became more frequent through greater geographic mobility and urbanization, the rituals of etiquette increasingly became a tool for recognizing social peers and a way to police entry into more intimate relationships.
broadly middle-class readership. The proliferation of such guides was an important component of middle-class consolidation in the middle decades of the century; using standards of behavior to signify gentility enabled the middle-class to define its boundaries without explicitly using wealth as a criterion of membership. To those who imagined that mastering the intricacies of social interaction—from tipping one's hat and sneezing discreetly to proper mourning—would allow them to rise in the ranks, etiquette manuals insisted it was not enough simply to follow the rules. True gentility was believed to be the natural expression of genuine emotions, the outward display of middle-class virtues like sincerity. Since virtue was always sex-specific for the middle-class, etiquette’s codes of conduct were also closely entwined with gender roles. In addition to being held to different sets of expectations, the extent to which men and women fulfilled those requirements was a measure not only of good breeding, but also of their masculinity or femininity. Thus, a woman’s perfect manners were the expression of perfect femininity as well.

If this uniquely American brand of etiquette functioned in the antebellum period as a defense against intrusion from insincere social climbers, these codes took on heightened significance after the Civil War, particularly in the South. Social interactions between black and white Americans that had been heavily scripted by slavery were now (theoretically at least) open to change. Although most freedmen were a long way from achieving the financial status necessary for membership in polite society, there was a

124 The codification of behavior through etiquette manuals raised the possibility that insincere individuals might learn to imitate middle-class conduct without possessing the substance. Etiquette writers labored to overcome the fundamental contradiction that the supposedly natural behavior they described was, in fact, increasingly scripted. This threat of hypocrisy is an important theme in Karen Halttunen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
small and growing segment of African Americans who already enjoyed the trappings of middle-class life. As African Americans gained in prosperity and embraced (with some modifications) white notions of respectability in their personal conduct and family life, the possibility of social equality between the races grew more likely. As a result, the situations governed by the rules of etiquette—dining together, encounters in public spaces, relations between men and women—became skirmishes in a much larger battle to determine African Americans' place in the nation. Every instance in which blacks and whites engaged one another according to dictates of etiquette, with its “symmetrical assurances of mutual respect,” was another step closer to the advent of racial equality—and the demise of white supremacy.

In the minds of strict segregationists, then, Jim Crow regulations served as a bulwark against this terrifying prospect. Yet these restrictions were only the most visible obstacle to African Americans seeking social acceptance. The longstanding stereotypes which provided the ideological foundation for Jim Crow’s subordination of African Americans were far more difficult to overcome. According to these entrenched beliefs, only Anglo-Saxons were capable of the fine sensibilities, restrained expression of emotion, and proper bodily management demanded by the tenets of nineteenth-century etiquette. By their very nature, African Americans were unfit for membership in the category of “lady” and “gentleman.” To combat these assumptions, the black elite held itself to exacting standards of respectability and tried to inculcate the same values throughout the race. For an unmarried African American woman like Wells, whose work pushed the bounds of appropriate feminine behavior in so many ways, being recognized as a lady by whites was a stunning accomplishment.
Wells’ speaking style may have been a decisive factor in her successful performance of lady-hood. Elocution, like etiquette, was a means of marking class distinction in the nineteenth-century. Encompassing the “just and graceful management of the voice, countenance, and gesture,” elocution built upon the principles instilled through etiquette training. Both were markers of gentility and, as such, became popular subjects for countless self-help manuals, exercises, workshops, and lessons. In fact, during her time as a schoolteacher in Memphis, Wells had taken elocution lessons. That she chose to devote a portion of her very limited resources to what would seem to be an extravagance suggests the value she and her social circle placed upon disciplined speech.\(^{125}\) While in England, the word most commonly used to describe Wells as a speaker was restrained. Catherine Impey wrote, “She spoke with a cultivated manner—with great simplicity & directness & with a burning intensity of feeling well controlled—it was the convincing kind of speaking—it sounded so intensely genuine & real.”\(^{126}\) Richard Acland Armstrong’s depiction of Wells’ appearance before his congregation at Hope Street Unitarian Church in Liverpool echoes Impey’s recollection. “She spoke with singular refinement, dignity and self-restraint, nor have I ever met any ‘agitator’ so cautious and unimpassioned in speech. But by this marvelous self-restraint itself, she moved us all the more profoundly.”\(^{127}\) Her approach was clearly persuasive, but it was also very cautious.

\(^{125}\) McMurray, 35.


\(^{127}\) Wells, Crusade, 146-7.
Wells could not be seen displaying any undue feeling. Such excess would have evoked a range of damaging stereotypes: the hysterical woman, the even more intemperate black woman, the minstrel show. With a similar investment in voice, especially dialect, demeanor, and class difference, minstrel shows can be seen as elocution’s lowbrow twin. Indeed, a typical highlight in the minstrel show was a “lecture” segment in which white performers in blackface caricatured elocutionary decorum and, by extension, the social aspirations of African Americans. Given these parallels, Dwight Conquergood argues that the norms of elocution were constructed against the black voice and body, making one’s manner of speaking an important marker of racial difference. “Whereas blackface minstrelsy was a theatrically framed mimicry and parody of blackness, elocution can be thought of as the performativity of whiteness naturalized.” Wells’ dignified speaking style and deadly serious subject matter had little in common with the raucous atmosphere of a “coon” show, thereby disrupting the racial oppositions constructed by elocution and minstrelsy.

The respect with which British individuals, audiences and the press treated Wells—as a woman and as a reformer with vital information to impart—emboldened the young activist. This new confidence is evident in Wells’ willingness to challenge Frances Willard during the second tour. As the leader of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union during the height of its power, Willard would seem to be an

---

128 Shirley Wilson Logan also notes Wells’ suppression of emotion, although she connects it to her persona as an investigative reporter. Shirley Wilson Logan, “‘Out of their own mouths’: Ida Wells and the Presence of Lynching,” in “We Are Coming”: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 76.

129 This paragraph draws heavily from Conquergood’s essay. I have simplified his argument for my purposes, as his conclusions are based on more than the similarities between elocution and minstrelsy. Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech,” in Text and Performance Quarterly 20, no. 4 (October 2000): 331.
unassailable target. Well-regarded and well-connected both at home and in England, Willard in many respects represented the perfection of feminine virtue. Although she had no husband or children of her own, Willard’s work with the WCTU extended her motherly influence to include the entire American (or at least Anglo-Saxon) family. Nevertheless, Wells returned to England prepared to tackle this imposing moral guardian. During her first tour, Wells had been asked about the temperance leader’s views on lynching. Her reply that Willard’s only public statement on the issue seemed to condone it carried little weight without any evidence. The second time around, Wells was determined to demonstrate the complicity of America’s Christian leaders in the lynching epidemic; she brought a copy of Willard’s 1890 interview in the New York Voice and arranged to have it published in the SRBM’s journal, Fraternity.

Willard and her hostess, Lady Henry Somerset, responded with another interview in the Westminster Gazette that cast doubt on Wells and her claims. Willard insisted that the previous interview dealt only with black voting rights, not with “southern outrages,” and reiterated her support for educational restrictions on the ballot. While she objected to “the taking of any human life without due course of law,” Willard continued to vouch for the truthfulness of the South’s “best people,” who assured her that “the safety of women, of children, is menaced in a thousand localities so that the men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof trees.”130 Faced with this public attack, as well as Somerset’s earlier threat, Wells fired off a rebuttal, which appeared in the same paper the following day. In Wells’ unflattering portrait, the esteemed “Miss Willard” appears as a privileged woman more concerned with protecting her reputation than the lives of her fellow citizens. When Lady Somerset first raises the “terrible subject of lynching,” Willard

130 Wells, Crusade, 206-7.
"laughingly replies by cracking a joke." These two women enjoying a "quiet hour . . . under the trees" are not principally concerned with helping the "Negro who is being hanged, shot, and burned." The true object of the interview is revealed by Willard's smug parting comment that "British justice may be trusted to guard my reputation."

Wells then contrasts Willard's "indifference to suffering" with her own selfless crusade, noting, "With me, it is not myself nor my reputation, but the life of my people which is at stake." In an audacious closing, Wells attributes Willard's belated denouncement of lynching to the force of British public opinion, essentially claiming the temperance leader's recent attack as a victory for her crusade.131 From Wells' perspective, the scuffle, which also exposed the WCTU's exclusion of African Americans, only increased her support in London.132 The sight of two powerful white women working together to "crush an insignificant colored woman who had neither money nor influence nor following—nothing but the power of truth with which to fight her battles" offended the "British sense of fair play." She proudly notes in Crusade for Justice that her most prestigious honors, such as the dinner at Parliament, were bestowed soon after this affair.

Following her return to the States in July, to much fanfare, Wells' self-confidence remained strong. When asked by a group of African American men to play down her assertions about white women's sexual relations with black men in an upcoming

131 Ibid., 208-9.
132 Ibid., 209. Southern branches of the WCTU had no black members, while the North had segregated branches. Frances E. W. Harper was the only African American woman on the WCTU's Executive Committee. Blacks in the South were also typically denied to benefits of the WCTU's moral suasion, yet Willard blamed them for the failure of prohibition. See also Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 92-5.
interview with the New York Sun, a major white daily, Wells adamantly refused. Soon afterward, she appeared at the A.M.E. ministers’ meeting in Philadelphia and was incensed to discover their reluctance to endorse her. Citing the applause and commendation with which she had been greeted by other “white gatherings” of late, Wells declared that she did not need their endorsement, bid them good morning, and walked out. In recounting both these incidents decades later, Wells referred to her work in England, underscoring the lasting impact of British support on her behavior.

“Objects in the Gaze of the Civilized World”: A Red Record’s Aggressive Stance

These confrontations are telling, but the most decisive evidence of the tours’ impact lies in the book Wells published the following year. Three times longer than Southern Horrors, A Red Record represents the full flowering of Wells’ anti-lynching argument. While A Red Record repeats some of the earlier pamphlet’s claims and uses similar tactics, such as relying on white sources and statistics to reveal the true causes of lynching, this text offers much that is new. Indeed, the imprint of the British tours is so pronounced that it is difficult to imagine Wells publishing A Red Record prior to her trips abroad.

Although Wells does not explicitly address Britain’s reaction to her, the country’s response to the anti-lynching cause and the impact of that scrutiny at home is central to A Red Record. Her opening sentence declares, “The year 1894 [was] marked by a pronounced awakening of the public conscience to a system of anarchy and outlawry which had grown . . . so common, that scenes of unusual brutality failed to have any

133 Wells, Crusade, 220.

134 Ibid., 221-3.
visible effect upon the humane sentiments of the people of our land.”\textsuperscript{135} Finally alert to this “peculiarly national” crime, the world now watches in judgment and America “stands condemned.”\textsuperscript{136} To support this claim, Wells offers excerpts from white newspapers declaring that British public opinion, as well as editors of the leading journals, is solidly behind the anti-lynching crusade. Moreover, English investors are taking notice of the South’s lawlessness, which could threaten the region’s economic growth. As a result of this pressure, Wells notes that governors, newspapers, senators, representatives and bishops “have all been compelled” to acknowledge the charges levied against the United States. Yet it is not a newfound sense of justice which accounts for this change. The American people, Wells confidently asserts, “now feel, both North and South, that they are objects in the gaze of the civilized world.”\textsuperscript{137} The power of this gaze has even stirred the recalcitrant city of Memphis to mend its ways, as demonstrated by the authorities’ swift response to the lynching of six men suspected of barn burning in 1894. In contrast to the 1893 triple lynching, which was barely investigated, thirteen white men were indicted for these murders. More surprisingly, whereas leading citizens had openly advocated the deaths of Moss and his partners, these crimes were resoundingly denounced and a collection was taken up for the victims’ families. The Memphis Commercial’s candid explanation for the city’s turnaround supports Wells’ analysis:

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 122.
prosecution is necessary to avoid "the pitiless fire of denunciation that will be heaped upon us."\textsuperscript{138}

By arguing that civilization constitutes the audience for both \textit{A Red Record} and America's crimes, Wells rhetorically places the United States outside the bounds of civilization. Again and again, she reminds readers that the world is watching in judgment, measuring Americans' behavior against their purported respect for democracy and Christian morality and finding them wanting. To highlight this discrepancy, Wells includes several gruesome accounts of spectacle lynchings, which dwell on the agonies of the flesh and, more importantly, the crowds' eagerness to inflict such torture. The lengthy description of Lee Walker's lynching from \textit{The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition} reappears in \textit{A Red Record}, along with the damning photograph inscribed to Judge Tourgée. However, Wells gives far more space here to the Paris, Texas lynching, offering multiple descriptions of Henry Smith's grisly death that circle back on each other, always returning to the cruelty of the mob. As hot irons are thrust into his flesh, burning out his eyes and throat, "every groan from the fiend, every contortion of his body was cheered on by the thickly packed crowd of 10,000 persons."\textsuperscript{139} Perhaps the most chilling of these accounts comes from a black minister who attempted to stop the execution. Reverend King's perspective, like the grisly account of the Lee lynching in \textit{The Reason Why}, expands the frame of the lynching photo so that the victim is a relatively minor part of the spectacle. Weeping as

\textsuperscript{138} Wells did not include this level of detail in her account of the 1894 lynching. For a fuller discussion of the impact of Wells' crusade on Memphis, and particularly her battles with the Memphis Commercial, see David Tucker, "Miss Ida B. Wells and Memphis Lynching," \textit{Phylon} 32, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 112-22. Perhaps the most impressive indicator of the crusade's success in Memphis, which Tucker points out, is the fact that this was the last lynching until 1917.

\textsuperscript{139} Wells-Barnett, \textit{Red Record}, 81.
he watched parents holding their young children aloft for a better view, Reverend King declares, “The people were capable of any atrocity now... it was difficult to hold the crowd back, so anxious were the savages to participate in the sickening tortures.”

After begging the crowd to stop in the name of God and getting the butt of a Winchester rifle as his response, King is literally run out of town on a rail.

It is noteworthy that Wells addresses this most heinous of lynchings in a chapter entitled “Lynching Imbeciles.” Whereas Southern Horrors used lynchings for crimes other than rape primarily to debunk the myth of the “black beast,” A Red Record treats these victims separately. The “weak minded” Smith was not the most sympathetic of this group, as Wells conceded he most likely murdered young Myrtle Vance as suspected, but his offense still pales in comparison to the manner of his death. Rather than let the state send him to the gallows, Vance’s father and his friends exaggerated the circumstances of the crime in order to whip the town into a frenzy, contending that the little girl had been outraged and torn asunder “with the mad wantonness of gorilla ferocity.” Americans’ willingness to inflict the harshest punishments upon “imbeciles” like Smith, not to mention the truly innocent victims included in Wells’ catalog, demonstrates the ease with which their “civilization” can revert to barbarism.

If Southern Horrors exposed the rape myth as an excuse to punish African Americans for all manner of offenses and The Reason Why used graphic descriptions of lynch mobs to reveal the white South as a menace far more frightening than the “black

140 Ibid., 83.
141 Ibid., 77.
beast,” A Red Record builds upon these tactics to indict American society as a whole.\textsuperscript{142} Whereas Southern Horrors mentioned northern complicity only briefly and reserved its strongest condemnation for southern law enforcement, courts, and the press, A Red Record casts a much wider net. The rising body count and the openness with which lynchings are conducted have rendered this a national crime. Wells’ new anecdotes ensnare those at the highest levels of leadership, including a governor, a bishop, and one of the country’s preeminent moral guardians. In fact, Frances Willard’s callousness merits its own chapter. While the sheer number of examples is damning, A Red Record is also notable for the intensity of Wells’ commentary on these incidents. Unlike The Reason Why, which closed with a white newspaper editorial rather than its authors’ words, Wells injects her own scathing commentary throughout the later work. For instance, the account of C. J. Miller’s lynching, which also appeared in The Reason Why, now includes Wells’ own gloss on the event: “It is the honest and sober belief of many who witnessed the scene that an innocent man has been barbarously and shockingly put to death in the glare of the nineteenth-century civilization, by those who profess to believe in Christianity, law and order.”\textsuperscript{143} The lynch mob was only one target of Wells’ blistering sarcasm, as her commentary on the murders of a man suspected of well-poisoning, his wife, mother-in-law, and acquaintance illustrates.

It may be remarked here in passing that this instance of the moral degradation of the people of Mississippi did not excite any interest in the public at large. American Christianity heard of this awful affair and read of its details and neither press nor pulpit gave the matter more than a passing comment. Had it occurred in the wilds of interior Africa, there would have been an outcry from the humane

\textsuperscript{142}The later pamphlet still seeks to debunk the rape myth, but this portion of Wells’ argument does not appear to have changed substantially, as indicated by her use of several lengthy passages copied from Southern Horrors.

\textsuperscript{143}Ibid., 92.
people of this country against the savagery which would so mercilessly put men and women to death. But it was evidence of American civilization to be passed by unnoticed.\textsuperscript{144}

For Wells, this nonchalance is as incriminating as the most spectacular lynching. Americans’ indifference to their own degeneration signals that the culture is irreparably debased. The institutions charged with upholding society’s values—press, church, law—have been corrupted by their complicity in the lynching epidemic. Moreover, the foundation on which this scaffolding rests, the family unit, has also been compromised. The nation that proclaimed itself civilization’s heir at the World’s Columbian Exposition only two years before is reduced, in Wells’ depiction, to a shameless reprobate no longer fit to wear the crown.

With its fierce rhetoric and ambitious scope, \textit{A Red Record} illustrates the surge in self-confidence Wells gained from her tours abroad. Wells’ invigorated voice draws some of its new potency from her reliance on concepts like Christianity and civilization, which had played comparatively minor roles in the earlier texts. She references these ideas throughout \textit{A Red Record}, invoking their cultural authority and expectations for humane behavior to provide a moral framework in which to understand—and pass judgment on—America’s national crime. While some might view her repeated allusions to civilization as a kind of borrowed legitimacy, it also signals that Wells considered herself a viable representative of these venerated ideas. As many critics have noted, Wells does more than seize these weapons as her own. In her depictions of the white South as barbaric “Other,” driven by desire for black sexual partners and delighted by public torture and death, Wells inverts the conventional binaries and destabilizes them. If the lines dividing civilization and savagery were redrawn according to Wells’ direction,

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 99.
observes Simone Davis, “one would be forced to question the entire imperialist project, resting as it does on a racist belief in the white Westerner’s superiority and his ‘civilizing’ mission.”\(^{145}\) Wells would hardly have attempted such a subversive appropriation unless she felt her own association with the “Other” had already been suppressed.

Wielding these powerful ideas and bolstered by her newly fortified status as a lady, Wells takes a more aggressive stance toward her detractors in *A Red Record*, particularly Frances Willard. “Miss Willard’s Attitude” recaps their altercation during the second tour as well as a subsequent confrontation at the 1894 WCTU convention, where Willard used her Annual Address to misrepresent Wells’ claims and a promised resolution protesting lynching was squashed. Adding to the offense, the resolution that finally appeared in the WCTU’s *Union Signal* expressed the organization’s opposition to “all lawless acts” but insisted those acts were “provoked” by the “unspeakable outrages” inflicted upon “childhood, maidenhood and womanhood.” Categorizing these “atrocities” as “worse than death” while reducing mob murder to a lawless act, the WCTU made its true sympathies clear.\(^{146}\) What is notable about Wells’ retorts to Willard, whether in England, at the convention or in *A Red Record*, is her willingness to both defend herself publicly, especially after so many years of relying on others to vouch for her, and against such a formidable opponent. Since Willard challenged Wells’ status as a trustworthy authority on lynching, her comments had the potential to undermine her crusade and demanded a forceful rebuttal. However, Wells goes further, exposing the


\(^{146}\) Simone Davis points out this disparity. Davis, 81.
WCTU’s hypocrisy and Willard’s own indifference to black suffering. By calling into question the very moral authority which elite white women like Willard used to justify their entry into the public sphere as reformers, Wells tacitly asserts her parity with the venerated WCTU leader.

As these characteristics suggest, A Red Record is hardly a feminine text. Wells speaks from a position that has little to do with the nineteenth century’s notion of Woman. The feminine posturing that opened Southern Horrors, namely a preface explaining why she has dipped her otherwise pure “hands in the corruption here exposed,” is omitted from the later work. \(^{147}\) Much of A Red Record’s persuasive force comes from Wells’ reliance on documented facts, the masculine realm of reason and objectivity. Although she does appeal to the reader’s sympathy, the overwhelming emotional current in the text is anger, most often expressed through Wells’ trenchant sarcasm. \(^{148}\) Anger—even righteous indignation—was largely off limits to respectable women of Wells’ era. While elite white women enjoyed more latitude in this area, particularly those like Frances Willard who claimed their anger was God’s instrument, the rise of True Womanhood made anger incompatible with femininity. \(^{149}\) Ladies were expected to restrain their emotions, as Wells consistently did in her speeches throughout England.

The most strikingly unfeminine aspect of A Red Record, however, is the way in which Wells speaks for African American men. This ventriloquism is most pronounced in the introductory chapter, in which Wells justifies the searing pages to follow. She

\(^{147}\) Wells-Barnett, Southern Horrors, 25.

\(^{148}\) Schechter, Reform, 13.

explains that the intimidation and murder of black men is hardly new; only the excuses used to rationalize their oppression have changed. While the Negro has endured much since the abolition of slavery, this latest charge—the rape cry—cannot be allowed to stand. Thus the black man is finally rising up to “defend his name and manhood” against the “vile accusation” that he is a sexual “monster.” Wells demands that “he should now have the impartial ear of the civilized world, when he dares to speak for himself as against the infamy wherewith he stands charged.” Yet it is Wells who seizes the podium. After defining these charges as a threat to the manhood of the race, Alison Piepmeier observes, it is “significant that she is the one rising to the defense; she is answering her own call, embodying in her own public discourse the black manhood she calls for.”

In contrast to Wells’ dynamic authority, most of the black men in A Red Record, with a few notable exceptions, are dead bodies. By combining a confrontational stance usually reserved for men with womanly claims to advance civilization through moral leadership, Wells emerges in this text as an exceptional defender of the race.

During the pivotal years between 1893 and 1895, Ida B. Wells gradually came to occupy a hybrid position combining, sometimes uncomfortably, the roles of race man and race woman. Emboldened by her reception abroad as an “American Negro lady,” she

---

150 Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors*, 58, 64.
151 Piepmeier, 169.
152 Calling attention to the masculine aspects of Wells’ narrative persona is a departure from earlier readings of her work, such as Joanne Braxton’s influential *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition*, which includes a chapter on Wells. Braxton sees Wells as an “outraged mother” figure, a protector of black manhood and a defender of black womanhood. Yet, she also notes the gender slippage in the preface to *Crusade for Justice*, in which Wells justifies her desire to write an autobiography by noting that “there is such a lack of authentic race history of Reconstruction times written by the Negro himself” (4). While I concur that Wells offers a forceful defense of black manhood at times, she also emphasizes their passivity, in part by usurping their traditional role in speaking for the race. Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Woman Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 109.
adopted some behaviors more suited to an African American man, such as presuming to speak for the race and using aggressive rhetoric in defense of herself and her cause. Interpreting her new status as license to revise existing models of feminine activism, Wells gained access to a broader range of tactics to advance the anti-lynching cause. Still, she could not forgo the trappings of femininity entirely. A look at the Indianapolis Freeman’s coverage of Wells in the months after her second tour provides a window into this balancing act. On 25 August 1894, the Freeman offered this complimentary assessment of Wells’ work: “To our mind, therein lies one of the chief charms of Miss Wells’ crusade in that she has not permitted the cares and labors of the same to unsex her. The full blown rose of a blameless womanhood abideth within her.” This comment might be read as an indication that Wells needed defending on that very score, yet the flowery language suggests she was not so masculine as to render such a defense laughable. In early September, the paper solicited reactions to the recent lynching of six men accused of barn burning from “prominent” African Americans. The three-column article included portraits and lengthy interviews with Frederick Douglass, New York Age editor T. Thomas Fortune, and Ida B. Wells, signifying that Wells’ stature within the black community was roughly on par with luminaries like Douglass. Her views, at least on lynching, merited serious consideration. On September 29, the Freeman addressed Wells’ unique status once again, declaring, “The hour had come, where was the man? Unfortunately, the man was not forth coming—but Miss Wells was!” Just as

153 Following her marriage to Ferdinand Barnett in June 1895 and the birth of her first son the next year, the duality of her life became even more apparent, as she traveled from speech to speech with a nursing infant in tow.

154 Indianapolis Freeman, 8 September 1894.

155 Quoted in McMurray, 233.
"Iola" was famous for writing like a man, the mature Wells, now in her thirties and soon to be married, is known for usurping what should have been a man’s role. Should we read this as light-hearted praise of her dedication to the race, or a subtle warning against trespassing on the traditionally male province of race leadership? It is likely a bit of both, and that ambiguity exemplifies Wells’ distinctive position within the African American community in the wake of her British tours.

Conclusion: The British Anti-Lynching Committee Comes to America

The summer of 1894 was an exhilarating time for Ida B. Wells. After receiving accolades in the London press and tribute dinners with the British elite during May and June, Wells returned to New York in late July triumphant. Although the New York Times groused, they and other white newspapers covered her return, and she was soon the subject of a lengthy and flattering interview in the New York Sun.156 With her new access to white audiences, Wells could finally bring her message to those with the power to curtail lynching. Amid hearty praise from the black press, Wells pledged to spend the next year speaking throughout the country. Finally, in late August the British Anti-Lynching Committee arrived to investigate the conditions Wells had described during her tours. The diverse reactions to this scrutiny provide some insight into the consequences of Wells’ two British tours. Was international attention as effective as Wells claimed? Would Americans feel the same pressure to reform once evidence of British condemnation faded from the papers? Did British support for her and her cause give the spirited activist as much license to bend gender norms as she imagined?

156 Wells, Crusade, 220.
Formed during Wells’ last days in Britain, the Committee was led by the Duke of Argyle, Sir John Gorst, and boasted an illustrious membership, whose names Wells listed in *Crusade for Justice*. The Committee queried governors about lynchings in their states and lobbied political leaders to make statements against mob violence, generating excitement in the black press and hostile responses among white newspapers and politicians. They resented the British intrusion, often pointing out the hypocrisy of an imperial power with its own skeletons in the closet presuming to preach to others, and accused Wells of misrepresenting the facts. Overall, the Committee’s visit had mixed results among whites. It kept anti-lynching in the news and, like Wells’ tours, pressured Americans (at least those working in the journalistic and political arenas) to treat lynching as a serious problem. Republican Congressman Henry Blair introduced a bill that month to investigate cases of alleged rape. This first attempt at federal intervention, while notable, was ultimately defeated, as were nearly 200 other such bills in subsequent decades. Several states—North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Texas—successfully enacted anti-lynching legislation between 1893 and 1897. Having laws on the books did not necessarily translate to enforcement or a drop in lynchings, of course, but their passage suggests that the practice could no longer be easily defended. As previously noted, the city of Memphis demonstrated a new commitment to apprehending and prosecuting lynchers after six men suspected of barn burning were

---

157 Ibid., 215-7.

158 See McMurray for these responses, 227-9.

159 Karcher, 149.

160 Thompson, 66.
murdered during the Committee’s visit. As with the Blair bill, this apparent sign of progress soon dissolved into disappointment as the jury refused to convict the killers.

As these examples suggest, any assessment of Wells’ crusade is a complicated task. What constitutes a victory in a campaign of moral suasion and public embarrassment? Certainly black men and women continued to be lynched well into the twentieth century, although the total number of victims began to decline after peaking in 1892. Prosecutions and convictions of the perpetrators remained rare. Yet we cannot know how many lynchings did not happen as a result of her demand, echoed through the British press, that African Americans suspected of crimes be tried and punished by legal means. While Wells’ efforts may not have had a discernable impact on the quantitative measures, her campaign clearly scored a discursive victory. Wells persuaded some American citizens to question the “old thread-bare lie” about black men raping white women and reconsider their tolerance of extra-legal mob murders. By shifting the terms of debate, Wells made lynching more recognizable as a problem, rather than a regrettable fact of life.

The British Anti-Lynching Committee’s impact on the African American community was also mixed. Some blacks, as well as whites, accused Wells of exacerbating racial tensions in the region. Stoking white hostility arguably made daily life more difficult, and dangerous, for African Americans, and may have curtailed support for the anti-lynching movement. More specifically, the Committee’s work had a

---

161 McMurray describes one such incident in 1894. The National Press Association invited Wells to speak at its annual meeting in Richmond, Virginia that year, and then asked Governor Charles T. O’Ferrall to speak to the group. O’Ferrall refused, saying that Wells had slandered the people and civil authorities of the South. He accused her of stirring up “a feeling against her race which did not exist prior to her crusade” and sympathizing with the “brutes” rather than their “victims who have suffered more than death.” McMurray, 226-7.
direct effect on African American middle-class women. In an effort to enlist support from American journalists, the Committee sent letters to various members of the press, including the president of the Missouri Press Association, John W. Jacks. Jacks' scathing response to the Committee's Secretary galvanized the nationalization of the African American women's club movement. While there was a long history of black women organizing, particularly through the church, their work was restricted to the local level. In more recent years, clubs that addressed the needs of black women as women, as well as those of the broader community, had formed in numerous cities and discussions of a national network of black women's clubs had begun. Jacks' letter provided the precipitating event; Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the Women's Era Club of Boston called the First National Conference of the Colored Women of American to meet in July.162 The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), which quickly became black women's primary vehicle for race leadership, emerged from that meeting. Its rapidly growing membership, jumping from 200 affiliates in 1896 to 1500 only two decades later, enabled the organization to mount more sophisticated programs and expanded opportunities for black women to forge careers in the public sphere.163

In some respects, the club women's response to Jacks' attack, which vilified all African Americans but directed its most salacious accusations toward the women of the race, would seem to be in line with Wells' strategies. Indeed, a special appeal was made to secure Wells' attendance at the conference, where a resolution was passed praising her

162 McMurray, 245-7.

163 The NACW did not emerge directly from the 1895 conference. It was formed in 1896 from the merger of National Federation of Afro-American Women and Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. For an excellent discussion of the club movement's beginnings, see Deborah Gray White, Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 24-39.
“noble and truthful advocacy” “against the lying charge of rape.” However, support for Wells’ crusade among clubwomen was not universal. She had difficult relationships with two prominent leaders in the movement, Mary Church Terrell and Fannie Barrier Williams, which limited her involvement at the national level. Moreover, some clubwomen feared Wells’ aggressive tactics might reflect negatively upon African American women, thus undermining one of the fundamental goals of their movement. According to Deborah Gray White’s study, black clubwomen believed they were their own best argument against discrimination. They argued that the race should be judged by their exemplary accomplishments, particularly feminine virtues, rather than the depths to which others had sunk. The activities of the NACW and similar organizations gave elite black women opportunities to better themselves while instilling the values of middle-class respectability among their working-class peers, thus fulfilling the NACW’s motto of “Lifting as We Climb.” While Wells shared the clubwomen’s faith in their power as role models for the race, she saw this as one of many tools available to female activists. One of the defining debates within the club movement, on the other hand, was whether women should assume more public positions in working to solve the race problem or exert influence exclusively through their roles as wives and mothers. This more

164 Quoted in McMurray, 247.

165 Wells’ involvement with large, national organizations like NACW was often troubled. Although she was deeply pragmatic, Wells could also be uncompromising. Her positions were often more radical than many mainstream organizations, which tended to side with the self-help accommodationist positions outlined by Booker T. Washington. Moreover, her celebrity and stubbornness probably inspired some resentment among her competitors for leadership positions. Terrell tried to exclude Wells from NACW’s annual convention in Chicago in 1899. Williams made a number of unflattering comments about Wells, such as her insinuation in 1895 that the anti-lynching activist’s upcoming marriage might bring on more name-calling contempt, and perhaps even danger for black women as a whole. Crusade, 259-60; Schechter, “Gender,” 306.
restricted sense of possibilities shaped the clubwomen’s response to Jacks, and illustrates how far Wells deviated from those expectations.

In contrast to the grand gesture of a national meeting, the club women’s approach toward the content of Jacks’ letter, which had vilified African American women as “prostitutes,” “natural liars and thieves,” was more cautious. Invitations to the July meeting included a copy of Jacks’ letter, but warned recipients to use it discreetly as it was “too indecent” for publication. At the conference, Ruffin encouraged African American women to respond to Jacks’ “humiliating . . . charges” not by “noisy protestation of what we are not” but through a “dignified showing of what we are and hope to become.” Ruffin’s sense that they could not effectively rebut Jacks’ claims except by making a positive example of themselves indicates that attacks on black women’s sexual mores still posed a significant threat to even this exceptional group.

Wells’ activities during this period are a far cry from the clubwomen’s prudence. A Red Record, with its sarcastic indictment of white America’s moral depravity and ventriloquizing for black men had been published early in 1895. In June, after more than ten years in public life as a single black woman, Wells finally wed. Her new status conferred some additional credibility, but it did not mark a radical change in the conduct of her crusade, nor did it silence her critics. Blanche K. Bruce joked that of the couple,

---


167 Quoted in Carby, 116.

168 Quoted in Schechter, Reform, 115.

169 McMurray, 229.
Wells gives “Ferd her skirts and dons his trousers.” Fannie Barrier Williams slyly noted that Wells’ “determination to marry a man while still married to a cause will be a topic of national interest and comment,” casting the marriage as sign of promiscuity or adultery. Wells soldiered on; less than a week after the wedding, she became editor of her husband’s newspaper, The Conservator, and soon resumed her hectic schedule of lectures.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that British acceptance of Wells as a lady and their support for the anti-lynching crusade insulated this fiery activist from criticism at home. While the tours greatly expanded her access to white audiences, her ideas were hardly universally accepted. Within the black community, she struggled to adapt to the changing landscape of reform and was often disappointed by the treatment she received from members of her race. Whereas Wells was a national figure during the critical years discussed here, her sphere of influence gradually receded to her adopted home of Chicago. Over the next few decades, she re-emerged on the national stage periodically, usually in conjunction with egregious acts of violence against African Americans, but

170 Quoted in McMurray, 239.


172 McMurray, 239. Wells’ inclusion that year in a handsome tome, titled The College of Life: Giving Examples and Achievements of Successful Men and Women of the Race as an Incentive and Inspiration to the Rising Generation, gives a sense of her unique position within the black community at this time. That the volume presented a flattering description of the anti-lynching activist in a chapter on “Noted African American Women” was hardly remarkable. However, an illustration elsewhere in the book is worth noting. Dominating the center of the page is a circular portrait of Frederick Douglass, surrounded by four rectangular photographs of T. Thomas Fortune, I. Garland Penn, Booker T. Washington and Ida B. Wells. In the caption, Douglass is labeled a statesman, Washington, an educator, Fortune, a journalist, and Penn, an author and orator. Alone among this illustrious group of men, Wells the “Lecturer” is hailed as “Defender of the Race.” Henry Davenport Northrop, D.D., Honorable Joseph R. Gay, Professor I. Garland Penn, The College of Life or Practical Self-Educator. A Manual for Self-Improvement for the Colored Race, Giving Examples and Achievements of Successful Men and Women of the Race as an Incentive and Inspiration to the Rising Generation Including Afro-American Progress Illustrated (n.p.: Chadwick-Healey, 1900). The montage appears on an unnumbered page. McMurray includes an identical illustration from the 1895 edition, which was presumably the first.
never attracted the same attention as during the early 1890s. In fact, 1895 is the last year in which Wells’ name appears in the New York Times index.\(^{173}\) Although she was bold enough to write A Red Record in the wake of her British tours, she did so without the support of a major organization; she absorbed the costs for this and subsequent pamphlets herself. Similarly, her year-long commitment to lecture throughout the United States in order to “follow up the splendid effort the English people had begun for us” never spurred the financial and political support she had imagined.\(^{174}\) The ascendance of Booker T. Washington as the spokesman for the race, and the accompanying trend toward more conservative goals and methods among many race leaders, also contributed to Wells’ marginalization, as did the intensifying gender divisions within reform work, where national organizations were dominated by men and women’s groups served as auxiliaries or focused on local efforts. The latter half of Wells’ career as described in Crusade for Justice includes many notable achievements—operating a settlement house for black men, running for state Senate, and, as always, protesting and investigating outrages against African Americans—but these victories are interspersed with episodes of frustration and betrayal.

To acknowledge the decline in Wells’ influence does not diminish what she achieved at the height of her celebrity. Wells’ ideas were integrated into the national discourse about lynching (often without acknowledgment) for decades to come; her incisive analyses of the racial and sexual dynamics of this brutal phenomenon have been recognized in recent years as path-breaking. Would Wells’ ferocious critique of


\(^{174}\) Schechter, Reform, 104.
Americans’ moral complacency have reached its full development without the transformative experience of the British tours? Had she not been sustained by the mother country’s endorsement of her claims and validation of her lady-hood, would Wells have challenged America’s status as a Christian civilization so forcefully in *A Red Record*? Although Wells may have overestimated the leverage she gained from British support and the impact of international opprobrium in combating lynching, there can be little doubt that the tours emboldened her. Unlike Cushing, who struggled to contain the volatility in his identity precipitated by his intimacy with the Other, Wells learned to manipulate the mechanisms of the exotic to strengthen the analytical potency of her work. These new tactics, combined with Wells’ fierce efforts to resist her own “othering,” to claim her place among the respectable women of civilized society, prevented the feisty reformer from being fatally “tainted” by her encounter with the Other. She remained a viable African American woman in public—one whose behavior and rhetoric was often more suited to a man.

As impressive as Wells’ accomplishments are, it is important to keep in mind the constraints placed on her work by her race and gender. As an outspoken unmarried African American woman challenging some of the most fundamental beliefs about the sexual behavior of both blacks and whites, Wells’ work generated scathing criticism and death threats. To say that she risked being “tainted” by these efforts is, at best, an understatement. Yet, however salacious Wells’ charges, her behavior is only shocking by the most rigid standards of middle-class feminine decorum. Her sharp rhetoric, forceful defense of herself and her cause, and audacity in speaking for the race were certainly unladylike, but far from “uncivilized.” The same cannot be said for Frank Hamilton
Cushing’s behavior during his five-year sojourn at the Zuni pueblo. Of the border-crossers considered here, Cushing and Wells have the most problematic form of celebrity. To a much greater degree than Nellie Bly or Richard Harding Davis, who were adept in their self-presentations and protected by the journalistic context of their work, the eccentric anthropologist and the fiery activist endured far more criticism during their tumultuous careers. However, the fact that Cushing incited rumor and suspicion for his transgressive Indian play, rather than the more frequent and explicit attacks levied at Wells, illustrates the far greater latitude enjoyed by white, middle-class professionals like Cushing at this time. For Wells, assuming a few of manhood’s privileges in her crusade, was incendiary enough.
Intimacy, Erasure, and the Other:
Frank Hamilton Cushing's Volatile Performance of Self

Cushing, indeed, was epidemic in the culture-circles of New England, that year of 1882. . . . His personal magnetism, his witchcraft of speech, his ardor, his wisdom in the unknowabilities, the undoubted romance of his life of research among 'wild Indians of the frontier' (for New Mexico was a good deal further from Boston then than it is now), and the impressive dignity and poise of his Indian comrades—all were contagious.

Charles F. Lummis, "The White Indian"

Looking back on the extraordinary career of Frank Hamilton Cushing, Charles Lummis precisely captured the uneasy excitement that the charismatic anthropologist incited among Eastern elites in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1879, Cushing had left his office inside the Smithsonian Castle to begin fieldwork at the Zuni pueblo in present-day New Mexico. The precocious 22 year-old quickly abandoned the more detached methods of his predecessors in favor of an unprecedented brand of participatory ethnography that entailed not only living among the Zuni, but living as a Zuni. By the time he returned to the East in 1882 as part of a publicity tour, Cushing had been visibly transformed by his immersion in Zuni culture. As a blond-haired white man dressed in full Zuni regalia, conversing in the native tongue, and intimately familiar with the tribe's public and private rituals, Cushing's body confirmed his success in penetrating the "inner life" of the pueblo and guaranteed his authority as a Zuni scholar. Yet Cushing's fantastic appearance also marked his estrangement from "civilized ways" and fueled suspicions about his moral standing. Straddling the border between white and native, savage and civilized, scandal and sensation, this "contagious" anthropologist

---

promised the “culture circles of New England” an encounter that was both thrilling and slightly dangerous.²

Faced with such an ambivalent form of celebrity, Cushing struggled to reaffirm his status as a serious scholar and dispel rumors that he had succumbed to the intoxicating pleasures of playing Indian. In an effort to influence public perceptions of his work and character, his correspondence, appearances, and popular writings forged a delicate balance between self-promotion and self-defense. However, what is most striking about Cushing’s accounts of his Zuni experience is their inconsistency. Narrating his encounter with the exotic produced an uneven and at times incoherent performance of self, particularly in terms of gender dynamics. Depending on the events recounted and his perceived audience, Cushing’s persona vacillates, often at dizzying speed, between a humble martyr to science, a passive child at the mercy of his Indian hosts, a pistol-waving ethnographic adventurer, and a disembodied scholar. Like the other figures in this project, Cushing uses the discourse of gender to recalibrate his relationship to the exotic, to differentiate himself from the Other whom he so closely resembles. However, his attempt to reassert the highly naturalized gender binary cannot entirely offset the transgressive effect of a Smithsonian scientist in primitive drag. By blurring the boundary between “savage” and “civilized,” another pair of mutually exclusive categories, Cushing’s Zunification threatened to disrupt the self-Other dichotomy which lay at the heart of America’s emerging relationship to the exotic.

Contextualizing Cushing's "Indian Play"

Cushing's method of immersing himself—both body and mind—in the culture of his subjects was a radical departure from contemporary conventions of anthropological research. Although Cushing's wholesale adoption of Zuni ways was the first instance of this practice, its roots were evident in his childhood experiments with ethnography. A precocious and frail child, Frank was isolated from his older and more robust siblings, and spent much of his youth wandering the woods of Orleans County, New York.³ His fascination with Native American artifacts began early, when a hired farm hand gave the eight-year-old boy his first arrowhead.⁴ "Nothing had ever aroused my interest so much," Cushing later recalled. "That little arrow-point decided the purpose and calling of my whole life."⁵ Despite staunch opposition from his father, a physician who felt ethnography was an insufficiently scientific pursuit, Frank's collection of arrowheads and other relics swelled to include hundreds of objects.⁶ After discovering an Indian fort near the village of Medina, the ambitious teenager built a wigwam of bark at the site and stayed there for days at a time, searching for relics, fossils and minerals. The wigwam

---
³ Cushing was born July 22, 1857 in Erie County, Pennsylvania to Thomas Cushing and Sarah Crittendon Cushing. They moved to western New York in 1860, living first in Barre Center, then in Medina. Clarissa Parsons Fuller, "Frank Hamilton Cushing's Relations to Zuni and the Hemenway Southwestern Expedition, 1879-1889" (Masters Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1943), 1. Raymond Stewart Brandes' dissertation also provides valuable information about Cushing's childhood and early career. Raymond Stewart Brandes, "Frank Hamilton Cushing: Pioneer Americanist" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona 1965).

⁴ The dates given for this event vary. Brandes puts it at age eight. Brandes, 5.


⁶ Thomas Cushing tried to discourage Frank's enthusiasm for Native American relics, once going so far as to toss the boy's collection of arrowheads and other objects out of doors. While he may not have nurtured his son's ethnographic ambitions, Thomas Cushing's own disregard for convention likely fostered a deep sense of independence in the boy, which proved integral to his career. George Kennan, "G. K.'s Column," Medina [N.Y.] Tribune, 6 December 6 1923; quoted in Jesse Greene, ed., Cushing at Zuni: The Correspondence and Journals of Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1897-1884 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 349-50.
also served as a laboratory for Cushing’s early attempts to replicate native tools. Once he
discovered how to make flint into arrowheads, Cushing blistered and lacerated his hands
repeating this feat, leaving scars that endured through adulthood. In contrast to his
peers, who studied Native American artifacts in a more passive fashion, Cushing learned
through trial and error how to replicate those objects, putting his body in place of the
Indian’s.

Cushing’s early collecting also led to his lifelong association with the
Smithsonian Institution. At seventeen, he composed an essay, “Antiquities of Orleans
County, N.Y.,” based on the collection, which was subsequently published in the
Smithsonian’s Annual Report for 1874. The following year, after a brief stint at Cornell
University, Cushing accepted an offer from the Institution’s Secretary, Spencer Baird, to
serve as an assistant to archeologist Dr. Charles Rau. The eighteen-year-old soon found
himself at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition working on the Smithsonian’s
anthropological exhibit and, shortly thereafter, appointed Curator of the Department of
Ethnology at the National Museum. By 1879, Cushing was tapped by Baird to serve as
ethnographer on a collecting expedition to the pueblo tribes of the Southwest under the
auspices of the newly formed U.S. Geological Survey. In this still professionalizing
discipline, Cushing’s limited formal education posed little threat to his promising career.
Indeed, Baird’s ambiguous directive to “find out all you can about some typical tribe of

7 Cushing, “The Arrow,” 313.
8 Fuller, 3.
9 Although Colonel James Stevenson was the leader of the expedition, Cushing considered Baird
his supervisor and frequently butted heads with Stevenson. Also included in the group were Colonel
Stevenson’s wife, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, and John Hillers, a photographer. Mrs. Stevenson was, from
Cushing’s perspective, another source of discord. An aspiring competitor, Mrs. Stevenson disapproved of
Cushing’s behavior and often sided against him in disputes at the pueblo.
Pueblo Indians,” which left his protégé to determine the precise scope and method for this project, underscores the fluidity in the field at the time.  

After several weeks of travel by train and by mule, the group, led by Colonel James Stevenson, arrived in Zuni in September, 1879. During those first weeks, Cushing was occupied with sketching, measuring, and observing daily life in the pueblo while the other members of the group amassed a collection of ritual and mundane objects through trade. In less than a month, he had moved out of the party’s camp on the outskirts of the pueblo and—uninvited—taken up residence with the Zuni governor, Palowahtiwa. When the rest of the group returned to Washington in November, Cushing remained at Zuni.

His willingness to live like a Zuni gradually won him increased access to the pueblo’s ritual life. Using a combination of clever manipulation and personal influence, Cushing managed to observe a variety of ceremonies in the sacred estufas along with the more public events. In the fall of 1881, after a protracted negotiation, Cushing was finally initiated into the Priesthood of the Bow, the most exclusive and powerful of the Zunis’ twelve secret orders. The initiation prompted Cushing to yet again extend his stay since he now had an unprecedented opportunity to study Zuni “from the inside.”

While Cushing’s success seemed to confirm ethnography’s claim to scientific legitimacy, which “lay in the accumulation of details that proved the transgression of temporal and cultural boundaries and a subsequent return with objective knowledge,” it also provoked questions about his eagerness to deviate from “civilized ways” for the sake

---


of science. Only a few months into his stay at the pueblo, Cushing was humiliated at nearby Fort Wingate when the army officers refused to provide adequate shelter for the peculiarly attired ethnographer and his Zuni companions. Deeply shaken by the incident, he anxiously confessed to Spencer Baird, "Need I feel surprised if, on the strength of the same gossip and conjectural representations, which I naturally expect must precede me in Washington as they have at Wingate, my friends there come to class me—in desires and motives—with drunken sailors and enlisted soldiers?" Convinced that his reputation was under attack, Cushing repeatedly sought reassurances from friends and colleagues as to the legitimacy of his methods. He soon began seeking public appearances, lectures, and publications, all while vehemently denying any interest in self-promotion, as an opportunity to craft a public image that reflected favorably upon his work and his character.

The first prong of this campaign was a triumphant return to the East with several prominent Zuni, which Cushing hoped would garner recognition for his remarkable findings while quelling rumors that the "White Indian" had lost his moral character. In


13 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 14 December 1879, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 83. Cushing obliquely blames Matilda Stevenson ("a presence in our party") for his treatment at Fort Wingate. She has been "incapable of recognizing in my self-inflicted degradation to the daily life of savages any motives other than such as, from their rather low character, I trust I shall in the future be, as I have in the past been, quite incapable of." Ibid. For further information on Matilda Coxe Stevenson's own path-breaking career, see Nancy J. Parezo, "Matilda Coxe Stevenson: Pioneer Ethnologist," in Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest, ed. Nancy J. Parezo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 38-62.

14 Frank Hamilton Cushing to James Pilling, 25 December 1881, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, M.D.; quoted in Green, 214. Cushing admits to a "natural desire to have attention called to my work, its extent and elements of popular as well as of scientific interest and to its purity of purpose and singleness of aim." He goes on to note that his "moral character and earnestness have been often questioned and slandered, and the most undreamt of and frivolous things have been imputed and assigned as my motives."
many respects, the tour was an overwhelming success. Beginning in March 1882, the
group, composed of Cushing; the governor; his father, Pedro Pino; Naiiutschii and Kaisi
(both members of the Bow Priesthood); Cushing’s adoptive father Laiiuahtsailunkia; and
the Hopi Nanahe, was toasted by dignitaries and cultural tastemakers in Washington,
New York, and Boston. Whether they were attending the theatre, performing dances
before the Harvard Athletic Club, or passing an evening with the gentlemanly Paint and
Clay Club, their appearances generated intense interest among the bourgeois public and
the press. The tour kicked off the most intense period of Cushing’s celebrity and he
maintained a high profile for more than a year afterward due to a flurry of articles by or
about the young ethnographer that appeared in all segments of the media, ranging from
specialized science journals and children’s magazines to elite and middlebrow monthlies.
He was also a regular feature in newspapers across the country; even when his own
activities were not newsworthy, Cushing served as a reference point in articles only
tangentially related to his work.15

Cushing returned to Zuni, accompanied by his new wife, Emily Magill Cushing,
and her sister, after the tour and continued his work for another year and a half.16

15 Cushing’s publicity tour in some respects followed the examples of Charles Dickens’ American
tour, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s British tour, and Jenny Lind’s tour under the auspices of P.T. Barnum. They,
too, were toasted at special dinners, met dignitaries, and received ample attention from a variety of
newspapers, including mentions of both official events and more mundane comings and goings. What
seems to be new about Cushing’s tour with the Zuni was that he was not promoting any scholarly or
cultural product which people could buy. His purpose (though he would argue otherwise) was more plainly
to promote himself, or rather a vision of himself as a civilized scientist and translator of a soon-to-be lost
culture. On preceding tours, see David Haven Blake, Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity

16 The newlyweds were also joined by an African-American man who would serve the family as a
cook and “maid of all work.” While they remained in the governor’s house for most of this period, moving
to a separate home just before Cushing’s recall to Washington, the anthropologist’s daily interactions with
the Zuni changed as Emily insisted upon a measure of privacy out of step with local custom. William E.
Curtis, “Mr. And Mrs. Cushing at Home,” in Children of the Sun (Chicago: The Inter-Ocean Publishing
Company, 1883), 42.
However, tribal matters now took up a greater portion of his time, particularly negotiating the Zunis’ increasingly contentious relations with outsiders. Cushing was embroiled in conflicts with the Navajo and their Indian agent, the Zunis’ own Indian agent, the Presbyterian missionary who lived outside the pueblo, and powerful ranching interests. The last of these erupted in a national scandal, in which Illinois Senator John A. Logan publicly vilified the ethnographer as uncivilized, and likely contributed to Cushing’s eventual recall to Washington. Cushing’s declining health was another growing distraction. Whatever strength the sickly child achieved as an adult had been steadily eroded by his punishing lifestyle at Zuni. Extreme temperatures, exacerbated by traditional dress and the Zuni habit of sleeping on the floor with only a few sheepskins, insufficient sleep, and intense physical exertion led to a series of illnesses during his stay at the pueblo. Cushing’s most common complaint, however, was digestive trouble; he announced to Baird late in 1879, “if Providence spare me to ever reach Washington again, it must be with but half a stomach.”¹⁷ The Zuni diet, rich in chilies and low in vegetable matter, was especially harsh for Cushing, who suffered from a form of diverticulitis as well as a virulent infestation of tapeworm through much of his adult life.¹⁸

By January 1884, John Wesley Powell, Cushing’s then-supervisor, ordered him to return to Washington. The impetus for this decision has never been entirely clear and it is likely that a variety of factors contributed to the recall. Cushing’s health and the possibility that his Zuni knowledge, much of which he had yet to present, would be lost,

¹⁷ Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 29 October 1879, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 60.

were certainly influential. The fallout from the Logan scandal and Cushing’s other entanglements were a potential source of embarrassment for the Institution, as well as a diversion from research. At the very least, Powell hoped a return to Washington would force Cushing to produce the comprehensive report on Zuni he had so long promised.19

In the fifteen years between his return from Zuni and his untimely death at age 42, Cushing’s career was a mixture of heady expectations, frequent disappointments, and lengthy periods of illness and convalescence. His next major project was the Hemenway Southwestern Archeological Expedition, financed by a Boston philanthropist who had likely became acquainted with Cushing’s work through the eastern tour.20 As the most ambitious project of its kind, the massive expedition promised spectacular results and was eagerly followed by the scientific community and the broader public. By most accounts, the expedition was a disaster. Cushing’s persistent illnesses and poor management resulted in his replacement by Harvard-trained Jesse Walter Fewkes in June

---

19 Powell and the Smithsonian were to be kept waiting quite a bit longer, however. Cushing’s recurring illnesses, which were often followed by extended periods of recuperation, prevented him from working for months at a time. When his health was good, Cushing much preferred working on new research projects to the more tedious task of writing reports. During the latter half of the 1880s, Cushing appears to have been on extended leave from the Smithsonian in order to attend to his health and pursue external projects, namely the Hemenway Southwestern Archeological Expedition. It was not until his removal from the Hemenway Expedition that Cushing began a prolific period of writing. Between 1892 and 1895, Cushing stayed out of the field and produced the bulk of his scholarly articles, most of which were based on his work in Zuni.

20 The Cushings spent several months at Hemenway’s estate, Manchester-by-the-Sea, in 1885 while Frank recovered from his most recent ailment. The extended stay gave Cushing ample opportunity to share his Zuni experiences and lay out his ambitious research agenda for the Southwest. His subtle sales pitch was amplified by the arrival of governor Palowahtiwa and several other Zuni, who joined Cushing for several weeks in August and undoubtedly enthralled Mrs. Hemenway. Cushing soon proposed the idea of an expedition to study the archeological remains of the Zunis’ ancestors and explore the broader puzzle of aboriginal migration through the Americas; the resulting collection was to become a pueblo museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Cushing took an extended leave from the Smithsonian to pursue this private project. For a fuller account of the expedition see Hinsley and Baxter’s collection of Sylvester Baxter’s writings and Hinsley’s essay “Ethnographic Charisma and Scientific Routine.” Curtis M. Hinsley, “Ethnographic Charisma and Scientific Routine: Cushing and Fewkes in the American Southwest, 1879-1893,” in Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork, ed. George Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University Wisconsin Press, 1983).
1889. The dismissal dealt a severe blow to Cushing’s standing in anthropological circles, but forced him to resume his work on Zuni; he produced his most significant anthropological texts in the wake of that failure. The brief Hearst-Pepper Expedition, which focused on the archeology of the Florida Seminoles, likewise began with great promise but yielded limited results. He never completed classifying and arranging the resulting collection, nor the final report on the project. At the time of his death in April 1900, Cushing was once again eagerly planning his next excursion, this time to the woods of Maine.

Cushing’s unexpected passing was mourned by both the anthropological community and the broader public. The Anthropological Society of Washington dedicated its next meeting to their late Vice President, where friends and colleagues eulogized Cushing’s contributions to the field. Many praised Cushing’s peculiar insight into the spiritual and material lives of his subjects, particularly his ability to understand and replicate native tools and crafts; more than one speaker labeled him a genius. Cushing was also remembered with obituaries in major newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times, as well as pieces in Scientific American, The Chautauquan, and Land of Sunshine. As these notices illustrate, Cushing’s fame as the “Washington Zuni” was the core of his public persona. Although he drifted in and out of the spotlight throughout his career, subsequent triumphs and controversies only added nuance to the basic portrait seared in the nation’s imagination during Cushing’s

21 Curtis M. Hinsley, “Heroes and Homelessness: Reflections on Frank Hamilton Cushing, James Mooney, and BAE Anthropology,” in The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in Victorian America (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 205. Cushing also became involved in a dispute with a photographer from the Bureau of American Ethnology, who accused him of falsifying a shell specimen, during this project. Although Cushing was eventually vindicated and the photographer fired, the affair was a further drain on his limited energy.
sensational years as an adopted Zuni. Even as late as 1905, Cushing remained tightly
linked to the Zuni, an association illustrated by his appearance—in the form of Thomas
Eakins’ portrait—in the Brooklyn Museum’s Zuni exhibition that year (figure 1).

As Eakins’ visually arresting portrait attests, Cushing’s spectacular body,
transformed through his daily intimacy with Zuni ways, was the engine behind his
complicated celebrity. Cushing became a national figure not because he laid bare the
mysteries of Native American culture, but because of his own intimate contact with that
culture. Crossing the boundary between white and native, even under the guise of
scholarly inquiry, made Cushing himself exotic. While his five-year sojourn at the
pueblo provided an unparalleled opportunity to observe the workings of Zuni culture, the
most remarkable product of this research was not a scholarly monograph but the birth of
Tenatsali, Cushing’s adopted Zuni name. In his leap from privileged observer to integral
participant, Cushing/Tenatsali became increasingly uncertain how to play himself before
the diverse audiences—residents of the pueblo, neighboring whites, Eastern elites, fellow
anthropologists, and like-minded friends equally smitten with native culture—he
encountered. The remainder of this chapter uses Cushing’s interventions into his public
image to argue that the role of a Smithsonian scientist in primitive drag was an inherently
unstable one during this period.

As a participant-observer, living with the Indians as an Indian in order to learn
from them, Cushing had no clear predecessor. Certainly earlier anthropologists (or their
disciplinary precursors) had come into contact with Native American groups. In addition
to attending ceremonies and councils, trading to gather collections, and witnessing an
array of mundane activities, some of these men had delved into deeper social structures,
such as familial organization, spiritual beliefs, and systems of justice. But none had
gone as far as Cushing had in allowing his research to transform nearly every aspect of
his life, even his identity.

Similarly, although there was a long tradition of whites adopting Indian ways
temporarily, most did so under circumstances much different from Cushing’s. The
preeminent example would be the captive, whose assimilation into native society was
compulsory. Captivity narratives, which were a well-established and popular genre
throughout the nineteenth century, typically devoted a great deal of energy to bemoaning
the hero’s or, more likely, heroine’s forced separation from “civilized” white society.
Those that grew to respect Native Americans and their customs, even to the point of
choosing to remain among their former captors, were excused by the fact that their
exposure had been involuntary.

At the other extreme were those who voluntarily played Indian on a temporary
basis. As both Philip Deloria and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg have shown, there was a long
history of mimicking Indian dress and ritual in the context of political protest, such as the
 thinly disguised “native” perpetrators of the Boston Tea Party. During the colonial
period and the early republic, when the need to forge a distinct national character was
especially intense, Native Americans were repeatedly deployed—through political
cartoons, organized societies and fleeting incidents of Indian play—to symbolize an
authentic American identity. During Cushing’s lifetime, the flourishing movement of

---

22 Anthropology was dominated by men, like most of the scholarly disciplines, until the early
twentieth century. Although there were several notable women in the field, including Matilda Stevenson,
who played a critical role in Cushing’s career, few were able to find a place in the burgeoning institutions
supporting anthropological research.

23 See especially chapters one and two in Deloria, as well as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Surrogate
Americans: Masculinity, Masquerade, and the Formation of a National Identity,” PMLA 119, no. 5
fraternal orders, many of which drew upon native cultures for their costuming and ceremonial activities, was the locus of organized Indian play.\textsuperscript{24} By the turn of the century, playing Indian became a vital tool for molding young boys into strong, self-reliant men.\textsuperscript{25} For instance, the hugely popular Boy Scouts, which incorporated Earnest Thompson Seton’s Woodcraft Indians, combined aspects of military scouting with Indian-inspired games and dress in an effort to instill character, physical strength, and patriotism in the next generation of American men. With a few notable exceptions, the Indian play which preceded Cushing’s Zuni experience made instrumental and superficial use of Native American cultures.\textsuperscript{26} Even his peers in anthropology devoted comparatively little time to studying particular groups in depth, often assuming that primitive people created correspondingly simplistic societies which could be understood relatively quickly. To a large extent, the field was focused on acquiring and understanding objects more than life ways, collecting the remnants of cultures presumed to be on the verge of extinction. Thus, as open-ended as Baird’s instructions to Cushing were, no one would have expected the young ethnographer to interpret the directive to


\textsuperscript{25} Youth groups for girls also incorporated Native American lore and ritual, but these were a smaller segment of the total offerings for young women.

\textsuperscript{26} Seton’s Woodcraft Indians were devoted to preserving and diffusing the culture of the Redman. Lewis Henry Morgan’s Grand Order of the Iroquois Confederacy began as a literary society that used Indian play to inspire an authentic national literature but gradually shifted its focus to understanding the history and culture of the native groups that once thrived in western New York. The group thus mixed the ritual of later fraternal organizations with a deeper interest in anthropology. (See Deloria’s third chapter for an incisive analysis of this delicate balance.) Cushing corresponded with Morgan, an early luminary in the field of ethnology, during his adolescence in Medina, New York. Huhndorf, 70-1; Brandes, 8.
learn "all you can about some typical tribe" as a license to remain in the field for nearly five years, much less to insinuate himself so thoroughly into the life of the pueblo in pursuit of that goal.

Because Cushing's Zuni experience did not correspond with the available models of Indian encounter, contemporaries often found it difficult to categorize the ethnographer and his work. His shifting personas, which often undercut previous justifications for his self-described "degradation," only added to the confusion. Despite his acute sensitivity to gossip, he proved inept at managing his public persona. Compared to contemporaries like Theodore Roosevelt, whose well-honed Rough Rider image approached the status of myth during his own lifetime, Cushing's public presentation of self was highly contradictory, even volatile. If he sometimes succeeded in putting the appropriate persona before a given audience, as in his Atlantic series "The Nation of the Willows," there were also frequent missteps. He appeared at a Washington reception of scientific notables in full Zuni regalia only to be scolded by his Smithsonian supervisor to "go home and get dressed." In corresponding with one of the U.S. Indian Agents regarding a land conflict between the Zuni and the neighboring Navajo, Cushing

---

27 Until recently, subsequent scholars have fared little better. Although the participant-observer method he pioneered was integral to the development of the field, Cushing was a times dismissed as a colorful anecdote from the discipline's fledgling years, before the adoption of rigorous scientific standards. His findings, though richly detailed, were considered marred by poetic musings and sweeping speculations. Only a handful of full-length works are devoted to Cushing and no biography of him exists. It is only in the last decade or so that scholars have begun to take Cushing and his eccentric reputation seriously, examining the complexities of Cushing's relationship with the Zuni, his role in the development of the Southwest as a region, and the appeal that his Zuni experience held for the Eastern elite. See Eliza McFeely, Zuni and the American Imagination (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Audrey Goodman, Translating Southwest Landscapes: The Making of an Anglo Literary Region, 1880-1930 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), Curtis M. Hinsley, "Heroes and Homelessness," and Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox.


29 Truettner, 65.
admitted to firing at, with the hope of killing, one or more Navajo horses that had wandered into Zuni territory. Worse, he signed his letter “1st War Chief of Zuni, U.S. Ass’t Ethnologist,” which did little to endear him to the government agent or improve his standing among whites in the area.\textsuperscript{30} While the ethnographer’s occasional indulgence in frontier justice may have reached a smaller audience than his popular articles or publicity tour, his ongoing struggle to play the dual role of Cushing/Tenatsali underscores the burden of simultaneously belonging—however ambivalently—to two cultures.\textsuperscript{31} Whether Cushing “went native” was a titillating subject for his contemporaries and, to some degree, remains so even today.\textsuperscript{32} However, the question simplifies Cushing’s complex relationship with his largely white, bourgeois audience. In his role as an interpreter of the Zuni, Cushing promised a privileged glimpse into what his audiences believed was a primitive, vanishing culture. Through his writings, lectures, and the Eastern tour, Cushing provided vicarious contact with an exotic Other—temporally, culturally, and racially distinct from his audience. In this capacity, Cushing was similar to countless purveyors of the exotic during these decades. What set Cushing apart was his unique position straddling the well-defined line between white and native cultures. By blurring these boundaries, Cushing became much more than a mediator between

\textsuperscript{30} Frank Hamilton Cushing to Galen Eastman, 11 October 1882, National Archives, Record Group 75, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received 1881-1907, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 245. The conflict eventually led to a scathing letter from the United States Indian Service to General Powell, which described Cushing’s horse shooting as a “reckless and lawless act... in the line of the old barbarism rather than of the civilization which Mr. Cushing ought to exemplify.” It also mentions Cushing’s “wide-spread” “reputation for licentiousness” in the area. C. H. Howard to John Wesley Powell, 26 December 1882, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, M.D.; quoted in Green, 263.

\textsuperscript{31} As an indication of Cushing’s enduring identification with Zuni, and his own Zuni identity, he published a pamphlet of poems around 1897 entitled \textit{Tenatsali’s Leaves}.

"primitive" and "civilized" worlds. His evolution from respectable Smithsonian protégé to Tenatsali, First War Chief of the Zunis, threatened to disrupt mainstream white culture's developing relationship to the exotic. Contemplating Cushing's fantastic body—so similar to their own and yet so profoundly different—forced audiences to reassess identity categories that once seemed natural and stable. Like Wells' exposure of the vicious and "primitive" desires running loose in a supposedly enlightened society, Cushing compelled his audience to consider the possibility that the "savage" and the "civilized" are not mutually exclusive categories, that what separated them from the Other was mere rhetoric.

The Suffering Body: Cushing's Return to the East

Throughout his stay at the pueblo, Cushing was at pains to demonstrate that his Zuni experiment was a serious scholarly endeavor. He wrote enthusiastically about his progress, particularly when he had discovered a new aspect of the Zunis' rich spiritual life, yet was cautious not to take undue pleasure in the work itself. On the rare occasions when he spoke unguardedly about the excitement of his life as Tenatsali, these comments were usually reserved for a select group of friends who shared his infatuation with the Southwest. In presenting his Zuni experience to more discerning audiences, particularly his Smithsonian colleagues, Cushing strove to project an image of himself as a heroic martyr to science. Although he at times modified and even undermined this rationale for his unusual method, as this chapter demonstrates, the core of his persona remained the suffering scientist. By emphasizing the personal sacrifices that his method entailed, Cushing sought to dispel the impression that his work was merely a boyish indulgence, a
grown-up form of Indian play. Such a romantic provenance would make Cushing’s discoveries appear all the more precious while giving their author an intriguing, though respectable, reputation.

Cushing’s suffering was a theme in both his Smithsonian correspondence and early articles about the anthropologist, which were based, at least in part, on Cushing’s own accounts of his work. The doggedness with which Cushing pursued this theme suggests that he was keenly aware of the transgressive nature of his behavior. Given his apparent allegiance with the Zuni, a blatant reversal of efforts to “civilize the Indians” then taking place at missions and boarding schools, Cushing needed to be very clear about how he—as a “civilized” white man—regarded these “primitive” people. Were they subjects or brothers? While Cushing sometimes resorted to denigrating the Zuni, more often he used his own misery to call attention to the gap between pueblo life and the civilized world he had left behind. He wrote to Baird in early 1881,

I am terribly weary, terribly cast down. It does not seem at times as though I could endure longer this terrible work, or wait longer for the call which shall summon me back to Washington. Yet with the acquisition of the Zuni language, I have laid open a field which without presumption I can say is the richest ever within reach or sight of an American investigator, but it widens with each step and to leave it now, after my struggle to acquire it, would seem not short of sacrilege to me.

In this head-spinning letter, Cushing depicts himself as a selfless professional determined to fulfill his mission at great personal cost. His stance as an unhappy exile underscores Cushing’s scholarly commitment, and justifies his extreme method as essential to the advancement of science.

33 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 12 March 1881, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 150.
Cushing’s suffering also serves to affirm his whiteness and his manhood. His disdain for pueblo domesticity, which he conveyed through repeated complaints about the Zunis’ rudimentary hygiene and general dirtiness, underscores the anthropologist’s continued reverence for “civilized” notions of cleanliness, even as his work requires a temporary deviation from those standards. At a time when domestic arrangements were seen as an index of one’s claims to middle-class standing and, by extension, whiteness, Cushing’s sensitivity to these matters demonstrated the limits of his immersion in primitive ways. That Cushing is willing to endure these physical hardships—for he attributes much of his ill health to the Zunis’ lack of cleanliness—in order to further his scholarly project illustrates his powers of self-mastery, an important component of manhood in the Gilded Age. He is able to subordinate the immediate needs of his body to the more distant, and more important, goals set by his highly developed mind.

Sylvester Baxter’s feature article in the Boston Herald, which is generally credited with introducing Cushing to eastern audiences in June of 1881, struck a remarkably similar tone. Baxter and Cushing had met that May while the Boston journalist traveled

34 In a letter to Spencer Baird on 29 October 1879, Cushing offered this scathing description of Zuni hospitality: “...were I to paint you the picture of my daily life here—of my meals—you would, I fear, for some days, enjoy yours as little as on all days does your poor servant his. I am the “good Cushie” for I take the child, dark with inherited disease, and cleanse and anoint its great sores that they heal. As such, therefore, I am entitled to distinguished courtesy. Hence a woman at a meal picks up from the floor (which is our table) a wooden spoon. It is not clean. She therefore wipes it across her moccasin (I do not tell you what that moccasin has repeatedly stepped on today), she draws it along her mantle (which was once white), and bethinking that it is the Good Cushing who is to eat with it, she quickly raises it to her mouth (I will not tell you what that mouth has been used for today—wait till my Report comes out) and in a manner most natural and expeditious, cleans (?) and immediately with the most irresistible smile hands it to me...if Providence spare me to ever reach Washington again, it must be with but half a stomach.” Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 29 October 1879, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 60.

35 The reality of his frequent illnesses was that they did distract from his work at times. Given the competing notions of masculinity in the Gilded Age, it is possible to read Cushing’s ailments as a sign of potentially feminine weakness or firmness of character, in so far as he persisted in his work despite recurring health concerns.
the Southwest trolling for stories. The two shared a passion for Southwestern anthropology and became fast friends. While we cannot know what precise role Cushing had in crafting “Solved at Last,” we can assume that it was largely based on Baxter’s conversations with Cushing. Baxter begins by trumpeting the Zunis’ importance as a window into the continent’s distant Aztec past, then promises that Cushing’s “name will soon rank with those of famous scientists.” He describes Cushing’s tactic of “becoming one with the Zunis” as “the only sensible method” of penetrating this wondrous and secretive culture. To unlock the mysteries of the Zuni, Cushing has endured “perils and privation,” threats to his life, and the ridicule of whites in the West. Through pluck, tact, and adaptability, skills that Baxter associates with generals and diplomats, Cushing has gradually acquired influence among them, gaining access to “their most secret councils” and becoming one of their chiefs, second in influence only to the governor. In Baxter’s account, Cushing’s submission to the physical hardships of Zuni life produces an initial loss of physical strength but ends with his gaining considerable power over the Zuni.

These early efforts to shape perceptions of Cushing’s work met with modest success. His superiors at the Smithsonian seem to have found his arguments persuasive and Baxter’s flattering depictions surely won him additional fans. However, the stance of a suffering scientist left tantalizing questions unanswered. Just how far would the dedicated ethnographer go for the sake of his research? Were there any limits to his participant-observer method? With rumors about the “White Indian” circulating back

---


37 Ibid., 47-8.
east and snubs like the chilly reception at Fort Wingate fresh in his memory, Cushing clearly felt that his wider reputation needed shoring up. In requesting permission for the eastern tour in late 1881, he acknowledged a desire to defend his work, "its purity of purpose and singleness of aim." As he explained, "my moral character and earnestness have been often questioned and slandered, and the most undreampt of and frivolous things have been imputed and assigned as my motives." By appearing in the authoritative role of serious scholar, acting as interpreter for the Zunis, Cushing hoped to reassure eastern audiences that he could still be counted among civilized men. The tour was an opportunity to show that, despite his eccentric lifestyle, Cushing's relationship to the exotic remained within acceptable bourgeois boundaries.

Publicly, however, Cushing presented the tour as a palatable resolution to his much-hyped marriage dilemma. Following his initiation in late 1881 into the Priesthood of the Bow, which gave Cushing access to nearly all aspects of Zuni ritual life, the Zunis expected their adopted brother to take a native woman as his wife. The marriage was an appropriate next step for a man of Cushing's age and stature, and, more importantly, would signify the strength of his commitment to the Zuni. While Cushing had managed


40 Curtis Hinsley argues that the tour was arranged in reciprocation for Cushing's initiation into the Priesthood and was also a prerequisite for his initiation into the Order of the Kā-Kā. The ceremony on the beach of Deer Island, which will be discussed shortly, was the beginning of that process. Curtis M. Hinsley, "Zunis and Brahmins: Cultural Ambivalence in the Gilded Age" in Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 179. Jesse Green explains that a Zuni man would normally be initiated into the Order of the Kā-Kā, or Kachina Society, before the age of fifteen as a matter of course. However, the initiation depended upon membership in a family and a clan, and Cushing's status in these groups was only provisional, pending his
to avoid several suitors in the past, the Zuni grew impatient with his excuses and Cushing finally seized upon the eastern tour as a possible substitute for the marriage. The Zuni had long desired to be received by "Washington" and were somewhat embittered that this privilege had already been extended to their detested neighbors, the Navajo, and the ill-behaved Apache. Secondly, the Zuni wished to replenish their dwindling supply of water from the Ocean of Sunrise. In Zuni mythology, ocean-dwelling spirits are responsible for rain across the land and the water was therefore instrumental in rituals to secure successful crops.

The story of Cushing’s marriage prospects, which circulated “widely and purposefully” during the spring of 1882, was treated in some circles as “a humorous narrative of matrimonial manners and morals, displaced to an exotic locale.” Cushing himself regarded the matter lightly in his correspondence, perhaps because the possibility of intermarriage was so remote. In explaining his refusals and the Zunis’ subsequent displeasure, Cushing remarked to Baird and Powell, “serious as the move had been, I almost regretted when I thought of the ground lost, that I had not made it.” Whether this statement was an attempt at humor or an extravagant show of scholarly dedication, it seems unlikely that Cushing actually considered such a union. Still, as his anxious speculation that friends in Washington might conflate his “desires and motives” in living as a Zuni with those of a “drunken sailor” suggests, he clearly recognized the sexual implications attached to charges of “going native.” In this context, the marriage dilemma

marriage to a Zuni woman. To be fully recognized as a Zuni, he would have had to take a Zuni wife, had not the trip to the Ocean of Sunrise been accepted as a substitute for the marriage. Green, 399.

41 Hinsley, “Zunis and Brahmins,” 180.

42 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird and John Wesley Powell [draft], 18 February-13 April 1880, Hodge-Cushing Collection (47), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 94.

136
provided a useful frame for both the tour and Cushing’s relationship with the Zuni. If the Zunis’ desire to marry Cushing into the tribe underscored their acceptance of the ethnographer, his refusal delineated a clear limit to his Zunification and reassured Eastern audiences that he was not lost to civilization. The apparent imbalance of the exchange—escape from intermarriage for a little seawater—further demonstrated Cushing’s control of the situation.

By many measures, the tour appeared to be a success. It solidified Cushing’s relationship with the Zuni and augmented his stature in the pueblo community. On a more personal note, publicly quashing the prospect of a white-native union, through both the spring tour and Cushing’s marriage to Emily later that summer, addressed some of the more salacious questions about the extent of his intimacy with the Zuni. Mrs. Cushing’s presence at the pueblo likewise answered concerns about her husband’s domestic arrangements in the field. Both Sylvester Baxter and William E. Curtis, a reporter for the Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean, took a keen interest in the numerous improvements wrought by “the refining touch of a woman’s hand.” With the addition of a “negro cook” who had been “trained in an old Virginia family” and “an abundance of nice crockery,” the family could now enjoy “the nicest dishes.” The ethnographer’s once spartan residence was “filled with civilized furniture” and decorated according to his wife’s “charming artistic taste,” complete with “excellent oil paintings,” “rich scarfs [sic] and draperies,” books, magazines, and even “Japanese screens.”

Mrs. Cushing also instituted a new measure of privacy, insisting that their neighbors knock before entering the home, contrary to

local custom. Descriptions such as this provided reassurance that Cushing’s topsy-turvy homelife had been set aright; in place of Cushing’s submission to Zuni ways there was now a legitimate white couple in control of the household, whose wishes were carried out by a subordinate racial Other, presumably a former slave.

Additionally, as Cushing promised his superiors, the tour garnered national attention for his research and raised the Smithsonian’s public profile. The Zunis’ most mundane activities were newsworthy and the tour sparked an enduring interest in the tribe among the northeastern elite. Stories about the Zuni, ranging from decorating tips on incorporating a native aesthetic to reports of Zuni conflicts with the Navajo, continued to appear throughout the decade. The tour also spurred tourist traffic to Zuni, as the railroad which partially underwrote the group’s travel had hoped. A party from Chicago, led by the managing editor of the Chicago Inter-Ocean, arrived at the pueblo the following spring with a letter of introduction asking that the bearers be initiated into the

---

44 William E. Curtis published a small book on Cushing and the Zuni called Children of the Sun that included a chapter titled “Mr. and Mrs. Cushing At Home.” Chicago: The Inter-Ocean Publishing Company, 1883. He mentions Mrs. Cushing’s insistence on privacy on page 17.

45 Cushing’s sales pitch to the Institution was a multi-faceted one. In addition to promoting the Smithsonian’s accomplishments to a popular audience, Cushing assured his superiors that the costs of the venture would be minimal. Cushing boasted that a “large body of gentlemen—and ladies—of great culture, wealth and position... are anxious to have me bring my Zunis forward and to do all they can to advance, not my interests alone, but also those of the Institution which I strive faithfully to serve.” He further assured them that friends in Washington and elsewhere, presumably from the same distinguished group, would attend to the travelers’ needs during their stay. In terms of his own motives, Cushing emphasized his desire to defend his work and personal reputation in seeking permission for the tour. Although he admitted that the tour would gratify a “natural desire to have attention called to my work,” he was careful not to be seen as self-promoting, lest he undermine his claims of selflessly risking his health for the sake of his research. Frank Hamilton Cushing to James Pilling, 25 December 1881, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, M.D.; quoted in Green, 214.

46 Cushing informed Major Powell’s chief clerk that he had negotiated with one of the railroads to pay for a portion of the party’s travel expenses on the condition that the party be “representative and impressive enough to attract patronage and stimulate travel over the lines.” With the recent extension of the rail line through Gallup, which was just north of the pueblo, they no doubt hoped the eastern tour would increase travel to the Southwest and boost their own profits. Frank Hamilton Cushing to James Pilling, 25 December 1881, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, M.D.; quoted in Green, 214. Hinsley, “Zunis and Brahmins,” 176.
Zuni tribe. The writer, W.F. White of the Atcheson, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company, kindly offered to assume the costs of their “initiation fees.”

As the most recent arrivals in a long line of native ambassadors, the Zunis’ reception in the nation’s cultural and political capitals was, by the early 1880s, rather routine. Yet at this particular moment the Zunis held a special appeal. In contrast to the “savage” Plains tribes, who were known for prowess in battle and continued to resist their removal to reservations, the peaceful pueblo Indians were regarded as “semi-civilized.” While hardly on par with western civilization’s achievements, the Zunis’ rich and stable culture, which was considered exceptionally well-preserved despite centuries of Spanish domination in the region, merited a measure of respect. Moreover, contact with the Zunis’ premodern ways assuaged bourgeois longing for authenticity. As scholars such as Phillip Deloria and Jackson Lears have argued, the transition to modernity was accompanied by a sense of increasing inauthenticity or unreality among the middle and upper classes. Studying the present-day Zuni therefore offered a unique glimpse into the distant world of their more famous ancestors, the Aztecs, and a sense of connection with the nation’s pre-history. The Zunis’ more private appearances on the tour, such as evenings with the Paint and Clay Club and the women of Wellesley College, frequently replicated traditional kiva circles, considered to be the locus of spiritual knowledge.

According to Curtis Hinsley, these circles enclosed and defined a process in which deep,

---

47 Mr. William E. Curtis, who would soon become a staunch defender of Cushing, particularly in his conflict with Senator Logan, was the bearer of the letter. That he hoped to be initiated into the tribe suggests Curtis, like Cushing’s other unofficial publicist Sylvester Baxter, shared a romantic infatuation with the southwest. W. F. White to Frank Hamilton Cushing, 15 April 1883, Hodge-Cushing Collection (88), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 281.

integrated cultural knowledge was presumed to be changing form—from oral tradition to written poetry and narrative—and changing hands. Through these intimate moments with the Zuni, stewardship of Southwestern history and landscape were transferred from one priestly brotherhood to another. Representatives of this modern day brotherhood of Anglo aesthetes, like Edward Everett Hale, believed that the Indians, having already lost their land, came East to complete the transfer of cultural knowledge before exiting gracefully from the scene. The Zunis’ apparent accessibility and easy embrace of their newfound friends, which newspaper accounts often remarked upon, seemed to support this fantasy of peaceful transition while obscuring the real bloodshed that more often characterized white-native relations in the early 1880s.

For Cushing, the tour was an opportunity to redirect public curiosity about his life as a Zuni toward the proper subjects of his study. In place of a man carelessly rejecting civilized ways, Cushing struck the pose of a uniquely gifted mediator between two discrete cultures. The ethnographer appeared in western dress for much of the tour and had shorn his long blond hair. His scholarly lectures and appearances with the Zuni testified to the success of his controversial method. Having crossed into the Zunis’ world temporarily, Cushing returned with his hard-won expertise to translate Zuni words and actions for his white audience. His immersion in the life of the pueblo was thus vital to accessing the spiritual knowledge eastern elites craved. The Zunis’ obvious respect for

49 In one case, this caretaking became a business transaction. Reverend Edward Everett Hale offered to pay Cushing $100 to address his congregation at Boston’s prestigious Old South Church with the Zunis in tow. Sylvester Baxter to Frank Hamilton Cushing, 23 January 1882, Hodge-Cushing Collection (99), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 215. Hale also hosted the Zuni party at his home for lunch confessing afterward, “We have fallen in love with them.” Hinsley, “Zunis and Brahmins,” 192. Hinsley’s essay pinpoints the tour as an early stage of the Eastern establishment’s aesthetic appropriation of the southwest, particularly through these makeshift kiva circles. See especially 183-8.
Cushing and reverence for all things American also allayed fears that the young man had lost control of his native encounter and helped to silence critics who were “anxious to insinuate moral lapse by the ethnographer.” Finally, the spectacle of six Zuni interacting with the cultural and technological wonders of modern America—from a locomotive engine to a blackface minstrel act—provided an effective contrast with their more subdued guide. To the extent that such events encouraged eastern audiences to focus on their reactions to these Others, while relegating Cushing to the role of a privileged interpreter, a romanticized yet professional purveyor of the exotic, the tour upheld the self-Other binary inculcated by anthropology and the emerging museum world view. In these moments, Cushing’s suffering for science seemed to be a worthwhile sacrifice.

However, the charismatic ethnographer was not always able to maintain that delicate balance and the trip east also included unsettling scenes which once again foregrounded Cushing’s potential to undermine anthropology’s cultural work. The group’s pilgrimage to Deer Island, where they collected water from the Ocean of Sunrise for the pueblo in an elaborate ceremony, was once such occasion. More than 100 esteemed guests invited by Boston’s mayor, as well as journalists from New York, The Century and several weeklies, observed the Zunis spreading sacred meal, smoking special cigarettes, filling ritual vessels with saltwater, singing and praying fervently. Standing

---

50 Hinsley, “Zunis and Brahmins,” 180.

with them, in full Zuni regalia, was Cushing. In fact, the outing ended with a rite that began Cushing’s initiation into the Order of the Kâ-Kâ, a further step in his assimilation into the tribe. Bridging the divide between subject and object on the shores of Deer Island, Cushing prompted his audiences to turn the potent gaze developed for exotic bodies upon a supposedly civilized white man. Re-enacting his transformation into Tenatsali in this way reminded those in attendance that the primitive might not be utterly distinct from the civilized, as scientific and popular notions asserted. Instead, Cushing opened the possibility that the primitive lay within the civilized—that the progress narrative articulated by evolutionary theory was not an inevitable linear movement but a fragile construct. More disquieting than the possibility of an individual’s personal degeneration was the prospect of “savage” and “civilized” coexisting in the same white body. Such a juxtaposition would represent, in Marjorie Garber’s words, a “category crisis,” indicating that these once exclusive categories were no longer distinct. By blurring these critical boundaries, Cushing/Tenatsali threatened a fundamental pillar of his white audiences’ collective identity: utter certainty of their difference from the exotic Other.

Cushing’s stance as a suffering scientist ultimately could not contain the questions raised by his unusual method. For whatever knowledge the ethnographer gained through his submission to Zuni ways, which was highly valued by some if not all observers, was ultimately written on his increasingly spectacular body. Contemporary accounts of Cushing’s Zuni years often drew attention to his physical appearance, especially the contrast between his elaborate native costume and flowing blond hair. The Boston

---

52 Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16.
Advertiser's coverage of the Deer Island event included a lengthy description of Cushing's attire. Many of Baxter's articles on Cushing, whom he addressed in correspondence as "my dear Té-na-tsa-li," featured detailed accounts of his appearance as well as illustrations, even as Baxter defended the ethnographer's controversial tactics as essential to his scholarly progress. Other supporters were well aware of the risk Cushing took appearing before white audiences in the guise of Tenatsali. His friend Captain John Burke confessed in a diary entry that he found Cushing's participation in the Deer Island ceremony quite troubling, remarking that such overdramatizations might cause people to doubt Cushing's sincerity. Major Powell's strong reaction to Cushing's appearance at a Washington reception in full Zuni regalia suggests that he shared some of Bourke's concerns. Cushing himself seems to have recognized that whatever ground he gained through the tour could not protect him from future scrutiny. His next foray into public life removed his body almost entirely and instead directed attention to unruly native bodies.

Cushing's Masculinity Play: "The Nation of the Willows"

For his next "appearance" on the national stage, Cushing published a harrowing account of his desert trek to visit the elusive Havasupai, considered the "younger brothers" of the Zuni, in The Atlantic Monthly. "The Nation of the Willows," his first major publication for a relatively large, non-scientific audience, marks another intervention into the ethnographer's public persona, which again seeks to recalibrate his

53 Fuller, 72.
relationship to the exotic.\textsuperscript{54} Cushing’s choice of audience is also telling. In 1882, \textit{The Atlantic Monthly} was decidedly highbrow in content and readership; its subscribers consisted of the well-educated and the well-heeled, the uber-civilized. As standard bearers of bourgeois morals, they were more likely to appreciate both the scientific value of Cushing’s work and his flirtation with the exotic. Cushing’s vacillation between proclaiming his allegiance to civilized ways and his obvious deviance from those strictures surely resonated with many of his \textit{Atlantic} readers. Cushing’s inclusion in this forum testified to his work’s respectability as well as the elite’s infatuation with those who had escaped the enervating atmosphere of modern life to return, even briefly, to the primitive past. Cushing’s choice of material satisfied these dual interests. As one of only a handful of white men to have seen the Havasupai, and the only one to be personally invited to their community, Cushing’s research broke new scientific ground. At the same time, this tale also satisfied sophisticated readers’ hunger for the ever more exotic. Now that the Zuni were a popular commodity, Cushing introduced his savvy audience to a culture considered even rarer and more pristine.

Cushing’s attitude toward both the Havasupai and his native guides in “The Nation of the Willows” suggests that he saw the \textit{Atlantic} piece as an opportunity to distance himself from his problematic role as the “Washington Zuni.” Although Cushing briefly acknowledges his Zuni connection, which has earned him the invitation to Havasupai, he is careful to position himself as not wholly Zuni. When he refers to a Zuni as his “brother,” the man responds by grouping Cushing with “you Americans.” Cushing then spends much of the article demonstrating his superiority to the Indians while

\textsuperscript{54} Cushing previously published a brief piece in \textit{American Antiquarian}. Frank Hamilton Cushing, “Ancient Cities in Arizona,” \textit{American Antiquarian} 10 (1880): 325-326.
claiming cultural affinity with his Atlantic readers. His stance is such a departure from his treatment of the Zuni that the Zuni experience appears to be an aberration. Having paid the price for native acceptance, Cushing seems freed to resume his role as an objective scientist utterly in control of his encounter with the native.

The persona Cushing crafted for his Atlantic readers differs sharply from the self-sacrificing man of science presented in his correspondence, on the eastern tour, and in the work of Sylvester Baxter. In these earlier accounts, Cushing appears concerned about others’ perception of his method, yet insists on its efficacy. His many complaints about the physical discomfort and personal humiliation that he suffers are pleas for sympathy, but also a badge of honor. Casting himself as a martyr to science in this way implied that the knowledge Cushing gained through this torment was worth more than his own health or reputation. As he reminded his supervisors, he only consented to remain at Zuni because his research was so very promising. In contrast, the narrator of “The Nation of the Willows” is imperialistic, coolly rational and aggressively masculine.

In recounting his manly triumph over harsh conditions and disobedient natives in the desert, Cushing uses the discourse of gender to forcefully articulate his claims to whiteness and civilization. Because gender is a delivery system for race and class distinctions, which are implicated in the nineteenth-century concept of civilization, consciousness of gender difference “implicates the entire order of difference.”

---


56 These traits do appear in Cushing’s other incarnations, though hardly with the same force.

insight has been most often applied to women whose deviation from bourgeois norms threatens not only their respectability, but also their interlocking status as white and as women. As Hazel Carby describes it, “The ideology of the dominant class offers women their gender definition as the situation through which race and class are lived,” meaning that adhering to social custom gives women natural feminine superiority but rebellion means losing the privileged claims to womanhood.\textsuperscript{58} While Victorian men certainly enjoyed a broader range of acceptable behaviors, the overlapping influences of race, class and gender expectations also circumscribed their choices. These “articulated categories,” argues Anne McClintock, come into existence in and through their relation to each other. While different social situations are overdetermined for race, gender or class, the intimate, reciprocal, and contradictory relations between them means that all three terms are always, to some degree, in play.\textsuperscript{59} Cushing’s use of gender as a way to talk about race and imperial power clearly takes advantages of the intense but muddled connections among whiteness, manliness, and civilization at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{60}

From the outset, Cushing frames the trip to Havasupai as a quest, a contest of masculinity between the young American anthropologist and his native companions. After hearing about “a most marvelous country toward the sunset, covered by waterless wastes and vast pine forests” that is home to the mysterious Havasupai, Cushing declares

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Anne McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that he intends to “look myself upon the younger brothers of the Zuni.” That the Zunis mock his determination, saying that Americans “are a soft people” not fit to survive such a journey, only strengthens his resolve: “But I did go, and this came to be the way of it.”

With this smug phrase, Cushing assures his readers that he will prove not only his own tenacity and endurance, but that of all American men. Not surprisingly, the rest of the article is a series of comparisons between Cushing and his guides in which the natives are always found lacking.

Cushing succeeds in the desert by combining the virtues of manliness and masculinity, two notions of manhood competing for ascendancy at the turn of the century. Manliness, with its emphasis on self-discipline and bodily control, emerged in conjunction with the middle-class in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Gender norms, especially sexual restraint, were critical to this process of class definition since the vocabulary of gender and the body allowed the middle-class to differentiate itself as a class without referring to economic status. These values, which had fostered middle-class affluence through saving and entrepreneurship in the mid-nineteenth century, were increasingly out of step with the economic landscape of the Gilded Age in which it was ever more difficult to become a self-made man. In addition to narrowing prospects for financial independence, middle-class men’s power and prestige were threatened by the

---

61 Cushing, “Nation I,” 362.

62 The irony, of course, is that Cushing could not have made the trip without those companions. He notes in passing that it took him a year and half to secure a guide. Ibid.


64 Cushing’s repeated requests for money typically emphasized his frugality or the absolute necessity of whatever he hoped to purchase. His rhetoric could be read as an implicit assertion of middle-class status.
growing influence of immigrants in politics and the woman’s suffrage movement. These changes compounded existing fears that middle-class men were becoming overly restrained, even effeminate, and unable to thrive in a competitive, modern world.

Masculinity, which was a nascent ideology in 1882, offered an alternative basis for male identity. While still celebrating a strong will, masculinity directed that control toward development of the body’s power and endurance as well as suppressing naughty urges. Its emphasis on physical vigor licensed an indulgence in violence, but only within certain constraints and always in the name of revitalizing American manhood. The popularity of college football, boxing, hunting and other forms of outdoor adventure in the 1890s are prime examples of the growing acceptability of a temporary release—not wholesale abandonment—from Victorian decorum. As their everyday lives included fewer opportunities for physical exertion and decisive individual action, middle-class men sought these ideals in their leisure pursuits and, more vicariously, through the heroes they celebrated, from Teddy Roosevelt’s “strenuous” exploits in Cuba and out west and Henry Stanley’s explorations of Africa, to the fictional accomplishments of Owen Wister’s cowboys and Richard Harding Davis’ gentlemanly adventurers.

Cushing’s persona in “The Nation of the Willows” evokes both these ideals. Firmly rooted in bourgeois values while pushing the boundaries of acceptable behavior, the narrator moves easily from genteel scientist to colonial adventurer. Awestruck by the beauty of the Southwestern landscape in one moment, he will brandish his pistol in the next. This combination renders Cushing enough like his readers to be respected yet different enough to be exceptional and admired. As the representative of all American
men, Cushing's masculinity contest also encourages readers to identify with Cushing rather than see him as a deviant who abandoned civilization to align with the Other.

As promised, Cushing proves his masculine prowess on the most dangerous leg of the journey and puts the childish Indians in their rightful place. After teasing Cushing about the weakness of his race, it is the Indians who jeopardize the group's safety. Although they should be wary of the desert's perils, they fail to fill all the water vessels in preparation for the long, dry hike to the Havasupai's territory. They carelessly break one of the canteens on the first day and then consume most of the remaining water, confident that an earlier good omen will bring more soon. When Cushing, who has been walking ahead of the rest and is now "tortured by thirst," sees one of the Indians reach for "one more good drink," he seizes control of the water supply. "My hand laid on my pistol soon taught them, to use their own words, to be men." 65 Recognizing that "the case was desperate," Cushing forces the group to hike through the night to reach water. 66 The Indians, however, are too focused on their immediate needs to realize the gravity of the situation. They repeatedly undermine his plan by mounting the exhausted animals, stopping to complain of illness and tight shoes, and finally falling asleep. To goad them on, Cushing twice draws his pistol and "reason[s] with them," then shames them with their own taunts, "'Be men, brothers.' Remember how you reminded me of my weakness, and told me how you would have to carry me, crazy with fever, into the Kuhni cañon, or come to grief on my account." 67 This mocking encouragement, coupled with the Indians'
foolish tricks to slow the caravan, creates a parent-child dynamic between the ethnographer and his guides that recalls the pervasive trope of the white adult managing unruly and immature dark children. Interwoven through theories of recapitulation and the Family Tree of Man, this notion was used to legitimate subordination of non-white races by their more evolved “parents.”

Cushing again appears in the guise of an ethnographic adventurer after the group reaches Havasupai. He promptly declares that all trades sealed with the customary handshake must be final. When his interpreter makes a trade that the buyer wants reversed, Cushing forces his companion to refuse. A crowd gathers, tensions mount, guns begin to appear, and the interpreter begs Cushing to relent. Instead, Cushing suddenly grabs one of his revolvers, returns it to its sheath, and then ejects the disgruntled trader. This maneuver does not, however, bring an end to the dispute. The crowd only disperses after the head chief has paid a visit to Cushing’s tent, giving the Anglo visitor his tacit support.

Cushing’s turn as the brash ethnographic adventurer in The Atlantic also taps into the emerging mystique of the American cowboy. This myth will not fully mature until several decades later, as a combination of factors such as the closing of the frontier and

---

68 McClintock, 37.

69 Like the trek through the desert, this episode presents a brash and fearless Cushing imposing his will upon a group of defiant natives. However, in both cases his bravado is out of step with the events he describes. As the group begins the most dangerous portion of the journey, Cushing fails to oversee the Indians’ filling of the water vessels because he has no doubt that they will follow his directions. Yet they do ignore his command, not once but repeatedly. Again and again, Cushing must resort to threats of violence to keep the Indians in line because his stature as the “Washington Zuni” is insufficient. Cushing displays a similar overconfidence in the trading conflict. Since he offers no scientific rationale for the decree that all trades must be final and the object at the center of the dispute does not even merit naming, it seems clear that what is at stake in this rapidly escalating conflict is not Cushing’s collection, but his authority as a white man among natives. The trading episode, which is ultimately decided by the head chief’s intervention rather than Cushing’s pistol, further underscores the inadequacy of that authority. Although Cushing gets his way in the end, it is possible to read “The Nation of the Willows” as a testament to the limits of imperial power.
the transformations wrought by modernity propels a pervasive nostalgia for the Old West, but its beginnings are evident even in 1882 in dime novels, local color stories, and the popularity of western figures like William F. Cody. Like the archetypal cowboy, Cushing’s persona in “The Nation of the Willows” is a lone individual, a heroic white man whose rugged physical strength and determined will set him apart. He overcomes the challenges of a punishing environment by conquering his own bodily needs and mastering the “lesser” natural men under his command. His commanding presence and always-at-the-ready pistol ensure his success. The Southwest of “The Nation of the Willows” resembles the mythic Wild West: a place where the possibility of violence always looms, where white men prove themselves against native enemies, and where masculinity is always the real prize to be won. It is a world that eastern elites like Roosevelt and Wister would soon celebrate in histories like The Winning of the West (1889-1896) and novels such as The Virginian (1902). Moreover, Cushing’s strategic promotion of his adventure in “the country toward sunset” prefigures Roosevelt’s and Wister’s use of a western sojourn to revamp their careers and public personas.\(^7\) Cushing was recalled to Washington just as T. R. left New York to become a rancher in the Badlands of North Dakota, a well-orchestrated makeover that successfully erased his early reputation in the Albany Assembly as “Punkin-Lilly” and opened the way for his subsequent political ascent.\(^7\)

\(^7\) For a more detailed explanation of these western rebirths, see G. Edward White’s The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

In much the same way that Roosevelt combined exuberant physicality with more intellectual pursuits like writing history, Cushing makes certain that his audience sees him as more than a newfangled man with a pistol and a propensity toward violence. He balances masculine prowess with demonstrations of his cultural affinity with readers. In the first segment, which deals primarily with the arduous journey, Cushing intersperses the drama of disciplining the Indians with his well-honed appreciation for the natural scenery. This display links Cushing to elite sightseeing practices and travel writing, in which judicious aesthetic pleasure is a mark of cultural and moral refinement. During the visit to Havasupai Cushing gives a lavish demonstration of anthropology's capacity to bring order to the world. His highly methodical collective portrait of the Havasupai includes concise assessments of (among other things) their standards of cleanliness, parenting styles, physiogamy, marriage practices, language, and justice system. While this report does little to demonstrate why the coveted Havasupai are so "remarkable," it nicely showcases Cushing's ability to organize a vast amount of information into discrete ethnographic boxes. Alternating between science-minded gentleman and ethnographic adventurer, Cushing reassures his audience that he's civilized but not overly so.

Cushing's treatment of the Havasupai exhibits his ethnographic skills while maintaining an aloof stance toward his subjects. Before he reaches the Havasupai, Cushing romanticizes the isolated group as an ancient people obviously worthy of study. He trumpets his unprecedented access, going so far as to itemize every other white person known to have come in contact with them and then dismiss each encounter as superficial. Yet, once he arrives, the Havasupai become small and ordinary—and far less enchanting. Cushing's description of the Havasupai gives no hint of being a preliminary study,
suggesting that this supposedly fascinating group requires very little time to “know.” His
treatment of the Havasupai thus contradicts the anthropological method and standards
implicit in his Zuni research. Whereas the Zunis merit intensive, extended study,
learning about the Havasupai apparently requires very little intimacy with them. Nor
does Cushing’s account convey a sense of excitement or urgency about penetrating their
“inner life,” a central theme of his letters from Zuni. Other than one brief, enigmatic
encounter with the head chief, there is no indication that Cushing forged any sort of
personal relationship with his hosts. All in all, Cushing’s treatment of the Havasupai
makes the reader wonder whether they were worth the trouble.

Similarly, Cushing’s treatment of his guides ranges from distant to disdainful.
His tone reaches its most paternalistic when describing these companions, whom he
refers to as “my Indians” and “my happy Indians.” The three men—a Zuni, a
Hampton-educated Cheyenne sent by the Smithsonian to assist Cushing, and a Moqui—
are hardly individualized at all. In fact, the group’s mules seem to have more distinct
personalities than the men, who appear as children who must be directed, monitored, and
then rewarded with a smile from their beneficent leader. Although Cushing includes
some of the Indians’ folk tales and oral history, he usually dismisses these as
entertainment that “enlivened” the journey. Even more puzzling is Cushing’s attitude
toward a prayer plume that he picks up along the way. The Indians are distraught that he

73 Cushing, “Nation I,” 370, 364.

74 Cushing, “Nation I,” 364.
has removed it, and certain the mistake will bring them bad luck, but Cushing gives their concerns little weight.\footnote{Cushing plays innocent, contending that he picked up the plume as a good omen but didn’t know how to consecrate it. He gently mocks their efforts to rectify his “heinous offense” as well as their confidence that the plume has worked when they finally reach water. Cushing, “Nation I,” 373.}

Cushing’s detachment from the Havasupai, his disregard for the guides, and his bullying of both groups effectively distances him from all Native Americans and underscores his status as a rational scientist who has definitely not “gone primitive.” He purports to be firmly in control—through physical threats and his God-like ability to order the world—of all the natives he encounters. Cushing’s new imperial stance seems incompatible with the man who was so determined to understand the Zunis’ “inner life” that he endured hardship and humiliation for years. In his eagerness to claim and defend his authority as a white man, Cushing subordinates his immediate ethnographic objectives and undermines the previous rationale for his controversial behavior.

“The Nation of the Willows” turns anthropology into a theatre of imperialist masculinity. As ethnographic adventurer, Cushing evokes old and new ideals for male behavior while emphasizing the imperial overtones of both. He combines the view from nowhere associated with the tourists, explorers and colonial administrators, with the physical prowess of the white body with a gun. The world he surveys lays ready to be catalogued and mapped by his knowledge; its nonwhite subjects are open to his penetrating gaze and obedient to his direction. The few who resist are easily subdued through violence or intimidation. Like the suffering scientist, this new persona is able to suppress immediate needs and desires in the interest of long-term goals, to ignore the body and listen to the mind. However, despite the profoundly physical drama at the center of the article—the lack of water in the desert—we get very little information about
what Cushing's body does other than give orders, appreciate the view, and draw his pistol. His persona's imperial shift succeeds in making the white man invisible once again. "The Nation of the Willows" still draws attention to Cushing's body, but directs that interest toward his mastery over the exotic rather than his intimacy with it. This new dynamic between Cushing and his subjects presented in The Atlantic might, had he been able to maintain it, have decisively shifted the tone of his celebrity, grouping the ethnographer with virile icons of the West like Roosevelt and Buffalo Bill. The pose ultimately proves to be unsustainable, however. When Cushing turns to describing his "Adventures in Zuni" in his next series, the domineering hero of "The Nation of the Willows" returns briefly before being usurped by two radically different, deeply contradictory personae.

"My Adventures in Zuni" and the Unnarratable Body

With "My Adventures in Zuni," which appeared as a three-part series in The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine from December 1882 to May 1883, Cushing delivered the most comprehensive account of his life among the Zuni. That the series proved popular, as evinced by numerous reprintings from Cushing's day to the present, is hardly surprising since "My Adventures in Zuni" gets at what made the anthropologist so compelling: his transformation from precocious Smithsonian scientist into Tenatsali.\(^{76}\)

This is not to say that the Century series makes Cushing's Zuni training its explicit focus. Like much of the regional literature and travel writing of the period, the articles offer a somewhat meandering plot, loosely organized around seasonal changes and local

traditions, punctuated by vivid descriptive passages. What holds the series together is Cushing’s deepening relationship with the Zuni, which provides drama, continuity, and narrative momentum.

Cushing’s representation of that relationship, however, is anything but consistent. His fluctuating attitude toward the Zunis correlates to distinct shifts in the series’ narrative persona. In fact, it would be more accurate to describe The Century series as narrated by an unstable set of personas. While some of this vacillation can be attributed to fluctuations in Cushing’s personal and professional reputation, its ultimate source is the subject matter itself. Cushing’s morphing persona suggests that his increasing intimacy with the Zuni is deeply disruptive to his identity. His Zunification alters the self-Other binary that anthropology—and Victorian culture more broadly—sought to institutionalize. Without this framework, Cushing no longer knows how to play himself. Occupying both white and native cultures but belonging fully to neither, Cushing fumbles what should be an ingrained, daily performance as an adult white male.

The first article in the series, recounting the party’s arrival at Zuni and Cushing’s decision to remain at the pueblo after his companions depart, flows in much the same imperial vein as “The Nation of the Willows.” The dominant narrative persona is a novice version of the ethnographic adventurer that bullied his way through the pages of The Atlantic. As a newcomer wielding only his authority as a representative of the Great Father, Cushing is far less domineering toward the Zuni than toward his guides to Havasupai. However, from the reader’s perspective he quickly establishes a hierarchical relationship with his hosts/subjects through careful use of an imperial gaze. He repeatedly seeks an elevated vantage point from which he can survey the pueblo in its
entirety, preferably without being seen himself. This God-like perspective, as the work of Mary Louise Pratt has shown, instills the viewer with a sense of mastery and control over the landscape and individuals s/he oversees. Cushing reinforces this dynamic by his miniaturizing descriptions of the Zuni. The pueblo and its inhabitants are frequently associated with small, natural objects that can be easily observed and manipulated. The pueblo’s architecture is compared to a honeycomb, while its windows and doorways are likened to the holes in an anthill. The Zuni themselves alternately appear childlike, in keeping with the notion that primitive cultures were immature versions of western civilization, or else spectacularized. Cushing first encounters the Zunis at a dance, where most of his description focuses on un-individuated, nearly nude, elaborately costumed bodies—a dizzying display of bare limbs and fantastic masks that obscure the wearer’s identity.

Most importantly, Cushing organizes his account of the first weeks at Zuni around a similar contest of wills between the young ethnographer and his native hosts. The conflict, which centers on the Zunis’ resistance to the sketching of their dances and ceremonies, once again positions Cushing as a heroic scientist fiercely determined to advance his research. The quarrel escalates over the course of several weeks as the Zunis move from passive distractions to more aggressive means of persuasion. They finally decide to perform the Homatchi or Knife Dance, which culminates in an enemy being killed and eaten, to frighten Cushing into compliance. Cushing, however, wins the day with a display of cool detachment. As the menacing dancers advance toward him crying “Kill him!”, Cushing laughs and flourishes his hunting knife before the crowd, then

77 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (New York: Routledge, 1992). See especially chapters two and three.
calmly puts down his sketch book and partly rises as if to join the dance—or the fray. His response convinces the dancers that he is no Navajo but a friend, and they brutally sacrifice a yellow dog in his stead.

The daring display wins the newcomer widespread praise, cements his friendship with the influential pueblo governor, and, in Cushing’s words, “decided the fate of my mission among the Zuni Indians.” Closing his initial article in this way, with the Knife Dance as a decisive, dramatic climax, suggests that Cushing’s relationship to the Zuni is mediated through manly bravado and violence. Indeed, the story of Cushing’s triumph at the Knife Dance became a convenient turning point in his oft-repeated narrative of becoming a Zuni. Although Cushing’s journal entry attributed little significance to his role in the dance, by the time he reported the incident to Baird seven months later it had become critical to his authority in Zuni. Cushing offers the story as an illustration of his reputation, “very valuable among Indians,” for “absolute fearlessness.” Since defying the “naked painted devils called Newekew,” Cushing declares, “I have been pretty much master of my situations.” He then goes on to brag that he “pounded the War Captain the other day in a crowd of fifty opposers; settled in the same way the Governor, who attempted to interfere, and since then I’ve had no trouble with the Zunis.”

---

78 Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni I,” 207.

79 This placement also violates the actual chronology of events as recorded in Cushing’s journals.

80 It is possible that he doesn’t attribute much significance to the dance because at the time of the journal entry Cushing did not know the dance was mounted in order to intimidate him. Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 18 July 1880, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 116-7.

81 Cushing’s phrasing is somewhat unclear but his journal for 21 July 1880, three days after the letter to Baird, refers to “the day I struck the war captain,” suggesting that he did physically assault these men. Frank Hamilton Cushing Daily Journal, 21 July 1880, Cushing Papers, Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 117.

158
like the *Century* version, attributes Cushing’s increasing influence to a heady mixture of intimidation and aggression.

Cushing’s account of the Knife Dance, embellished or not, was hardly the only occasion on which the young ethnographer asserted his authority as a Washington man and, later, as a Bow Priest. As his stature in the pueblo grew, he was given—or took on—greater responsibilities, particularly mediating the Zunis’ relationships to other native groups, government representatives, and local whites. While the Zunis seem to have recognized the benefits of this arrangement, there is also evidence that Cushing abused, or at least relished, his power. His correspondence and journals record several instances, such as his shooting Navajo horses on Zuni land, in which Cushing bullied the Zunis or indulged in a form of frontier justice. Such moments of aggression, which might have further fueled speculation about “The White Indian,” are quite rare in *The Century* series. When Cushing does assert himself it is either to protect his own safety, as in the Knife Dance episode, or, more often, a rhetorical gesture addressed to the reader rather than the Zunis.

In fact, for all Cushing’s bluster, the *Century* series as a whole suggests that the Zunis are swayed by an entirely different tactic, one whose importance Cushing explicitly acknowledged in his letters and awkwardly incorporated into “My Adventures in Zuni.” Only nine days after the Homatchi dance, Cushing wrote Baird this revealing description of his method:

> Because I will unhesitatingly plunge my hand in common with their dusty ones and dirtier children’s into a great kind of hot, miscellaneous food; will sit close to [those] having neither vermin nor disease, will fondle and talk sweet Indian to their bright eyed little babies; will wear the blanket and tie the *pania* around my
long hair; will look with unfeigned reverence on their beautiful and ancient ceremonies, never laughing at any absurd observance, they love me, and I learn. 82

Here Cushing makes clear that while he is disgusted by the Zunis’ domestic habits, a frequent theme of his correspondence, he is a willing and outwardly gracious participant in their daily life. His acceptance of their table manners may be feigned, but his respect for their culture is genuine. Far from the relation of dominance implied by the sketching conflict, Cushing now attributes his success to treating the Zunis as near equals. As a closer look at the Century series shows, his willingness to live among the Indians as an Indian is a critical first step toward opening the door to the Zunis’ “inner life.”

These moments of deepening intimacy with his hosts complicate the overarching narrative of conquest that structures Cushing’s first article. To juggle the disjuncture between these parallel plots, Cushing develops two distinct personas. He justifies his initial decision to “try living with the Indians” as a bold but necessary step in his campaign to sketch freely. 83 Yet, once he has settled into the governor’s home—much to Palowahtiwa’s dismay—his demeanor abruptly changes. When describing his gradual adoption of Zuni habits, and the personal relationships that develop in tandem with this process, Cushing’s bravado evaporates; he depicts himself in these moments as passive, childlike, and desperately helpless. More importantly, he attributes almost every stage in his transformation to the governor’s wish to make him into a Zuni, to which he reluctantly acquiesces.

82 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 29 October 1879, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 60.

83 Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni I,” 199.

160
On his first night in the governor’s house, Cushing attempts to make his own dinner and fails miserably. Palowahtiwa, lured by the noxious odors, gruffly removes the spoiled food and prepares a palatable Zuni meal for his uninvited guest. According to Cushing’s account in *The Century*, this was to be the pattern for the duration of his residence at Zuni as the governor never willingly allowed him to prepare his own meal again. Thus Cushing’s native diet emerges from a combination of necessity and good politics; it is the concession of a gracious houseguest rather than evidence of a desire to “go native.”

Cushing’s new living arrangement and the governor’s begrudging hospitality do not resolve the sketching conflict, however, and the Zunis continue to watch him both day and night. Determined to overcome their suspicion, Cushing opts to remain at the pueblo while his group moves on to another settlement. As soon as he has made the decision, Cushing bemoans his self-imposed status as a “doomed exile.”84 The realization that the party has left him few provisions only deepens his gloom. Once again, the governor finds Cushing in a pathetic state and takes pity on him. Calling him “our little brother” for the first time, the governor offers an exchange. “If only you do as we tell you, and will only make up your mind to be a Zuni, you shall be rich, for you shall have fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and the best food in the world.” In response to what would seem to be a momentous question, Cushing offers a rhetorical evasion. He replies, “in despair,” “Why should I not be a Zuni?,” and then quickly turns his attention back to the sketching conflict without commenting upon the bargain he has

84 Ibid., 204.
(apparently) struck.85 A few paragraphs later, in an echo of “The Nation of the Willows,” Cushing is taunting the governor that he will witness the upcoming dance contrary to Palowahtiwa’s wishes.

Cushing’s equivocal response, which implies acceptance without articulating a commitment, and his speedy retreat epitomize the ambiguity and instability at the heart of “My Adventures in Zuni.” What appeared in the opening article as competing narrative personas becomes an internal contradiction in the next installment, which is dominated by the passive, childlike persona. The second article describes most of Cushing’s transformation, including his adoption of traditional Zuni dress, décor, and sleeping habits. It culminates in an ear-piercing ceremony where Cushing receives his Zuni name and is welcomed into the governor’s family. Much of this process follows the same pattern as Cushing’s new diet; the Zunis initiate a change that Cushing reluctantly accepts out of political and material necessity. However, Cushing is unable to stick to his own story. After trumpeting his passivity in these changes, he undercuts his own rationale by insisting to the reader that he retains control of the situation.

Early in the second article, Cushing announces to the governor that the Smithsonian has granted his request to remain at Zuni. Palowahtiwa, who has grown increasingly fond of his young guest, vows to make a man of Cushing, to “harden [his] meat.”86 Instead of objecting to this evident insult, Cushing generally acquiesces to the governor’s escalating demands, extending the parent-child dynamic begun in the first

85 Ibid.

86 Palowahtiwa first uses this phrase in urging Cushing to adopt the Zunis’ habit of sleeping on the floor rather than in his hammock. However, the notion of making Cushing into a man permeates the second article. Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni II,” The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine 25, no. 4 (February 1883): 509, http://cdl.library.cornell.edu.proxy.wm.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABP2287-0025-153.
article. Soon, Cushing is subjected to a Zuni makeover, as the governor approaches the ethnographer “with a designing look in his eyes” and then “snatches” his helmet hat off his head. It is quickly replaced with a long black silken scarf, which the governor happily wraps around Cushing’s head, pronouncing it “Good! Good!” Adorned with the scarf and a new pair of moccasins, an embarrassed Cushing is sent out to show the other Zunis and the Stevenson party. “Heartily ashamed of [his] mongrel costume” and “thoroughly disgusted” by the teasing he receives from his colleagues, he vows never to wear the “head-band” again.87 The governor, however, prevents his return to “civilized ways” by refusing to return his clothes. If there is any doubt in readers’ minds that Cushing is reluctant to take up Zuni attire, he then notes that the governor dresses him in the black scarf every morning.

In this episode and others, Cushing carefully absolves himself of any responsibility for his altered appearance by creating a situation in which he has no way—other than endangering his increasingly profitable friendship with the governor—of reversing his Zuni immersion.88 He voices his objections to readers, but does not press the point with his hosts.89 Instead, he is entirely passive in the process of Zunification, to the point of being dressed each day like a child. When Cushing is later outfitted with the


88 Cushing gains entrance to the kiva first through the invitation of a friend and then through an invitation from the governor. Keeping the governor and other Zunis happy was clearly advantageous for his work.

89 Cushing’s quarters in the governor’s house are altered twice in this article, with no objections from Cushing. The first time Cushing is moved into a more private room, which the governor calls his “little house.” Cushing is not displeased with the new space, although he protests the removal of his hammock. While Cushing is away from the pueblo for several days, the governor and his wife decorate his space “in Indian style more luxurious than any other room in Zuni.” This improvement, together with the warm greetings he receives on his return, convinces Cushing that the Zunis’ intentions toward him are good. Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni II,” 509-10.
rest of his Zuni costume by the governor and his wife, even his grammar becomes
submissive. He only participates in his fitting “under her instructions” and describes
putting on the new outfit—a passage punctuated with the governor’s sharp orders—in the
passive voice.\footnote{Ibid., 510.}

The final stage in turning this American boy into a Zuni man (with sufficiently
hard meat) is the ear-piercing and naming ceremony that closes the second article.
Although Cushing does agree beforehand to this particular step, which the pueblo’s
“principal men” have advocated for some time, his consent is far from forceful.
Convinced that “there must be some meaning in their urgency,” Cushing declares, “I
determined to yield to their request.”\footnote{Ibid., 511.} This statement, a fascinating blend of blustering
authority and total resignation, echoes earlier comments about his imposed wardrobe.
After going to such lengths to demonstrate his powerlessness in each transaction,
Cushing concludes these episodes by announcing that he will allow the Zunis to have
their way, saying, “I decided to permit them thenceforth to do with me as they pleased”
and “I . . . permitted the old Governor to have his way.”\footnote{Frank Hamilton Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni II,” 503, 510.} In an interesting twist to his
pattern of submission, Cushing gives a last gasp of agency, purporting to be master of his
fate while simultaneously relinquishing all control to the Zunis.

Why does Cushing, who was perpetually self-conscious about his age, choose this
slippery tactic, which relegates the former defender of imperial manhood to the status of
a child whose only form of defiance is talking tough to a disembodied reader?

---

\footnote{Ibid., 510.}

\footnote{Ibid., 511.}

\footnote{Frank Hamilton Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni II,” 503, 510.}
Describing his extraordinary transformation into Tenatsali for The Century's wide readership was a perilous opportunity for Cushing. To his colleagues, the scientific rationale for his unusual method and the promise of ever greater discoveries carried significant weight. As he reminded Baird, "[Were it not] for the ethnologic interest which it still has for me, my exile here ... [would be] absolutely unbearable." But could he presume that Century readers would value these scientific advances enough to excuse his "self-inflicted degradation to the daily life of savages?" While some might be convinced of the logic of his course, making that case meant confronting the public's suspicions about his work and character. Had the experience changed him? Was it possible to live as a primitive and remain civilized? How Cushing navigated these questions would influence whether he was treated as a scientific pioneer or a national embarrassment. As a result, Cushing's Zunification is the most essential component of his story—and the most difficult to narrate.

---


95 Cushing and Baxter both urged their readers not to take the ethnographer's spectacular appearance too seriously by suggesting that only primitive peoples value these outward identity markers. After Lai-iu-ah-tsai-lun-kia insists that dressing entirely in the native costume, having pierced ears, and eating Zuni food will "make a complete Zuni" of him, Cushing gently derides the old man's logic, saying, "Had I not eaten Zuni food long enough to have starved four times, and was not my flesh, therefore, of the soil of Zuni?" Cushing clearly expects his readers' response to be, "No." Sylvester Baxter's "The Father of the Pueblos" prompts readers for a similar reaction. "To a primitive people rank and authority are most powerfully indicated by their outward symbols. To maintain his influence, Cushing must out-Zuni the Zunis, so to speak. A man sent to them from the great father at Washington ... must dress in the full traditional costume of their nation—a dress such as they only wear on formal occasions. He is amply rewarded for all such conformities to their pleasure." By arguing that only ignorant primitives see dress as an accurate measure of character or status, Baxter pushes his readers to discount the implicit association between looking like a native and "going native." Savvy readers, he suggests, will have a more complex understanding of identity. Cushing, "My Adventures in Zuni II," 509; Sylvester Baxter, "The Father of the Pueblos," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 65 (June 1882): 72-91; quoted in Curtis M. Hinsley and Davis R. Wilcox, eds. The Southwest in the American Imagination: The Writings of Sylvester Baxter, 1881-1889 (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1996), 68.
To engage willingly in his domestication as a Zuni would mean abandoning white
domesticity and, by extension, civilization itself. As the work of scholars such as Laura
Wexler, Amy Kaplan, and Anne McClintock amply demonstrates, domesticity came to be
regarded as the cornerstone of civilization over the course of the nineteenth century. The
values enshrined in the middle-class home were considered the driving force behind
society's progress toward human perfection. Domesticity's reign was premised, in part,
on a perceived correspondence between control of the physical world and cultivation of
the self. Banishing dirt and disorder was more than a matter of housekeeping or personal
grooming as such externalities reflected the inner state of a home, a family or an
individual. Those who failed to live up to these tenets, whether through poverty,
ignorance, cultural difference, or choice, were consequently judged inferior, even
inhuman. Such was the power attributed to white domesticity that numerous institutions
sought to harness its benevolent influence to elevate "primitive" races. Indian boarding
schools, to take an example from Wexler's work, documented the progress of their
students with dramatic before and after photographs that celebrated the obvious cosmetic
changes as well as the implied moral and intellectual improvements. 96

Cushing, in contrast, appeared to be playing the progress narrative backward and
embracing degeneracy. Before departing for Zuni in 1879, Cushing made time to
commemorate his journey with a studio portrait (figure 2). The photograph shows a
fresh-faced young man of only twenty-two dressed in the fashion of a gentlemanly scout,

96 This connection helps explain why white observers took such a keen interest in Cushing's
domestic arrangements, particularly after Emily's arrival at the pueblo. For insight into the complex links
between domesticity, progress, evolution, and imperialism, see Bederman; Amy Kaplan, "Manifest
Domesticity," American Literature 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 581-606; McClintock; Laura Wexler,
Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism (Chapel Hill: University of North
Carolina Press, 2000). Wexler discusses the before and after photos in chapter three of that volume.
with a collared shirt, silk tie, and thigh-high gaiters. Although Cushing carries a hunting knife at his waist and a rifle rests in the corner of the frame, these props are peripheral to his larger purpose. Sitting half astride a large rock with his back to the gun, he is poised with notebook and pencil in hand; ready to document the pueblo peoples he has yet to meet. Most Americans never saw this fresh-faced scholar, however. They were introduced to a startlingly different man through the sketches and verbal descriptions included in Sylvester Baxter’s 1882 articles in *The Century* and *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. (Not surprisingly, Cushing chose not to include any images of himself in his own popular writings.) In the guise of Tenatsali, Cushing appears bedecked in necklaces, countless buttons and other decorative trappings, his well-coiffed hair grown long and held back by a headband and feather (figure 4). Standing slightly slouched with one hand resting on a knife at his waist, Cushing evinces no trace of the earnest scholar captured in the studio portrait. His alert expression has been replaced by a downward gaze and shadowed features that convey a serious, even somber, air. Although they are not evident in the drawings, blisters and pockmarks covered his face, spurring rumors of venereal disease that lent further credence to suspicions of a moral lapse.97

On the other hand, portraying himself as totally passive carried considerable pitfalls as well. To do so would raise the specter of a body out of the self’s control. The physically able body, as Rosemary Garland Thompson’s work has shown, is critical to Americans’ concept of themselves as individuals and as a nation. The values of self-determination, self-government, autonomy, and progress, which structure the American

---

97 William E. Curtis, “General Logan’s Ranch,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, 2 May 1883; quoted in Green 282-3. Curtis refutes charges apparently made by Logan or his supporters that Cushing had venereal disease and attributes the scars to the harsh Zuni diet.
Figure 4. Frank Hamilton Cushing in Zuni attire. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (NAA Portraits 22E).
Ideal posited by liberal individualism, all depend upon a notion of the body “as a compliant instrument of limitless will.” Were Cushing to cede control of his otherwise “normal” body to the Zunis, it would at some level evoke the same anxieties then fueling the popularity of freak shows. Bodily control was also essential to contemporary definitions of civilized society and middle-class decorum. The ability to manage one’s physicality—ranging from odors and noises to hair and facial expressions—was an outward manifestation of well-disciplined desires and urges.

Moreover, as a scientist at the mercy of his subjects, a helpless Cushing would relinquish whatever claim he had to scientific authority, along with his professed rationale for living among the Zuni in any capacity. As Cushing steps further into the Zunis’ world in the final article of the series, he foregrounds his scholarly project to buttress that authority and reassert control over his Zuni encounter. Where Cushing appeared in the second article as primarily a passive body, the scholar/expert persona that dominates the concluding segment is distinctly disembodied. What’s on display here is Cushing’s ethnographic mind rather than his increasingly spectacular body.

Whereas the preceding articles contained vivid descriptions of the spaces and events that Cushing observed during his first weeks at the pueblo, it is clear that the English-speaking newcomer does not fully grasp their significance. Ethnographic information is relegated to footnotes so that the reader can experience the disorientation and excitement of Cushing’s first months at the pueblo when his relationship with the Zuni was ambiguous and potentially dangerous. A few key details are provided to make the scenes legible, while still retaining an overall sense of the exotic. In the final article,

---

the balance between description and explanation noticeably shifts as Cushing's scholarly persona becomes dominant. He provides numerous translations, including a lengthy passage from the Zunis' creation myth, extended ethnographic discourses on such topics as the Zunis' system of justice, and explicit references to the progress of his research. As an objective observer, Cushing reports brutal customs, like the initiation ceremony of two young boys who are forced to swallow fiery sticks or the interrogation of a suspected sorcerer that includes torture, with scientific detachment. Most importantly, Cushing demonstrates how profitable his new knowledge can be. Striking a balance between the physical aggression of the opening piece and the utter passivity of second, the expert persona instead relies on clever manipulation of people and knowledge to get what he wants. These tactics display agency without calling attention to his body, only to his mind.

Cushing's leap into the scholarly persona is an attempt to reassert his professional distance from the Zuni even as his involvement with their language, rituals, and daily habits was at its height. His expertise provides implicit proof of his intimate acquaintance with Zuni ways while glossing over how he gained such knowledge, the prior acts of submission by which he earned their trust. In fact, Cushing pointedly omitted a crucial transition in his life as a Zuni: his initiation into the Priesthood of the Bow, which takes place in the chronological gap between the second and third articles. Gaining admission to the Bow Priesthood began a new phase of Cushing's research since

---

99 This shift produces two noteworthy effects. First, it makes the Zunis' culture appear more complex. Cushing is quite impressed by the intricacies of their language, time keeping, secret orders and games. His poetic translations of Zuni prayers and other ritual language confer a certain beauty to their culture that was largely absent in the earlier articles. On the other hand, Cushing also includes more incidents of violence than in the previous pieces. This blend of savage brutality and cultural complexity renders a very ambiguous portrait of the Zunis.
members of this most exclusive and powerful sect also had access to the other eleven secret orders. As a Bow Priest, Cushing’s access to the Zunis’ “inner life” would be almost entirely unfettered. Despite the event’s ethnographic importance and obvious interest for his readers, Cushing makes only a brief reference to it. Even with this newfound professional distance Cushing could not describe his willing participation in the “weird and impressive” ritual, one that included the ethnographer procuring a scalp.  

When Cushing does depict ceremonies in the final article, he is careful to mark the limits of his involvement by specifying what he does not do.

Cushing’s intensified reliance on scholarly credentials was also driven by a changing political climate. Beginning in December 1882 with the Logan controversy, Cushing’s ever-fluctuating personal and professional reputation was increasingly under attack. Senator Logan visited Zuni during the previous summer and learned that the valuable Nutria spring had been inadvertently omitted from the description of the Zuni reservation established in 1877. The Senator and his son-in-law, Major William F. Tucker, part owner of a cattle ranch adjacent to Nutria, investigated the lands in question and by November Tucker and his two partners had entered claims under the Homestead and Desert Land Acts. Sylvester Baxter got wind of this and filed a story with the Boston Herald on December 1, which was subsequently picked up by the New York Times. Logan, fearful that the accusation of land grabbing would spoil his presidential aspirations, fumed to his friend Colonel Stevenson that he held Cushing responsible for the public attack. Stevenson, in turn, warned Spencer Baird of the brewing feud. Baird

---

100 Frank Hamilton Cushing To Washington Matthews, 30 September 1881, Hodge-Cushing Collection (72), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 179.
then demanded that Cushing placate the powerful Senator, who was in a position to disrupt the Smithsonian’s federal funding. Cushing promptly denied any involvement in the article, but this did little to quell the growing scandal. 101

The controversy stayed in the public eye throughout the spring, fueled by Logan’s vicious attacks on Cushing in the press, his supporters’ defenses, and the absence of an official ruling on the reservation’s boundaries. Logan’s criticisms, such as this tirade from a letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune, pinpointed Cushing’s vulnerabilities as a grown man “playing Indian.”

Any white man who will live in the midst of those Zuni Indians with his wife, disrobing himself of citizen’s clothes, putting on leggings and moccasins, tying a handkerchief around his head, eating the vilest food ever known to a human being, and living in the midst of the most nauseating and offensive stench, and signing himself officially “War Chief of the Zuni Indians”... has my contempt. 102

While Cushing was publicly silent on the matter, having promised Baird that he would not enter into any “newspaper controversies,” it is possible that he coordinated with Baxter to refute the Senator’s charges. 103 His correspondence from the spring of 1883, the period in which he composed his final article for The Century, includes repeated assurances from friends eager to comfort the besieged ethnographer. 104 Cushing even

101 Green is doubtful about Cushing’s claims of innocence. Green, 261.


104 For reassurances from friends, see Sylvester Baxter to Frank Hamilton Cushing, 19 February 1883, 30 March 1883, 9 May 1883, Hodge-Cushing Collection (99), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 274-5, 280-1, 287; and Washington Matthews to Frank Hamilton Cushing, 28 February 1883, Hodge-Cushing Collection (284), Southwest
took the time to write a lengthy "interview" with himself, probably in the hopes of publishing a defense of his work anonymously without breaking his promise to Baird.\footnote{For the so-called Nutria "interview" see Green, 297-300. Cushing might have attributed the eventual article to the "always unscrupulous" newspapermen who, he claimed, wrote notices about him "quite without my authority." Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer F. Baird, 4 December 1881, Spencer F. Baird Papers, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 201.}

Closer to home, Cushing’s scholarly integrity was challenged in the Topeka Capital. In addition to exaggeration and outright lies, the article charged Cushing with using his Zuni research as a ploy for self-promotion, an interpretation he had desperately sought to squelch through the work of Baxter and his own correspondence with friends and colleagues.\footnote{For instance, Baxter’s “The Father of the Pueblos” included an unnamed army officer’s unsolicited defense of Cushing’s appearance: “It is no streak of eccentricity that prompts him to dress that way; no desire to make himself conspicuous. He is one of the most modest fellows I ever knew, and the attention attracted by such a costume is really painful to him. But he bears it without flinching, as bravely as he has borne many perils and privations in the cause of science. He has an end in view and wisely adopts the means best suited to its attainment.” Baxter, “The Father of the Pueblos,” 66-8.}

Mr. Cushing is a glaring fictionist and deserves exposure . . . He seems, however, to prefer the role of a sensationalist, and to invite attention to himself instead of the facts by embellishing his "scientific" remarks with cheap yarns of personal exploits that occurred only in his dreams or his imagination. Such impositions are without excuse, and particularly censurable in such an instance as this, where there is a pretense of serving the cause of science and of enlightening the general public on matters of importance.\footnote{Topeka [Kansas] Capital, 18 January 1883; quoted in Green, 266. Washington Matthews, a colleague and admirer, offered a rebuttal to these charges in the same newspaper the following month. See Green, 272.}

Given this backdrop, Cushing’s shift in persona in the final article appears to be largely a defensive posture. With a commanding tone and well-defined professional distance, the scholar/expert narrator was far better equipped to refute the stinging accusation that
Cushing's work at Zuni held only the "pretense" of science. Even so, Cushing seems to have felt this buffer was insufficient protection against his detractors. He twice interrupts the narrative to directly address the reader, excusing seemingly out of place passages with references to his tarnished reputation.

Before enumerating the Zunis' various secret orders and their relative functions, he breaks from his usual conversational style rooted in the seasonal flow of events at the pueblo to ask the reader's pardon. The digression is necessary, he contends, "since their existence is a fact of ethnologic importance, and moreover my statements relative to them have been most acrimoniously criticised and persistently disputed." He then launches into the first of many methodical ethnographic lessons in the article.

The second interruption concludes Cushing's account of his marriage dilemma, where the once pliable Cushing decisively draws the line in his Zunification. Through avoidance, feigned ignorance, and gentle diplomacy, Cushing successfully dispatches the threat of an interracial union with little damage to either his status in the pueblo or his profitable friendships with its leading men. Moreover, he turns the potentially embarrassing situation into an opportunity to display his knowledge of Zuni courtship rituals, affirming both his expertise and scholarly detachment from pueblo society. In spite of his skillful maneuvers and the fact that the marriage dilemma's resolution had been well publicized more than a year before, Cushing finds it necessary to disrupt the narrative yet again to explain himself. In a parenthetical aside, he concedes that the account of his marriage prospects may seem "out of place," but argues it is in fact

“essential to the narrative” and “characteristic of the Zunis, and of their early attitude toward me.” More tellingly, Cushing confesses his hope that these statements “may disarm charges and criticisms which are as narrow, unrefined, and malicious, as they are false.”\textsuperscript{109} That Cushing felt compelled to acknowledge these charges in his final Century article suggests just how tarnished his reputation had become. Solidifying his scholarly standing in general and his status as a Zuni expert in particular had become an urgent task.

\textbf{Cushing’s Dangerous Indian Play}

What are we to make of Cushing’s repeated efforts to manage public perception of his work? Are these fluctuating personas the mark of an unskilled author or something more significant? What does Cushing’s volatility reveal about his effect upon his audience? Like the more purposefully crafted accounts of his sensational years at Zuni, Cushing’s journals and correspondence are also marked by internal contradictions. Read together, the narrators created for The Atlantic and The Century emerge as distilled or even exaggerated versions of the divergent strains of his more private writings. For example, the passive child forced by extreme circumstances to live like a Zuni amplifies the techniques Cushing used in his letters to dispel the notion that his work was merely a glorified form of Indian play. To a much greater extent than in “My Adventures in Zuni,” Cushing takes responsibility for choosing to live as a Zuni to his friends and colleagues. However, he still emphasizes the external factors pushing him into this role, justifying his intimacy with Indian ways as a necessary concession to the demands of his

\textsuperscript{109} That the marriage issues arises suddenly and seemingly out of nowhere supports my argument that Cushing felt compelled to address it. Cushing, “My Adventures in Zuni III,” 41.
work. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate his physical and emotional suffering in an effort to prove that he takes no pleasure in this “self-inflicted degradation.” And, although Cushing does describe his involvement in some Zuni ceremonials, he is careful to downplay the most salacious episodes, such as the scalp he obtained for admission into the Bow Priesthood.

To his superiors at the Smithsonian, Cushing provided sparse details about the initiation ritual and left his acquisition of a scalp decidedly vague. He coolly explained to Baird that Apache raids “enabled me to secure a scalp, which, with the ones furnished by my father and Dr. Yarrow, enabled me to get a hearing in the secret council, [and] be named a candidate,” while obscuring the possibility that he has scalped an Apache with the passive voice construction.\(^{110}\) When describing the same incident to Sylvester Baxter, Cushing refers to his encounter with the Apache as “my tale of blood” and strengthens his connection to the scalp, saying, the Apache raids “enabled me to acquire another and far more genuine article with right and title to possession.”\(^{111}\) Displaying such enthusiasm before readers of The Century was apparently unimaginable, as Cushing omitted both the scalp story and his initiation into the Bow Priesthood from “My Adventures in Zuni.” With the exception of a few romantically inclined friends like Baxter, Cushing tried to maintain a public image of himself as a suffering scientist who endured “simply horrible” living conditions for the sake of his work.\(^{112}\)


\(^{111}\) Frank Hamilton Cushing to Sylvester Baxter, nd, Hodge-Cushing Collection (97), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 181.

The inconsistencies in both bodies of writing are indicative of a tendency toward excess that, on occasion, reaches the level of melodrama. As with his divergent narrative personas, Cushing's correspondence shows a predilection toward extremes, from overblown statements to extravagant emotional reactions. At the first hint of accusation or even a lack of support from his superiors, Cushing offered sob stories, fierce defenses, and outrageous threats—often in stunning combination. When Baird did not immediately respond to one of Cushing's many requests for money, the headstrong ethnographer took the delay as an indictment against his work and character. In a letter from January 1883, Cushing insinuated that Baird did not fully appreciate the extent of his research. Should Baird determine, "in the end," that his findings are "not what I have represented them to be," Cushing pledges to cover the costs himself, confident that the rich material will facilitate an easy reimbursement. After essentially threatening to sell his research, Cushing quickly backs down and begs "the hearty support" of his institutional backers. He then abruptly shifts gears to defend himself against another unspoken attack.

My work in Zuni, while voluntary, is not a pleasure, nor is it for myself. It is for the Smithsonian Institution and the Bureau of Ethnology; and I have never responded to the many tempting and liberal offers I have had for even the roughest press notes, nor have I, wittingly, given the smallest scrap of information to representatives of the Press. The various notices of my work which you may have seen have been unavoidable and have been ingenuously gathered from my friends or from my unconscious conversations... I have never, either morally or in the matter of etiquette, ever forgotten my honor in my relationships with yourself or Major Powell.113

Putting aside for the moment that Cushing's assertions are false—he had spent several days with Sylvester Baxter the previous spring and later agreed to review a draft of

“Father of the Pueblos” before it was sent to Harper’s—it is useful to consider why he mounts such a bristling defense.\footnote{114 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Sylvester Baxter, nd, Hodge-Cushing Collection (97), Southwest Museum of the American Indian, Autry National Center, Los Angeles, C.A.; quoted in Green, 181. Greene places the letter in October 1881 since it also describes his recent initiation to Bow Priesthood.} Since Baird seems to have voiced no objection to Baxter’s recent article on his protégé, treating his relationship with the Press as a matter of honor is a gross overreaction.

Cushing’s tendency toward excess, whether in his divergent narrative personas or in his grandiose responses, is characteristic of a man whose social compass is deeply impaired. As a “White Indian” who still claimed to speak to and for the respectable, educated middle-class, Cushing’s relationship to the exotic had been radically altered. His intimate relationship to the Zuni and rebirth as Tenatsali not only eroded this critical facet of the self-Other binary, it also called into question his status as a civilized white man. Lacking these stable identity markers, Cushing lost his ability to gauge appropriate reactions. An acute sensitivity to any insinuation that he had “gone native,” and a keen awareness of the damage that accusation could do, further exacerbated Cushing’s erratic behavior. The result was an uneven and at times incoherent performance of self.

What was destabilizing on an individual level for Cushing was equally jarring to his audience. Some, like Sylvester Baxter, saw in Cushing’s Zuni experiment a tantalizing promise of spiritual rejuvenation and connection to an ancient culture. For others, Cushing’s behavior amounted to a rejection of civilized society in favor of a slide down the evolutionary scale. The eccentric ethnographer roused the deeply held fear that Anglo-Saxon America’s progress, far from being inevitable, was precarious. Cushing, of course, took great pains to refute any interpretation of his Zunification as evolutionary degeneration, insisting that his “degradation” was only an external condition which could
be easily reversed. The implicit assertion that he could live as a Zuni while retaining a
civilized character did little to quell such anxieties. In fact, the possibility that Cushing
could be both ethnographer and First War Chief was even more disquieting. Cushing and
Tenatsali’s coexistence—simultaneously civilized and savage—represents what
“category crisis.” His unique brand of primitive drag points to what Garber describes as
a “failure of definitional distinction” in that the border between the seemingly exclusive
categories of “savage” and “civilized” has become permeable. Moreover, by detaching
the signs understood to signal one’s status as “civilized” or “savage” from the raced
bodies to which they typically belonged, Cushing demonstrated that these markers were
not immutable, but socially constructed.

The spectacular figure of Cushing/Tenatsali thus threatened a crucial component
of his white, middle-class audience’s identity: utter certainty of their own difference from
the exotic Other. At a time when the nation’s culture brokers were busy building an
extensive ideological and institutional infrastructure devoted to differentiating the exotic
from implicitly “normal” Americans, Cushing’s Zunification challenged the logic of this
project. The nodes of this network—educational display spaces, entertainment venues,
certain elements of visual culture, and a variety of literary and journalistic genres—also
dealt in contradiction, but worked toward conservative ends. Their staging of opposition
between self and Other in a tightly controlled environment served to shore up the
viewer’s or reader’s identity. Cushing, in contrast, collapsed these distinctions on to a
single white body. His ability to penetrate “the inner life” of the Zuni may have made
Cushing an anthropological pioneer and a national celebrity, but his dual identity proved
to be a deeply dangerous form of Indian play.

115 Garber, 16.
In contrast, Nellie Bly’s public persona is truly playful. While there are moments of seriousness, her spunky attitude quickly reappears, assuaging any lingering fears about the risks inherent in her stunts. By forging what I term personality armor, Bly models for New York World readers a way to experience the metropolis without being overcome by its kaleidoscopic diversity. Her ability to filter all experience through her own consciousness enables Bly to inhabit a variety of spaces and identities while maintaining a stable performance of self and an emphatic bodily presence. Despite being seemingly ill-equipped for an encounter with the urban Other, Bly proves to be far savvier than her ethnographic predecessor as a celebrity border-crosser.
In September 1887, curious notices appeared in several Manhattan newspapers describing a seemingly insane woman who had been brought before Judge Patrick G. Duffy in the Essex Market Police Court. This pretty girl in fashionable dress could provide no account of her arrival in New York or her background, other than to say her name was Nellie Brown and she had been raised in Cuba. According to the boardinghouse matron accompanying her, Miss Brown had refused to sleep the night before. Her inexplicable vigil, coupled with odd comments and queries, had frightened the other tenants and led to Miss Brown’s appearance before the judge. Puzzled by her strange behavior and mysterious origins, Duffy called in a gaggle of reporters in the hope that publicizing her admission to the charity asylum would bring forward friends or family members to identify her. Despite numerous visits from newspapermen and individuals in search of lost loved ones, the famous patient remained unclaimed during her ten-day stay in the notorious asylum at Blackwell’s Island. On 7 October, the New York Times reported that Miss Brown had been released due to the “gratifying results” of her treatment but noted that her identity remained a mystery.\footnote{New York Times, 7 October 1887, p. 8; quoted in Brooke Kroeger, \textit{Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist} (New York: Times Books, 1994), 93.}

What might have been the end of the tale was, in fact, just the beginning. Two days later, Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World announced with typical fanfare that the “poor child,” as Judge Duffy had termed her, locked up on Blackwell’s Island was their own intrepid reporter, Nellie Bly.\footnote{Nellie Bly, \textit{Ten Days in a Mad-House} (New York: Ian L. Munro, n.d.), 14, http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/bly/madhouse/madhouse.html. Citations follow pagination of the online edition.} Bly’s explosive exposé on conditions inside the
asylum was her very first assignment for the World and immediately launched her as a celebrity journalist. The story was picked up by newspapers all over North America and Bly soon published a book version, Ten Days in a Madhouse (n.d.), as well as a shorter account for the middlebrow monthly Godey’s Lady’s Book. She quickly became the leader of the stunt-girl fad sweeping American newspapers in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Over the next three decades, Bly moved in and out of journalism according to interest and financial need, amassing an impressive collection of stunts and scoops, both silly and serious. She entrapped a crooked Albany lobbyist, traveled to Chicago to cover the 1894 Pullman strike, conducted jailhouse interviews with Emma Goldman and Eugene Debs as well as several notorious murderesses, and reported from the Austrian front soon after the outbreak of World War I, making her one of the first female war correspondents. In between, she learned to ride a bicycle and train an elephant, stepped into the boxing ring to take a swing at a champion prizefighter, and joined a chorus line—to name just a few of her feats. Bly’s final stint as a journalist found her working for Pulitzer’s rival, William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal, as an advice columnist and unofficial adoption broker. While Bly was equally well-known for her incisive interviews during her lifetime, she is best remembered for the stunts, particularly her madhouse adventure and her whirlwind trip around the world in 1889. Traveling through the harsh winter months and the monsoon season, Bly not only bested the fictional record set by Jules Verne’s British hero, Phileas Fogg, in Around the World in 80 Days (1873), she also defeated a living competitor: Elizabeth Bisland of Cosmopolitan.

magazine. More remarkably, at least in the eyes of her contemporaries, she did so as an unaccompanied woman toting only a carpetbag.

The common thread in these diverse assignments was usually Bly herself. She habitually insinuated herself into the story, a practice that The World endorsed by regularly incorporating her name into the headline. Bly’s popularity rested not so much on her skill in reporting the news as her ability to make it. Whether an investigation into the market for unwanted babies or a lighthearted look at matchmaking services, Bly’s articles were propelled by the drama of her own experience exploring the modern metropolis. In many cases, the “stunt” aspect of Bly’s work—the thrill of a middle-class woman temporarily adopting a new, often working-class, persona in order to gain unfettered access to some hidden corner of the city—eclipsed the supposed public service of the expose. Bly’s account of her stay at Blackwell’s Island, as well as the World’s packaging of the series and the secondary coverage in other newspapers, exemplifies this tension. Although she claimed to have undertaken this “mission” to investigate charges of mistreatment at the asylum, the mentally ill women do not appear until midway through the narrative.4 Instead, Bly and her commentators largely focus on her experience feigning insanity and enduring more than a week “among the mad.”5 The patients’ suffering appears far less scandalous than the ease with which myriad experts are fooled by this untrained reporter’s performance. The professional expertise of police officers, Judge Duffy, numerous doctors and nurses is sharply undermined by the

4 Nellie Bly, Ten Days, 3.

5 This is the title of Bly’s article in Godey’s. Accompanying the final installment of Bly’s series, The World published excerpts from other newspapers’ commentary on the expose. Most of these express doubts about the authority of experts and applaud Bly’s effort. New York World, “Press Comment,” 16 October 1887, 26.
experiential authority of an utterly uncredentialed 23-year-old girl.\(^6\) At a time when many fields, including journalism, were being transformed by professionalization, Bly made “her own truths based on physical sensation” into a new kind of authority.\(^7\)

Impersonating insanity, argues Jean Marie Lutes, allowed Bly to flaunt the very characteristics used to justify women’s exclusion from the newsroom: femaleness, emotional expressiveness, physical (even sexual) vulnerability.\(^8\) This body-based authority, coupled with the circulation-boosting perils inherent in stunt reporting, served Bly’s journalistic ambitions while also tapping into readers’ anxieties about modernization’s threats to their own authority. While unlikely to be trapped “behind asylum bars,” \(\text{World}\) readers could appreciate the dangers of bureaucratization revealed

---

\(^6\) Francesca Sawaya notes that the concept of experience was very important to female reformers at the close of the nineteenth century such as Jane Addams. Unable to make claims to institutional forms of authority, experience provided another form of expertise to authorize their work within the professional culture that excluded them. Francesca Sawaya, “The Authority of Experience: Jane Addams and Hull-House,” in Women’s Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945, eds. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 48.

\(^7\) Jean Marie Lutes, “Into the Madhouse with Nellie Bly: Girl Stunt Reporting in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” \textit{American Quarterly} 54, no. 2 (2002): 217. That Bly’s bodily experience could challenge—or even undermine—the authority of the staff at Blackwell’s Island points to the relatively weak social position of mental health workers at this time. As Elizabeth Lunbeck notes, medicine professionalized in the late nineteenth century through increasing scientific rigor and more stringent credentialing, expelling practitioners who had practical experience but little formal training (who were often, but not exclusively, women). Yet it would not be until the second decade of the twentieth century that medicine would establish itself “at the top of the professional hierarchy” based on its successful defense of its “privileges, knowledge base, and monopolistic control” (26-7). The sub-specialty of psychiatry took a somewhat different path to cultural authority, relying less on exclusive claims to a specific knowledge base and more on the spread of “a psychiatric perspective” that pervaded nearly every aspect of human life (4). At the time of Bly’s stunt, however, those who treated the mentally ill were rather estranged from the medical field. Their work had little basis in scientific knowledge and was typically more caretaking than cure. Since psychiatry at the time focused on the most extreme cases, rather than the range of normal and not-so-normal behaviors it would later encompass, the field seemed to have little to offer the broader public. Thus while the doctors Bly encountered enjoyed some prestige and certainly came closer to professional status than their ostensible patient, their authority was hardly impregnable. The nurses could claim even less status, which perhaps explains their sometimes violent exercise of what little authority they had over the patients. Elizabeth Lunbeck, \textit{The Psychiatric Persuasion: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Modern America} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

\(^8\) Ibid., 218.
in Bly's stunt. Even after she dropped her "mad" act, Bly's insanity was repeatedly confirmed by so-called experts; her eventual escape was procured by the World's attorney, not by any cure. Despite the foreign asylum setting, Bly's depiction of individuals at the mercy of intractable institutions, led by incompetent experts, whose machinations are hidden from public view, was eerily familiar.

In the broad outlines of her work, Nellie Bly bears a striking resemblance to her ethnographic predecessor, Frank Hamilton Cushing. Like the plucky reporter submitting to an asylum's "care" for the sake of her scoop, Cushing relied on bodily experience to ground his authority as an expert on the Zuni. By putting his body in place of the native's, Cushing gained unprecedented access to this "primitive" culture, laying bare its secret customs and ceremonies to a wider audience. The public's interest in Zuni, based as it was in the hope that ancient spiritual knowledge might serve as a source of rejuvenation for the stultified elite, was likewise a by-product of modernity's sweeping changes. Cushing's articles about the Zuni catalogued what might be lost as the inexorable "March of Progress" spread from the city to the former frontier, just as Bly's stunts explored those consequences closer to home.

Where Bly and Cushing sharply diverge, however, is in the narrative representations of their encounters with the Other. As his immersion in Zuni culture progresses and the line between self and Other becomes compromised, Cushing's persona grows more volatile and more disembodied. This self-erasure, which protects Cushing from having to describe his increasing intimacy with Zuni ways, registers the taint of the exotic. Bly, in contrast, maintains a stable, coherent presentation of self throughout her most notorious stunts. This persona—even without the comparison to Cushing's—is

9 This was the title of Bly's first article in The World, 9 October 1887, pg. 25-6.
remarkable for its consistency, narrative dominance, and emphatic bodily presence.

Given the constraints on personal behavior for women of Bly's class and the compromising situations her journalistic work entailed, how was Bly able to exercise her bodily authority without compromising her control over the narrative? Focusing primarily on the madhouse stunt and subsequent trip around the world, this chapter examines the protective armor which makes Bly resistant to the taint of the exotic. Rooted in her identity as a white, middle-class woman and her immense personality, particularly her ability to filter all experience through her own consciousness, this armor allowed Bly to explore both the modern city and the far corners of the British Empire without seriously endangering her status as an "American girl."

While Bly's initial entry into the public sphere, both bodily and in print, was to some extent legitimated by the history of women's reform efforts, her immense popularity is rooted in the newer culture of publicity. To better understand Bly's tenuous relationship to reform, her stunts will be compared to the work of Helen Stuart Campbell, a contemporary who investigated the dire conditions faced by New York's female laborers. Finally, considering Bly's performance of self in The World alongside Henry James' The Bostonians (1886), a novel preoccupied with women in public and the audiences entranced by them, will help elucidate the appeal Bly's personality armor held for urban readers.

**The Building Blocks of Resilience**

In many respects, Nellie Bly would seem poorly equipped for the challenges inherent in her stunts. While culturally middle-class, financial constraints, limited
education, and a general disinterest in marriage set her on a more unconventional trajectory. Born 5 May 1864, Elizabeth Jane “Pink” Cochran was the third child of Michael and Mary Jane Cochran. During “Pink’s” early years in western Pennsylvania, the family enjoyed great prosperity thanks to a successful general store, gristmill, and extensive real estate investments. However, after her father’s sudden death in 1880, the family’s financial circumstances became more precarious. Michael’s substantial estate was divided among many heirs, including ten children from his previous marriage. Mary Jane’s “widow’s third” coupled with small allowances from her five children’s inheritances provided a meager income. A disastrous second marriage to an abusive alcoholic, which ended in divorce after five years, only added to the turmoil at home. After completing less than a semester of teacher training before running short of funds, twenty-year-old “Pink” turned to journalism to help support her mother and siblings.

Bly’s chosen profession posed another obstacle to fulfilling middle-class gender expectations. In contrast to its earlier reputation as the province of “bohemians,” . . . “ne’er-do-wells, fly-by-nights, and, especially, drunkards,” journalism was becoming a more respectable career option in the 1880s and 1890s due to the increasing importance of daily newspapers and an influx of well-educated reporters. The working conditions, as Karen Roggenkamp notes, remained less than genteel, however: the pay was low and often dependent on one’s popularity; the hours were long; and editors, especially Pulitzer,

---

10 Since I am primarily interested in Bly’s public persona, I have limited references to her given name to this brief account of her youth. For the remainder of the chapter, I use her pseudonym to refer to both her professional and personal endeavors.

11 Bly entered the Indiana Normal School at age 15, and little is known about her life between this aborted educational venture and her first appearance in the Pittsburgh Dispatch in January 1885. Brooke Kroeger’s exhaustive biography of Bly is the definitive source for details on her early life. See chapter one for an account of her childhood.
sowed intense competition among the staff with their ruthless hiring and firing practices. Nonetheless, women were gradually gaining a toehold in the traditionally masculine newsroom. By the 1880s, most city papers employed half a dozen women in full-time positions. The Journalist, a trade magazine, estimated in 1888 that 200 women were employed as reporters or copy editors by New York City’s newspapers alone. In spite of their growing numbers, female reporters were still considered excessively emotional and unsuited to cover gritty stories of violence and crime; most were relegated to covering fashion, theater, and domestic concerns. “Pink” Cochrane had little interest in such matters and was instead drawn to the more sensational side of the field. Her early pieces for the Pittsburgh Dispatch, whose editorial staff dubbed her Nellie Bly after Stephen Foster’s well known song, were essentially feature stories touching on potentially controversial issues, such as divorce and “mashes” between working-class girls and the young men who paid for their nights out. When the Dispatch began assigning her more traditional fare, Bly set out for Mexico (with her mother as chaperone) to become a travel writer. The resulting six-month series was well received, yet Bly soon found her assignments drifting toward the women’s pages once again. In May 1887, she abruptly left Pennsylvania in search of bigger opportunities, leaving only

---

12 Karen Roggenkamp, Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005), 50.


14 Elizabeth Jane Cochran began spelling her last name with an “e” during her brief stint at Indiana Normal School. Her mother later adopted the practice as well. Kroeger, 25.

15 The heroine of the song is, interestingly, an African American woman. According to legend, Foster was inspired to write the song after spotting this “comely colored servant” while playing piano at a friend’s house. Kroeger, 44.
a brief note for her former employer: "I am off for New York. Look out for me. Bly." By October, she had burst on to the pages of the New York World.

As the flagship newspaper of sensation journalism, Joseph Pulitzer's World was a perfect match for Bly's talents. With its emphasis on story-telling and lavish layouts, New Journalism, as it was also known, decisively shifted the balance between information and entertainment in American reporting. Instead of presenting unframed, unadulterated facts, as dictated by today's objective ideal, sensation journalism narrated the news with an eye toward character, plot, setting, dialogue, and dramatic pacing. As long as the reporter maintained accuracy on key points, a certain amount of imaginative writing was accepted in pursuit of a story's larger truth. The World's relentless coverage of sex, crime, and violence showcased an often chaotic urban environment that, according to Michael Schudson, mirrored its readers' experience of the city as always unpredictable, always new. For those who had limited control over their personal circumstances, sensation papers offered a way to relate to external events by turning the city into a spectacle of thrilling individual stories.

---


17 Roggenkamp, xii-xiii.

18 Schudson, 119.

19 While sensation papers like The World were associated with working- and lower-middle-class readers, Roggenkamp notes that with such high circulation numbers, their readership could not be limited to these groups. Appealing to a broad constituency was crucial to their success. Karen Roggenkamp, "Dignified Sensationalism: Cosmopolitan, Elizabeth Bisland, and Trips Around the World," American Periodicals 17, no. 1 (2007): 38.
The stunt-reporter genre epitomizes this feature of New Journalism. In their efforts to expose hidden aspects of modern urban life, stunt reporters like Bly enacted personal dramas built around the increasing visibility of women in the city. Whether posing as factory workers, beggars, domestic servants, or mental patients, stunt reporters emphasized the role of women in New York’s spectacle. The development of new commercial and leisure spaces, such as the department store, which could be frequented by women without male escorts, was making the social landscape more fluid and ambiguous. Where unaccompanied women had once been immediately recognizable as prostitutes, such solitude was no longer an unambiguous sign of sexual availability. 20 Contemporary critics, who charged that the genre was designed to titillate rather than inform, recognized that many stunts played upon the anxieties surrounding women’s sexual vulnerability in public. A minor uproar ensued after a stunt reporter posing as a flower vendor was propositioned. One Manhattan gossip magazine, which promptly decried the incident, predicted that unscrupulous editors would soon send a virtuous young girl into a brothel since all else had been done. 21 Although Bly committed few explicit violations of proper feminine conduct during her stunts, she persistently raised the specter of such a breach, bending and stretching those limits. 22 With only her pseudonym and the pretense of reform to shield her, Bly set out to explore the dark—though not the darkest—corners of Manhattan. Her femaleness and the vulnerability that

---


21 Kroeger, 205-7.

22 Bly was forced to undress and bathe before other female patients and nurses at the insane asylum. Bly, Ten Days, 32.
implied were crucial to the genre’s appeal. She became a symbol of women’s growing publicity, an exciting and sometimes precarious position to occupy.

Frank Hamilton Cushing’s personal circumstances would seem to provide a more durable buffer for his encounter with the exotic. As a young white man, Cushing enjoyed much greater latitude in his personal behavior than Bly. His marriage to Emily Magill midway through the Zuni experiment alleviated many concerns about the domestic arrangements prevailing during his bachelor days at the pueblo. Moreover, his class status was considerably more secure, having been raised in a bourgeois home headed by a respected (if somewhat eccentric) physician. The brevity of his formal education, which ended after only one semester at Cornell, had little impact on his success in the still professionalizing field of anthropology. Indeed, Cushing’s first publication, which resulted in his invitation to join the Smithsonian Institution, was based on research conducted in his teens. While his methods sometimes raised eyebrows, the Smithsonian and the broader discipline of anthropology sanctioned his interest in Native Americans and applauded the results of his work. The imprimatur of that institution, along with his personal, often filial, relationships with its leading personnel, lent significant credibility to his project at Zuni.

Yet, as the previous chapter illustrates, that credibility proved to be a double-edged sword. The extent of Cushing’s Zuni immersion, which only stops short at intermarriage, demonstrates his deep respect for their culture at a time when many institutions, most notably Indian boarding schools, were determined to strip native people

---

23 When she did marry at age thirty that, too, was sensational. The groom was a wealthy businessman nearly forty years her senior, whom she had met at most two weeks before. Their tumultuous first year of marriage, during which Bly refused to eat at home and her husband had her followed around New York, was documented in the press. See Kroeger’s chapter, “Marriage,” for an account of their union, 261-303.
of their traditions in the name of assimilation. By subjecting his often sickly body to the
rigors of pueblo life, Cushing sought to gain a fuller understanding of the Zuni world
view. His method implicitly elevated this “primitive” culture at the cost of his self-
inflicted “degradation.”

While the prospect of “going native” haunts Cushing’s Zuni writings, it is
impossible to imagine such a denouement to Bly’s stunts. In large part, this is due to
Bly’s far more limited immersion in the lives of her subjects. Many of her stunts lasted
only a matter of days; her ten-day stay at the charity asylum was a notable exception. As
a result, whatever risks the stunts posed to Bly’s health, safety or moral standing, these
dangers had been overcome by the time her articles appeared. Readers could thus
experience the vicarious thrill of Bly’s exploits even as her confident, spirited narrative
voice reassured them that all would be fine in the end. Bly may have been eager to
expose the individuals, practices, and institutions at hand, but that interest was ever-
fleeting; next week, readers knew she would be onto something new.

Bly also never seeks to access—much less occupy—the consciousness of the
urban Other. Unlike later “class transvestites,” to borrow a phrase from Eric Schocket,
Bly did not strive to understand the poor’s point of view by sharing their physical
experience. The Progressive era students of poverty studied by Schocket and Mark
Pittenger lived and worked for months or years among their subjects in an effort to better
understand the corrosive influence of a harsh environment on the individual. Their

---

24 Frank Hamilton Cushing to Spencer Baird, 14 December 1879, Spencer F. Baird Papers,
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.; quoted in Green, 83.

America,” American Quarterly 49, no.1 (1997): 26-65; Eric Schocket, “Undercover Explorations of the
‘Other Half,’ or the Writer as Class Transvestite,” Representations 0, no. 64 (Autumn 1998): 109-133.
transformations, which began with outward changes in dress, personal habits, patterns of speech, and bodily comportment but gradually extended inward, were so extensive that many feared they would be permanently altered by their experience. Without wholly discounting more private motivations, such as those male practitioners who sought rejuvenation through their contact with the more vital working class, these "down andouters" aspired to increase scientific knowledge of the poor, galvanize reform efforts, and bridge growing class differences.²⁶ Bly's claims to reform, like the stunts themselves, were generally short-lived. The appeal of her stories lay not in revealing the Other's perspective but in Bly's own experience of such privations. Consequently, while she made modest changes in preparation for her stunts, including alterations in dress, slight changes in behavior, and false names, she retained a subjective distance from her subjects.²⁷

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, Bly differs from Cushing in the nature of the Other she encountered. Native Americans, even those deemed "semi-civilized" like the Zuni, were far more exoticized than all but the most degenerate urban dwellers, whom Bly studiously avoided. The individuals Bly comes in contact with are at times ominous, but rarely pose an explicit, imminent threat. Her stories, particularly after the madhouse exposé, which was probably the most transgressive, more often skirt the edges of

²⁶ Stephen Crane is a notable exception. As a literary practitioner of this genre, Crane made no claims to reform and instead saw depicting the world from the perspective of slum dwellers as an aesthetic challenge. According to Mark Pittenger, Crane sought to "transcend the academic, touristic and sensationalist investigative modes" and instead 'discover' the Bowery bum's 'point of view.'" Pittenger, 33. See also Alan Trachtenberg's essay on Crane's method of mobile subjectivity, "Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane's City Sketches," in American Realism: New Essays, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 138-54.

²⁷ To be sure, Cushing employed his own distancing techniques in describing his Zuni experience. However, the intensity and duration of his immersion in Zuni ways, particularly his habit of placing his own body in place of the native's, tend to outweigh these tactics. The sacrifices which Cushing makes in pursuit of his research demonstrate the value he placed on understanding Zuni culture.
salacious issues. For instance, her investigation into baby brokers evokes the shadow of illicit sex and possibly abortion, but Bly herself only conducts interviews with the intermediaries. The fallen women, shiftless fathers, and furtive buyers are always offstage.\textsuperscript{28} In a number of stunts, Bly was accompanied by an unnamed companion, which provided another guarantee of her safety. While she did endure unpalatable food, new social mores, and a variety of minor unpleasantries, the worlds she entered were fundamentally recognizable to her readers.

If the superficiality of Bly’s stunts eased the strain placed on this single, young white woman publicizing her intimacy with the city’s secrets, some sense of transgression remained. Whereas Cushing’s Zunification seemed to demand his self-erasure, Bly’s self-preservation takes a radically different form. Rather than minimize her physical presence in the accounts of her stunts, Bly creates a protective bubble that allows her to float safely through the suggestive spaces and situations that gave her stunts their massive appeal. This armor is both a rhetorical construction and a force in the world—its existence is validated by other individuals and events within the narrative. Without completely eliminating the possibility of danger, this armor does mitigate many of the risks inherent in stunt reporting, particularly the less tangible threats to Bly’s social standing. As a result, Bly is able to maintain both her bodily presence in the narrative and a stable presentation of self.

Bly’s personality armor is forged of two deeply intertwined components, which reinforce each other in a perpetual loop. First, Bly persistently asserts her middle-class womanhood, which at this historical moment, is inextricable from her whiteness. These

assertions exemplify Anne McClintock's explanation of the intimate, reciprocal relations between race, class and gender as articulated categories that come into existence in and through each other. Gender behavior, particularly in the wake of Reconstruction but beginning long before, was a critical index of racial distinctions. The "failure" of African American women to live up to the dictates of middle-class femininity was repeatedly cited as evidence of the race's failings rather than an effect of Reconstruction's institutionalized impoverishment. At the same time, those who fulfilled bourgeois gender expectations too well risked retribution for presuming to seize for themselves the privileges of whiteness, as Wells' ejection from the Ladies' Car illustrates. Assertions of manhood among African American men, whether exercising the vote, property ownership, or confronting a (white) neighbor on any issue, were particularly dangerous, as the long history of lynching illustrates. Disrupting the tangled knot of race, gender, and class carried comparatively minor penalties for a woman like Bly, yet those consequences could not be entirely ignored. Hazel Carby argues that the ideology of the dominant class offers women their gender identification as the situation through which race and class are lived. As a result of this bundling, adhering to gender conventions is necessary to maintain not merely respectability, but also to maintain whiteness.

Surprisingly, Bly's particular brand of feminine respectability is decidedly modern. With a remarkably secular outlook, Bly rarely invokes the middle-class feminine morality which many of her contemporaries used to justify stepping beyond


their established social roles. By relying on the protection provided by her class and racial status, she’s able to push the boundaries of gender expectations. She’s feisty, even rude at times, determined and competitive. Although she expresses compassion toward some of her subjects, Bly is rarely sentimental. She often smiles or laughs at inappropriate moments, belying the supposed seriousness of her exposés. Frequently flirtatious toward the men she encounters, Bly nonetheless upholds Victorian morality’s insistence on female sexual purity. She retains the core principles of ladyhood, but abandons its stiff formality.

The second element of this armor is Bly’s penchant for filtering all experience through her own consciousness, making her the star of every article. Although she does evince momentary sympathy for some of the individuals she encounters, this intimacy is always limited. Likewise, her subjects’ histories are consistently subordinated to Bly’s immediate experience in the stunt. As a result, the reader has no real opportunity to identify with anyone other than the intrepid reporter. The prominence of Bly’s own drama means that little other evidence is needed to substantiate her claims. Bodily experience, as Lutes rightly contends, is the supreme authority in the stunt girl genre. However, not all bodies possess that authority in equal measure. (Imagine, for instance, Ida B. Wells as a stunt reporter.) As her introduction to World readers, the madhouse stunt is instrumental in establishing Bly’s body as a viable source of truth. Throughout the account, she works assiduously to establish her class and gender status, and thereby her credibility as a trusted mediator between readers and the urban world.

Having Bly’s consciousness as the exclusive arbiter of events produces the overwhelming impression of her personality permeating every article. Biographer
Brooke Kroeger sees Bly’s unabashed display of self as fundamentally genuine and essential to her public appeal. Lutes, who has devoted the most scholarly attention to Bly and the stunt reporters, contends that this notion of “unselfconscious parading of personality” obscures the balancing act necessary for stunt girls, whose entry into journalism is predicated on their becoming both objects and agents of publicity.31 She sees Kroeger and World readers as duped: “The force of Bly’s personality, evinced by that physical, supposedly essential self that reacted to her environments, presents itself as so authentic that she makes it easy for her readers to make this mistake.”32 Putting aside Lutes’ concern with whether this narrative persona correlates to the historical figure Elizabeth Cochrane, her point that Bly’s display of self is a performance rather that an “unselfconscious” revelation is well taken.

Bly’s forceful personality and the notion of a performing self connects her to Verena Tarrant, the strangely compelling figure at the center of The Bostonians. This rather unpleasant tale revolves around a contest for Verena’s affections, as well as control of her considerable talent as a speaker in the “new” style.33 During an impromptu speech at the home of the aging abolitionist, Miss Birdseye, Verena instantly infatuates both Olive Chancellor, a radical reformer determined to alleviate the oppression of her suffering sex, and her staunchly conservative Mississippi cousin, Basil Ransom, who

31 Susan Glenn notes a similar balancing act among female performers in the theater during the same period. The New Women of the theater, whom Glenn sees as proto-feminists, occupied a space in which they could be both spectacles and personalities. On stage and off, they realized the demand for self-development and self-expression that would become a crucial component of the twentieth-century women’s movement. Susan Glenn, Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6-7.

32 Lutes, “Into the Madhouse,” 228.

expresses his opposition to women's advancement in gallant pronouncements like this: "The use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man happy" (214). As the dueling cousins vie for Verena's attention, each tries mold her into an icon for their respective cause. Olive, who is herself painfully shy, trains the already captivating Verena to be a speaker on women's rights. Basil, in contrast, longs to contain Verena's charm within his private domain. What is relevant here is not the struggle for possession of Verena, which ends unhappily for all involved, but the nature of her appeal, which seems to overlap considerably with Bly's.

Both these creations—the fictional character of Verena and Bly's public persona—exemplify the notion of personality described by Warren Susman in his influential essay "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture." For Susman, personality is comprised of an individual's unique traits and a performing self that attracts others. Drawing on his analysis of advice manuals, Susman sees the shift from a culture of character to one of personality emerging in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, he also acknowledges that such ideas are usually percolating in the culture well before they rise to the level of general, formally expressed understanding, making it possible to see Verena and Bly as nascent versions of this new type of self. The excitement surrounding Nellie Bly's stunts and the persistence of her popularity, which extends beyond both the stunt girl genre's novelty and her own undercover assignments, suggests that her personality was fascinating in and of itself. While it is true that Bly often made news, particularly in her stunt stories, her appeal

---


35 Susman, 278.
surpassed that first hook. It also eclipsed that of other stunt reporters. All of which suggests that Bly’s persona was something new but not entirely alien to the culture from which she emerged. Likewise, Verena’s newness is a recurring theme in the novel. Both Basil and Olive—and, I will argue, James—struggle to account for Verena’s effect on her listeners. Through Basil’s mockery of her arguments and the near total omission of Verena’s speeches from the novel, James seems at pains to underscore the irrelevance of content to Verena’s appeal. The pleasure of these lectures rests not on argument but on access. As Basil observes, “it was simply an intensely personal exhibition and the person making it happened to be fascinating” (55). Much the same could be said of Bly’s immensely popular work for the World. In light of these parallels, James’ depiction of Verena Tarrant and the emerging culture of publicity which surrounds her will be used throughout this chapter to provide insight into Bly’s celebrity.

Despite the tidy distinctions made here, Bly’s assertions of whiteness and feminine respectability cannot be separated from her personality. Her position as a white woman—or, rather the status of white women in the context of the New York World, the British Empire, and American society in the late 1880s—makes her particular brand of personality possible. That status is the foundation for her confidence, breezy attitude, and much-discussed pluck. The well-established superiority of the (white) American woman at this moment fuels the arrogance necessary to organize reality around her own consciousness. By the same token, Bly’s display of personality gave readers access—or the appearance of access—to her inner thoughts, a show of interiority that reaffirmed her class status.36 Bly’s account of her madhouse adventure amply illustrates the way in

36 The sources on subjectivity and interiority in the nineteenth century are considerable. Shawn Michelle Smith’s work, particularly “Prying Eyes and Middle-Class Magic in The House of the Seven
which these components reinforced one another. As her first and most transgressive stunt, Bly makes her most forceful claims to middle-class womanhood in *Ten Days in a Mad-House*. The long duration of the assignment, second only to her trip around the world, coupled with its focus on her mental state, makes Bly’s interiority an especially prominent feature of the narrative.

**Bly and the Work of Female Benevolence**

Bly’s asylum expose, following the formula for all effective stunts, promised readers the excitement of a young woman’s inappropriate behavior without fundamentally eroding her claims to propriety. In adopting a working-class persona who appeared to go mad, Bly purported to forgo the conduct—and protections—of middle-class respectability. Moreover, since both working-class and mentally ill women were perceived to be more sexually available, Bly’s apparent loss of class status potentially jeopardized her virtue as well. Putting herself at the mercy of the city’s charity wards, whose “care” was highly suspect, further heightened her vulnerability. What sort of physical, psychological, or sexual perils might a young lady face behind asylum bars?

To justify such risks, Bly and *The World* sought to frame her work within the context of urban reform. Neither denied that the undercover reporter would be subjected

---

Gables,” provides an astute reading of the gendered nature of middle-class interiority, 11-28. This revelation of a private, supposedly more authentic, self was also a key component of celebrity journalism in the late nineteenth century, according to Charles Ponce de Leon. Bly’s calculated exposure of a unique, idiosyncratic self foreshadows the lengthy profiles of public figures that became a staple of the Sunday supplements and mass circulation magazines in the 1890s. In contrast to the short, didactic bios that appeared in *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, and *The Century*, newer publications like *Munsey’s* and *McClure’s* strove to create a vivid impression of their celebrity subjects, such that readers might feel they had actually met them. Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 356.
to harsh, possibly dangerous, conditions during her “ordeal.” However, they argued that exposing the mistreatment of the mentally ill was a public service that trumped whatever hardships Bly might endure. Similarly, deceiving numerous juridical and medical authorities was necessary to guarantee that Bly’s perception of Blackwell’s Island was not a sanitized one. In the opening pages of Ten Days in a Mad-House, Bly says that she has been charged with writing “a plain and unvarnished narrative” of the patients’ treatment at the asylum; the purpose, her editor pointedly notes, is not to make “sensational revelations,” but to tell the truth as she finds it, “good or bad” (2, 3). Her concluding chapter details the grand jury investigation which followed her articles, where Bly served as a star witness. She closes with a self-aggrandizing assessment of her influence, saying, “I have one consolation for my work—on the strength of my story the committee of appropriation provide[d] $1,000,000 more than was ever before given, for the benefit of the insane” (52). In the book version of the expose, the disruptive potential of Bly’s stunt is quite literally contained by the righteous claim of reform.

In reality, the funding increase was in the works well before this stunt, but invoking the reform impulse enabled Bly to tap into a powerful, legitimizing discourse. Middle-class reform efforts intensified during the late nineteenth century in response to the sweeping social and structural changes associated with modernity. As the gulf separating rich and poor widened and the ugly effects of industrialization and massive immigration grew more glaring, a variety of individuals and organizations sought to

---

37 Bly, Ten Days, 2. References to this text will hereafter be given parenthetically. There are slight differences between Bly’s three versions of this stunt, which include the original account in The World, Bly’s subsequent book, and her article for Godey’s Lady’s Book, which will be discussed briefly. However, most of my analysis is based on the book version.

38 Kroeger, 96.
ameliorate the suffering of the “deserving poor” while also buttressing the traditional social order. A blend of altruistic and self-serving motives animated these campaigns; tenement reform, for instance, included improving sanitation and safety in these often squalid dwellings as well as efforts to impose middle-class notions of gender and domesticity on the working-class family. Mental illness was not a uniquely modern problem, but Bly’s series—which is haunted by the specter of her powerlessness before the medical/juridical complex—addressed widespread concerns about the individual’s diminishing influence in an increasingly bureaucratized society ruled by syndicates and corporations. Gilded Age reform may have spoken the language of benevolence, but such work also served to assuage class-based fears about social disorder and shore up the cultural authority of its practitioners.

Middle-class and elite women were particularly active in reform circles during this period and their prominence made Bly’s self-sacrificing claims more plausible. Reform work expanded the range of acceptable interests and activities for well-to-do women without necessarily challenging the doctrine of separate spheres or the gender expectations underpinning their (supposed) confinement to the domestic realm. For example, Frances Willard, the leader of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and an early advocate of women’s suffrage, was a powerful public figure who spent her days organizing, traveling, and lecturing. Contrary to own her non-traditional lifestyle, Willard’s temperance advocacy reinforced conventional ideas about women as moral guardians of the home. The WCTU’s crusade against the saloon offers another example of the double-edged nature of middle-class reform. Excessive drinking could poison family life through financial ruin or domestic violence, but attacks on the saloon were
also a way to “reform” the leisure practices of working-class, especially immigrant, communities.

Whether or not female reformers explicitly invoked feminine moral superiority to justify their entry into the public sphere, many of their activities could be construed as an extension of their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Jane Addams’ Hull-House, which opened only two years after Bly’s debut in The World, illustrates this overlap. Hull-House’s many programs offered wholesome entertainments, access to middle-class culture, and training in the domestic arts for its struggling neighbors. Addams was dubbed “Mother to the World” in recognition of this work, yet she never married or bore any children of her own. Her “home” was not a private haven nurturing a single, nuclear family united by bonds of blood and matrimony, but instead a public institution that embraced numerous single women, a few married couples, and an ever-changing cast of immigrant visitors. The settlement house movement enabled Addams to bypass the expectations attendant upon her social position while carving out a space for college-educated women like herself within the emerging professions of sociology and social work. 39 Although Nellie Bly’s chosen profession, journalism, had a rough and tumble reputation that made it a more dubious endeavor for ladies, the prominence of elite and middle-class women like Addams and Willard helped to weaken such barriers.

Invoking the tradition of feminine reform legitimated Bly’s venture into the madhouse, as well as her entry into the public sphere as a journalist. The promise of communal oversight and improved conditions protected, at least in part, both the reporter

and her newspaper against charges of sensationalism. However, as a comparison with her contemporary Helen Stuart Campbell illustrates, Bly’s engagement with womanly reform was merely instrumental. Her goals, methods, and mode of femininity differed significantly from both the older charity model and newer strategies emerging out of the settlement house movement and the evolving discipline of sociology.

Almost exactly one year prior to Bly’s first appearance in the World, the more respectable New York Tribune began running in its Sunday editions Campbell’s five-month series on the plight of women workers. Campbell, whom the Tribune referred to as its “special commissioner,” was already established as both a journalist and a fiction writer with “a peculiar aptitude and knowledge” of the city’s slums. Four years earlier she had published The Problem of the Poor, a collection of essays that originally appeared in Lippincott’s and Sunday Afternoon Magazine, followed by a novel, Mrs. Herndon’s Income (1886), describing a wealthy woman’s investigation of slum conditions. As the Tribune noted in its introduction to the series, the novel “could only have been written by one who had studied the most difficult of social problems deeply and at first hand.” However, while much of the series was based on Campbell’s interviews with desperately poor women, conducted during visits to their meager homes and dismal factories, it bears little resemblance to Bly’s first-hand accounts.

Campbell’s series for the Tribune, which was published as Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives in 1889, positions her as a transitional figure in the broad shift from managing urban ills through charity to a more

---

scientific approach emphasizing environmental factors over moral failings. By the 1880s, the work of urban benevolence was dominated by the Charity Organization Society movement, which built upon the seeds of professionalization and bureaucratization planted in the decade before the Civil War. Charity Organization Societies typically did not offer direct aid to the poor; instead, they strove to coordinate the efforts of other organizations by identifying needy households and tracking their moral and financial progress. The COS movement was thus a quasi-scientific effort, driven by the collection of data and systematized delivery of aid yet beholden to older notions of poverty as the product of moral failing. To reverse this moral degeneration, charity organization societies launched an army of “friendly visitors” into the tenement districts to assess families’ needs while subtly bestowing their elevating influence. The precise nature of this influence was difficult to quantify. The volunteers, primarily wealthy women, were essentially charged with instilling the middle-class virtues of honesty, thrift, sobriety, self-dependence, and respect for hard work in the poor through

---

41 While many histories of female reform cite the Civil War as a key transition point, Lori Ginzerg finds this shift beginning in the 1840s and 1850s as the older ideal of moral suasion lost sway and reformers became more focused on institution-building and electoral means of change. Ginzberg, 9.


43 These “friendly visitors” were precursors to the social worker. Just as the COS movement sought to differentiate its methods and practitioners from earlier forms of benevolence by stressing the collection of data and a more efficient distribution of resources, social workers struggled to distinguish their field from its earlier less scientific, more sentimental antecedents. Elizabeth Lunbeck offers insight into a slightly later shift, tracing the tensions between the female-dominated field of social work and the aggressively masculine field of psychiatry, which laid claim to essentially the same body of knowledge. She describes social work’s embrace of science and professionalism in the early decades of the twentieth-century vis-à-vis the concurrent (and often competing) efforts of psychiatry to define itself as a scientific profession with specialized knowledge, credentialed experts, and the authority and prestige attendant upon such a designation. For an analysis of the gender dimensions of this struggle, see especially her second chapter, “Professing Gender” (25-45).
their own example. These disparate duties—policing fraud, interrogating family members, and serving as role model—coupled with the volunteers’ false pose as good neighbors with no connection to aid organizations, could make weekly interactions quite awkward.

The settlement house model retained this emphasis on neighborly influence but sought to ameliorate some of the COS movement’s repressive tendencies. By setting up house in the slums, settlers provided an orderly, industrious and cultured domestic realm for the poor to emulate. In contrast to the weekly visits of charity workers, their ongoing presence would enable more natural and less intrusive interactions with their neighbors. Settlers also strove to be more sensitive to the ambiguities involved in these relationships, to recognize and respect their neighbors’ cultural differences rather than focusing exclusively on their deficiencies. While sharing the COS movement’s emphasis on cultivating character, settlers were also influenced by new social thought, which stressed the importance of environmental factors and suggested that self-reliance alone was insufficient to overcome entrenched poverty. Much more than traditional charity organizations, settlers aligned themselves with the developing fields of sociology and social work, relying on the authority of social science to legitimate their enterprise.

While both movements amassed legions of data in pursuit of their goals, their approaches differed significantly. For example, where COS volunteers catalogued the failings of individual families, the path-breaking Hull-House Maps and Papers (1895) offered

———
44 Boyer, 152-3.
45 Boyer, 157.
46 Carson, 51.
comprehensive documentation of slum conditions, including wage comparisons, essays on specific ethnic groups, and an analysis of child workers.

Despite much common ground, those involved in the settlement house movement tended to differentiate their endeavor from traditional charity work with its history of noblesse oblige. In addition to their allegiance to the developing fields of sociology and social work, settlers also mitigated the altruistic cast of their work by embracing the idea of reciprocity, claiming that they received as much benefit from these efforts as their indigent neighbors. 47 Jane Addams was a vocal believer in this exchange. In Addams’ eyes, her peers—the educated young women who longed to make noble use of their training but were crippled by the shock of their uselessness—were “as pitiful as the other great mass of destitute lives.” 48 Both groups were prevented from fulfilling their potential by social forces beyond the individual’s control, whether economic oppression or gender conventions. 49 By providing material assistance and cultural enrichment for the poor and a sense of purpose for the otherwise idle elite, settlement house work, Addams argued, would ease the suffering at both ends of the social spectrum while repairing the tattered communal fabric.

Helen Campbell’s work in the Tribune draws from all of these approaches to urban ills; the series is at once a moralistic document of bourgeois surveillance, an objective scientific study, and a call to social justice, even socialism. Focusing primarily on the needle trades, both factory and piece work, and domestic service, Campbell’s

47 Ibid.

48 Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House, ed. Victoria Bissell Brown (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999), 93.

49 Victoria Bissell Brown, introduction to Twenty Years at Hull-House (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999), 8.
chapters combine individual portraits with a statistical zeal. Sob stories of young women trying desperately to care for their children or siblings, and losing their virtue or their lives in the attempt, are juxtaposed with detailed analyses of profit margins and the wholesale cost of thread. While women workers garner the most attention, Campbell also highlights owners and managers who are alternately disingenuous, claiming that no one makes a profit on their wares, and disillusioned by failed efforts to reform the sweating system. Nor does Campbell exempt the consumer from her critique; she repeatedly calls attention to the human costs of inexpensive readymade clothing, which enables even the modestly affluent to indulge a love of fashion.

Campbell uses these individual portraits and industry overviews to argue that the economic system has been corrupted at every level by love of money. The damage is so pervasive that remediying it will entail a thorough overhaul extending into the next generation. Today's women workers have little hope of succeeding in this poisonous environment, whose relentless injustice she documents in grinding detail. Campbell expresses genuine sympathy for several individual women, devoting whole chapters to their miserable existences and often allowing the most piteous to speak for themselves, while condemning the cruelty of their endless labor as a group. Ultimately, though, these destitute women are cast as the undeserving poor. Campbell rails against their ignorance, stupidity, and lack of sense throughout the series; their refusal to adopt the band-aid measures Campbell advocates, such as "clubbing" with neighbors and fellow workers to improve their diets, squanders any chance of immediate improvement. Nonetheless, Campbell pleads with her readers to join the crusade to alleviate their suffering, appealing to their self-interest and self-image rather than the workers' merits:
No words, no matter what fire of fervor may lie behind, can make plain the sorrow of the poor. . . To souls that sit at ease and leave to “the power that works for righteousness” the evolution of humanity from its prison of poverty and ignorance and pain, it is quite useless to speak. They have their theory, and the present civilization contents them. But for the men and women who . . . know that the foulest man is still brother, and the wretchedest, weakest woman still sister, whose shame and sorrow not only bear a poison that taints all civilization, but are forever our shame and our sorrow until the world is made clean,—for these men and women I write, not what I fancy, but what I see and know.50

In keeping with the religious worldview underlying her critique, Campbell here urges her readers to accept their responsibility as their brothers’ (or, in this case, sisters’) keepers. Yet she also attempts to prick their pride. The misery of the poor is a blight on American civilization, whose advanced state is no doubt embodied in the Tribune’s esteemed readership. To ease the sorrow of these destitute women is thus to protect the nation’s collective progress toward perfection, while also staking an individual claim as civilization’s finest exemplar.

Campbell’s appeal to self-interest becomes more transparent when the discussion turns to the ever-controversial topic of domestic servants. While she acknowledges objections to the profession, including unreasonable mistresses, long hours and grueling labor, demeaning uniforms, and the lack of free time, Campbell’s true sympathies lie with the employers, whom she describes as “thorned beyond endurance by incompetence, dirt, waste, insubordination—all the evils known to ignorant and presumptuous service.”51

Even the servant’s sexual vulnerability, which Campbell frankly admits—“in the great cities, save for the comparatively small proportion of quiet homes where old methods prevail, household service has become synonymous with the worst degradation that

50 Helen Stuart Campbell, Prisoners of Poverty: Women Wage-Workers, Their Trades and Their Lives (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1889), 79-80.

51 Ibid., 221.
comes to woman”—is ultimately attributed to the servant’s own weak morals, the result of a tenement upbringing.52

The tenement-house stands to-day not only as the breeder of disease and physical degeneration for every inmate, but as equally potent in social demoralization for the class who ignore its existence. Out of these houses come hundreds upon hundreds of OUR domestic servants, whose influence is upon OUR children at their most impressible age, and who bring inherited and acquired foulness into OUR homes and lives.53

Improving the lives of slum dwellers, particularly their domestic arrangements, is a means to preserve the sanctity of middle-class homes.

Campbell’s domestic emphasis reverberates through much of Prisoners of Poverty, though usually at a lower decibel. Many chapters revolve around visits to tenement homes, especially those that also serve as workshops. She observes families buried under piles of fabric or intoxicated by the fumes of tobacco leaves, and laments the ill effects of such an atmosphere on the children. Her descriptions of dark, foul-smelling, and dirty living spaces, and the generational sagas that play out against this dismal backdrop, are often similar to the doomed genealogies of Jacob Riis’ How the Other Half Lives (1895). Campbell even dissects the diets of her subjects, praising those who make the most of their resources and scolding others who remain beholden to that “rank fluid,” tea.54 In part, this interest in household matters was a function of Campbell’s particular expertise. She had taught at the Raleigh Cooking School and written a widely read home economics textbook published in 1881.55 However,

52 Ibid., 234.
53 Ibid., 235-6.
54 Ibid., 125.
55 Henry, 19.
Campbell’s approach was also very much in line with the larger project of womanly benevolence, in which interactions with the poor were mediated primarily through the home. Whether in the guise of “friendly visitors,” settlement houses, or more traditional forms of aid, middle-class responses to poverty sought to redeem the poor by “fixing” their home life, a deeply intrusive and colonial relationship. Even Cushing’s encounter with the Other, while not reform-oriented, is deeply domestic. In fact, his method effectively reverses that of the “friendly visitor.” Rather than improving primitive customs, this enlightened outsider takes up residence with the Zuni governor and proceeds to make a home with the tribe. Much of his transformation can be seen as a perversion of middle-class domestication: adopting Zuni clothing, diet, and sleeping habits.

Bly’s career marks a significant departure in this regard. Her stunts take place primarily in public or quasi-public spaces, such as offices, theaters, clinics, and gymnasiums. While she does examine the lives of factory girls, she cannot elicit an invitation to visit any of the women at home and does not presume to intrude.56 The few domestic spaces she enters are not truly private dwellings, but group homes occupied by unrelated individuals. When Bly visits the Magdalen Benevolent Home for wayward women, she pays relatively little attention to the domestic arrangements therein. In fact, her article suggests that the Home offers only a momentary reprieve in the residents’ inevitable descent down “the toboggan slide of sin.”57 Domestic matters receive more


attention in the madhouse stunt, since a working women’s boarding house is the setting for much of the first installment, but Bly draws few connections between living arrangements and women’s lives. The bare tables in the dining room spur Bly to remark on the “cheapness of linen and its effect on civilization,” but her concern seems hollow. As a “home” for “deserving women,” Bly declares, the boarding house makes a mockery of that term. This dissonance threatens no moral degeneration, however; Bly is more concerned that such charity takes a “repulsive form” (6). At Blackwell’s Island, Bly doesn’t seem recognize the asylum as a home at all, suggesting just how detached she is from womanly reform’s ingrained belief in the transformative powers of a nurturing domestic sphere. Simply put, Bly’s meager interest in reforming her ostensible subjects obviates the need to assess the influence of home life, whether malignant or benign, upon their character or behavior. Nor does she seek to demonstrate her own home-making skills. Despite lengthy stays on three ocean liners during the trip around the world, Bly’s rooms merit hardly a mention amid her descriptions of the ships’ accommodations. 58

Bly’s relative inattention to domestic environments points to the instrumental nature of her association with womanly reform. Where Campbell outlines a sweeping vision for the future, which encompasses industrial education, eradicating the tenements, and rooting out greed from every level of the economic system, Bly’s aims are far less ambitious. She briefly assumes responsibility for a handful of women at the asylum, namely those who were wrongfully committed or driven mad by their experience once inside. For the vast majority of patients, however, she can imagine only modest improvements in food, clothing, and treatment. Her subsequent stunts display an even

---

58 When she does discuss her rooms, it usually relates to interruptions in her sleep.
more muted reform impulse. Since Bly is not principally concerned with changing the lives of her subjects, she is far less judgmental than Campbell, rarely invoking explicitly moralistic, much less religious, standards. (Her visit to the prostitute’s home is a notable exception in that she repeatedly uses the word “sin.”

59) Campbell, in contrast, intersperses sympathetic images of working women’s endless toil with scathing dismissals of them as “ignorant, blind, stupid, incompetent in every fibre.”

60 Campbell’s status as an agent of reform licenses her (and Tribune readers like her) to not only judge the poor, but to assume responsibility for “fixing” them as well. Her insistence that poverty must be eradicated and slum dwellers instilled with middle-class notions of domesticity in order to maintain social stability and protect the nation’s larger claims to civilization illustrates the imperial dimensions of urban reform in the Victorian era.

61 While Bly, too, would surely count herself among American civilization’s finest representatives, her stunts are not animated by this drive to remake the poor in her image.

Campbell’s secure position in the empire of reform meant that there was little need to justify her presence in the city’s slums. Although her proposed solutions, which tended toward socialism, were more radical than the Tribune could support, Campbell’s methods were quite conventional. Her forays into New York’s poorest districts violated

59 Bly, “In the Magdalen’s Home,” p. 29.

60 Campbell, 245.

61 While this assumption was hardly radical in reform circles, Campbell’s proposals for achieving this ideal state were more controversial. The Tribune’s editorial commentary grew increasingly critical as the series progressed. For instance, the paper sharply disagreed with Campbell’s portrayal of the servant problem, accusing her of considering only the perspective of the ideal servant. Campbell countered these charges with stories of sexual violation. The Tribune also took exception to Campbell’s call to take what was “best in socialism” in order to improve the situation of workers. While Campbell is at pains to differentiate herself from radical ideas in the series, reassuring readers that she writes “not as anarchist; not as declaimer against the full right to ownership of all legitimately acquired property,” she would go on to become a more active socialist. She joined the Boston Nationalist Club in the late 1880s and contributed to The Nationalist. Henry, 22, 25.
the traditional bounds of woman’s sphere, but in the name of reform’s civilizing mission.

If we get little sense of Campbell’s experience during her travels through the tenements, her elusive physical presence hardly seems a sign of stress. Although Campbell had divorced her husband by the time of the Tribune series, her claims to feminine respectability remained strong. Her writing career, ranging from sober examinations of poverty to children’s literature to the home economics manual, was grounded in the cultural authority accorded to middle-class womanhood. As an active member of Sorosis, the flagship of the women’s club movement, Campbell kept company with a group of well-educated, independent women, many of whom had professional careers combining salaried work and reform efforts. In short, the gulf separating Campbell from her subjects is assured. The sweeping judgments and expansive vision for the future articulated in Prisoners of Poverty stem from this well-founded confidence. She enjoys the protection of what we might call “morality armor,” an amalgam of existing class and gender privileges fortified by the institutional backing of reform.

What Campbell’s position as an agent of reform did not permit was the kind of excessive self-interest that characterizes Bly’s stunts. As the ever-present narrator, organizing and interpreting her material, Campbell naturally casts a long shadow over the essays comprising Prisoners of Poverty. Beyond her well-developed views on the evils of piece work and the benefits of “clubbing,” readers would be hard pressed to describe the author as a distinct individual based on this text. Campbell’s focus on the poor, if sometimes self-referential, plainly dominates the series. The same cannot be said for Bly’s stories in the World. What most clearly distinguishes Bly’s madhouse stunt from traditional reform writing is the relatively minor role the patients play in the exposé.

Although Bly tantalizes readers with the terrifying prospect of coming face to face with insanity, the madwomen are ultimately crowded out by her own adventure duping the experts and enduring asylum conditions in her still-sane state.

Given this framing and the suggestive nature of the stunt, which implicitly raised the question of whether mimicking insanity would somehow alter an otherwise sound mind, we might expect Bly to sharply differentiate herself from the “real” patients at Blackwells’ Island, whom she outwardly resembles. However, the young reporter exerts far greater effort distancing herself from the working-class women she encounters in the process. Bly’s struggle to assert her class and gender position in her initial stunt demonstrates the way in which the pieces of her armor function together.

“Behind Asylum Bars” But Still Bly

As Bly prepares for her “ordeal,” she makes clear that the abyss she plans to cross is one of sanity and class (2). Having no personal experience with “crazy people,” she spends the evening making faces before her mirror, imitating the distant stare that, according to what she has read, characterizes the insane (4). She frets that her skills as an actress are not sufficient to convince “a crowd of people,” much less the “learned physicians” who specialize in such ailments (4). Before her debut as a madwoman, however, Bly must first pass as a working-class girl. She explains that she will “go insane” only after moving into a women’s boarding house, confident that the residents will quickly call the police and so begin her journey through the courts to Blackwell’s Island (5). This, too, presents a challenge for the aspiring actress. “My acquaintance with the struggling poor, except my own self,” Bly teasingly confides to readers, “was very
superficial” (4). Nonetheless, she ascends to the stage the next morning following her final preparations. She bids a melodramatic farewell to “a few of the most precious articles known to modern civilization,” her soap and toothbrush, and dons the “old clothing” she has “selected for the occasion,” making sure to keep less than a dollar in her pocket (4). Bly’s costuming is a telling detail. Posing as working class means not only means leaving the soap behind, it means leaving the confines of civilization.

Once admitted to the boarding house, Bly quickly begins her descent into madness. Yet her “crazy” behavior most closely resembles that of an elite woman trapped in a nightmarish working-class world. To convince the boarding house matron to call the authorities, “Miss Brown” remarks repeatedly upon the legions of workers in the city, claiming to be frightened of the other women in the house who look “horrible” or “crazy,” and bemoaning the many murderers who are never apprehended (7). Her refusal to lay down to sleep that night may also be read as a sign of apprehension. When questioned about her work experience, “Miss Brown” claims never to have held a job. She soon begins asking about her lost trunks, in keeping with her invented backstory about arriving from her hacienda in Cuba, and consents to go to the police station only on the pretense that they are holding her belongings. Standing before Judge Duffy, Bly strikes a haughty pose, refusing to lift her veil until the judge reminds her that even the Queen of England would have to comply with the request. She refuses to be seen by the reporters Duffy has summoned, and complains throughout the stunt about being subjected to the penetrating gaze of strangers. Most offensive to Bly are the “rough looking” orderlies who periodically attempt to escort her only to be rebuffed (17). After one man grasps her arm tightly, Bly retorts, “How dare you touch me?,” and quickly explains to
the reader that she momentarily “forgot [her] role” (18). To the contrary, the patronizing remark is entirely in keeping with the rest of her performance.

Bly’s regal posture suggests that she was willing to forgo the appearance of sanity for the sake of her “mission,” yet cannot bear to relinquish her class privilege. Was this balancing act persuasive? The responses of those she encountered, as reported (however accurately) in Bly’s narrative and in the secondary coverage of the stunt, suggests that it was indeed credible. *Ten Days in a Mad-House* is full of instances in which Bly demands special treatment and receives it, validating her status. Upon first hearing Bly’s dignified voice, Judge Duffy immediately shifts from a gruff to a kindly tone. Calling her “my dear child,” Duffy soon declares that this well-dressed “lady” with perfect English is “somebody’s darling” (13, 14). He complies with Bly’s request not to be stared at, taking her into a back office to continue their conversation. At the end of the interview, “Miss Brown’s” sanity remains in doubt, but the judge is fully confident of her social position. 63 Reluctantly handing Bly over to the ambulance surgeon, Duffy instructs him to treat her kindly since “anyone can see she is a good girl” (15). The surgeon follows the judge’s lead; when Bly rebuffs the orderly’s grip, the surgeon steps in to provide a more suitable escort.

A rough-looking man came forward, and catching hold of me attempted to drag me out as if I had the strength of an elephant . . . The doctor, seeing my look of disgust, ordered him to leave me alone, saying that he would take charge of me himself. He then lifted me carefully out and I walked with the grace of a queen past the crowd that had gathered curious to see the new unfortunate (17).

63 Judge Duffy speculates that she may have been drugged, but cannot be sure until a few days have passed (15).
This pattern continues throughout Bly’s account, with nurses occasionally providing special food when Bly rejects the usual dreary fare.\textsuperscript{64}

Articles about the mystery patient in other newspapers, which the \textit{World} proudly excerpted in its own pages, largely confirm Bly’s version of her reception. Details provided by the \textit{Sun}, \textit{Herald}, and \textit{Evening Telegram} indicate that her mad act may have been more dynamic than her narrative suggests, but they also clearly establish “Miss Brown’s” identity as an elite young woman. These preliminary accounts are critical to Bly’s public persona since they created an initial image of Bly in readers’ minds before her official debut. Many articles emphasize “Brown’s” wealth, including minute descriptions of the girl’s fashionable attire (calling into question Bly’s claim to have worn “old clothes”), her habit of being “waited on,” possibly by slaves, and rumors about the fine possessions she left back in Cuba. More often, the articulation of her class status is inflected by gender. The New York \textit{Herald} exemplifies this conflation, noting that “Brown” shows in her “speech and bearing every evidence of having been well educated and tenderly reared amid refined associations.” More pointedly, the \textit{Herald} assures its readers that there is no evidence “Miss Brown” has been involved in “any unfortunate love affair.” When questioned “with much tact and delicacy . . . by one of her own sex,” she innocently responded “without exhibiting the least indication of anything but surprise.”\textsuperscript{65} If the \textit{Herald} exceeded its competitors in guarding the reputation of “Miss Brown” as a “good girl,” all framed the episode as a tragedy, a storyline which depends

\textsuperscript{64} At Bellevue Hospital, where she undergoes another round of examination before being sent to Blackwell’s Island, Bly is “favored” by the staff (22). “When I objected to the tin plate in which she had brought my food she fetched a china one for me, and when I found it impossible to eat the food she presented she gave me a glass of milk and a soda cracker” (20). A similar exchange occurs at the next meal.

upon the heroine’s status as a lady. “Nellie Brown’s” madness is no more tragic than that of the asylum’s truly indigent patients who fail to make headlines; the public’s interest in “Brown” stems from the possibility that a terrible fate has befallen “somebody’s darling.”

While compelling, Bly’s overt expressions of ladyhood during the stunt were only one facet of her performance. Readers of Ten Days in a Mad-House were privy to both the young reporter’s actions and her inner commentary on the experience, which carefully reinforced her outward self-presentation as an elite young woman. Even after being stripped of her fashionable garb and hair pins in favor of a cheap white calico and simple braid, Bly retains the intangible markers of class membership. She rails against the asylum’s “enforced idleness,” longing for something to read or an opportunity to discuss the world’s doings. When given a rare opportunity to be active, Bly displays her cultural capital by entertaining the other patients with her piano playing. She also objects strenuously to the physical conditions of asylum life. Her refined taste initially prevents her from eating the spoiled and poorly prepared food on offer. The lack of hygiene pains her, particularly the weekly bath. Forced to bathe in an icy communal tub, scrubbed by a “fiendish” madwoman, and in full view of the nurses and other patients, the episode marks Bly’s greatest humiliation and the clearest violation of class and gender codes. To recoup, she mounts a lightning-quick series of defenses. For a brief moment, she resembles Cushing, assuring readers that she protested vehemently throughout the ordeal and refused to remove her clothes until they were 

---

66 Bly uses this phrase to describe the environment at the women’s boarding house, where she’s astounded at many residents’ ability to sit and do nothing. This is one of several parallels between working women and the patients at the asylum.

finally taken from her. Bly's feisty attitude resurfaces once she is out of the tub, however. Realizing how absurd—even "insane"—she must look, Bly erupts into "roars of laughter," easily making light of her recent trauma (33). A moment later, her mood shifts again, as she watches her new friend Tillie Maynard, who is not insane but recovering from a fever, being dunked into the frigid water. Bly, in a show of selfless feminine sympathy, vows that she would gladly endure the bath again if it would save Tillie the experience. Finally, Bly vainly requests a nightgown from one of the nurses, demonstrating that she has not lost her sense of modesty.

The bath scene illustrates how effectively Bly exploited the divide between the actual stunt and her narrative account of it. Seizing upon this temporal disconnect and readers' reliance on her first-hand knowledge of the events described, Bly uses the space to display her bourgeois subjectivity, a more subtle indicator of class status that countered the indignities suffered during the stunt itself. This insight into Bly's inner thoughts compels readers to experience the stunt from her perspective exclusively and reinforces their perception of the author's immense personality.

Whereas Bly's alter ego "Nellie Brown" has lost all trace of self beyond her name and place of birth, Bly the narrator has no such trouble. To keep herself awake during her stay at the boarding house, the ever industrious reporter turns to observing the vermin scampering across the room, reporting that she made some "valuable discoveries in natural history" as a result. Bly also undertakes a review of her life, tellingly comparing the people and incidents she recalls to the pages of a book. At the close of this exercise, she remarks, "That was the greatest night of my life. For a few hours I stood face to face with 'self!'" (10). Like a realist novel, with its meticulous dramas of character
motivation and reverberating consequence, Bly finds her own recollections fascinating enough to ward off drowsiness. Her inclination and ability to engage in this sort of extended self-reflection was considered characteristic of elite subjectivity in the late nineteenth century. Whether it was the ascendancy of Realism or the rise of a therapeutic culture with its notions of the “sick” self, the bourgeoisie’s investment in elaborating the complex individuality and psychological depth of its members permeated Gilded Age society.68

Once she’s received a diagnosis of hysteria and been admitted to Blackwell’s Island, Bly continues to observe and process her surroundings. She is attuned to bodily sensations but never to the point that they overwhelm the life of the mind. Her capacity to experience the physical world while simultaneously analyzing it in a detached fashion is also a middle-class trait, notes Eric Schocket. In his study of “class transvestites” who temporarily adopted working-class identities in order expose the suffering of the poor, Schocket cites Bly’s stunt writing as the beginning of this trend.

It is this ability to remain observant in the midst of subjection that distinguishes these class-transvestite narrators from other classed subjects of this era’s literature, and that marks these as middle-class texts about the working and lower classes. Throughout their journeys to the realm of “misery,” these narrators never relinquish their role as translators of experience and mediators between “knowing” and “being.”69

While Bly’s work differs from that of Schocket’s primary subjects in some ways, namely the motivation for and duration of her stunts, the stunt-girl genre insists on the mind’s triumph over bodily experience. The laboring classes were commonly seen as less


69 Schocket, 110-11.
evolved and therefore dominated by their instinctive, animal natures. Unlike more “civilized” members of society who had learned to defer pleasure in pursuit of larger goals, their bodily needs were believed to overwhelm the mind’s rational objectives. Following this logic, insanity might be understood as a more severe instance of the poor’s inability to subordinate body to mind, in which the two become completely disconnected. When one has “lost” one’s mind, the body is no longer disciplined by a higher authority. More specifically, the popular Victorian diagnosis of “hysteria” designated a woman as excessively sensitive and irrationally emotional—essentially categorizing her as all body. Bly’s narrative amply contradicts the implications of her supposed ailment, laying bare a rich, inner life organized by objective observation and reflection upon the material world.

Of course, Bly’s running commentary on her asylum experience was by no means limited to staid, quasi-scientific observations. Her narrative is speckled with humorous asides, light-hearted moments, sneaking smiles and threatened laughter, flirtations with doctors and other minor vanities. For instance, Bly abandons her plan to have herself transferred to the Island’s harshest wards after hearing other patients recount the beatings they received there, declaring, “I decided not to risk my health—and hair—so I did not get violent” (50). When a handsome young doctor visits her room during her first night in the asylum and puts his arm “soothingly around [her] shoulders,” Bly complains to the reader, “It was a terrible task to play insane before this young man, and only a girl can sympathize with my position” (22). In response to the doctor’s question, “Don’t you remember me?,” Bly silently remarks with a wink, “I should not forget him” (23). Although much of this had to be concealed during the stunt itself, lest she give herself and her sanity away, Bly’s vivacious personality and bubbly confidence pervade the
written account of the adventure. Her pluck, the adjective most often used to describe the
gutsy reporter, is on full display. All of which contributes to the impression that the stunt
is not so very dangerous, and certainly no match for Bly’s resolve. While her stunt
courted a potential loss of bodily control, Bly’s assertion of narrative control, exemplified
by her forceful personality, decisively abolishes that threat.

Writing for *The World* gave Bly an opportunity to edit her experience at the
asylum and inject her personality into the account, but this was only the first round of
revision. Both the book version and Bly’s article in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* show further
alterations. *Ten Days in a Mad-House* offers a notably different report of Bly’s nocturnal
activities at the boarding house. She pares down the gruesome details of her natural
history lesson for the printed volume, perhaps to protect the squeamish or downplay her
contact with vermin. More importantly, Bly amplifies the review of her life, which
consumed a mere “five minutes” in the *World* version, into an exhilarating encounter
with “self.” Her bedside interview with the handsome doctor also gets a makeover,
probably in response to criticism in the press of his familiarity. After pointedly noting
that he had “the air and address of a gentleman,” Bly explains that “some people have
since censured this action, but I feel sure, even if it was a little indiscreet, that the young
doctor only meant kindness to me” (22). Such alterations seek to answer any lingering
doubts about Bly’s class and gender status.

“Among the Mad,” which did not appear in *Godey’s* until January 1889,
represents the final, and most abbreviated, incarnation of Bly’s madhouse stunt. Bly’s
tactics shift somewhat here; there are fewer markers of class status and ladyhood, but also

---

70 Nellie Bly, “Behind Asylum Bars: The Mystery of the Unknown Insane Girl,” *New York
World*, 9 October 1887, p. 25.
fewer challenges to her respectability. The patients’ role in the narrative is significantly diminished, while Bly’s dominance intensifies. Instead of using the prospect of reform, which isn’t mentioned until much later in the article, to justify her stunt, Bly calls attention to her “desperate” financial straits, a point entirely omitted from the earlier versions. Friendless in a new city, facing discrimination from editors who dismiss women reporters as “no good,” and finally robbed of her last pennies, Bly talks her way into the World’s offices, a feat in and of itself, to pitch her suggestions. This Bly is more determined, and smug, than ever. Commenting on her dogged pursuit of employment at the World, she declares, “I always say energy rightly applied and directed will accomplish anything. I accomplished my purpose.”

To further distance herself from sensation journalism, Bly excises many descriptions of her “mad” behavior. She is much more an observer than a participant in this account, and her interactions with other patients are quite minimal. On the few occasions when the madwomen emerge from the background, they are terrifying figures “whose proximity alone fills our souls with sickening horror.” As her use of the plural possessive suggests, Bly subtly aligns herself with her middle-class readership, while curtailing her association with the other patients. Readers drawn into the story through Bly’s personal drama of finding a job, testing her acting talents, losing faith in the authority of medical experts (an anxiety felt more acutely among the bourgeoisie), and finally escaping this “hell on earth,” have little opportunity to step beyond her controlling consciousness.

---

71 Bly, “Among the Mad,” 1.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., 7.
All three versions of Bly's madhouse stunt express contemporary concerns about doctors' expertise, although these anxieties are most pronounced in the Godey's article, in keeping with that publication's more middlebrow and more feminine readership. However, Bly reserves her harshest invective for the asylum's nurses, whom she explicitly charges with cruelty and ignorance. Not coincidentally, the nurses also serve as a rich point of contrast in the construction of Bly's class status, particularly its gender component. As Bly's descriptions make clear, the nurses are most assuredly not ladies.

The nurses' malice toward the inmates, including taunting, intimidation, and fierce beatings, accentuates Bly's kindly gestures toward these women. To Bly's reminders that the city "pays people to be kind to the unfortunates brought here," the nurses respond that charity patients deserve no better. "This is charity," Miss Grupe barks, "and you should be thankful for what you get" (33). From the nurses' perspective, the patients are there to serve them. The patients provide free labor, as they are forced to clean both the ward and the nurses' own quarters, and frequent entertainment for these white-capped tyrants. Urena Little-Page, to take one example, had been "born silly" and was especially thin-skinned, like "many sensible women," about her age (42). Once aware of this weakness, the nurses tease Urena relentlessly until she becomes hysterical. To quiet the now annoying patient, they slap and choke her, finally dragging her into a closet to smother her cries. Pairing these incidents of abuse with her sympathetic descriptions of individual patients underscores Bly's superiority to the nurses. Similarly, their coarse behavior, including spitting, foul language, and gossip, renders Bly's more refined.

Miss Grady nearly always interspersed her conversation with profane language, and generally began her sentences by calling on the name of the Lord. The names
she called the patients were of the lowest and most profane type. One evening she 
quarreled with another nurse . . . and when the nurse had gone out she called her 
bad names and made ugly remarks about her (44-5).

As this passage suggests, the nurses’ bad behavior often carries sexual overtones. 
For example, this same nurse is one of two attendants who whisper “perfectly vile things” 
into a patient’s ear, urging her to use these insults against another nurse. The patient, 
however, refuses to pass along the slurs, proving that, “even in her state,” she “had more 
sense” than her keepers (42-3). In retaliation, Miss Grady spits in her ear. The nurses, 
particularly Miss Grady, clearly possess the sort of vulgar knowledge of which a lady 
should be ignorant.74 When they prod Bly to talk about “lovers,” asking if she would not 
like to have one, the young reporter primly notes her disinterest in such matters, saying, 
“they did not find me very communicative on the—to them—popular subject” (45).

Again and again, Bly’s womanly innocence throws the nurses’ worldly ways into 
sharp relief. When Bly asks the nurses for additional clothing, “at least as much as 
custom says women should wear,” the nurses refuse (36). Bly even turns her 
embarrassing public bath into an indictment of the nurses’ lack of respect for feminine 
modesty. As patients and nurses gather together to watch the proceedings, Bly observes, 
“It was useless even to beg for privacy. Insane people are not supposed to have any 
feeling that should, in any way, be respected by nurses.”75 The madwomen are exempt 
from this criticism, but the nurses are no better than the gawking crowds that gaze at Bly 
throughout the narrative. In contrast to Miss Grupe’s brazen flirtation with one of the

74 When Bly is finally moved out of her ward after complaining to the assistant superintendent 
about her treatment, Miss Grady hisses, “You d—n hussy, you forget all about yourself, but you never 
forget anything to tell the doctor” (49).

75 Bly, “Among the Mad,” 6.
physicians, in which the two call each other by their first names, Bly takes immediate
offense when another doctor asks if she is a “woman of the town.” Although she
responds by claiming a lady’s ignorance, Bly’s asides to the reader indicate that she is
more savvy than her pose of sheltered innocence suggests. So “heartily disgusted” is Bly
by this impudent inquiry that she “felt like slapping him in the face” (21). This
exchange—particularly the absence of an actual slap in the face—illustrates the delicate
balance underlying Bly’s brand of modern femininity. She upholds the core values of
middle-class womanhood, namely sexual propriety and restraint, while strategically
revealing her feisty personality to the reader. Her righteous indignation affirms her status
as a lady even as her threatened slap marks her as a spirited rebel.

In many respects, the working-class nurses are a distorted image of their patients:
their words cannot be trusted; their reactions are often unpredictable or violent; they
make inappropriate sexual advances and comments; and they frighten Bly. The
prominence given to the nurses suggests that, contrary to the stunt’s flashy headlines, Ten
Days in a Mad-House has more to do with intersections between gender and class than a
young reporter’s brush with insanity. Whereas the working class is presumed unable to
subordinate bodily desires to the mind’s rational control, the madwomen have “lost” their
minds entirely. Likewise, the nurses’ loose morals appear amplified in the voracious
sexual appetite routinely attributed to mentally ill women, an assumption documented in
the secondary coverage of Bly’s stunt. In an interview with the World, the ambulance
surgeon who accompanied Bly claimed he already suspected that she was “romancing.”
Unlike the truly insane women, this “refined looking girl” didn’t “make violent love”
toward him during the ride. The physician who visited Bly on her first night in the
asylum advanced a similar claim, explaining that had the patient been crazy, she would have enjoyed having his arms around her neck. Through these parallels, the narrative constructs a continuum from bourgeois sensibility to working class to insane such that the "mad women" appear to be exaggerated versions of their laboring sisters.

The Horror of Blending into the Crowd: Bly and Verena as Modern Celebrities

In exacerbating the inmates’ daily suffering and using threats of violence to silence their complaints to the doctors, the nurses are a vibrant, fully realized terror in Ten Days in a Mad-House. Although the power to condemn or release a patient ultimately lies with the doctors, the nurses are clearly the villains of the text. The nurses may only be functionaries in a larger bureaucratic machine, but their petty viciousness makes plain the cruelty of this implacable institution. The doctors, while occasionally hurtful toward their charges, such as fiercely pinching Bly in the ribs to teach her to obey, provide a professional façade. Relative to the nurses’ control over minute aspects of these women’s lives, the physicians’ unfounded arrogance is more galling than terrifying.

Of course, the patients are also an object of fear for Bly, particularly as she prepares for the stunt. As the door locks behind her, Bly revels in her fate.

In spite of the knowledge of my sanity and the assurance that I would be released in a few days, my heart gave a sharp twinge. Pronounced insane by four expert doctors and shut up behind the unmerciful bolts and bars of a madhouse! Not to be confined alone, but to be a companion, day and night, of senseless chattering lunatics; to sleep with them, to eat with them, to be considered one of them...

228
Her expectations turn out to be somewhat overstated, however. While some patients are truly frightening, like the woman who creeps around the locked room she shares with Bly searching for someone she plans to kill, many induce pity rather than dread. Bly meets a number of women who are committed due to a lack of social agency rather than a mental defect, including a foreign woman separated from her family, a (possibly adulterous) wife locked up by a ruthless husband, and a domestic servant sent away after losing her temper on the job. Worse still is the case of Miss Maynard, whom Bly initially befriends. Already weakened by a fever when she arrives at Blackwell’s Island, the harsh conditions—frigid temperatures, cold baths and poor food—slowly drive her insane.

The single instance in which the patients become truly horrifying is Bly’s first walk through the asylum grounds. In this pivotal scene, which appears in some form in all three versions, Bly’s narrative pace slows as she lavishly describes the bizarre sight. What appears benign at first—all the women eagerly dressing for a brief respite outdoors—quickly turns terrifying.

We had not gone many paces when I saw, proceeding from every walk, long lines of women guarded by nurses. How many there were! Every way I looked I could see them in the queer dresses, comical straw hats and shawls, marching slowly around. I eagerly watched the passing lines and a thrill of horror crept over me at the sight. Vacant eyes and meaningless faces, and their tongues uttered meaningless nonsense. . . . Can you imagine the sight? (37-8)

The group’s collective madness is certainly an important component of Bly’s horror. This is the first time the reporter grasps the size of Blackwell’s population, which she cites as 1600 women, and it is also her first glimpse of the most troubled patients, who are visibly disturbed and only allowed outside when attached to a rope. Yet, there is also something else at work in this passage. The patients are disconcerting in their sameness.
The matching outfits are initially a source of amusement. Having temporarily lost her friend, Miss Neville, in the homogenous crowd, Bly removes her hat to search for her and both women laugh when reunited. As she grasps the magnitude of the crowd, however, Bly's festive demeanor disappears. Uniformity on such a scale—a multitude molded into "one senseless mass of humanity"—is deeply disconcerting.

This mass of indistinguishable women may have been especially chilling for an attention-seeker like Bly, but it also speaks to broader anxieties in late nineteenth-century American culture. Gotham's residents, who comprised Bly's primary readership, were exceptionally well placed to appreciate the effects of a rapidly changing, modernizing nation. Becoming an anonymous cog in this giant engine was a very real possibility. The scene evokes a tangle of fears associated with the age of the crowd, not only the difficulty of distinguishing oneself within the throng, but also the prospect of being unable to connect meaningfully with others. After all, what sort of relationship could be forged between madwomen?

Cultural historian Warren Susman argues that the sweeping transformations during this period, as American society moved from a producer to a consumer ethos, also necessitated a new vision of self appropriate to the emerging mass society. The old notion of character, with its emphasis on moral striving, honor, and self-discipline, was gradually supplanted by the concept of personality. Whereas character was associated with words like citizenship, duty, integrity, and work, personality is described by terms like magnetic, dominant, forceful, stunning, and fascinating, most of which emphasize others' perception of the individual with little regard for more objective moral
standards. Personality for Susman refers to both the unique qualities of an individual and the display of that self to others. In a world of personality, everyone is a performer playing to an ever-present audience; the success or failure of the “show” largely depends on their response. Although this transition was uneven and incomplete, with elements of the old regime of character persisting, often in distorted form, the shift is evident in advice manuals published in the first decade of the twentieth century, according to Susman. Readers were taught how to cultivate their personalities, which paradoxically included both being yourself and winnowing out less pleasing qualities, in order to achieve a happier, more fulfilling life. By learning to attract others with their “magnetic” personalities, they would become leaders at home, at work, and in the community. In short, they would be regarded as “Somebody” by their friends, family and colleagues.

It is but a short leap from this vision of a performing self, possessing distinctive yet widely appealing qualities, to the modern notion of star power.

Nellie Bly exemplifies both components of personality, suggesting Susman’s concept can be usefully extended into the last decades of the nineteenth century. By filtering all her journalistic adventures through her own perception, Bly puts her personality quirks on display for thousands upon thousands of New York World readers. Her plucky persona, which oscillates between touting her vulnerability then scoffing at the challenges inherent in her stunts, is a carefully crafted performance of self. Henry James’ character Verena Tarrant offers another instance of Gilded Age personality, though in a slightly different vein. Embraced by the Boston women’s movement, Verena

---

78 Susman, 273-4, 277.

79 Susman, 274.

80 Susman, 277.
offers few ideas for improving women’s lot, but boasts a remarkable ability to incite enthusiasm for the cause. Verena’s talent is partially rooted in her “lovely” voice and James devotes considerable attention in the novel to describing this extraordinary instrument (317). Advice manuals for the personality-deficient likewise dwelt on this capacity, counseling readers that a pleasing and persuasive speaking voice was crucial to their makeover. However, Verena’s true charm, which is felt by audiences and individual characters, lies in her ability to exhibit herself unabashedly. During her first impromptu speech at Miss Birdseye’s, James’ narrator explains the young girl’s allure in this way: “it was simply an intensely personal exhibition and the person making it happened to be fascinating” (55, emphasis added). As an object of fascination for a variety of listeners, ranging from the Female Solidarity Convention to a clique of Harvard men and New York’s elite, Verena’s career seems torn from the pages of one of Susman’s advice manuals.

The effect of this young woman is delicious and decidedly new—so much so that James’ characters struggle to account for Verena’s charisma. For Basil Ransom, Verena’s thoughts are irrelevant; as part of his strange courtship, the Mississippian coolly remarks, “I don’t listen to your ideas; I listen to your voice” (298). While this reactionary’s dismissal comes as no surprise, more enlightened listeners are also enthralled by their encounter with the red-haired lecturess. James reinforces the impression that Verena offers more style than substance with his habit of substituting audience reactions to the speeches in place of her words. His refusal to address the

---

demands of the contemporary women's movement, as well as his often unflattering
depiction of its members, might be interpreted as a lack of interest in, or even hostility
toward, the "woman question." Indeed, Verena's engaging presence and gift for public
speaking are perfectly suited to a movement James depicts as relentlessly focused on
attracting new supporters to the apparent exclusion of more substantive goals. Yet James
was clearly piqued by women's increasing visibility in the public sphere and, in
particular, the terms by which they gained access to that realm. Through the character of
Verena Tarrant, James explores the convergence of women's entry into public life and
the new culture of publicity, which is epitomized in the novel by hungry newspapermen
and celebrity portraits in drugstore windows. Given James' well-documented concerns
about the interpenetration of public and private life and his detailed descriptions of
Verena's mesmerizing effect on her listeners, it seems more appropriate to read his
emphasis on the superficiality of her appeal as an indictment of Victorian audiences and
the declining state of public discourse.82 Verena may be the poster girl for a rather
nebulous cause, but her admirers—corrupted by publicity's toxic influence and infatuated
with her "new" style—hardly seem to mind (46).

The Bostonians is one of several novels in which James documents the Victorian
public's hunger for access to "fascinating" personalities like Verena's. His novels of this
period, which are rife with prying journalists like Matthias Pardon in The Bostonians,
Henrietta Stackpole in The Portrait of a Lady (1881), and George Flack in The

82 Joyce A. Rowe suggests a similar reading: "Thus the concerns that motivate [James's] novel are
less a matter of [his] male 'hysteria' over female public speaking per se . . . , than of his prescience about
the social and psychic debasement endemic to the ethos of advancing capitalism and the perversions of
speech upon which it feeds, and for which the woman's movement serves as a convenient dramatic marker."
Joyce A. Rowe, "'Murder, what a lovely voice!': Sex, Speech, and the Public/Private Problem in The
Bostonians," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 40, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 158-84,
http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.wm.edu/itx/start.do?prodId=AONE.
Reverberator (1888), depict a growing publicity machine that turns private matters into fodder for public consumption. As agents of the public and their insistent right to know, these characters are linked, in Allan Burns’ words, with “the dissolution of the private sphere, a prevailing preoccupation with things of the moment, the rise of commercialism and vulgarity, and the collapse of social ‘forms’ and manners.” In short, they represent the “more distressing manifestations of American democracy’s influence on the life of the individual.” While at the beginning of the decade Isabel Archer affectionately defends her friend Henrietta’s intrusive habits, contending that she is “a kind of emanation of the great democracy—of the continent, the country, the nation,” James’ depiction of journalists grew progressively darker. Henrietta Stackpole and Matthias Pardon are objects of derision but almost comedic figures; they have little impact on the novels’ plots. It is not until The Reverberator’s appearance at the end of the decade that George Flack actually fulfills the journalist’s threat of exposing private matters to public view.

Although Pardon’s influence on the major characters in The Bostonians is quite minimal, as a representative of the voracious publicity machine surrounding Verena, he is a significant figure in the novel. Having begun his journalistic career snooping in hotel guest registers, Pardon is now “the most brilliant interviewer on the Boston press.”

---

83 Richard Salmon notes that James’ early reviews are full of rebukes against the invasions of privacy committed by biographers, journalists, and publishers of authors’ manuscripts. These concerns also appear in stories like “The Aspern Papers,” “Sir Dominick Ferrand,” and “The Right Real Thing.” Richard Salmon, Henry James and the Culture of Publicity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.


85 Ibid. The journalists’ role as representative figures is Burns’s larger point. He notes that the criticisms James applied to his journalists are later applied to the general democratic milieu in The American Scene (1907).
However far his methods have evolved, Pardon’s drive to publicize the private doings of others remains unfettered.

For this ingenuous son of his age, all distinction between the person and the artist had ceased to exist; the writer was personal, the person food for newsboys, and everything and every one were every one’s business. All things, with him, referred themselves to print, and print meant simply infinite reporting, a promptitude of announcement, abusive when necessary, or even when not, about his fellow-citizens. He poured contumely on their private life, on their personal appearance, with the best conscience in the world. His faith . . . was . . . that being in the newspapers is a condition of bliss, and that it would be fastidious to question the terms of the privilege (110-1).

Despite his awareness that newspapermen are often seen as “rather apt to cross the line,” Pardon lacks any sense of boundaries (114). Appearing uninvited at Olive Chancellor’s home, much to the dismay of his reluctant hostess, Pardon presumes to seat himself, again without being asked, before making his crass pitch that the two “run” Verena together (128). Horrified that this impudent reporter would try to turn her soul mate into a money-making venture, Olive soon escorts him to the door. After Olive’s rebuff, Pardon turns to other means to fulfill his prediction that “there’s money for some one in that girl” and proposes marriage (57). In pressing his case with Verena, the reporter/suitor makes no effort to conceal the fact that his interest is both romantic and professional, stressing the prospect of fame more than marital happiness. As both an offer of marriage and a business proposition to “bring [Verena] out,” Pardon’s proposal exemplifies the dissolving boundary between public and private spheres (126).

Verena rejects Pardon’s offer in deference to Olive’s wishes, although she considers the loss of his promised celebrity to be a “sacrifice” (132). Her father, whose

---

86 Pardon returns to Olive’s house in the final chapters of the novel desperately seeking “any personal item” to print in advance of Verena’s appearance at the Music Hall. When Mrs. Luna refuses to oblige him, Pardon presses her to comment on Olive’s role in the whole affair, panting at the prospect of some familial discord. However, Pardon finally shows some sense of discernment after hearing Mrs. Luna’s pronouncement that Verena is a “vulgar idiot,” refusing to print such a distasteful remark (377 ff.)
own appetite for publicity is boundless, approves of the match for precisely that reason. Selah Tarrant, with his shark-like smile, haunts newspaper offices in hopes of insinuating himself into the copy. “He was always trying to find out what was ‘going in’; he would have liked to go in himself, bodily, and, failing in this, he hoped to get advertisements inserted gratis” (94). Like Matthias Pardon, Selah’s “ideal of bliss was to be as regularly and indispensably a component part of the newspaper as the title and date,” yet he is a far more insidious figure in the novel (91). While Pardon’s transgressions are primarily limited to uninvited visits and impertinent questions, Selah’s quest for publicity violates the most hallowed precincts. His attitude toward Verena is truly mercenary. Not only does he envision sharing paragraphs with her in the press, but he eagerly anticipates the day when her performances will also generate “receipts” (92). Most damningly, he shows no compunction at forfeiting his daughter for an entire year to guarantee Olive’s exclusive access to the girl. In accepting Olive’s “very considerable” check, Tarrant signals his willingness to pervert a filial relation into a business transaction, eroding the most fundamental division between public and private spheres (148). Rather than protecting his child, the voracious Tarrant turns her into a commodity. As James had predicted in his initial description of Tarrant’s quest for public exposure, “he would gladly have sacrificed to it the innermost sanctities of home” (92).

Selah Tarrant’s willingness to prostitute his daughter in pursuit of celebrity is a grotesque reflection of the expanding opportunities for public exposure, even momentary celebrity, at the turn of the last century. The tremendous growth in advertising and sensation journalism, two facets of a burgeoning consumer culture, fueled unprecedented
traffic in images and information within American's urban centers. New photographic technology, namely the Kodak camera, allowed amateurs to easily snap pictures of friends, loved ones, and unwitting public figures. Many of the resulting images remained in private hands, but others migrated, becoming part of window displays, newspaper articles, or even advertisements. 88 At the same time, the interview was becoming a popular, if objectionable, feature in newspapers. Although question and answer items had appeared in American newspapers since the 1840s, the interview was criticized by some as an invasive and sensationalist tool for making fools of great men. 89 Nellie Bly made this controversial form one of her specialties; according to biographer Brooke Kroeger, Bly was equally well known for her skills as an interviewer as for her stunts. With flirtatious prodding and unexpected questions, Bly often provided new insight into public figures, whether politicians, performers, civic leaders, or criminals. Even more intrusive than the interview was the gossip column, which was a staple of the sensation papers but appeared in modified form in more respectable publications as well. These brief notes—sightings around town, excerpts from hotel registers, and romantic speculations—turned individuals' daily activities into entertainment for the reader.

While some, like Selah Tarrant, embraced this new publicity machine, many Americans greeted its encroachment into their private lives with more apprehension than enthusiasm. Of particular concern was the circulation of candid photographs, whose unguarded facial expressions were believed to capture a person's "true" self. A public outcry erupted around the case of Abigail Roberson, a Rochester teenager whose image


89 Kroeger, 126.
had been incorporated into the logo of a flour company without her permission. Roberson developed a severe case of neurasthenia as a result of the unwanted exposure and sought $15,000 in damages from the Franklin Mills Company in 1899. She did not claim an injury to her character or reputation, but to her feelings. The alienation of her image, and by extension her private thoughts, and its circulation through the market violated her right to privacy. Although the lower courts sided with Roberson, the New York Court of Appeals reversed these decisions on the grounds that "the law did not protect the constellation of inner feelings that were thought to define personality." In response to widespread condemnation of the final ruling, expressed in newspapers and even a law journal, the New York State Legislature quickly passed an act prohibiting the unauthorized use of a person's name or picture "for the purposes of trade." The law was the first to explicitly protect an individual's right of privacy without reference to infringements of property interest, which were already well established in statutes covering libel, contract, and copyright. Intended to provide a check on the intrusion of consumer culture into the private realm, the law also validated the existence of an inner self in need of protection, inadvertently feeding the publicity machine.\(^1\) The idea of a secret self, a closely guarded realm of thoughts and sentiments that only carefully chosen intimates were privy to, stokes the thrill of access that fueled not only sensation journalism, but the broader celebrity culture which would emerge full blown in the twentieth century. This promised access certainly contributed to Bly's popularity. Her success as an interviewer depended upon being able to offer new tidbits about already well-known individuals. During a visit to John L. Sullivan's training camp, during which Bly peppered the boxer with personal questions and even pinched his muscles, Sullivan

\(^{1}\) Mensel provides an incisive analysis of the Roberson case and its implications, 36-9.
remarked, "You are the first woman who ever interviewed me. And I have given you more than I ever gave any reporter in my life."\(^91\) Bly, of course, printed the quotation, once again making herself a prominent piece of the story. Even when Bly didn’t deliver new insight into public figures, her personality-driven journalism purported to reveal another hidden self—her own.

The interpenetration of public and private spheres was an ominous development in Henry James’ eyes.\(^92\) Soon after the publication of *The Bostonians*, James penned this plaintive assessment of his age.

One sketches one’s age but imperfectly if one doesn’t touch on that particular matter: the invasion, the impudence and shamelessness, of the newspaper and the interviewer, the devouring *publicity* of life, the extinction of all sense of public and private. It is the highest expression of the note of “familiarity,” the sinking of *manners*, in so many ways, which the democraticization of the world brings with it.\(^93\)

The devaluation of privacy James observed in social interactions, the emerging mass culture, and even modern architecture certainly offended the author’s aristocratic tastes. More importantly, Allan Burns argues, these developments threatened the artist’s creative potential. The loss of privacy, in James’ view, tended to “stultify the development of an inner reserve that could muster some sort of resistance to the constant external pressures

\(^91\) Kroeger, 128-9.

\(^92\) In addition to Salmon and Burns, other useful sources on the public/private divide in *The Bostonians* include Ian F. A. Bell, “The Personal, the Private, and the Public in *The Bostonians*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 240-56; and Brook Thomas, “The Construction of Privacy in and around *The Bostonians*,” *American Literature* 64, no. 4 (December 1992): 719-47.

of commercialization and conformity.” In “the land of the ‘open door,’” as James memorably dubbed his native country in *The American Scene* (1907), the spaces—both physical and psychological—which are protected from public scrutiny and therefore conducive to nurturing the self’s creative capacity, are quickly disappearing.

While not a journalist, Verena Tarrant is a “flower of the great Democracy” (99). Like Matthias Pardon, for whom “the newest thing was what came nearest exciting in his mind the sentiment of respect,” Verena is enchanted by the new; she was raised in “an atmosphere of novelty” (111, 64). Indeed, newness is integral to Verena’s appeal. In urging the audience at Miss Birdseye’s to hear from this unknown girl, Pardon characterizes Verena’s talent as “a new style, quite original” (46). The audience concurs; “it was generally admitted that the style was peculiar, but Miss Tarrant’s peculiarity was the explanation of her success” (58). For all his emphasis on Verena’s newness, James does not necessarily imply that she is unique. Rather, she functions as a herald of things to come. Verena offers an extreme example of James’ concerns about modern American culture, particularly the consequences of a life entirely lived in public.

The division between private and public spheres has no place in the Tarrant household and Verena’s unusual upbringing accounts for much of her “peculiarity.” By profession, Selah is a charlatan mesmerist who wishfully calls himself Doctor Tarrant. Tarrant’s obsession with publicity, his complete orientation toward an imagined audience, renders him a perpetual performer. The good doctor is so devoted to his own deceptions that he never concedes—even to his own wife and accomplice—that his

---

94 Burns, 11.

spiritual healing abilities are a sham. Even within the sanctuary of the marital bond, Selah cannot lower his public façade.

Veterans of every social cause and free thinking fad, the elder Tarrants carried their daughter from lecture to meeting to séance night after night. Although Verena does not share her father's duplicity or voracious appetite for publicity, she, too, is always on. Upon first meeting this curious red-haired girl, Basil observes that she

... had the sweetest, most unworldly face, and yet, with it, an air of being on exhibition, of belonging to a troupe, of living in the gaslight, which pervaded even the details of her dress, fashioned evidently with an attempt at the histrionic. If she had produced a pair of castanets or a tambourine, he felt that such accessories would have been quite in keeping (53).

Verena’s public orientation also pervades her personal relationships. As she concedes during a private conversation with Basil, “They tell me I speak as I talk, so I suppose I talk as I speak.” Her suitor forgives this slippage between conversation and performance since “by education, by association” the “lecture-tone was the thing in the world with which . . . she was most familiar” (203) Olive, too, witnesses this overlap. During their heated debates about renouncing marriage and Basil in particular, Verena turns her “abundant eloquence” against her mentor to great effect (339). “The habit of public speaking, the training, the practice, in which she had been immersed, enabled Verena to enroll a coil of propositions dedicated even to a private interest with the most touching, most cumulative effect.” Olive recognizes this passionate display as performance, but is nonetheless moved, giving Verena a silent kiss at its close.96 Verena, James tellingly

96 A similar exchange occurs during the scenes at the Cape later in the novel. “I scarcely venture to think now, what [Olive] may have said to herself, in the secrecy of deep meditation, about the consequences of cultivating an abundant eloquence. Did she say that Verena was attempting to smother her now in her own phrases? did she view with dismay the fatal effect of trying to have an answer for everything?” (339).
notes, interprets this gesture as proof that Olive believes she has “renounced,” suggesting the Verena is not oblivious to her power (270).

In contrast to Abigail Roberson, Verena neither recognizes nor objects to her commodification. She greetsthe display of her image in drugstore windows with equanimity. The sale of her photograph and biography at the Music Hall is not troubling, nor is receiving payment for speaking, as she does from Mrs. Burrage (272). In the caustic words of Mrs. Luna, Verena “looks like a walking advertisement” (232). While Olive frets that the Harvard gentlemen regard her protégé as merely an afternoon’s entertainment, Verena is utterly unfazed by this prospect. Even the realization that her parents have been “bought off” by Olive merits no complaint. It was, in Olive’s view, impossible “ever to offend her,” as Verena was “too detached from conventional standards, too free from private self-reference” (155). All of this suggests that perhaps Verena has no core self in need of protection.

Phillip Fisher contends that Verena begins to forge a private, authentic self when she conceals from Olive her walk through Cambridge with Basil. By obscuring certain acts and emotions from Olive, sheltering pieces of her self from public view, Verena moves toward the “full possession of an individual self.” For Fisher, the life of performance and celebrity that Olive offers is incompatible with an “intimate and human-scale personality,” which can only be achieved by disappearing into Basil’s domestic realm. While the disruption in Verena’s otherwise frank relations with Olive marks a significant transition in the novel, it is difficult to concur with Fisher’s positive gloss on

---

97 For the scene at the Tarrant home, see 116-121.

this development. Her break with Olive is brought about by Basil’s superior magnetism, just as Olive’s intensity lured her away from her father. The novel is replete with the language of mesmerism, as well as numerous references to Verena’s malleability. During their outing in Central Park, Verena is lulled by Basil’s “deep, sweet, distinct voice” even as he expresses “monstrous opinions” (294). To explain Verena’s “strange” reaction to this unusual mode of courtship, the narrator observes that

> there was a spell upon her as she listened; it was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne. . . . Her whole relation to Olive was a kind of tacit, tender assent to passionate insistence, and . . . it may be supposed that the struggle of yielding to a will which she felt to be stronger even than Olive’s was not of long duration (294).\(^9^9\)

Verena’s immense desire to please others, which occasions her initial promise to “renounce” marriage, coupled with her propensity to bend before stronger wills, points to the absence of a fully developed self. Without this sense of a protected core, Verena’s increasing commodification cannot register as a violation.

The novel’s other characters affirm this assessment of Verena. Both Basil and Olive see her as a commodity. In trying to account for Verena’s charisma, they insist that it cannot come from the elder Tarrants, opting instead to see Verena’s talents as something miraculous and utterly separate from her vulgar upbringing. Early in their relationship, Olive reflects upon Verena’s inexplicable appeal. “Her qualities had not been bought and paid for; they were like some brilliant birthday present, left at the door by an unknown messenger, to be delightful for ever as an inexhaustible legacy, and

---

\(^9^9\) Basil makes a similar observation later in the scene. “You always want to please some one, and now you go lecturing about the country and trying to provoke demonstrations, in order to please Miss Chancellor, just as you did it before to please your father and mother. It isn’t you, the least in the world, but an inflated little figure (very remarkable in its way too), whom you have invented and set on its feet, pulling strings, behind it, to make it move and speak, while you try to conceal and efface yourself there” (303).
amusing for ever from the obscurity of its source” (104). Despite Olive’s vision of Verena as a product with no maker, she soon finds herself implicitly acknowledging the Tarrants’ claim to their daughter, by paying for exclusive access to the girl.

Basil’s often superficial infatuation with Verena likewise underscores her commodity status. He does not even feign interest in her ideas, treating her as a pleasing bauble destined to love. Although he insists on silencing her public voice, he imagines that Verena’s vocal talents will bring a delightful charm to his fireside—particularly if she becomes a mouthpiece for his reactionary ideas. Finally, as Richard Salmon rightly notes, Basil’s revision of Verena’s image of women trapped in a glass box reveals his perception of the girl as a commodity. When Verena uses the metaphor in her speech before the Wednesday Club, the glass sides are a concession to the box’s occupant, allowing her to peer out into the world without fully participating in its activities. In Basil’s version of the metaphor, the box is not a protective shell, but a display case allowing spectators to view the beautiful creature inside. Verena, in Basil’s eyes, is a living mannequin trapped behind a department store window awaiting a manly rescuer. 100

The effect of Verena’s melodic voice and “new” style on larger audiences provides another link to the emerging consumer culture. From the outset, Verena and her parents insist this “talent” does not belong to the young speaker, but originates from somewhere beyond her. 101 Although this mystical rhetoric disappears once the taint of mesmerism—namely, the roving hands of Selah Tarrant to “start her up”—has been removed from the performances, Verena still acknowledges that she is being fed ideas by

100 Salmon, 29-30.

101 Before her speech at Miss Birdseye’s, Verena and her parents repeatedly disavow ownership of Verena’s gifts, stating that the girl’s charm comes from “some power outside” (49).
Olive (48, 201). Once she has fallen under Basil’s sway, Verena begins to mock her gift and the cause to which she has pledged it. Her alliances may have shifted, but her sense of detachment from her voice remains intact. Just as Olive and Basil deny Verena’s connection to her makers, perceiving her as an inexplicable gift, Verena is alienated from her voice and her ability as a speaker.

During her speech before the “fashionable benighted” gathered at Mrs. Burrage’s home, which is primarily recounted through Basil’s perspective, Verena most clearly speaks as a commodity (255). From his cynical perspective, the young woman resembles “an actress before the footlights, or a singer spinning vocal sounds to a silver thread.” Sensing that this “slim provincial girl” might fail to “fascinate” the audience of “blasé New Yorkers simply by giving them her ideas,” Basil envisions the girl as an acrobat swinging on a trapeze high above the crowd.” His fears prove to be unfounded, as Basil soon realizes Verena is “in perfect possession of her faculties, her subject, her audience” (236). As the speech progresses and Verena’s hold over her listeners intensifies, Basil notes her growth as a speaker. To assure her listeners’ conversion to the cause, Verena strives to put “the truth into a form that would render conviction irresistible.” Her resolve to turn the group into “a single sentient being” gradually bears fruit as the audience begins to mirror her gestures and emotional cadence. After a few minutes, Basil observes that “she had indeed—it was manifest—reduced the company to unanimity; their attention was anything but languid; they smiled back at her when she smiled; they were noiseless, motionless when she was solemn” (237). As Richard Salmon observes, although Verena’s speech appeals to listeners individually, making each member of the audience feel uniquely set apart from the rest, its cumulative effect unites the group into
unanimous agreement. Her performance thus functions in a manner similar to a mass-produced commodity. Like the beautiful leather shoes which speak “tenderly” to Sister Carrie, such objects promise to fulfill the buyer’s particular desires and remedy her deficits, yet ultimately serve to incorporate her into the larger consuming public, whose ability to see beyond glittery surfaces James held in doubt. For James, the unnerving sameness of Verena’s audience, the loss of individual discernment in thrall to a mesmerizing speaker who woos with spectacle more than substance, signifies publicity’s degradation of public discourse. Like the consumer culture of which it is a part, publicity is the ugly offspring of American democracy’s marriage to capitalism.

The slightly ominous scene at Mrs. Burrage’s, with a crowd of unthinking individuals gathered before a remarkable young woman, offers a muted reminder of Nellie Bly’s terrifying walk through the grounds of Blackwell’s Island, where she first grasps the enormity of the institution and its troubled charges. While James sees Verena as the source of her audience’s disturbing homogeneity and Bly cannot be held responsible for the madwomen’s diminished capacity, both scenes project fears about the mind-dulling uniformity of the modern world. Yet, James and Bly position their readers quite differently, in keeping with the authors’ dissimilar attitudes toward the new culture of publicity. If James judges Verena to be an object more than an agent of these corrosive influences, he nonetheless treats her as a curiosity, a new type of individual who cannot be fully explained. Since her speech, aside from a few paragraphs, is

102 Salmon, 22-3.


104 Allan Burns makes this observation about James’ later work, The American Scene. However, the larger point of his article is that James’ journalists of the 1880s prefigure the criticisms he makes of American society as a whole in The American Scene. Burns, 13.
recounted from Basil’s detached, skeptical perspective, readers are not encouraged to identify the speaker. (Nor do they have an opportunity to align with Verena’s listeners, who, unlike Basil, are visibly moved by her pleas.) Indeed, the narrator spends relatively little time with Verena throughout the narrative and she remains a mysterious void at the center of the novel. In contrast, Bly’s penchant for filtering all experience through her consciousness leaves readers with little choice but to ally with the author/heroine. In contrast to the madwomen who are the object of Bly’s horrified gaze, her readers can see themselves as astute, thinking individuals like the spunky reporter narrating the event. Whatever disturbing parallels James might have seen between Verena and Nellie Bly as representatives of the new culture of publicity, World readers were encouraged each week to approach these developments from a vastly different perspective. Nellie Bly’s articles offered a possible antidote to modernity’s homogenizing forces. By witnessing her personality armor at work, readers gained valuable instruction in how to assert control over a chaotic environment through individual perception. Moreover, Bly’s confessed anxieties and humorous asides offered confirmation of an autonomous self and rich inner world, the sort of subjective compensation that promised to offset readers’ limited power over changing external conditions.

The appeal of Bly’s magnetic personality to World readers of the 1880s was, in part, pedagogical. Her ability to filter new, potentially unsettling experiences, while remaining somewhat detached from these encounters, was a particularly useful skill for urban dwellers at this moment. Nor was Bly alone in offering this lesson. Although the World’s vision of New York was far from orderly or reassuring, the newspaper’s carnivalesque presentation of urban life at least framed the chaos as a form of
entertainment, allowing readers to see the city as spectators rather than discombobulated participants. Indeed, sensational newspapers were one of several contemporary journalistic and literary genres that modeled strategies through which city people might learn to feel at home in this rapidly changing environment. Inter-urban walking tours, featured in periodicals like The Cosmopolitan, The Century, and the Overland Monthly, framed the Old World customs, foreign accents, and peculiar costumes of the city’s ethnic enclaves as a charming aspect of the nation’s increasingly cosmopolitan character. By instilling an appreciation of the urban picturesque, Carrie Tirado Bramen contends that these articles taught readers to greet the diversity and inequality that accompanied modernity’s prosperity with mild surprise and even pleasure. Such tours “provided a pedagogy of spectatorship, instructing the reader how to transform the congested and impoverished districts of the metropolis into a sense of ‘rough and rugged’ pleasure.” 105 Instead of viewing rag-pickers as a troubling sign of class division and potential ethnic strife, intra-urban walking tours prepared readers to understand these sights as an aesthetic spectacle, part of the rich and varied metropolitan experience. More broadly, the genre turned urban residents into tourists within their own cities, encouraging a detached perspective that turned neighbors into aesthetic objects.

Amy Kaplan sees a similar strategy at work in William Dean Howell’s novel of urban settlement, A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890). Howells traces Basil and Isabel March’s exploration of Manhattan as the displaced Bostonians search for a literal and figurative home in their new city. Through the process of house-hunting, the Marches chart a mental map of New York’s neighborhoods, gradually discerning which streets

might provide a suitably respectable residence for the magazine editor and his family. In order to feel truly at home, however, the newcomers need more than a physical sanctuary; they must also master the city's cacophony of sights, smells, sounds, and social diversity. To achieve this elusive sense of control, the Marches imagine New York as a foreign country and themselves as tourists. Through repeated incidents of framing, such as peeking into working-class apartments through the windows of an elevated train, the Marches reduce the overwhelming reality of the city and its Others to discrete scenes that exclude extraneous information. Such carefully delineated images, coupled with the distanced stance of a tourist, allow the Marches to reinterpret formerly unsettling sights as quaint and charming.  

As Kaplan and Bramen's work suggests, the Marches' pose as genteel tourists is part of a rich rhetorical and perceptual interplay between the modern city and more distant realms. Journalists, reformers, and pulp fiction writers regularly depicted the city, and especially its slums, as a foreign land or colony—a domestic Dark Continent. In this displaced drama of exploration and settlement, readers were often charged with civilizing and controlling the unruly natives, typically newly arrived immigrants. Jacob Riis' *How The Other Half Lives*, which alternates between delighting at the tenement districts' street scenes and decrying their miserable living conditions, exemplifies this blending of touristic vision, urban exploration and a civilizing mission.  

Jack London's *People of the Abyss* (1903) invokes the figure of the tourist only to dismiss him: "But O Cook, O


Thomas Cook & Son, pathfinders and trail-clearers . . . unhesitatingly and instantly, with ease and celerity, could you send me to Darkest Africa or Innermost Tibet, but to the East End of London . . . you know not the way.” 108 Whether these texts counseled an explicitly touristic relationship to the city, the looking practices, sense of distance, and objectification inherent in the tourist’s stance often remained intact. According to Ellen Strain, the tourist-spectator position was migrating beyond its traditional settings during these decades as part of the ascendancy of a capitalist world view. As the principles of touristic pleasure were more widely applied, it made possible the “creation of a safety zone within which the exhilaration of geographical proximity with the Other could exist without compromising less literal forms of distance.” 109 Bly’s personality armor likewise provides a safe space from which to view the world.

An American Girl Abroad: Bly’s Trip Around the World

In the months after her madhouse exposé, Nellie Bly became a fixture in the Sunday edition of the New York World. Although subsequent stunts lacked the national reach of her debut effort, Bly’s popularity was such that by May 1888, the World ran a column consisting of Bly’s responses to fan mail. 110 This success also brought imitators. In addition to several rivals at the World, in keeping with Pulitzer’s belief that in-house


competition kept the staff sharp, stunt girl stories appeared in many other newspapers. None of these women attained the same celebrity status as Bly, but the fad threatened to dilute her appeal. Within a few years, the stunt girl persona would become standardized, with the *World* attributing all such stories to “Meg Merrilies.” Bly, however, was not confined to a generic persona and soon applied her vivacious personality—and considerable fame—to other types of stories, which contributed to her career’s longevity. Whether stunts, interviews, or human interest pieces, Bly continued to make herself the focal point of every article. She was notorious for including (and sometimes soliciting) her subjects’ delighted reactions at meeting the legendary Nellie Bly. If these post-asylum assignments presented more modest challenges to the young reporter’s armor, Bly’s demeanor hardly reflected the change. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Bly’s protective bubble is that it enabled her to maintain the same breezy attitude while exposing a sham mesmerist as interviewing former First Ladies.

Bly’s trip around the world, which defied several precepts of appropriate feminine behavior, purported to put this consistency to a new kind of test. In the fall of 1888, Bly brought the idea of a solo trip around the world to her editor, pledging to beat the record set by Jules Verne’s fictional hero, Phileas Fogg, in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which had been published to great acclaim fifteen years earlier. Her editor revealed

---

111 The creation of the “Meg Merrilies” also prevented another female reporter from developing a unique, portable celebrity identity as Nellie Bly had. A nameless stunt girl was in no position to demand higher wages or better assignments, whereas Bly had some leverage in her dealings with the *World.*

112 Kroeger, 216.

that the newspaper was already considering such a stunt, but naturally planned to give the
assignment to a man. A woman, after all, could not be expected to travel abroad alone;
she would require a chaperone and, more importantly for a journey focused on speed, a
retinue of trunks. A lady traveler with these (presumably indispensable) constraints
would never be able to manage the many tight connections necessary to crisscross the
globe in less than 80 days. The publicity-savvy reporter retorted that she would offer her
services to a rival newspaper and beat the World’s man. After assuring her editor that
she would travel alone with minimal baggage, Bly landed what seemed to be her most
audacious stunt.

By the time Bly realized her proposal to “girdle the earth,” American women
were becoming increasingly mobile, both at home and abroad.114 Extended journeys,
facilitated by improvements in steamships and railroad cars, might be undertaken to
maintain family relationships, accompany a spouse on business, or simply for leisure. As
women’s activities outside the home expanded, along with the number of spaces
considered suitable for the weaker sex, shorter excursions into the public domain became
commonplace. However, the extension of women’s activities beyond the domestic
sphere was predicated on upholding other aspects of Victorian gender norms. The spaces
frequented by women were often domesticated, both to entice female customers and
dispel any reluctance. Department stores, whose goods enabled female consumers to
express their femininity and outfit their homes, were largely staffed by women and
offered commercial versions of household services, such as restaurants and tea rooms,

114 The first chapter of Around the World in Seventy-Days is titled “A Proposal to Girdle the
Earth.”
nurseries, and beauty salons.\textsuperscript{115} Railroad cars, as Amy Richter’s work demonstrates, also strove to simulate the comforts of home. Since passengers had little choice but to engage in a variety of domestic activities (eating, sleeping, grooming, childcare) while on board, rail companies sought to create appropriate surroundings with richly appointed parlor and dining cars. Sex-segregated spaces like lavishly decorated ladies’ dressing rooms and men’s smoking cars mimicked the specialized rooms of a Victorian house. All these amenities sought to offset the inevitable concessions to privacy and comfort rail travel required.\textsuperscript{116} Regardless of their physical surroundings, women’s behavior in public was widely believed to hold the key to their treatment.

As mountains of nineteenth-century women’s conduct manuals and travel guides attest, the protections and privileges accorded to ladies—here presumed to be white women like Bly who comprised the majority of travelers, especially abroad—were not guaranteed, but earned. The codes of etiquette rested upon a single key principle: a woman’s dress, behavior, speech, and traveling companions were the signs by which others determined her status and, by extension, the way in which she should be treated. Female travelers abroad, notes Mary Suzanne Schriber, were “subject to a host of perils large and small, either invited or avoided by their comportment and appearance; women who traveled alone or in groups without men were subject to suspicion, expected to take measures to ensure their virtue and the appearance of virtue.”\textsuperscript{117} One contemporary


writer admonished that “in nine cases out of ten” a woman’s mishaps abroad are “due wholly and solely to her own fault . . . [since] the garment of modest purity is as magic a defence today as when Una wore it.”118 Guidebooks like this one promised to teach women how to project their “modest purity” to an audience of foreigners and fellow travelers. As the emphasis on purity and virtue suggests, the consequences for those who failed in this task struck at the heart of Victorian women’s claims to respectability. Although contemporary writers spoke of women being assailed by unseemly looks and comments, such genteel phrasing barely hid the sexually charged subtext.

By agreeing to undertake her world trip without a male companion, Bly forfeited a lady’s most reliable protection against all manner of insult. Bly’s youth exacerbated the appearance of vulnerability, which in turn made her feat all the more impressive. Well-acquainted with the public’s appetite for feminine valor, Bly took the liberty of making herself more girlish during the journey. When she received her permanent passport after arriving in England, having crossing the Atlantic with a temporary one, Bly trimmed her age by three years, making the adventurous reporter appear to be only twenty-two.119

Bly’s lack of luggage was another cause for concern. Without an extra dress or regular access to laundry services, maintaining an appropriate level of cleanliness would be difficult, as Bly well knew. Consequently, she packed her single hand-satchel, an effort deemed the “most difficult undertaking of my life,” with as many feminine

---

118 Elizabeth Bisland, “The Art of Travel,” in The Woman’s Book: Dealing Practically with the Modern Conditions of Home-Life, Self-Support, Education, Opportunities, and Every-Day Problems, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1894), 1: 382-3; quoted in Schriber, 29. This is same Bisland who was Bly’s competitor during her trip around the world.

119 In Bly’s account of her interview at the American Legation, she laughingly dismisses the Secretary’s delicate attempts to ask her age, saying, “I will tell you my age, swear to it, too, and I am not afraid; my companion may come out of the corner” (14). Of course, she then omits her response to the question.
accoutrements as would fit, including three veils, a dressing gown, several complete changes of underwear, an "uncompromising" jar of cold cream, and "a liberal supply of handkerchiefs and fresh ruchings" (4, 5). In the absence of a chaperone and a perfectly polished appearance, it appeared that Bly would have to rely on impeccable behavior to protect her while abroad. For those following her progress at home, the question was not only whether this American girl would best Fogg’s fictional record, but whether she could do so with her blithe attitude in tact.

From all appearances, Bly was successful on both counts. On 25 January 1890, she returned to New York triumphant, having circled the globe in seventy-two days, six hours, and eleven minutes. Although she had only limited contact with the World during the trip, periodically cabling her progress rather than full articles, the newspaper compensated for this lack with pieces describing what Bly might have seen on her projected route, excerpts from other publications, idle speculation about her chances, and a contest in which readers tried to guess the duration of her journey. Adding to the excitement was Elizabeth Bisland, a reporter for Cosmopolitan who had left San Francisco on her own west-to-east world tour the day after Bly’s departure and seemed poised to best the World’s representative. The competition with Bisland combined with the World’s promotional efforts made Bly’s final sprint across the continent a “glorious” "maze" of “happy greetings,” “wild hurrahs,” “congratulating telegrams,” and cheering crowds (90). “They say no man or woman in America ever received ovations like those given me during my flying trip across the continent,” Bly recalled. “It seemed as if my greatest success was the personal interest of every one who greeted me. They were all so

120 Since Bly’s steamer initially left from Hoboken, her trip was considered complete when she arrived in Jersey City. She then proceeded to the World headquarters in Manhattan.
kind and as anxious that I should finish the trip in time as if their personal reputations were at stake” (90).

The intense public interest in Bly’s accomplishment, stoked as usual by the World, continued well after her return. Over the next month, the newspaper featured not only Bly’s own account of the journey, but congratulatory telegrams, news about the accompanying contest, which had garnered more than a half a million entries, and an “authentic biography” of their star reporter whose identity, while not entirely unknown, had previously been kept quiet. 121 The somewhat embellished portrait of the “world’s best known and most widely talked of woman on earth today” described Bly as earnest and hard-working, yet noted that “a jolly lightheartedness at times manifests itself.”122 These promotional efforts proved beneficial to the World and to Bly. With the first installment of Bly’s travelogue, the newspaper’s circulation figures, which had been rising throughout the journey, reached 280,340, an increase of 10,000 from the previous Sunday.123 Bly’s recompense was also substantial. In addition to a profitable lecture tour, Nellie Bly’s Book: Around the World in Seventy-Two Days sold its initial 10,000 copies by that August and went into a second printing. A handsome three-year contract

121 Kroeger, 178, 169, 179.

122 “The Story of Nellie Bly: An Authentic Biography of the World’s Globe-Girdler,” New York World, 2 February 1890, p. 5. The biography errs on two counts, most likely due to Bly’s emendations. In addition to using her passport age, the biography claims that Bly spent two years at normal school rather than an abbreviated semester. Moreover, it attributes her departure to “threatening heart disease,” rather than financial difficulties.

123 Kroeger, 173.
to write serialized dime novels for the weekly *New York Family Story Paper* brought Bly a salary commensurate with what the most prominent editors at the *World* earned.¹²⁴

Bly’s mounting celebrity was also evident in her emergence as an advertising figure in the wake of the world tour. It is hardly surprising that Bly’s name was used to sell a traveling hat modeled on her highly recognizable cap. However, the variety of goods ("health biscuits," "Indian Root Pills," and a dry goods house) with which she was linked suggests just how familiar consumers were with her achievement.¹²⁵ A trade card titled "Nellie Bly Bids Fogg Good-Bye" suggests that Bly’s appeal was rooted in her image as a bold, yet carefree American girl (figure 4). Clad in her now iconic traveling costume, a youthful Bly swings her carpet bag as she strides across the globe, leaving a frowning Englishman in her wake. In her other hand is an American flag, which she jauntily waves toward the defeated Fogg. Contrary to the text’s claim that “it takes a maiden to be spry, to span the space ‘twixt thought and act, and turn a fiction to a fact,” the flag’s inclusion implies that gender is not the only factor in Bly’s success.

Bly’s friendly but dismissive backward glance at Fogg, and by extension Britain, obscures that country’s substantial contribution to her feat. As much as Bly and the *World* sought to cast her accomplishment as a national victory, *Around the World in...

¹²⁴ Ibid., 185-7. The contract stipulated that Bly would be paid $10,000 during the first year and $15,000 in the subsequent years. Since no copies of the *Family Story Paper* survive, it is not known what, if anything, Bly actually produced. Kroeger, based on Bly’s single, dismal novel and her depression during the initial months of the contract, suggests that the output may have been negligible either in size or in quality. Kroeger, 187-8.

¹²⁵ Bly herself sold 100 collector’s quality photographs of herself, at five dollars each, to raise funds for the city’s Washington Memorial Arch. Kroeger 181-2. A series of advertising cards featuring images of Bly on her trip around the world were used by several different businesses, including Dr. Morse’s Indian Root Pills, the Wilson Biscuit Company in Philadelphia, the Commonwealth Clothing Company in Worster, Massachusetts, and J. W. Brown and Company, a dry good store in Philadelphia. Samples of the Wilson Biscuit Company cards are held in the Broadsides Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R.I. The remainder are available at http://home.att.net/~gapchenry/BlyAdCards.html, a website developed by Bly’s great-, great-, great-niece, Linda Champanier.
NELLIE BLY BIDS FOGG GOOD-BYE.

"O Fogg, good bye," said Nellie Bly,
"It takes a maiden to be spry,
To span the space twixt thought and act,
And turn a fiction to a fact."

Figure 4. Nellie Bly Advertising Card. Collection of Linda Champanier.
Seventy-Two Days quietly acknowledges the imperial infrastructure which made such a trip possible—and often pleasant. Beyond the logistical benefits of empire-building, which are considerable, Bly’s account reveals the extent to which Britain’s colonial outposts provide an environment where traditional gender roles may be revised and modernized. Her travels through the Empire include very few challenges to her armor, meaning that Bly has even more freedom to play the spunky yet respectable American girl.

While Bly encounters some hardships during her travels, such as foregoing sleep to squeeze in a visit to Jules Verne, occasionally unpleasant meals, and the usual seasickness, she is much more of a pampered tourist than a daring traveler. With the exception of braving the brutal heat in Aden and making a day trip to Canton, where she was accompanied by an American-educated guide and a ship-provided luncheon, Bly hews very close to the beaten path. That path, from rail and steamer lines to well-appointed hotels at major ports, has been forged by the combined forces of tourism, trade, and colonial expansion. Thus, after speeding through France and Italy by train, the vast majority of her ten weeks abroad is spent within the British Empire and in the company of Europeans, who make up the ships’ officers and passengers. On shore in Aden, Ceylon, and Hong Kong, colonial functionaries, like the native soldier “in the Queen’s uniform” who enforces standard prices for local boatmen and drivers to prevent “the tourists being robbed,” clutter the margins of Bly’s narrative (39). Her encounters with non-westerners, while frequent, are consistently mediated by the well-established patterns of tourist interaction. In many instances, these individuals are reduced to the barest

126 Outside of Europe, the only sovereign nation in which Bly spent more than a few hours was Japan, where she remained for five days.
outlines, defined by brief physical characteristics or their function relative to Bly.

Following countless travel writers before her, Bly gives considerable attention to the relative merits of various ethnic groups as servants, praising the Singalese waiters, who are both efficient and “interesting to the Westerner” while complaining about the odor of Ceylonese jinrikisha drivers (44, 50). Others, such as the Somali boys who entertain the ship’s passengers by racing each other to retrieve the silver coins tossed in the bay at Aden, briefly interrupt the monotony of a long journey. Had Bly lived within the communities she so briefly visited, her interactions with the colonial Other would likely have been more complex than these momentary, well-scripted episodes. From within the tourist bubble, however, native peoples generally provide straightforward services, entertainment, and a bit of local color. The few times Bly expresses concern about their treatment are fleeting. As she rides around Canton in a jinrikisha, Bly is initially concerned about overtaxing “coolie number two” and concertedly tries not to shift her weight. By the end of the day, the effort has given her a “sick headache” and Bly berates herself for being so anxious about the “the comfort of the Chinaman” (75). Similarly, after being shocked by the British sailors and passengers who beat back the Arab boatmen clamoring to take their group ashore, Bly concedes, “Although I thought the conduct of the Arabs justified this harsh course of treatment, still I felt sorry to see it administered so freely and lavishly to those black, half-clad wretches” (33).

While Bly’s momentary qualms are noteworthy, they are clearly overshadowed in an otherwise celebratory depiction of life within the British Empire. These moments of

---

127 Bly’s attention to such details also marks her as a tourist. In addition to ranking servants according to ethnicity, she’s fascinated by the various local modes of travel, noting, for instance, the differences between jinrikisha drivers and the advantages of American railroad cars over the British model. Finally, Bly ends her account with a wealth of practical information, such as the names of rail lines and steamers, for those who might wish to replicate her journey.
imperial fantasy are especially evident in Ceylon and Hong Kong, where Bly is forced to
spend several days. Lounging on the verandah of her hotel in Colombo one evening,
lazily watching the “naked black runners” with their jinrikishas, Bly observes that all of
life’s disappointments may be swept away with the ocean breezes and the “cooling lime
squash which the noiseless, bare-footed, living bronze has placed on the white arm rest”
(45-6). She is charmed by evening promenades along the seashore, peeping into the
thatched huts of the locals, and an outing to a native theater. Finally, Bly asserts that
Colombo’s picturesque homes, wide boulevards, and ocean views are reminiscent of, and
perhaps preferable to, America’s venerable Newport (46). In Hong Kong, Bly immerses
herself in colonial society, attending a “splendid” play mounted by the British officers
stationed there and marveling at the lavishly attired women who depart from the theater
enclosed in private chairs, protected from the public’s (or the native’s) gaze.
Immediately following this passage, Bly turns her attention to the plight of the empire’s
bachelors, whose numbers she has noted at every port. “They are handsome, jolly and
good natured. They have their own fine homes with no one but the servants to look after
them. Think of it, and let me whisper, ‘Girls, go East!’” (69). As her sly revision of the
old dictum “Go West, young man!” suggests, Bly sees a bright future living under the
imperial umbrella. Her initial befuddlement at the patriotism of British passengers, who
sing “God Save the Queen” at every conceivable opportunity, quickly fades. “As I
traveled on,” Bly remarks, “I felt an increased respect for the level-headedness of the
English government, and I cease[d] to marvel at the pride with which Englishmen view
their flag floating in so many different climes and over so many different nationalities.”
She soon slides into subtle encouragement of American expansion, jealously observing
that “the English have stolen almost all, if not all, desirable sea-ports” (39). While Bly remains prickly toward the British people throughout her journey and even well beyond, their country’s imperial endeavors hold considerable appeal.128

The British Empire’s most notable benefit, which goes unacknowledged in Bly’s account, is the security it provides to “unprotected” ladies. Staying within the limited confines of the tourist’s sphere reduced the likelihood of a lady being insulted while abroad. However, the surest defense against both impudent looks and more tangible injuries is, the guide books promise, the company of gentlemen. Even though Bly was officially without an escort on her journey, which was crucial to the stunt’s appeal, in practice she was rarely so vulnerable. In addition to the official attentions of several ship captains and the World’s London correspondent, who accompanied her through England and France, a variety of men (several doctors, a British civil servant, a ship’s purser) assume this responsibility on an informal basis, as etiquette dictated they should.129

When Bly ventures off the ship or out of the railroad car, she is never alone, never defenseless. Nor did she expect to be. In packing her single bag, Bly briefly contemplated bringing a revolver but deemed it unnecessary, confidently asserting, “I knew if my conduct was proper I should always find men ready to protect me, let them be American, English, French, German or anything else” (4).

Her assumption about the chivalry of western gentlemen (no non-westerners make Bly’s list of possible rescuers) proves correct when a shipboard suitor turns menacing en

128 Bly despises the British even before meeting them, having been warned of their prejudices (26). She finds the English stewards on her first steamer (from Brindisi to Colombo) terribly rude and even the captain earns her ire. According to Bly’s biographer, her dislike of the British persisted well into the twentieth century and intensified during her time in Austria during the First World War when she was cut off from Allied news sources. For Bly’s anti-British attitude during the war, see Kroeger, 422, 438.

129 For men’s duties to female travelers on the railroad, see Richter, 89.
route to Hong Kong. Rebuffed by Bly and laid low by the punishing Monsoon swells, this lovesick/seasick man romanticizes the prospect of death by drowning and offers to prove his point with Bly in tow. Ever the reporter, Bly keeps the scene from escalating by interviewing her suicidal suitor on the merits of such a demise, but it is the ship’s chief officer who ultimately intervenes and brings her to safety. In putting her professional skills to use and remaining calm as she watched her rescuer stealthily advance, the scene shows Bly to be a shrewd and clear-headed young woman, though not invincible. She must still rely on etiquette’s code of conduct, in which a lady’s “proper dress and comportment will show her to be the sort of woman proper males have learned to desire and respect.”130 Bly’s parting comment on this incident, acknowledging that she “was careful afterward not to spend one moment alone and unprotected on deck,” suggests that she recognized this bargain (61, emphasis added). As experienced by Bly, the Empire is a secure space populated by well-trained gentlemen who recognize and value white womanhood. In this environment, Bly’s forfeited trunks, stuffed with femininity’s trappings, are superfluous. The only garment she requires to travel unmolested is a lady’s cloak of respectability.

The rescue scene illustrates Bly’s participation in, and indeed reliance on, the conventions of public gender roles, with their accompanying privileges and responsibilities. However, this episode also points to the feisty reporter’s deviations from those expectations. Bly admits that she is relieved when the persistent suitor takes ill, since it may lessen his unwelcome attentions, and has no sympathy for the man’s suffering. This lack of womanly concern, here largely confined to the page, later erupts into public view. As a particularly violent swell tosses passengers about the decks of the

130 Schriber, 29.
Oriental, another gentleman attempts to assist Bly, but ends up falling flat on his face. Bly’s response is hysterical laughter, which only intensifies when she sees his broken nose bleeding profusely. Despite feeling “a great pity for the poor fellow, hurt as he was in my behalf,” Bly cannot contain her impulse to mock his misfortune (64).

Her decidedly unfeminine laughter, reported with only a hint of embarrassment, suggests that the Empire’s protective bubble allows Bly to safely tweak Victorian gender norms. The relative security of this environment, where the Queen’s soldiers are everywhere visible and encounters with native Others are structured by touristic routine, means that as long as Bly maintains the core virtues of middle-class womanhood, she can experiment with a more modern version of femininity. Bly can ridicule her suitors, nonchalantly recount the gory details of her trip to a Chinese torture garden, and generally show off the spunk she was so known for in ways that would have been impossible had she ventured off the beaten path where other forms of difference were not so tightly managed. Despite her geographic displacement and the vulnerability of traveling alone, Bly makes relatively little effort to assert her position as a white, middle-class woman in this narrative. Her personality remains prominent, but the other component of her armor recedes, indicating that the Empire has already secured Bly’s position relative to the Others she encountered as a tourist abroad.

Although Bly occasionally takes advantage of this latitude in her actions, such as hollering through the cabin walls at the noisy family who disrupt her sleep, it is important to note that much of the pluck on display in Around the World in Seventy-Two Days is merely rhetorical flourish (56). When Bly laments that the Straits of Malacca are no longer “infested with pirates,” whose appearance might have cured her “longing for some
new experience,” she reminds readers of her previous adventures as the World’s most famous stunt reporter without confronting any new peril—or even exerting any real effort (56). Asides like these to the reader, which served in the madhouse exposé to fortify her armor of white, middle-class respectability, now merely burnish the surface of that persona. The concluding image of Bly’s narrative exemplifies this bait and switch. As Bly’s special train pulls into the Jersey City station, she confides that she “wanted to yell with the crowd” celebrating her arrival. Readers, familiar with her earlier stunts and impetuous nature, can imagine her doing just that, obscuring the fact that Bly does not, in fact, make such a boisterous demonstration in this very public venue. Relying on her already established spunky persona, Bly is able to heighten the excitement of a journey full of ordinary touristic pleasure more than stunt girl derring-do.

If Bly’s world tour was not quite the feat it promised to be, the phenomenal response it generated nonetheless offers insight into the nature of her celebrity and American attitudes toward expansion at the dawn of the 1890s, a decade that would witness the United States claiming international prominence in both ideological and military theatres. For those watching stateside, the success of this American girl, usurping the place of a British gentleman (albeit a fictional one), offered a seemingly indisputable sign of the nation’s global ascendance. Moreover, Bly insisted that the victory was easily won, modestly saying, “Oh, I don’t know. It’s not so very much for a woman who has the pluck, energy, and independence which characterize many women in this day of push and get there.”

Bly’s coy insistence that she was not an exceptional American woman, but merely a representative example, lent her achievement a national

---

131 San Francisco Chronicle, 22 January 1890, p. 8; quoted in Kroeger, 167.
character, an impression The World eagerly fostered. In anticipation of her homecoming, the journal crowed, “She is coming home to dear old America with the scalps of carpers and critics strung on her slender girdle, and about her head a monster wreath of laurel and forget-me-nots, as a tribute to American pluck, American womanhood and American perseverance.” By turning Bly into a real-life Columbia, whose legacy this image of feminine conquest evokes, The World and its star reporter offered readers a tantalizing vision of America’s future in which Bly’s armor and forceful personality figure as national assets available to any gutsy young woman. The modern American girl, exemplified by Nellie Bly, has escaped the excessive limitations imposed on her more traditional sisters while remaining an object of admiration at home and abroad. In contrast to their weak nerves and fragile bodies, Bly braves all manner of physical and emotional challenges, even longing for a pirate attack if it will mean a new adventure. While still susceptible to the occasional “sick headache,” she is hardly a candidate for the dreaded disease of over-civilization. Protected by her armor, Bly can mingle with all segments of society. Contact with the mentally ill and the city’s seedier elements leave her untainted. Powerful individuals are easily charmed by her infectious smile and quirky interview style. She is the kind of woman who can be rumored to receive precious gifts from the rajah at Singapore (a monkey) and a Japanese prince (a mandolin). Equally familiar with the beauty of Newport as with Bowery humor, Bly can be at home

---


133 Kroeger, 170.
anywhere.\textsuperscript{134} The ease with which she traverses the globe signals that the world is safe not merely for solo female travelers, but for American colonization.

Bly’s well-publicized globetrotting would seem to be a far cry from Ida B. Wells’ travels abroad a few years later.\textsuperscript{135} In contrast to Bly’s jolly holiday to defeat a fictional record, Wells’ trips to England and Scotland are serious endeavors worthy of the term “crusade.” Bly’s success certainly boosted her popularity, but the stakes for Wells’ lecture tours were much higher—both personally and politically. Without the international attention directed at the lynching epidemic, the impact of Wells’ critique would likely have been far more modest. Had Bly failed in her attempt, her plucky persona and previous stunts would have ensured her career’s continued longevity. Nor did her time abroad fundamentally alter the direction of her career. Bly gained international prominence from her travels, but her perspective remained relatively unaffected. Wells, on the other hand, was decisively changed by her experiences abroad. From across the Atlantic, the truly national dimensions of the lynching crisis become clear and Wells applied this transnational perspective in her subsequent work to devastating effect. Instead, Bly’s travels more accurately prefigure those of journalist and author Richard Harding Davis. Just as Bly was celebrated as a representative American girl, Davis was an icon of youthful male exuberance in the 1890s. Finally, the prospect of an American empire overseas, which is but a fleeting notion in Bly’s narrative, becomes the enduring preoccupation of Davis’ fictional and journalistic work.

In tracing these developments through Europe, Latin America, and Africa, Davis

\textsuperscript{134} As Bly and an Englishman exchange jokes on the deck of the Oriental, she describes her response to the bait as “in a Bowery tone” (62).

\textsuperscript{135} There is one notable similarity in their travels: both women were expected to be representative in some sense, Wells a representative of her race and Bly a representative of American womanhood.
concocts his own protective bubble, one which functions quite differently from Bly's but serves some of the same ends.
A (Boy) Scout for American Empire:
Richard Harding Davis and His Kit

Among Richard Harding Davis’ numerous appearances in the pages of Harper’s New Monthly Magazine during the 1890s is a short story entitled “The Exiles.” Set in contemporary Tangier, the tale draws from Davis’ recent journey through northern Africa to Greece and finally Turkey, published in 1894 as The Rulers of the Mediterranean. “The Exiles” takes little interest in Morocco’s governing sultan, however, and instead explores the unfettered freedom enjoyed by Tangier’s expatriate community, which is subject to neither an extradition treaty nor the force of “Public Opinion.”¹ This collection of disreputables is soon joined by Manhattan Assistant District Attorney Henry Holcombe, a terribly earnest young man whose nerves have been left “unstrung” by a particularly trying corruption case (8). After holding himself aloof for several days, the city’s charms gradually induce Holcombe to join the expats’ lively society. Intoxicated by his new companions and the sultry environment, the uncompromising reformer begins to relent, laughingly dismissing news of an eminent New York acquaintance absconding with $300,000 as just “another good man gone wrong” (38). When he learns that one of the embezzler’s victims is a dear spinster, Holcombe is jolted out of complacency. He confronts the scofflaw, who is also in Tangier, at gun point, recovers the spinster’s retirement fund, and sails home the next day convinced that his Moroccan sojourn has made him a better man. Yet Davis is far less sanguine about this transformation. At the close of the story, it is not clear whether the rigidly rule-bound Holcombe has been rejuvenated or nearly ruined by his month-long stay in Morocco.

If he is today remembered primarily as a romancer whose plots revolve around "little revolutions," chivalric rescues and impossibly heroic leading men, at the time of its publication in Harper's "The Exiles" did not seem terribly out of step with Davis' earlier work. The story's crime-laden plot, gritty details, and cynical characters were nothing new. Davis had won praise from writers now considered realists and naturalists for his willingness to confront the unpleasant aspects of modern life. In reviewing Stephen Crane's Maggie (1893), Hamlin Garland admonished Davis, who had several slum stories to his credit already, to "step forward right briskly" lest he be overtaken by this new talent. At the same time, Davis offered much that appealed to idealists. To those dismayed by the increasing prevalence of coarse characters, dismal plot resolutions, and morbid introspection in American fiction, the spontaneous good deeds in Davis' tales—from a street thug surrendering to the police for the sake of an abandoned toddler to a debonair bachelor treating tenement girls to a ride on the swan boats at Central Park—were an encouraging sign. Davis' characters moved through a decidedly imperfect world, but their good-natured spunk and sparks of sentimentality pointed to their creator's bedrock optimism.

This combination proved almost irresistible to American audiences, fueling Davis' meteoric rise throughout the decade. His first story for the New York Evening Sun, in which Davis apprehended a con-artist preying upon newcomers to the city with

---


3 Scott C. Osborn, "Richard Harding Davis: Critical Battleground," American Quarterly 12 (1960): 85. This overview of Davis' early reception relies on Osborne's article.

only guile and a football tackle, made him a local sensation in 1889. With the 1890 publication of “Gallegher: A Newspaper Story” in Scribner’s, the first of many appearances in the elite monthlies, the twenty-six-year-old secured a national audience. The first edition of Gallegher and Others (1891) sold out in only a month; a third volume of short stories in 1892 disappeared after less than two days on the market. By this time, Davis had already been tapped to edit Harper’s Weekly, a post that conferred considerable literary prestige and political access. Although the managerial duties quickly became cumbersome, Davis embraced the opportunity to promote his favorite pastime, collegiate football, through new columns on amateur sports and extend his literary empire into travel writing. Davis’ ubiquitous textual adventures, fictional and otherwise, cast him as a dashing young writer, an impression undoubtedly furthered by his striking appearance. A strapping young man devoted to stylish dress, Davis was the inspiration for the Gibson Girl’s handsome companion. Given these considerable attributes, Dick Davis in a few short years became not only a fashionable writer, but a full-fledged celebrity who might be besieged by school girls and their mothers at a New York portrait exhibition.

Despite his immense popularity, Davis’ literary stature did not endure much beyond his death in 1916; his war reporting, which began in 1897, has enjoyed greater

---

5 Roggenkamp, 51. Davis’ story was picked up by other newspapers, but this publicity hardly compares to that created by “Gallegher” and his subsequent stories in national publications.


7 Charles Dana Gibson’s idealized rendering of Davis appeared on the cover of the humor magazine Life in May 1890, just three months before “Gallegher” was published by Scribner’s. Gibson, a longtime friend, went on to illustrate many of Davis’ works, contributing to the perceived overlap between the author and his fictional heroes. Lubow, 68.

8 Lubow, 107. This incident, which forced Davis to leave the exhibition, occurred in 1894.
longevity. Those who study him today typically acknowledge Davis as a minor writer, but argue for his critical significance as a representative of his youthful, confident, expansive age. This representative status principally rests on Davis' role as a chronicler of American imperial aspirations at the turn of the century. Through his fiction, travel narratives, and work as a war correspondent, especially that which dealt with U.S. interests in Latin America, Davis managed to insert himself into most of the pressing international issues of the day. Uniting this geographically and generically wide-ranging output was a distinctive hero, an amalgam of Davis' public persona and his fictional projections. While the precise contours of this character naturally vary, certain core traits persist: cool-headedness, love of adventure, dedication to a chivalric code, physical aptitude or at least manly endurance, and buoyant optimism tempered by the realities of a dangerous world. A man such as this was the proper emissary for a nation coming into its own as a global power.

What, then, are we to make of Henry Holcombe and his ambiguous holiday in Tangier? Holcombe and his fragile nerves might be excused as an individual aberration, which does not detract from the prospects of his more vigorous countrymen. However, Davis suggests that the threat of degeneration Holcombe faces in this "picturesque plague-spot" is universal. He explicitly frames the tale as a study of "just how far a man of cultivation lapses into barbarism when he associates with savages" (3). Holcombe may be an anomaly among Davis' protagonists, but his experience raises concerns which are fundamental to his author's larger project.

---

9 Kaplan ("Romancing"), Lubow, Murphy, and Osborne and Phillips all cite Davis' representativeness as a rationale for their critical attention.

272
Richard Harding Davis' enduring subject is the emerging relationship between the first and third worlds, and more specifically the men who move between these two realms in furtherance of that process. His multi-faceted career coincided with—and indeed influenced—the escalation of U.S. imperialism, from extra-continental military intervention and annexation to increasing foreign investment and economic interdependence. In works like *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (1896), a travelogue, *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897), a novel, as well as his war reporting from Cuba before and during the American invasion, Davis helped shape the national debate about the obligations and opportunities these new entanglements might bring. Whether he was touring the proposed site for a Nicaraguan Canal or observing the exploits of the Rough Riders at Guasimas, the question of how foreign bodies would be incorporated into the nation—as workers, dependents, citizens, or consumers—underlies Davis' global circulation.

Yet Davis is ultimately less concerned with how these developments will change the nation's character and more interested in their impact on the men who will bring this new relationship between the U.S. and its third world subordinates into being. These mediators comprise the empire’s advance guard, carrying American interests into new territory. Although these soldiers, engineers, mercenaries, and real-life reporters are often better equipped than “Young Holcombe,” their service to America’s budding empire is not without hazards. By placing their white, male bodies in unfamiliar, often hostile, environments populated by native Others, these representative men also test the boundaries of the National Body. Interspersed with Davis’ resounding praise for the mediators’ selfless dedication, valor, and gallantry are subtle reminders of their
vulnerability. This chapter examines Davis’ efforts to balance the nation’s outward imperial drive with the threat of invasion at the individual level. As a scout for the empire, the precautions Davis takes during his travels abroad suggest how the boundary between “savage” and “civilized” might be maintained even as America’s encounter with the exotic enters a new phase.

In a place like Tangier, where “there is no law,” the ability to make such distinctions takes on heightened significance (58). Flashing a pistol before his thieving friend, Holcombe delights in returning “to first principles,” like “two dogs fighting for a stolen bone” (58, 56). After spending so many years beholden to the law and his father’s legacy, the opportunity to come “face to face . . . with [his] fellow [man]” in a visceral way is liberating, and Holcombe leaves Morocco confident that he has learned “a great deal” (66). Yet the attorney remains oblivious to his own decline, which is painfully apparent to his friends among the expats. Holcombe’s flirtation with primitive ways is dangerous, but more troubling is his failure to recognize it as such. As the narrator ironically notes, after only a few days abroad, Holcombe “had risen above seeing the mud” (16). Ignoring the many cautionary examples on display in Tangier, such as the gentlemanly forger who has degenerated to viciously whipping his slave girl, Holcombe sees only the rejuvenating potential in his release from civilization’s constraints without appreciating the recklessness that unlimited freedom can breed. Lacking this awareness, Holcombe makes no effort to protect himself against Tangier’s influence and is consequently lucky to escape the city when he does.

Where “The Exiles” elaborates the pitfalls of mingling the “savage” and the “civilized,” Davis’ broader output offers a more promising model for American men’s
engagement with the exotic abroad. As the nation’s borders grew more porous through
the surge in immigration and expanded outward through acquisition and less overt forms
of influence, the fiction, journalism and potent public image of Richard Harding Davis
provided ample support to America’s imperial trajectory while also intimating how other
boundaries might simultaneously be fortified. Although he gave limited attention to the
country’s rapidly changing demographics or the prospect of absorbing alien races in
newly acquired territories, issues which preoccupied many of his contemporaries, Davis’
depiction of the interactions between powerful Anglo-Saxon men and naturally
subservient natives provided some cause for optimism. The ability of Davis and his
mediators to uphold the values of civilization in uncivilized places suggested that the
nation’s internal character might also prove resilient when tested. For those who believed
that the fate of the republic rested upon the conduct of its male citizens, a widespread
notion at the end of the nineteenth century according to Kristin Hoganson’s analysis of
gender politics in the Spanish-American War, the fate of a handful of fictional and actual
men, particularly a celebrity like Davis, carried considerable weight. In this sense, the
immensely popular Davis was recognized as a representative figure of his age, and of his
nation’s manhood, long before contemporary critics staked their claim.

The ways in which Davis promoted empire building as a manly pursuit, which
able American men would find challenging but not debilitating, were integral to his
success as an author and journalist. While he was not quite the jingo some contend, his
work often provided sustenance to advocates of bellicose military, diplomatic, and
economic policies. After attending briefly to this facet of his career, I would like to

10 Kristin L. Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the
sketch out another, complimentary reading of Davis as a proto Boy Scout, an image rooted in the early years of his stardom, but not out of keeping with his twentieth-century profile. This is not to supplant previous assessments of Davis as nearly interchangeable with his larger-than-life heroes like Robert Clay of Soldiers of Fortune, but to flesh out a neglected component of his popular appeal, one that is critical to understanding his depiction of empire’s mediators.

Davis functions as a scout for American empire in several ways. Over twenty-five years as a travel writer and war correspondent, Davis observed the workings of numerous European colonies from Africa and the Middle East to Central America. Much of this commentary centers on the military and administrative expertise of the British Empire, a testament to the extent of England’s domain and Davis’ keen anglophilia. While he often admired British ways, he also grew “tired of getting down and sailing forth and landing again always under the shadow of the British flag.” Echoing Bly, Davis complained during his 1893 tour through the Mediterranean that “if the United States should begin with Hawaii and continue to annex other people’s property, we should find that almost all the best corner lots and post-office sites of the world have been already pre-empted” (164). This not-quite playful sense of competition reappears in Davis’ Latin American works as he assesses potential investments, such as “the vast undiscovered and untouched territory” near Caracas, and regional conflicts which might require a bold assertion of U.S. “interests,” whether a boundary dispute between

Venezuela and British Guiana or the Cuban revolution. Most importantly, Davis is a scout in the sense that his travel narratives and, to a greater degree, his fiction describe a reality that is just beginning to come into being.

To see Davis as a Boy Scout, then, is to appreciate how freighted his early adventures are with the burden of future expectations. Children serve as a screen on to which parents and society more broadly project their aspirations and anxieties. As childhood is a critical period for assimilating gender roles, the energies directed toward cultivating a new generation are often especially fraught with adults’ concerns about their own gender performance. The creation of a movement, first in Britain then in the United States, combining wilderness survival tactics and Native American ritual in a militaristic framework reveals a great deal about the perceived challenges facing Anglo-Saxon masculinity at the beginning of the twentieth century. If Davis is not literally a boy, much less a Boy Scout, his status as a celebrity and representative of American manhood made him subject to similar investments. Celebrity, as David Haven Blake observes, is a social construct. While those elevated to celebrity status may be individuals of exceptional achievement, more so in the nineteenth century than in the present, their “very identity lies in the community’s embrace.” In the increasingly fragmented, volatile and disparate environment of a modernizing society, celebrities offered a means for representing the public to itself. In much the same way as the daily newspapers, monthly magazines and advertising that proliferated during Davis’ heyday, these “human texts” were a medium that allowed discombobulated Americans to glimpse not only a reflection

---

of themselves but the increasingly complex world they inhabited—or, in the case of a future-oriented celebrity like Davis, the world they might inhabit.  

Davis' boyishness was widely noted by his contemporaries, but his resemblance to a Boy Scout is most visible in those characteristics and habits which also serve to reassert boundaries. Judged by many as a snob, Davis' efforts to police social hierarchies, particularly in military contexts, are also an effort to preserve order in the midst of war's chaos. His fondness for costumes, evident in the photographic documentation of each new war outfit, can be seen in much the same light. Looking the part of a war correspondent, whether in a pith helmet or dinner dress complete with medals and ribbons from past conflicts, was a clear display of one's social role and past achievements. Finally, there is Davis' kit, an evolving collection of tools and amenities to keep his body "comfortable, clean, and content" during excursions on the imperial frontier. At the close of nineteenth century, caring for the white male body, shielding it from polluting influences, was more than a practical matter. The body had become increasingly important to American conceptions of masculinity. Where manhood was once a state of maturity that followed naturally upon one's adolescence, according to the new notions of masculinity, manhood was something to be proven through ongoing demonstrations. A strong and healthy body was essential to many of these tests, as the incredible popularity of amateur sports, physical culture and other vigorous pursuits in the 1890s attests. The body was something to be developed, but also something to be

---


mastered. Self-mastery was a longstanding ideal for men, a vital skill for those striving to become successful in a culture that lionized the “self-made man,” but now encompassed overcoming weaknesses in one’s body as well as one’s character.\footnote{This synopsis of the shifting notions of masculinity relies on E. Anthony Rotundo, “Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920,” \textit{Journal of Social History} 16, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 23-38.} For the flipside of an embodied masculinity is that a man may be betrayed by a frail or sickly body. In this context, protecting the body from disease and other sources of enervation was also a means of preserving masculinity.

The ramifications of this shift toward an embodied masculinity were felt most acutely by individual men, but did not end there. The reformulation, argues Amy Kaplan, was accompanied by new conceptualizations of national power as disembodied on the part of politicians, intellectuals, and businessmen debating the form America’s expanding empire should take. Rather than the European model of territorial acquisition, which carried with it the responsibilities of colonial administration, many envisioned a more informal system in which American interests were achieved through economic influence and political pressure. Such a system would uphold the nation’s identity as a discrete republic, and thereby the fantasy of American exceptionalism, while exerting an empire’s powerful reach beyond those borders. In the absence of a massive institutional bulwark, the bodies of American men engaged in the work of empire building cease to be individual citizens and become figures for the nation itself. The discourse of American imperialism in Kaplan’s formulation is therefore double, in that it “simultaneously
delineates national power that is disembodied from territorial boundaries and reembodied in the power of the male body.\textsuperscript{16}

Richard Harding Davis provided a combination of attributes ideally suited to this backdrop of ideologically-charged bodies and fluctuating boundaries. The manly derring-do, brash pronouncements on American honor, and accounts of successful military exploits stoke the desire for expansion while Davis' Boy Scout behavior insists that in the process of imposing civilization upon wild places, American men will not be tainted by their exposure to the exotic. Instead, they will simply become more intriguing dinner guests.

**Chronicler of Empire: Davis' Travels in the 1890s**

Although this chapter draws from the full breadth of Richard Harding Davis’ career, its focus is the first heady decade culminating in the American invasion of Cuba, ostensibly to liberate the suffering Cuban people from tyrannical Spanish rule, a move Davis had advocated on humanitarian grounds and as a defense of national honor. Davis assumed his unofficial role as a chronicler of empire soon after leaving the New York *Evening Sun* in 1891 to become managing editor at *Harper’s Weekly*. He approached the subject in a variety of genres, from topical essays and somber dispatches from the front to theatrical farces and light-hearted travelogues, over the next two and half decades. If he did not always grasp the nuances of these machinations, sometimes overstating the importance of the incidents he had personally observed, Davis' oeuvre at least suggests just how multi-faceted his topic is. In addition to colonial administrations and military

preparedness, Davis is keenly interested in the economic advantages awaiting the “great powers,” which will be realized through the contributions of civil engineers, explorers, consul agents, and even telegraph operators.

Davis’ wanderings in the early 1890s provided the aspiring travel writer with a broad introduction to the current state of the imperial game. His first travel narrative, The West from a Car Window (1892), recounts an often disappointing tour through Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. Unlike Theodore Roosevelt and Frederic Remington, who had witnessed the waning years of the Wild West in the 1880s and mythologized it for their fellow easterners, Davis arrived too late.17 The (domestic) frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner would announce the following year, was closed. Cowboys still exist, but their once-romantic work has been systemized by large ranching operations; likewise, the Indians no longer inspire fear or admiration now that they have been contained on an Oklahoma reservation.

Davis’ next venture was a far more enjoyable holiday among Our English Cousins (1894). After taking up residence at Balliol College “for at least a . . . term,” the twenty-eight-year-old writer made the most of London’s social season, including sporting events, theatrical productions and a evening in the East End slums, accompanied by a coterie of young aristocrats.18 Rulers of the Mediterranean, which appeared the same year, is to some degree an extension of the earlier sojourn, as many of the places Davis visited were subject to British control. His depiction of Britain’s lingering hold on Egypt is somewhat critical, arguing that while England’s influence has been beneficial, the young khedive

17 John Seelye, War Games: Richard Harding Davis and the New Imperialism (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 75.

and his ministers are now capable of leading the country without the crown’s input. However, John Seelye cautions against reading these comments as a condemnation of imperialism per se. While Davis’ support for foreign interventions was less steadfast than many assessments suggest, his occasional objections tend to be situational. Moreover, there is some intimation that Britain’s departure will bode well for American interests. The implication of Davis’ stance on Egypt, according to Seelye, is that “what the English do well, the Americans could do far better.”

Although Davis’ insinuations of an American foray into Africa may have been premature, he shortly visited a more likely field of endeavor closer to home, in the resource-rich lands of Central and South America. When Davis sailed south in January 1895 to begin the trip that would become *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America*, he had already visited Cuba once and begun writing *Soldiers of Fortune*, a novel set in the fictional South American country of Olancho but based on his earlier experience in the contested island nation. Davis’ connection with Latin America coincided with escalating U.S. political and economic attention to the region, as well as reinvigorated interest in the Monroe Doctrine as a “sacred national tradition and cherished document.”

The Cuban insurrection against Spanish rule reignited in 1895, calling attention to the unwelcome presence of a European outpost less than 100 miles from the Florida coast. The French were also making inroads in the southern hemisphere,

---

19 Seelye, 151, 159.

20 Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 120. The Monroe Doctrine was regarded as still relevant in the 1890s, but its meaning and application were a matter for intense debate, making Davis’ observations of Latin America especially timely.
winning a concession in 1880 from Colombia to build the Panama Canal. Although work on the canal had been abandoned amid insufficient planning and rampant disease by the time Davis toured the site, the prospect of a swift and lucrative route through the isthmus—ideally one controlled by the U.S.—remained tantalizing. Nicaragua appeared to be the most promising location for such a project and Davis naturally included this country, which had recently pried the strategically vital Mosquito Coast from British control, in his itinerary. During their meeting with President Zelaya, the Gringos applaud their host for taking such a firm stand, urging him “to see that the British obtained no foothold near our canal” (181). In contrast to his ambivalence about foreign control in Egypt, Davis brushes aside the ideal of self-rule for Central America’s citizens, declaring that should they “have a protectorate established over [them], either by the United States or by another power; it does not matter which, so long as it leaves the Nicaragua Canal in our hands” (146).

Davis also had the good fortune to visit Venezuela as its confrontation with British Guiana over their shared boundary intensified, a dispute which many saw as implicating the United States. Whether the British encroachment was, in fact, “the beginning of a general European scramble for colonial territory in South America,” as

21 Although France appeared uninterested in exerting broader control over Colombia’s government and both countries promised the canal would be available to all, some regarded the move as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine, according to Murphy. Ferdinand de Lesseps, the engineer famous for his work on the Suez Canal, published an article in North American Review assuring readers that the canal was merely evidence that the free institutions the Doctrine sought to protect were quite healthy. Murphy, 127.

22 It is not clear that Zelaya actually received this message, as Davis and his companions were using the naturally reluctant British consul as their interpreter. Indeed, much of the humor in this scene derives from the discomfort of the consul, who at one point complains, “I’ll be hanged if I translate that” (181). The meeting is not entirely a lark, however. Lloyd Griscom, one of the Gringos, was the son of a shipping magnate who had been offered the presidency of the proposed Nicaraguan Canal Company. His son’s participation in the trip, which Davis attributed only to Lloyd’s health, was also a scouting mission. Scott Compton Osborn and Robert L. Phillips, Jr., Richard Harding Davis (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 61.
more pessimistic voices claimed, President Cleveland did seek to intervene, taking a
bellicose stance in his Message to Congress in December 1895—just as Davis’ article on
Venezuela appeared in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine. The fortuitous timing
positioned Davis as a prescient commentator on Latin American affairs. Even though his
take on the dispute was confused and, according to Seelye, somewhat misinformed,
Davis’ on-the-ground perspective carried considerable weight. While scoffing at the
New York newspapers’ allusions that his article had “inspired the President’s message,”
Davis happily noted to his brother that the essay was “greatly quoted and in social
gatherings I am appealed to as a final authority.” Davis’ contradictory stance toward
the conflict also conveniently appealed to several constituencies. Reluctant to become
embroiled in too many foreign entanglements, particularly those stemming from the bad
behavior of Latin American governments toward European powers, Davis was
nonetheless bullish on America’s right to be the dominant force in the hemisphere.

Davis’ next major assignment, covering the Spanish-Cuban War for William
Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal, provided another opportunity to address both the
United States’ relationship with Latin America and its position vis-à-vis the established
imperial powers of Europe. Whether the U.S. would intercede on behalf of the Cuban
rebels—and on what grounds such aggression could be justified—was a matter of
passionate debate when the dispatches later collected as Cuba in Wartime (1897)

23 Murphy, 120.

24 Davis asserted that the conflict had been exacerbated by Venezuela sending three foreign
ministers out of the country for criticizing “her tardiness in paying foreign debts and her neglect in holding
to the terms of concessions” (229). However, Seelye notes that no historical study of the dispute mentions
this incident (188).

appeared. The suffering of the Cuban people had been so sensationalized, often through spurious reporting, that Davis arrived doubting that conditions could be as dire as others had claimed. Like the anti-imperialists who sought to slow the jingoes’ rush to invade, Davis objects to the “hysterical head lines” and recommends that men of “common sense and judgment” give the matter serious deliberation. However, Davis’ skepticism is quickly swept aside by his first-hand observations and the testimony of Americans and Englishmen, “concerning whose veracity there could be no question.” The bulk of the book provides eloquent support for those advocating war.

While Davis acknowledges that verifying accounts of Spanish atrocities is notoriously difficult, he assures readers that although one story circulating may not be true, another “just as horrible” has not been told. The daily misery of the pacíficos, noncombatant women and children forced to leave the countryside to prevent their aiding the revolutionaries, is equally compelling and more easily documented. Without land or employment, the innocent pacíficos often go hungry; the makeshift shelters they are forced to inhabit in the towns lack sanitation and breed disease. Meanwhile, the Spanish officers grow rich off prolonging the conflict, earning higher pay for service abroad and defrauding the military through falsified accounting. With little incentive to win the war, the Spanish officers, whom Davis derides as drunkards and poor marksmen, use cowardly tactics that risk few casualties and produce only minor gains. The ragtag Cubans lack the men and firepower to force a decisive battle, leading to a painful stalemate that cruelly

---

26 Richard Harding Davis, Cuba in Wartime, illustrated by Frederic Remington (New York: Robert Howard Russell, 1897), 55.

27 Ibid., 104-5.

28 Ibid., 103.
punishes the *pacificos*. Intervening in this humanitarian crisis casts the U.S. as a chivalric rescuer rather than a belligerent power-grab, a role closely in keeping with Davis' gentlemanly ideals. Moreover, Davis' unflattering portrait of the Spanish forces, which he contrasts with the U.S. Calvary troops he observed in Texas, suggests that an American victory would be easily won.

Davis' evocations of national honor provided further fuel to the war fever. He argues that the U.S. could intervene to protect the rights of its citizens in Cuba, who have endured property destruction, imprisonment, and even death, although most of these claims are vaguely substantiated in his account. More incendiary still is the treatment of U.S. vessels in Havana's port, which have been subject to searches by Spanish forces. One such search, of a Cuban woman accused of carrying missives to a rebel in New York, had made headlines when Davis reported her ordeal for the *Journal*. The provocative account was accompanied by a misleading sketch of male officers groping the young woman, who had in fact been searched by members of her own sex. Once the error was exposed by the rival *New York World*, Davis was accused of the same sensationalism he decried in other journalists.29 After brusquely defending the accuracy of his original dispatch, which said nothing about who performed the search, Davis goes on to argue that any search of American ships by foreign agents, while technically legal, is an affront to U.S. honor. For good measure, he adds that a British captain would never have brooked such an insult to his passengers: "Great Britain would have been the first

---

29 Lubow describes this incident in detail (142-4). Davis' contention that he never claimed the search was performed by male soldiers was true, but the passive construction of several key phrases in his initial dispatch makes it easy to reach that conclusion.

286
to protect her citizens and their property and their self-respect if they had been abused” in this way by a “fourth-rate power.”

In urging (or shaming) the U.S. to assume the rights and responsibilities of a great power, Davis’ coverage of the Cuban conflict advanced the jingoes’ bellicose arguments. Yet his echo was not perfect one, and where he parts company is telling. Davis’ call for intervention, like much of the discourse surrounding Cuba, is clearly a gendered argument. His emphasis on the plight of the Pacifcos, whose “eyes are turned toward the great republic that lies only eighty miles away” as they cry out for aid, positions the U.S. as a manly savior protecting the weak. Similarly, his objections to the violation of U.S. vessels draws upon the man-nation analogy Hoganson identifies, according to which foreign policy decisions are guided by the same principles of honor that bound self-respecting Victorian men. What Davis does not say is that Cuban liberation will bring salvation to American manhood. In contrast to the most ardent jingoes, whose celebration of martial prowess was intertwined with anxieties about masculinity’s decline in a coddled era of peace, Davis evinces few qualms about the fitness of American men.

When war did come the following year, what Davis saw largely confirmed his optimism. The volunteer soldiers, with the notable exception of the Rough Riders, are occasionally criticized for their impatience with the more mundane tasks of soldiering;

---

30 Davis, Wartime, 128.

31 Ibid., 139.


33 This is an important theme in both Hoganson’s work and Sarah Watts’ reading of Theodore Roosevelt. Sarah Watts, Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
the volunteer’s inexperience, some of which can be attributed to inadequate training, places an additional burden upon the army regular who must “offset his mistakes, ... help him cook his rations, ... teach him to shelter himself and to keep himself clean.”34 While these deficiencies are noteworthy, particularly as an indication of Davis’ own interest in the domestic aspects of life on the front, his overall impression of America’s military performance was quite positive. The regulars and Rough Riders are praised not only for their bravery and martial prowess, but their exceptional discipline and endurance under daunting conditions. Moments of sorrow and death are far outweighed by those that fill Davis with pride, such as the sight of Colonel Roosevelt “mounted high on horseback . . . charging the rifle-pits at a gallop and quite alone,” which “makes you feel that you would like to cheer.”35 Where the events in Cuba demonstrate America’s ability to win an empire, the Puerto Rican campaign, though less exciting militarily, showcases its managerial skills. The army generals prove to be as adept at “governing and establishing order” as they are at winning battlers. To Davis’ delight, “They went about the task of setting up the new empire of the United States as though our army had always been employed in seizing islands and raising the flag over captured cities. They played the conquerors with tact, with power, and like gentlemen. They recognized the rights of others and they forced others to recognize their rights.”36 Though new to the imperial game, the Americans, in Davis’ depiction, appear well-equipped for its challenges.

---

34 Richard Harding Davis, The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898; reprint, 1904), 235.

35 Davis, Cuban, 217.

36 Ibid., 329.
A Collection of Remarkable Men: Davis’ Mediators

By the end of the 1890s, Richard Harding Davis’ travel books and journalism had lent considerable support to the advocates of American expansion, whether territory, economic influence, or political sway. That Davis’ allegiance to this cause was not absolute, that he could occasionally take an opposing stance, as he would in championing the Boers against the British in South Africa, likely made his backing even more influential. Yet his most valuable contribution was the figure of the gentleman adventurer, the most heroic of the mediators comprising empire’s advance guard. Davis’ praise for Roosevelt’s performance in Cuba is tepid relative to his portrait of explorers like William Astor Chanler, whom he lionized in another Harper’s essay in March 1893. The leader of a large expedition through eastern Africa, Chanler has rejected the life of the idle rich in favor of arduous work that will benefit science and bring acclaim to his country. His natural leadership ability, a critical skill for a man managing “three hundred negroes in the heart of Africa,” is complemented by an extraordinary set of practical talents, touching on medicine, agriculture, engineering, geography, diplomacy, and of course war. Davis is most struck, however, by what a delightful gentleman Chanler is. Although his days in London, where the two met, are consumed by preparations for the expedition (kit-making on a grand scale), Chanler easily discourses on a variety of topics far beyond smokeless rifles and Sudanese porters, all while “ordering a dinner at the

37 Davis covered both sides of the conflict in 1900, collecting the dispatches as With Both Armies in South Africa. He was disillusioned by the performance of Britain’s officers and blamed their incompetence—and the resulting casualties—on a class system that rewarded parentage rather than talent. His public support for the Boers cost him friends and club memberships in England, a rift that was not fully healed until World War I, when Davis once again lauded Britain’s efforts. Lubow covers Davis’ time in South Africa in “A Woman Well Bred, Wholesome, and Intelligent” (197-221).
Savoy with enviable taste.”  

His experience in the wilds of Africa has not undone previous training in the nuances of elite society.

Men like Chanler and his fictional counterparts amplified the sense of potential animating Davis’ journalism and travel writings. What they accomplish independently, or with the assistance of a few trusted companions, foreshadows what might be achieved by lesser men with the backing of a full-fledged empire. Where other explorers are supported by “an emperor, three geographical societies . . . and a trading company,” Davis notes that Chanler’s first African trek through the land of the Masai, “where Henry M. Stanley has said it is not safe to go with even a thousand rifles,” was undertaken simply “for fun.” Such a comparison naturally prompts the reader to imagine what wonders Chanler and his compatriots might perform in a more serious endeavor.

As tensions between the U.S. and Spain escalated in the late 1890s and the possibility that a new generation of American men would be tested on the battlefield grew more likely, Davis again stoked the nation’s confidence with his 1897 novel Soldiers of Fortune. Davis’ greatest commercial success, the novel became the second best-selling book of the year, thanks in no small part to its dashing protagonist, Robert Clay (figure 5). An engineer and occasional mercenary with little formal education, Clay travels to Olancho to develop an iron mine for the Valencia Mining Company, which happens to be owned by the father of Alice Langham, a society belle Clay whom has admired from afar. After first defeating the jungle, Clay must put down a coup

---


39 Ibid.

40 Lubow, 124.
Robert Clay dismissing General Mendoza, the would-be dictator of Olancho, after he attempted to solicit a bribe from the American engineer. From Soldiers of Fortune, illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson.
(whose leaders would nationalize the mine), rescue the President’s wife, restore the country to democracy, and discover that his true love is not Alice, but her spunky younger sister, Hope. As he and his new fiancée sail back to America in the closing scene of the novel, Clay draws Hope a map of his world, divided into sites of past glory, such as his stint soldiering in Algiers, and far flung places in Mexico or Peru that will soon be improved by his work as an engineer.

Clay’s contribution to the undeveloped places of the globe is a fictional elaboration of the proper relation between the U.S. and its southern neighbors that Davis projected in Three Gringos. In both works, the native residents rarely materialize out of the narrative’s hazy background other than to provide services for the white characters, whether laboring at the mines or providing food and shelter to travelers. (The greedy revolutionary, General Mendoza, who will gladly abandon his threat to nationalize the mines for a tidy sum, is a notable exception.) Their laziness and primitive technology makes it impossible for them to develop the land’s abundant natural resources. Since “the mines really didn’t exist . . . until we came,” whatever profits the company shares with Olancho will be a generous gift to those who had nothing before.41 While Clay is well-compensated for his expertise, Davis stresses that profit is not his motivation. Upon sighting the ore deposits from a tramp steamer, Clay sends an unsolicited letter to Langham and proceeds to seek a concession for him, with no apparent guarantee of his own employment on the project. Even after he is hired, Clay insists that he is not a “salaried servant of Mr. Langham’s” but a man charged with an “almost noble” task who

---
“does good work . . . because his self-respect demand[s] it” (76-7, 50). As part of the
“world’s land which is lying unimproved,” which in Davis’ view all but demands to be
improved, Olancho’s ore awaits “some honest effort” “to turn it to account” (Gringos,
148).

If Davis’ vision of U.S. dominance in Latin America in Three Gringos tends to be
combative, declaring at one point that the unproductive region would be better off had the
thwarted “American filibuster” William Walker “put his foot on the neck of every
republic in Central America,” Clay’s influence over the Olanchoan people is depicted as
benign, even beneficial (147). Although his workers are “sulky” and “resentful” at first,
“they could not long resist the fact that Clay was doing the work of five men and five
different kinds of work, not only without grumbling, but apparently with the keenest
pleasure” (20). A natural leader, Clay does not need violence to secure the obedience of
his workers. Yet when called upon, he proves to be a gifted military leader whose
makeshift troops, consisting of miners and loyalist soldiers, gladly follow him. In fact,
they proclaim Clay military president of Olancho once General Mendoza’s forces, which
have killed the country’s elected leader, have been defeated. While Clay laughingly
dismisses the offer as a task beneath his abilities, he nonetheless assumes a dictator’s
prerogatives, directing the new president to release an American mercenary from jail and
grant his native lieutenants the Star of Olancho. He then advises the U.S. Marines, who
arrive just as the dust settles, how to secure the capital city. Clay’s troops may be

42 Davis’ efforts to make Clay into a self-made man are noteworthy. Clay has succeeded despite
being an orphan without formal schooling. Although he is an employee, Davis tries mightily to erase this
reality, casting him as a professional driven by his own self-respect and fascination for the work. On
several occasions, Clay refers to the mines as his, and he takes little direction from Mr. Langham, who is in
Olancho during the attempted coup d’etat, even disregarding his wishes at times. Clay’s self-direction on
the job seems calculated to reassure white-collar professionals of their own lingering autonomy.
deprived of his stellar leadership, but they will be rewarded for their service; thanks to their wages at the booming mines, financed by Langham and protected by the new U.S.-friendly president, “they should all be rich men” (175).

Soldiers of Fortune also echoes Three Gringos in its depiction of empire building as fun and not terribly dangerous. Although Olancho’s coup d’état results in a handful of casualties, including the death of an important secondary character, there is a persistent sense in the novel that the political turmoil, even the battles themselves, need not be taken seriously. This nonchalance derives in part from the military ineptitude of the Olanchoans, who cannot function without a strong leader and are dreadful marksmen regardless. Confident that this will be merely a “picnic,” the American men are thrilled to be involved in the conflict (119). Ted Langham, Alice’s college-age brother, exults in being shot, regretting only that the bullet will not likely leave a scar. These escapades hold no novelty for the worldly Clay, who is bemused by the political intrigue but nonetheless exhilarated by the adventure. When he does acknowledge danger, it is out of concern for others’ safety or couched in irony. Exposed on a moonlit beach with unseen enemies shooting down from the jungle above, Clay bitterly notes that he might lose his life “in a silly brawl with semi-barbarians” after having found love (153). Of course, Clay survives the assault and goes on to kill General Mendoza, ending the coup. His victory in this “row,” like the offer to rule Olancho, means little to Clay, who is far more moved by the rousing tribute he receives from the American Marines, which leaves his eyes “wet and winking” (175, 178).

Davis and his fellow gringos long to find some comparable excitement during their Latin American travels, but—aside from one telling exception—are thoroughly
disappointed. Instead, the trio creates dangerous situations for their own amusement. At a village bull fight, all three men jump into the improvised ring with the bull, entertaining the locals with their antics. A hunting expedition offers another chance to test their mettle. Given the choice between hunting wild birds and alligators, Davis opts for the larger prey, which necessitates fording a deep, rushing stream. To underscore the risk, Davis sardonically remarks that he lost sight of his companion during the crossing and assumed him drown, but was “more or less consoled” to discover him downstream, very much alive and also empty-handed. Finally, the gringos plot to rescue a Panamanian attorney accused of assisting the last uprising. Although Davis and his conspirators know “nothing of the rights or wrongs of the revolutionists,” they decide that “a man who was going down a rope into a small boat while three soldiers sat waiting for him in an outer room was performing a sporting act that called for our active sympathy” (Gringos, 212, 215). To their disappointment, the attorney disappears before their plan can be executed. In repeatedly putting their bodies in unnecessary danger, Davis and his companions demonstrate that Latin America is a safe space for boyish pranks and presumably the more serious work of building an empire.

Davis’ carefree façade is breached one night in Honduras when their guide, an American mining engineer and longtime resident named Jeffs, decides to alleviate the visitors’ boredom. As their cross-country mule ride comes to a close, the group bemoans the “discomforts and hardships” they have endured in this fever-ridden, “uninteresting” country, without even “the consolation of excitement that comes with danger or the comforting thought that we were accomplishing anything in the meantime” (122). Jeffs leaves his whiny charges as dusk falls and hides himself behind a large boulder further
down the trail, hanging his coat on a nearby bush and his hat on another to create a shadowy band of brigands. When the gringos arrive at this “ambuscade,” Jeffs sternly orders them to halt in Spanish, followed by a “rapid fusillade of pistol-shots” (125). The startled travelers fall off their mules and return fire until Jeffs calls out to them in English. Davis tries to paint Jeffs as the frightened party, “afraid of stray bullets” even behind his boulder, but his sour description of the prank as “a very unsatisfactory practical joke for all concerned” in which the gringos are “grossly deceived and imposed upon” suggests otherwise (126).

As much as Davis’ contemporaries wanted to see the handsome war-correspondent and author as a real-world counterpart to his fictional heroes, the roadside fire-fight points to the considerable flaws in that parallel, particularly at this early stage in his career. Contrary to his brash pronouncements, the Dick Davis of Three Gringos is more akin to young Ted Langham, the college boy eager to prove his valor but startled to find himself at the front of the line, fighting unseen enemies and dazzled by the flash of gunfire, than a veteran soldier like Clay. In addition to the direct peril posed by rogue army officers, Clay is subject to the more subtle temptations of an extended exile from civilization, which only begin to emerge during Davis’ relatively brief stints abroad. Surrounded by corrupt officials and his “half-breed” workers, including Olanchoans, “Irish” and “negroes,” Clay is almost entirely isolated from proper society (19, 28). The coming of the Langhams represents a rare chance to associate with “white people,” as his railroad engineer MacWilliams notes, after which daily life in Olancho will seem intolerable (65). Their arrival also brings an influx of feminine influence and domestic

---

43 That the gunfire is compared to a “flash-light photograph” provides another link between young Langham and the oft-photographed Davis (173).
comforts, which are sorely lacking at the mining camp. Clay, MacWilliams and Ted, who precedes the rest of the family, live “roughly” in a “wooden hut” whose primary decorations are blueprints and weaponry (22). Once the other Langhams arrive, however, they enjoy pleasant evenings filled with piano playing and delicious meals at The Palms, a lavish home the three men construct, outfit, and staff but leave empty until its “rightful owners” can take possession (23). Even without civilization’s external safeguards, Clay shows little sign of deteriorating personal standards or hardened manners. He moves easily between the jungle and a ball at the Government palace, showing the same social fluidity as William Astor Chanler.

Davis’ mobility is a pale imitation of these extremes, in that his travels carry far less risk than those of the full-fledged mediators he idolizes. In many respects, Davis’ globetrotting resembles Nellie Bly’s more than Robert Clay’s. Although he steps off the tidy paths carved by the British Empire during his journey down the isthmus, Davis’ encounter with the exotic remains fairly superficial and comparatively brief. The local residents serve as an audience for his boyish stunts and as fodder for his pronouncements about the character of Central America’s citizenry. Davis attributes the “bare and poor” mud houses of rural Hondurans, who provide food and shelter during the group’s cross-country mule ride, not to their owners’ poverty but to their indolence, noting that they prefer to eat “sitting on their haunches” rather than “taking the trouble necessary to make a chair” (Gringos, 93, 92). With such an attitude, there is little danger that Davis will be converted to native ways. Since his interactions with the Hondurans are governed by a rudimentary tourist system, Davis can hardly be said to impose his will upon them. The prospect of petty tyranny, like that of the lapsed gentleman who brutally beats his slave
girl in "The Exiles," in these interactions is equally slim. Moreover, Davis' society is not limited to Latin America's peasants. In addition to his two eminent companions and a servant, Davis enjoys several semi-civilized respites, including dinner with the governor of British Honduras, meeting the president of Nicaragua and the former president of Honduras, and an enjoyable stay in Caracas, "the Paris of South America" (221). As much as Davis emphasized the distance he had traveled from the civilized world, noting that even the "ubiquitous" Cook & Sons "threw up their hands" at his request to go to Porto Cortez and offered "a comfortable trip to upper Burma or Mozambique" as a substitute, there is little chance of this fastidious reporter "going native" (38). When Davis emerges from the jungle and strides into the Waldorf Astoria to amuse a bevy of Gibson Girls with tales of his most recent adventures, the reversal is somewhat less dramatic than it might first appear.

This is not to dismiss Davis' status as a mediator entirely. Floating through the world, showcasing exotic countries as a (relatively safe) playground for an exuberant American youth, Davis' Latin American journey serves many of the same ends as Bly's. As a celebrity journalist writing on current hotspots in well-regarded monthlies, Davis' work, as well as his confident persona, fueled the nation's imperial drive in a way Bly could only hint at. If Davis has little direct impact on the ground, failing to discipline

---

44 Somers Somerset, whom Davis had met at Oxford, brought his servant Chalwood. Somerset was the son of Lady Henry Somerset, who, with Frances Willard, tried to sabotage Ida B. Wells' second British tour in 1894.

45 Booth Tarkington, who was several years Davis' junior, sketched a similar image in his reminiscence of the reporter in R. H. D.: Appreciations of Richard Harding Davis, published the year after his death. "When the Waldorf was wondrously completed, and we cut an exam.... for an excursion to see the world at lunch in its new magnificence, and Richard Harding Davis came into the Palm Room—then, oh, then, our day was radiant! That was the top of our fortune: we could never have hoped for so much. Of all the great people of every continent, this was the one we most desired to see." R. H. D.: Appreciations of Richard Harding Davis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 10, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/406/406.txt.
native workers or secure American access to natural resources or build a railroad, that does not render his travels unproductive. Engineers like Clay may be glorified as "the chief civilizer of our century," but in his modest way Davis also demonstrates civilization’s portability (Soldiers, 4). His efforts to maintain boundaries at the individual level, which often serve to domesticate seemingly uncivilized and inhospitable spaces, are an important lesson for those mediators who will come after this intrepid scout to face a more extended, and more intimate, encounter with the exotic. In this respect, Davis’ Boy Scout behavior addresses a danger that is more relevant to Cushing’s Zuni immersion than Bly’s stunts. Where the plucky reporter strives to defuse or obscure external threats to her feminine respectability and sexual purity, Cushing and Davis must guard against the possibility of internal dissolution.

Be Prepared: Davis as Boy Scout

By the time Robert Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement took root in the United States in 1910, Richard Harding Davis was already a middle-aged man. His first marriage, which would soon end in divorce, was platonic and produced no children, much less as Scouting-age son. Nonetheless, the eternally youthful Dick Davis did not entirely miss the Scouting phenomenon, which so closely mirrored many of his own ideals. In the last years of his career, Davis penned two stories starring Boy Scouts, to which I will return shortly. "The Boy Scout" (1914) and "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" (1916) were part of a long line of tales that featured adolescent boys as characters, such as his first big hit, "Gallegher," or appealed to a juvenile audience. In fact, Davis’
second collection was entitled *Stories for Boys* (1891). Nor was his interest in Scouting exclusively literary. Davis hosted a group of Boy Scouts for a two-week camp out at his estate in upstate New York in 1914, impressing upon the group his own faith in the ethos of the outdoors.

For a man who foreshadowed the twentieth-century figure of the dutiful Boy Scout in numerous ways, Davis’ embrace of the Scouting movement was an appropriate denouement to his career. Davis, like the Scout, embodied the collective hopes for America’s future greatness, combining high ideals with practical know-how, individual competence with willing obedience to superiors. Each was a fitting representative of a modern, bureaucratic nation with a growing empire. While these Scouting elements are not neatly collected in a single text, a clear resemblance emerges over the span of Davis’ career, both in its public aspects and in more private ones, such as letters to his beloved family and incidents observed by his fellow reporters. His boyishness is thus not a discrete identity, but a strain in his public persona. If this quality was muted in some contexts, most notably his war reporting, where boys in mortal danger are forced to become men, it swelled in others. After Davis’ death at age 52, John Fox, Jr., a fellow correspondent and novelist, remembered his colleague as “youth incarnate—ruddy, joyous, vigorous, adventurous, self-confident youth.” Augustus Thomas, a playwright


47 Lubow, 314.

48 Davis’ boyishness is thus more akin to Bly’s girlishness, rather than Cushing’s alternating personas.
who collaborated on Davis' stage productions, declared in the same volume of *Appreciations*, “At his very best he was in heart and mind a boy grown tall.”

Lured by the promise of adventure and the irresistible figure of Baden-Powell, who became a national hero in the Second Boer War due to his leadership at the siege of Mafeking, young boys in England and elsewhere jumped at the chance to be one of B-P's Scouts. Although Baden-Powell planned to encourage scouting within existing youth movements, the incredible success of *Scouting for Boys* (1908), which was adapted from his earlier book on military scouting, created an intense demand from boys outside these groups and a separate organization was soon established. By 1910, there were over 100,000 Scouts registered in Britain and the movement had spread to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and the United States, where it enfolded the Woodcraft Indians and Sons of Daniel Boone. “To its recruits,” observes Robert MacDonald, “Scouting offered freedom, and a chance to break out from the restricted and often stifling atmosphere” found in the home and the school. Roving the countryside, learning the skills of woodcraft and outdoor survival, Scouts got to play at the work of men—soldiers, explorers, frontiersmen—whose exploits populated the story papers and novels they devoured. In fact, *Scouting for Boys* recommended Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling to its readers, writers whom Davis also admired and, in some respects, emulated.

49 *Appreciations*, 17, 13.

50 This conflation is not as problematic as it might first appear. Baden-Powell was familiar with Ernest Thomas Seton's *Birch Bark Rolls* (1906) and incorporated many of its ideas into *Scouting for Boys*. Thus Scouting already combined the figures of the military scout, drawn from Baden-Powell's own experience, and the Native American scout. Seton's more pacifistic ethos did eventually clash with the more militaristic bent of other American leaders, and he later withdrew from the movement.

51 Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 119. This overview of the Boy Scouts' origins also relies on MacDonald.
In addition to the thrill of activity and possible of danger, Scouting appealed as a boy-centered secret society, complete with its own rituals, chants, oaths, and rites of initiation.

Davis’ own yearning for adventure, whether seeking big game in Egypt or political intrigue with a Panamanian revolutionary, is one of many affinities with the Scout. Like the boy who is too young to serve, Davis relished his proximity to real soldiers, highlighting the practical expertise and experience he shared with the troops. Most often, the self-deprecating Davis would call attention to the courage of other war correspondents, which burnished the profession’s public profile by linking them with regular soldiers. In addition, Davis’ attire as a correspondent, with its evocations of military dress, resembled the Boy Scout’s uniform, which was itself adapted from Baden-Powell’s design for the South African Constabulary. In fact, Davis’ costume contributed to his arrest as a British spy during World War I. Having strayed beyond the environs of Brussels without a pass, Davis stumbled upon German forces engaged in a surprise maneuver. His American passport complicated an already tense situation as he was wearing what appeared to be a British army uniform, complete with war ribbons, in the photograph. Davis sought another quasi-military experience in middle age,

---

52 Davis was commissioned as a captain at the start of the Spanish-American War but declined the post. Although he struggled with the decision, seeing the war as possibly his last chance to bear arms for his country, Davis was ultimately convinced that without proper military training he would never be considered a true soldier. Moreover, as a well-connected journalist, he reasoned that he would receive plum assignments, allowing him to see more of the war than an officer with specific responsibilities. Lubow, 161-2.

53 MacDonald, 124.

54 Davis was released at 3 a.m. and forced to walk back to Brussels within two days—or be shot on sight as a spy. Lubow, 229. The author’s pride in these military trappings is quite different from Robert Clay’s attitude. Clay wears his medals to a ball at the Government palace, but only “to do honor to the President,” his host (81). When Hope asks him to explain each one, Clay belittles his accomplishments. A medal from the Sultan of Zanzibar, for instance, is dismissed as a trinket, bestowed on Clay only because he “was out of cigars the day I called” (89).
becoming involved with the war preparedness movement championed by General Leonard Wood, a hero of the Cuban conflict concerned about the state of the U.S. Armed Forces. In 1909, Davis participated in staged war games near his family’s summer home in Marion, Massachusetts; he joined a similar month-long exercise six years later at the U.S. Army post in Plattsburg, New York for a Collier’s Magazine article. Playing at soldiering in Plattsburg was not all that different from hosting Boy Scout patrols as both movements tapped into anxieties about the state of American manhood.

For Baden-Powell and like-minded adults, Scouting was a tool to counteract the degenerative effects of civilization, whether the enervating influences of a comfortable middle-class life or the privations endured by the urban poor, and thereby revitalize manhood. Such an intervention would preserve the strength of the Empire, which could be undermined by unruly native populations in the colonies and encroaching European powers like Germany. Although Baden-Powell urged his scoutmasters not to preach to the boys, instead encouraging imaginative play and even some rowdiness, the ideological aims of the movement were quite explicit. Subtitled A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship, Scouting for Boys stresses a boy’s duties to others, from serving his country to performing a daily good deed, and the necessity of obedience. Many of the characteristics that define a proper Scout, as outlined in the nine-part Scout Law, are also those of an ideal soldier. As Michael Rosenthal notes, six of the original nine laws

---

55 Lubow, 315.

56 MacDonald, 127.

57 This is also true of the original Scout’s Oath: “I will do my duty to God and the King. I will do my best to help others, whatever it costs me. I know the Scout Law, and will obey it.” Robert Baden-Powell, Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship, ed. Elleke Boehmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36.
“have as their essential thrust the Scout’s unquestioning loyalty and his absolute willingness to carry out any orders given him.”58 More than blind obedience, however, Scouting sought to inspire a sense of honor and self-sufficiency in England’s youth, so that manly conduct would emanate from within.

As much as Davis craved adventure, it is his adherence to the ideals that Scouting sought to instill in boys that makes his resemblance to the Boy Scout unmistakable. For instance, Davis’ concern with maintaining order in military settings permeates his coverage of the Spanish-American War. He raves about the sailors’ discipline on board the flagship New York, declaring the Americans’ “intelligent obedience” superior to what he has seen in military posts from Knightsbridge to Egypt (Cuban, 15). The cowboy contingent of the Rough Riders is also praised for its ability to shoot only on command, defying expectations about the boisterous westerners. On the other hand, while Davis lauded Roosevelt’s leadership publicly, he was dismayed to observe the Colonel dining with non-commissioned officers. For Davis, who was known to eat alone rather than dine with an unsuitable companion, this was likely both a social and strategic offense, in that such familiarity might undercut Roosevelt’s authority on the front.59

The obligation to do one’s duty runs throughout Davis’ life and fiction. The plot of “The Boy Scout” turns on the young protagonist’s determination to fulfill his daily good deed quota, which inspires a jaded adult to perform a good turn of his own, setting


59 Lubow, 169; Seelye, 24.
in motion a chain of events with global ramifications. In a slightly less fantastic plot, Courtland Van Bibber, a wealthy bachelor always in search of amusement who appears in several Davis stories, reunites a motherless girl with her aristocratic father to save her from a life on the stage. Davis also modernized the parable of the prodigal son, turning the disgraced young man into a gifted gambler who uses his talents to help a pair of newlyweds buy their own business and so discovers that his seemingly wasted life might be salvaged. 60 Davis took a particular interest in good deeds performed for the benefit of young ladies, from Clay’s rescue of the President’s wife in Soldiers of Fortune to Van Bibber defending an upper-class social worker from some street toughs on his way home from the theater. 61 Although his heroines tend to be spirited, athletic, and independent women, they also graciously accept the chivalrous gestures of his heroes. In promoting the old-fashioned virtues of chivalry through his fiction, Davis anticipated Baden-Powell’s more direct instruction in Scouting for Boys (1908), whose chapter on “The Chivalry of the Knights” aimed to revive these “rules” which “did so much for the moral tone of our race.” 62

Those who knew Davis saw the noble actions of his characters as a reflection of his own ideals. Many of the reminiscences collected after his death as R. H. D.: Appreciations of Richard Harding Davis (1917) remark upon Davis’ devotion to a personal code of conduct, his own set of “rules.” According to E. L. Burlingame, Davis

60 These are the plots of “Her First Appearance” and “‘There Were Ninety and Nine’” respectively. The latter story appeared in Gallegher and Other Stories, while the former was collected in Van Bibber and Others (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892).

61 Van Bibber’s rescue of “Eleanor Cuyler” also leads to the heroine’s reunion with her beloved. The story appeared in Van Bibber and Others.

62 Baden-Powell, 212.
"had certain simple, clean, manly convictions as to how a man should act; apparently quite without self-consciousness in this respect, . . . he went ahead and did accordingly, untormented by any alternatives or casuistries, which for him did not seem to exist."

Gouverneur Morris similarly observed that Davis had "a will of iron" "on questions of right and wrong" and "all his life" "moved resolutely in whichever direction his conscience pointed." 63 Davis' voluntary adherence to these "convictions" exemplifies a fundamental principle of Scouting, which Baden-Powell described as striving "not so much to discipline the boys, as to teach them how to discipline themselves." 64

The world Davis depicted in his much of his fiction and sought to replicate in his own life was an orderly place, in which honorable actions were easily identified and lesser alternatives firmly rejected. In foreign spaces, where these divisions could slacken under the weight of local customs, new freedoms, and practical necessity, Davis sought to maintain his habits—moral and otherwise—whenever possible. John T. McCrutcheon, a fellow correspondent, speaks to this connection in his recollections of Davis in Veracruz, Mexico during the U.S. occupation in 1914, just after his fiftieth birthday.

His code of life and habits was as fixed as that of the Briton who takes his habits and customs and games and tea wherever he goes, no matter how benighted or remote the spot may be. . . . He carried his bath-tub, his immaculate linen, his evening clothes, his war equipment—in which he had the pride of a connoisseur—wherever he went, and, what is more, he had the courage to use the evening clothes at times when their use was conspicuous. He was the only man who wore a dinner coat in Vera Cruz, and each night, at his particular table. . . . at the Hotel Diligencia, he was to be seen, as fresh and clean as though he were in a New York or London restaurant. 65

63 Appreciations, 12, 9.
64 Baden-Powell, 212.
65 Appreciations, 23.
As a handsomely-paid journalistic icon stationed in a modern city, Davis' “habits” in Veracruz were surely more refined than what he could sustain under the more rustic conditions of other assignments. Yet McCrutcheon's linkage between Davis' personal habits of dress and hygiene and his broader “code” is telling, for it speaks to the gallivanting reporter's determination to minimize the impact of his dislocations. Davis' efforts to uphold his standards for personal comfort and cleanliness in the field is a way of asserting his continued allegiance to civilized ways. In contrast to Cushing, who willingly lets the pueblo environment change him, Davis staunchly resists these external influences, making only the barest concessions to local conditions. With the help of his kit and his “habits,” Davis reinscribes these intimate boundaries, creating a secure (clean) space from which to view the disorienting landscape of the imperial frontier. From this well-made camp, the boy (scout) “grown tall” is prepared to confront the wild places of the world without becoming wild himself.

For all its emphasis on molding boys into manly citizens, Scouting was also deeply invested in domesticity, albeit a domesticity without women. What is camping but learning to be at home in the woods? If Scouting appealed to boys for its lessons on self-sufficiency—how to build a bridge, treat a snake bit, or make a toothbrush from a twig—it also promised to make its recruits self-sufficient in another sense. They would practice discipline, good deeds and good hygiene in the absence of Mother’s prodding, internalizing the values of the home. Although the domestic is typically conceived in opposition to the foreign, alien or unfamiliar—and these boundaries are certainly critical in a nationalist enterprise that seeks to ingrain obedience and loyalty in its members—it is also useful to see domesticity as a process of domestication rather than a static condition.

307
of opposition. "Domesticity," as Amy Kaplan argues, "not only monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates traces of the savage within." Scouting, then, was poised on a delicate fulcrum: it was rooted in a desire to rescue boys from the deleterious effects of civilization, to restore their spirit and vitality, yet ultimately sought to produce men who would serve as agents of civilization and preserve the Empire. In light of these dual meanings of domesticity, we might reconceptualize the Scout’s kit to include both practical gear for making a home in the wildness and the ideological tools imparted by his training. The kit enables him to fortify the body’s boundaries against weather, dirt, and disease, upholding the distinction between foreign and domestic at the literal level of the body, while Scouting’s internalized regime of honor and obedience tames any lingering wildness in him.

In one of Three Gringos’ most sweeping criticisms, Davis likens the Central Americans to “a gang of semi-barbarians in a beautifully furnished house, of which they can understand neither its possibilities of comfort nor its use” (148). Although he was referring primarily to their failure to appreciate, much less develop, the natural resources of their region, the comparison, intimating that the Central Americans are a destructive influence in the home, is revealing. More often, Davis evokes domestic disturbances when discussing the fate of white foreigners in exotic places. While traveling in Honduras, Davis met Garland Howland, a former denizen of Newport working as the station master in San Pedro Sula after an unspecified disgrace involving forgery and drink. Davis spent several hours with Howland and his "colored ‘missus’" in their mud-floored hut while the couple’s mixed race children played nearby. He described the incident in a letter to his family, including the assessment of Howland’s American

66 Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity,” American Literature 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 582.
employer, who noted that the exile had given up alcohol "but had every other vice known to man." However, he gave Harper's readers a sanitized version that painted the unnamed man as more of a charming vagabond, and excluded the meeting entirely from the subsequent book.\textsuperscript{67}

Years after his suppression, Howland seems to resurface in the figure of Upsher, an English trader in the Congo who befriends Everett, an American reporter transformed by his African travels in "A Question of Latitude" (1910). Assigned to investigate reports of atrocities under King Leopold, as Davis did in 1907, the youthful muckraker gradually sheds his proper upbringing and earnest enthusiasm during months on the river, until he becomes a source of domestic disorder himself. Upsher's black wife initially comes as a "shock" to Everett, especially since the trader has a wife and child "at home" as well, but soon accepts Upsher as "his most intimate friend."\textsuperscript{68} As his behavior becomes more erratic, including bludgeoning a "wood-boy" for insinuating that Everett had cheated him, the American insists that the "rules and principles and standards of his old existence" have only been temporarily "laid aside." They have been left behind like his "frock coat and silk hat," "not because he would never use them again, but because in the Congo they were ridiculous."\textsuperscript{69} Seeing no use "in holding . . . to morals, to etiquette, to fashions of conduct" "in a dripping jungle," Everett eventually resents even having to change out of his pajamas for dinner.\textsuperscript{70} The reporter's final degradation comes when he

\textsuperscript{67} Davis' letter to his family is quoted in Lubow, 119. The meeting with Garland appears in the first installment of Three Gringos in Harper's New Monthly Magazine 91, no. 544 (September 1895): 494.


\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 75-6.
brusquely propositions another man’s wife, an offer which would betray his own beloved back home and establish another adulterous, topsy-turvy household like Upsher’s. After dismissing his strange conduct as the result of assimilating “new ideas,” a natural outcome of the traveler’s broader perspective, Everett finds that he has assimilated “just as much of the Congo as the rabbit assimilates of the boa-constrictor, that first smothers it with saliva and then swallows it” whole. 71

Davis will have no part of that spit. His kit enables him to domesticate a small portion of whatever environment he occupies in order to protect the vulnerable white, male body from foreign influences. Creating the ideal kit for each international outing was a source of pride for Davis, and he devoted considerable attention to the matter over the course of his career. Though occasionally saddled with strict limitations on his baggage, Davis’ kit became exorbitant given the chance. To cover the Boer War, Davis brought a “beautiful tent” with window panes, ventilators, and pockets, two tables, two chairs, two lanterns, a bath-tub, a folding bed, and a cape cart. He was accompanied by two oxen, two ponies, a stray puppy, and “three Kaffir boys,” one of whom did “nothing but polish [his] boots and gaiters and harness.” 72 He also bragged to his mother about his kit for the Russo-Japanese War, noting that “everybody here voted it the greatest ever seen.” The Japanese “saddlers, tent makers and tinsmiths” were determined to copy it. 73

Most remarkably, Davis included an essay on his kit in Notes of a War Correspondent (1910), a collection of some of his most memorable dispatches.

70 Ibid., 77.
71 Ibid., 72.
72 Davis, Adventures, 276.
73 Ibid., 302.
Davis' essay begins with a humorous paragraph in which he doubts whether anyone will take his advice on kit-making, since a man's kit is an expression of his "temperament" and a point of pride. "A man's outfit," Davis teasingly notes, "is a matter which seems to touch his private honor" (Notes, 83). Nonetheless, he forges ahead, providing detailed descriptions of his ideal tent, carry-all, and folding chair, as well as a ranked list of items useful when traveling heavy, including "one housewife" (90). While Davis at times traveled with a veritable entourage, he insists that he can be "quite as comfortable, clean, and content" with a lighter load (50 pounds of gear) and indeed prefers it. However, he quickly clarifies that "by traveling light I do not mean any lighter than the necessity demands." Contrary to the "tenderfoot," who believes that "to be comfortable is to be effeminate," an "old soldier," like Davis, knows that "it is his duty to keep himself fit, so that he can perform his work, whether his work is scouting for forage or scouting for men." He then recalls a major-general in the Spanish-American War who foolishly refused to sleep in an available bed because he was campaigning and had given up all "luxuries." By sleeping on the floor and depriving his "great brain" of rest, he is poorly prepared to lead his brigade, eventually taking ill and being relieved of command (85). Thus, the dutiful soldier (or scout or correspondent) wisely takes a few minutes to make his "surroundings healthy and comfortable." In a passage reminiscent of both domestic advice manuals and Scouting for Boys, Davis admonishes even the sleepiest soldier to boil a cup of tea or coffee as an aid to digestion, dig holes for hips and shoulder-blades under his blanket, and collect leaves to stuff in his boots as a pillow before retiring at the end of a long day.74 An "old sergeant" or "Indian fighter" will even

74 In a chapter on "Camp Life," Baden-Powell warned readers, "If you get sick you are no use as a scout, and are only a burden to others, and you generally get ill through your own fault" (150).
build a bunk or "possibly a shelter of boughs" upon making camp "just as though for the rest of his life he intended to dwell in that particular spot" (86). Far from effeminate, these grizzled fighters know the strategic value of domesticity in the wild.

The kit essay was not the first time Davis addressed the link between a man’s kit and his masculinity. At the beginning of the Spanish-American War, Davis had himself photographed in his latest war correspondent costume, which then included top boots, a canvas shooting jacket, a leather flask, a revolver and a cartridge belt. The publication in the Critic of his full-length studio portrait, complete with ersatz tree stump, provoked much comment, mostly of "amused derision." The Springfield Republican drily warned, "There will be terrific inkshed when he reaches the front," adding that if Davis "were cut up into small pieces, he would furnish the insurgents with arms and equipments for a whole winter."75 Quips like these poked fun at Davis’ status as a non-combatant journalist, drawing an unflattering comparison between the over-prepared reporter and the hardy Cuban rebels he would be covering. Davis again encountered charges of effeminacy after one of his Cuban dispatches included a lack of clean clothes and bathtubs among the many deprivations American soldiers endured during the long siege in the rifle-pits, which followed the famous assault on San Juan Hill. He responded to the "comic paragraphers" who had mocked him with a hefty does of sarcasm in The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns.

Of course, bathing is an effeminate and unmanly practice, and the American paragrapher is right to discourage cleanliness wherever he finds it; but cleanliness is an evil, nevertheless, which obtains in our army, and those of the officers who

75 The Critic published the photograph 23 April 1898. The commentary appeared in the same journal soon after. The Critic 32 (7 May 1898): 318-9; quoted in Lubow, 156.
were forced to wear the same clothes by night and by day for three weeks were so weak as to complain.\textsuperscript{76}

While clearly a defensive gesture, Davis' mock derision indicates his confidence in the virtues of cleanliness, particularly among the officers who are the subject of his retort. These gifted, elite military leaders are certainly \textit{not} weak in Davis' eyes, nor, he assumes, in the eyes of his readers. To prove his point, Davis next recounts a humorous incident surrounding the loss of his two saddlebags, the extent of his gear for the Cuban invasion, during this very dirty period. After several days, the misplaced bags were returned to him by a surgeon affiliated with the Rough Riders. Not quite the Good Samaritan, the surgeon has taken—and is now wearing—one of Davis' own shirts. When confronted, the surgeon exclaims that he had not touched the money or the bacon or the quinine found in the bags, all precious commodities on the front, “but that clean shirt I had to have. I’m only human. I will part with my life before I give you back that shirt.”\textsuperscript{77} The surgeon’s vow confirms Davis’ belief in the importance of cleanliness; so much the better that this endorsement comes from an educated professional who is also a representative of the war’s most heroic regiment.

These taunts about the hardships of dirty shirts surely generated a snicker in some circles, but others would have found Davis’ complaints entirely reasonable. For all the enthusiasm that preceded the Spanish-American War, there was also, as Hoganson notes, considerable anxiety about Americans’ ability to function in the tropics. Such concerns, which combined fears of tropical disease and the degenerative influence of savage people, only intensified after the devastating fever outbreaks in Cuba and the adoption of

\textsuperscript{76} Davis, Cuban, 278.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 280.
brutal counter-insurgency tactics to suppress the native Filipino resistance following the Spanish defeat in the Pacific. Yet the narrative of white incompatibility with the tropics was already circulating before the "splendid little war" showed its darker side.\textsuperscript{78}

Benjamin Kidd's \textit{The Control of the Tropics} (1898) forcefully argued that whites could not acclimatize to the torrid zones.

\begin{quote}
In climatic conditions which are a burden to him, in the midst of races in a different and lower stage of development; divorced from the influences which have produced him, from the moral and political environment from which he sprang, the white man does not in the end . . . tend so much to raise the level of the races amongst whom he has made his unnatural home, as he tends himself to sink slowly to the level around him.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

Kidd gives voice to a current of vulnerability underlying America's brash confidence at end of the century. In addition to transforming the once-exceptional republic into a tyrannical empire, consumed with its own power rather than promoting democracy, expansion overseas threatened to sap the nation's strength and fundamentally alter the character of its people through extended contact with the dark-skinned, savage Other. This kind of intimacy could lead to moral degradation, dilution of the racial stock, illness, or death, corrupting both individual bodies and the National Body. In Kaplan's eloquent formulation of this dynamic, "Underlying the dream of imperial expansion is the nightmare of its own success, a nightmare in which movement outward into the world threatens to incorporate the foreign and dismantle the domestic sphere of the nation."\textsuperscript{80}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{78} John Hay, U.S. Ambassador to England and later Secretary of State, coined this memorable phrase. Hoganson, 6.

\textsuperscript{79} Benjamin Kidd, \textit{The Control of the Tropics} (New York: McMillan, 1898), 50; quoted in Hoganson, 181.

\end{flushright}
Attention to personal cleanliness offered a modicum of protection against the dangerous influences of a foreign environment and, more importantly, signaled that the bearer of soap recognized the importance of policing all such permeable borders. Anne McClintock’s work on the fetishization of soap in Victorian Britain posits adherence to a bathing regime as a way of preserving the uncertain boundaries of class, gender, and racial identity in a social order threatened by the dirt and disorder of slums, class conflict, economic upheaval, imperial competition, and anti-colonial resistance. A clean body might not resolve any of these issues in and of itself, but the bather’s continual efforts to identify and expel dirt from his corpus suggested that he would advance similar goals at the national level. Since dirt expresses a culturally-specific relation to social value, Davis’ portable bath-tub, “two towels,” and “three cakes of soap” denote his broader awareness of what doesn’t belong, what doesn’t have value (Notes, 90). Unlike Henry Holcombe, Davis will never become oblivious to the “mud” in his travels.

While touring Cuba in 1897 prior to the U.S. invasion, Davis learned that a local officer’s club lacked a place for Spain’s military leadership to bathe. Nor could a bath be found anywhere in the surrounding town. This deficiency astounded Davis and decimated whatever respect he had for the Spanish. For eighteen months, “regiment after regiment of Spanish officers and gentlemen have been stationed in that town,” a place he describes as “the dirtiest, hottest, and dustiest town I ever visited,” yet “none of them had wanted a bath.” The Spaniards’ utter failure to seek out a bathtub, an object Davis declares to be “the dividing line between savages and civilized beings,” convinces him

81 Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995), 211.

82 McClintock, 154.
that “all the stories I had heard about their butcheries and atrocities” were true. While Davis was certainly capable of deadpan hyperbole, given the solemn tone of *Cuba in Wartime* and the prominent place accorded “The Question of Atrocities” in that volume, it seems reasonable to take seriously his statements about bathing’s importance. Davis’ own devotion to the practice, even under adverse conditions, supports such a reading.

Davis’ cleanliness is a startlingly consistent theme in the recollections of his friends and colleagues, encompassing “the clean body, clean heart, and clean mind of the man.” Several contributors to *Appreciations* remarked upon the suitability of Davis’ works for innocent eyes, citing his young daughter and his mother as potential readers. Even his “hot words” were “of a dry, clean indignation,” according to Booth Tarkington. Gouvernor Morris noted the wholesome nature of his writing as well as his bathing habits, lamenting that with R. H. D.’s passing “the biggest force for cleanliness that was in the world has gone out of the world.” Similarly, John McCrutcheon ties together Davis’ “clean-thinking heroes,” his dedication to a “fixed code of personal conduct,” and his personal cleanliness. He recounts a memorable incident during World War I when both reporters were working in Salonika and sharing a makeshift hotel room. McCrutcheon awoke to the “sound of violent splashing, accompanied by shuddering gasps” and witnessed Davis standing in his portable bath-tub and “drenching himself with


84 *Appreciations*, 18.

85 Finley Peter Dunne observed that Davis translated himself into his heroic characters and “no expurgation was needed to make the translation suitable for the most innocent eyes” (19). John Fox, Jr. remarked, “R. H. D. never wrote a line cannot be given to his little daughter to read when she is old enough to read, and I never heard a word pass his lips that his own mother could not hear” (18).

86 *Appreciations*, 10.

87 Ibid.
ice-cold water.” While “admirable” as an “exhibition of courageous devotion to an established custom of life,” McCrutcheon concludes that it probably was not “prudent” in light of the frigid November weather. Indeed, Davis’ determination to bathe sometimes trumped common sense, as two incidents in Three Gringos illustrate. At Corinto, the three men bathe in the surf each day despite sharing the waters with “large man-eating sharks,” while in Honduras they disregard warnings about the dangers of bathing, especially in the afternoon, since “we looked forward to the half-hour spent in one of those roaring rapids as the best part of the day” (Gringos, 187, 109). Where Baden-Powell cautioned his recruits “not to miss a single day” of bathing, even if it was only to rub their bodies with a wet towel or scrub it with a dry one, Davis adapted his bathing regimen when traveling abroad but strove to uphold it nonetheless. With his wholesome books and his pure white body, Davis the proto-Scout exemplifies the Scout Law’s requirement to keep clean “in body and thought.” Willing to risk illness, injury, and the incredulous looks of his colleagues in pursuit of this cleanly ideal, Davis reassured turn-of-the-century readers that regardless of the geographical boundaries crossed in pursuit of a story, he would not lose sight of these transgressions, nor the stark division between savage and civilized that a bathtub represents.

---


89 Baden-Powell, 196.

90 The original 1911 Boy Scouts of America Scout Law states: “A Scout is clean. He keeps clean in body and thought, stands for clean speech, clean sport, clean habits, and travels with a clean crowd.” The wording has changed slightly over the years, but the current BSA Scout Law still stipulates that “a Scout keeps his body and mind fit and clean. He goes around with those who believe in living by these same ideals. He helps keep his home and community clean.” “Scout Law History,” http://www.inquiry.net/ideals/scout_law/chart.htm; Boy Scouts of America, “What Is Boy Scouting?,” http://www.scouting.org/factsheets/02-503a.html.
Conclusion: Reading Davis’ Boy Scout Tales

In the last years of his life, Richard Harding Davis remained an esteemed war correspondent and popular author and playwright. However, he was no longer the bright young star whose name was on everyone’s lips.\(^91\) Burdened by the upkeep of his estate near Mount Kisco, New York, as well as the expenses of a new wife and baby, Davis increasingly wrote for profit more than art. As a result, much of his output during this period was fairly formulaic, revisiting old themes, characters, and plot devices with little experimentation.\(^92\) His values remained old-fashioned, although he sought to incorporate up-to-the-minute references to keep his fiction fresh, such as the newly imported Boy Scouts. After its American inception in 1910, the movement grew tremendously, attracting more than 360,000 members by 1919.\(^93\) That Davis adopted Scouting as a subject for short fiction at this time is a sign of his business savvy; what he chose to emphasize about the novel figure of the Boy Scout suggests that the aging reporter found ideological kinship in the new fad as well as a marketable “hook.”

“The Boy Scout” and “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” which appeared in Metropolitan Magazine in 1914 and 1916 respectively, are both fancifully plotted tales in which a lone Scout’s determination to do his duty has far-reaching consequences. In “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” Jimmie Sniffen, whose grandfather was a scout for General Washington in the same woods the boy now roams, is inspired to search for German spies in upstate New York by the visit of a celebrated war correspondent to his patrol. (Given

---

\(^{91}\) Upon returning from Salonika, he was dismayed to discover that his usual table at Delmonico’s had been reserved for someone more fashionable. Lubow, 331.

\(^{92}\) Osborn and Phillips, 127.

\(^{93}\) Macleod, xi.
Davis' own obsession with this possibility, it seems likely that "Clavering Gould" is a stand in for the author.)\(^{94}\) After observing a suspicious man in the countryside for several days, Sniffen "arrests" the stranger with the help of his family's shotgun. Upon finding that the man's binoculars are made in Germany and his map is covered in "military words," the young Scout takes his prisoner to the local Justice of the Peace, who also happens to be the "councilman" of the Round Hill Scouts ("Wolf," 271, 253). The Judge, however, has little confidence in Gould's warnings of a German infiltration. He has already dismissed Jimmie's earlier reports of a spy in their midst, instructing the boy to seek a warrant from him before making any "arrests," a request Jimmie has ignored. When the boy and his prisoner appear on the Judge's doorstep, the two adults concoct a ruse that releases the stranger, who purports to be planning maneuvers for the U.S. Army in preparation for a German invasion, while promising Jimmie that his prisoner will be shot at dawn. The Boy Scout is proven right in the end as a car full of Secret Service agents roars into the Judge's driveway in search of the German spy who has just eluded them.

The hero of "The Boy Scout" has an equally keen sense of his duty, which again supersedes the advice of a knowing adult. On the first day of the annual encampment of Boy Scouts, Jimmie Reeder is intent upon performing his daily "good turn." He gives his sister a portion of his train fare to go to the movies, declaring that he will walk the last portion of the trip to camp. As he trudges down the asphalt road, withering under the August sun and weighted down by a knapsack and heavy suitcase (his kit), Jimmie is offered a ride from a young man in a sports car. The Scout gratefully accepts, but soon

realizes that his good fortune has ruined his good deed. Without the “personal sacrifice” of walking, his sister’s gratitude will be obtained “by a falsehood.” Although the driver thinks he’s “crazy with the heat” and insists he can do another good turn later in the day, Jimmie is resolute and gets out of the car to resume his grueling walk.95 He has so internalized Scouting’s principles that external enforcement is superfluous and any attempt at dissuasion futile. Both Jimmies exemplify the Scout Law’s requirement to be brave, which includes not only the “courage to face danger in spite of fear” that Jimmie Sniffen demonstrates in confronting his spy, but also the courage to “stand up for the right against the coaxing of friends or the jeers or threats of enemies.”96 Such steadfastness will serve the Scouts well once they, like Davis, leave the confines of the nation to face greater challenges to their established code.

From Davis’ perspective, the Boy Scout’s impact was already substantial and could be felt well beyond America’s borders. The implications he assigns to these boys’ actions underscore the immense power of an individual sense of duty. In “The Boy Who Cried Wolf,” Jimmie’s arrest protects the homeland against an external invasion. While the complacent Judge is fooled by the spy’s claim to be a representative of the U.S. Army, the Scout’s powers of observation allow him to discern who does not belong and so expel this foreign “dirt” from his ancestral woods. In “The Boy Scout,” the ramifications of Jimmie Reeder’s “good turn” are even more extensive. Inspired by the Scout’s faithfulness to his “code,” his new acquaintance performs his own good deed,


96 The Boy Scouts of America’s original Scout Law of 1911 states that a Scout is brave. “He has the courage to face danger in spite of fear, and to stand up for the right against the coaxing of friends or the jeers or threats of enemies; and defeat does not down him.” “Scout Law History,” http://www.inquiry.net/ideals/scout_law/chart.htm.
investing $3 million in a faltering brokerage house nearly undone by newfangled accounting methods ("Scout," 5). The influx of cash saves the firm from ruin, setting in motion a series of positive outcomes that reverberate through the domestic and foreign spheres. One of the firm's principles decides against suicide. He sends the head clerk, who opposed the firm's recent recklessness, on a luxurious cruise, a holiday originally intended for his children so they would not see their father's disgrace play out in the newspapers. The clerk and his wife decide to share their good fortune, loaning their spacious flat to a newly married sibling currently spending his honeymoon in a sweltering boarding house. Finally, the reversal enables the firm to reward its young bond clerk, a hard-working former football hero named "Champ" Thorne, with a well-deserved raise. With his financial prospects assured, "Champ" can at last propose to Barbara Barnes, the privileged daughter of a rubber magnate.

In addition to securing the domestic happiness of four families, Jimmie and "The Young Man of Wall Street" inadvertently purify the nation's investments in Latin America as well. When offered a lavish wedding present from her father, Barbara declines pearls and vacant lots on Fifth Avenue in favor of a million dollar expedition to investigate labor conditions among his South American workers. Having heard stories of "Indian slaves" offered up as sacrifices to the rubber trade, Barbara insists that he send "men not afraid of fever or sudden death" who are able to tell unpleasant truths (9-10). While Davis implies that the businessman already knows what secrets the Amazonian expedition will expose, he grants his daughter's wish nonetheless, ensuring that "thousands of slaves" "buried in the jungles" will be reunited with their wives and children and saved from "fever, starvation, tortures" (11). Unbeknownst to the young
Scout, his good deed purges slavery’s taint from America’s economic empire, allowing the nation to extend its global power while preserving its character as a beacon of democracy and freedom for the western hemisphere.

Davis may have lost some of his idealism about U.S. foreign investment by 1914, but he clearly retained his ardent faith in the power of honorable, clean-minded young men to mediate America’s increasingly complex relationship with the third world. Still, his brand of impossibly talented heroes, whose light cynicism barely obscures a deep commitment to traditional moral principles, was increasingly out of step with the century he inherited. With his persistent optimism and aversion to anything approaching vulgarity, it is difficult to imagine Davis among the writers of the Lost Generation, lamenting the ravages of war or celebrating the freewheeling spirit of the Jazz Age. 97

Davis, like the Boy Scouts, was rooted in the values and aspirations of the nineteenth century even as he continually looked forward to the challenges of a new era. If neither Davis nor the Scout fully confronted the exotic during their brief forays into the wilderness, both modeled habits that would be useful to the generation of “boys grown tall” who came after them. The expansive sense of possibility Davis sowed in his fiction, war reporting and travelogues, coupled with his attentiveness to the more intimate boundaries limning his own body, made the dashing author-journalist an icon of the tumultuous 1890s. As a scout for the empire, Davis balanced the nation’s outward imperial drive with vigilance about the threat of individual invasion, policing the boundary between savage and civilized with every clean shirt he pulled from his kit.

97 For instance, while covering the Spanish-American War, Davis recorded a soldier’s expletive-filled shouts on the battlefield in his notebook without the offending words. Lubow, 176.
Conclusion: Cultural Cross-Over in the Age of Terror

In December, 2007 journalist Danielle Crittenden published a four-part series, which appeared in Canada’s National Post and on the internet newspaper The Huffington Post, entitled “Islamic Like Me.” Crittenden, a Canadian woman living in Washington, D.C., donned a burka for a week to find out “what it must be like” to be one of the mysterious masked women who are becoming a “disturbingly familiar sight” in the “shopping malls, airport lounges and Muslim neighborhoods across North America.” The experiment was reminiscent of Nellie Bly’s stunts for the New York World. Indeed, the first article opens with a light-hearted, seemingly out-of-nowhere conversation between Crittenden and her husband about the prospect of wearing “Arabic dress.”

Their chatter quickly devolves into competing stereotypes of Arab women. Her husband immediately evokes the Orientalist fantasies of “I Dream of Jeannie” and the scantily-clad, sexually permissive harem, while Crittenden turns to the equally alien, but significantly less alluring image of a completely veiled woman, whose physical obscurity corresponds to a disappearing self, crushed by the tenets of her fundamentalist religious culture. Fascinated by this cardboard cutout, Crittenden soon finds herself ordering a “full Saudi” online, a highly conservative combination of abaya (cloak) and niqab (face

---


2 Crittenden also depicts her experiment as a trip back in time in keeping with the notion that more “primitive” cultures do not inhabit the same historical space as “our” modern ones do. When her outfit arrives from Kuwait, the package looks like someone had shipped it “400 years ago.” Set out before her in piles, the clothing resembles “laundry day in a mourning Victorian household.” Crittenden, “Taking on the Veil;” Crittenden, “Islamic Like Me: Does This Burka Make Me Look Fat?,” The Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danielle-crittenden/islamic-like-me-does-thi_b_75583.html. Subsequent references will use an abbreviated version of this post’s subtitle, “Burka.”
covering) which leaves only her “intense blue eyes” showing between layers of black cloth.  

Experiencing daily life under the niqab is the crux of Crittenden’s experiment but its larger purpose is to expose the oppressive force exerted by the veil. Like Bly, Crittenden relies on her physical sensations—impaired vision, difficulty breathing, hunching as she walks to accommodate the mass of fabric—to ground her authority to make broader pronouncements about the Other she is impersonating. She similarly presumes that such a brief stint will provide an adequate understanding of a complex culture. Yet Crittenden is also far more presumptuous than the plucky World reporter, who augmented her first-hand knowledge with direct observation and interviews with others in the same situation. Crittenden’s border-crossing is, even by these standards, remarkably superficial. She does not seek out actual veiled Muslim women, nor does she adopt any other facet of a traditional Muslim lifestyle; she merely goes about her daily life in costume.

As is quickly apparent, however, Crittenden’s professed desire to learn about the experiences of Muslim women is a façade. Her conclusions have already been made. Crittenden cannot imagine any woman choosing the veil voluntarily, or retaining any viable sense of self beneath it. She insists on the psychological effects of her new

---

3 Crittenden, “Veil.”

4 In addition to the short duration, lack of contact with Muslims, and disinterest in adopting any behaviors beyond the veil, Crittenden maintains key signs of her “real” identity: bright blue eyes, un-accented voice, and Western name. When she purchases her plane ticket, it is her own driver’s license which secures the purchase. In fact, the TSA security agents (see footnote 5) assure her that she was not selected for secondary screening because of her attire, but because her attire did not match the name and face on her government-issued identification.

5 Crittenden’s experiment does not bear this out. She complains that she will be unable to communicate a simple smile of thanks from under the niqab, but she does strike up conversations on two
wardrobe: “the weight and constriction of the outer clothing constricts the personality on the inside too.”6 When she does briefly acknowledge other interpretations of the veil, voiced by respondents on The Huffington Post, who note that some choose the veil to protest the objectification of women in Western societies or counter with their personal experiences, these voices are quickly trumped by her own week-old expertise.7 The clothes truly make the (wo)man in Crittenden’s view, and in this respect she is similar to Frank Hamilton Cushing’s detractors, who saw the trappings of savagery as decisive evidence of civilization’s absence.

Despite offering astoundingly little insight into the lives of traditional Muslim women, “Islamic Like Me” nonetheless shines a penetrating light on Crittenden’s views of their culture and the dangers it poses to the democratic societies of the West. She frames her experiment with the question of whether veiling is “tolerable” in a free and equal society. Insisting that an acceptance of veiling implies “acceptance of a larger ideology of female subordination,” Crittenden positions herself as the protector of Muslim women, asking, “Does our deference to minority cultures require us to acquiesce in the subjugation and intimidation of women?”8 Crittenden maintains her focus on the oppression of women in traditional Muslim cultures throughout the series, noting both the routine restrictions, such as the ban on driving in Saudi Arabia and other abridgements of occasions—once with a young family in a restaurant and once with the Transportation Security Administration screening staff at Reagan National Airport. The staff goes out of its way to be considerate to Crittenden, politely asking for advice on how to respectfully treat other veiled women in the airport.

6 Crittenden, “Burka.”

7 In this regard, Crittenden replicates the subordinate status of Muslim women in oppressive traditional cultures that she decries. She can imagine no agency for them.

8 Crittenden, “Veil.” It should be noted that Crittenden positions herself as the true protector of women, contrasting her stance with that of “the feminist groups” who protest the war in Iraq but fail to express “outrage” over the oppression of women “right here.”
their legal rights, and more brutal forms of subordination like honor killings and domestic violence. While these examples are compelling, they are also an obfuscation; Crittenden is ultimately concerned not with the threat posed to Muslim women, but one that hits much closer to home.

Like Richard Harding Davis, Crittenden's outlook is future-oriented. However, her vision is a dystopic one in which Western societies integrate (without assimilating) hostile, foreign cultures in the name of diversity. In place of a confident nation extending its influence outward, Crittenden imagines a vulnerable homeland infiltrated by alien forces. Maintaining bodily boundaries are futile in this scenario, where the dangers are not subtle degenerative influences but sudden, lethal acts of terror. Crittenden's descriptions of her new attire, which are overwhelmingly negative, expose this underlying fear. She compares herself to a ninja, the bride of Darth Vader, an executioner, a vampire, and an "al-Jazeera version" of a Power Ranger. Even more telling are the errands Crittenden includes as part of her daily routine during her week under the veil. In addition to attending her usual spinning class at the gym and picking up groceries, she also rides the Metro during the morning rush hour with a large backpack "clutched to [her] chest" and buys a one-way, same-day ticket to New York with no checked baggage. These portions of the experiment, with their unsubtle references to the September 11th attacks and the 2005 bombing of the London Underground, make clear that far more ominous than the presence of a few veiled women is the radical, violent culture their cloaked figures represent.

To her surprise, Crittenden finds the residents of Washington, D.C. to be generally tolerant of a fully veiled woman in their midst. Riding the Metro and walking

---

9 Crittenden, "Burka."
through the security gates at Reagan National Airport, Crittenden sees herself as a spectacular Muslim Other and is disappointed when those around her fail to appreciate her terrifying difference. Reassuring herself that some of her fellow Metro passengers surely must have wondered “whether I was about to explode,” Crittenden finally shows her hand and observes that “even tolerance can be taken too far.” Here and elsewhere, she conflates tolerance of the veil with insufficient vigilance toward suspicion-worthy Muslims. When the Transportation Security Administration screeners politely engage her in conversation about her (apparent) conversion to Islam and the respectful way to treat veiled travelers, Crittenden is not struck by the fact that—contrary to her predictions about being unable to communicate her personality to strangers from beneath the veil—they treat her as a human being. Instead, she is shocked to learn that the security agents do not feel “entitled” to check the identities of veiled women, “mere seconds of air distance from Capitol Hill, the Pentagon, the White House.” Thus the parting message of her series is the corrosive influence of political correctness, or tolerance, on national security measures—with no mention of the oppressed Muslim women whose rights she claims to champion.

In addition to voicing anxieties about a twenty-first century Other, Crittenden’s series illustrates other developments in America’s long history of encountering the exotic. With the expansion of national and then global media networks, the mechanisms of the exotic have proliferated in recent decades, reinvigorating and circulating well-worn stereotypes to the furthest reaches of the globe. The opportunities to gain vicarious

---


11 Crittenden, “Sky Miles.”
knowledge of both far-flung cultures and home-grown subcultures have consequently multiplied. The internet is a new and rich reservoir in this respect, allowing untold numbers of users to observe (often anonymously) the virtual lives of the different and the not-so-different. Yet web forums like Crittenden’s blog on The Huffington Post also illustrate the internet’s potential for more interactive exchanges. “Islamic Like Me” was followed by three additional posts in which the author responded to the numerous reader comments on her experiment. Moreover, the series received pointed commentary on a variety of other blogs attuned to representations of Muslims and women in the media. While these commentators do not enjoy the same platform as Crittenden, who has published a book and a novel and written for a variety of high-level publications, their criticisms point to at least one new avenue for marginalized groups to contest their representations in mainstream spaces.

If Crittenden’s series evokes an Other whose menacing outlines are rooted in the present moment, “Islamic Like Me” also draws from much older stereotypes of Arab cultures as mysterious, tribal communities who might be hiding something dangerous—behind a veil or the wall of a mosque. In much the same fashion as the case studies comprising this dissertation, her work conveys the sometimes ugly cultural anxieties which accompany periods of social transition and increasing diversity. More pointedly, Crittenden resembles her nineteenth-century predecessors in her use of gender as a way to talk about other forms of difference, particularly uneven power relations. Her stated desire to defend Muslim women from the oppressive force of conservative Islam, embodied in the men who enforce such strictures, provides an entrée for decrying the dangers posed by that culture—again, in the form of its male members—to Americans.
According to Crittenden’s logic, the inferior position assigned to Muslim women not only signals Islam’s antiquated gender codes but can easily be extrapolated to a wholesale disregard for human life. While Crittenden explicitly connects accepting veiled women with condoning their physical, educational, sexual, and social subordination (including the possibility of abuse and even death), the stakes are actually much higher. In addition to putting this small population at risk, integrating the unassimilated Other jeopardizes American society itself, undermining the safety of its “real” citizens, disrupting their peace of mind, and curtailing their freedom of expression.\(^{12}\) Such a leap is reminiscent of defenses of segregation; preventing blacks and whites from interacting as equals in the public spaces of commerce and leisure was a way to guard against more intimate incursions—namely interracial marriage and mixed race children—that would destroy Southern civilization itself. This perceived correlation allowed apologists to depict lynching as a necessary communal response to an extraordinary peril. Of course, Crittenden does not advocate segregating Muslims, much less lynching them, but the ease with which she manipulates the exotic—blending old, new, and even contradictory images of Muslims while conflating and amplifying the threat they pose—underscores the fundamental lesson of Ida B. Wells’ career. As a highly fluid, mobile category consisting of multiple registers of difference, the exotic ensnares all bodies, whether by setting the bounds of the “normal,” identifying the culturally abject, or delineating the terms of national belonging.

\(^{12}\) Crittenden’s final post, a response to reader comments on the original series, includes several anecdotes describing how fear of Muslim retaliation has curtailed American and British freedom of expression. Danielle Crittenden, “Islamic Like Me: Why The Veil Is A Threat,” The Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danielle-crittenden/islamic-like-me-why-the-_b_76693.html.
Bibliography


_____. “Islamic Like Me: Does This Burka Make Me Look Fat?” *The Huffington Post.*

____. “Islamic Like Me: Taking on the Veil.” The Huffington Post.

____. “Islamic Like Me: Why The Veil Is A Threat.” The Huffington Post,


Cushing, Frank Hamilton. “Ancient Cities in Arizona.” American Antiquarian 10
(1880): 325-326.


____. Cushing at Zuni: The Correspondence and Journals of Frank Hamilton Cushing,
1879-1884. Edited by Jesse Green. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico

____. “My Adventures in Zuni I.” The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine 25, no. 2

____. “My Adventures in Zuni II.” The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine 25, no.

____. “My Adventures in Zuni III.” The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine 26, no.

____. “The Nation of the Willows I.” The Atlantic Monthly 50, no. 299 (September

____. “The Nation of the Willows II.” The Atlantic Monthly 50, no. 300 (October


Davis, James C. “‘Stage Business’ as Citizenship: Ida B. Wells at the World’s


____. The Bar Sinister. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919.


____. Gallegher and Other Stories. New York: Charles Scriber’s Sons, 1891.

____. Notes of a War Correspondent. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911.

____. The Red Cross Girl. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919.


Fuller, Clarissa Parsons. “Frank Hamilton Cushing’s Relations to Zuni and the Hemenway Southwestern Expedition, 1879-1889.” Masters Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1943.


Halttunen, Karen. Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class


Parezo, Nancy. “Matilda Coxe Stevenson: Pioneer Ethnologist.” In Hidden Scholars:


Pratt, Mary Louise. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. London: Routledge, 1992


VITA

Caroline Carpenter Nichols

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, February 1, 1974. Graduated as valedictorian from Niagara Falls High School, June, 1992. As a student at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, she earned a bachelors degree with honors in English and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. After graduating magna cum laude in May, 1996, she worked in the nonprofit sector for several years before beginning graduate study at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1999. She earned a masters degree in American Studies from the College in December, 2001, with a thesis entitled “Monument to Sentiment: The Discourse of Nation and Citizenship at the Oklahoma City National Memorial.” In November, 2002, she passed her qualifying examinations with distinction in all fields and advanced to candidacy.