

# “Everything was new, yet familiar”: British Travellers, Halifax and the Ambiguities of Empire

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## Article abstract

In their accounts published before Confederation, British travellers represented Halifax as both similar to and different from British towns in ways that simultaneously confirmed and questioned the strength of the British Empire. They judged the manners of the Halifax elite “English” and the political loyalty of its general populace “British”, but they were less pleased about the more democratic class structure and impoverished black and Aboriginal minorities. This is evidence of both the power of the empire to reproduce itself in a colonial capital in North America and the failure of that same empire to overcome difference.

# “Everything was new, yet familiar”: British Travellers, Halifax and the Ambiguities of Empire

JEFFREY L. McNAIRN

*Dans leurs récits publiés avant la Confédération, les voyageurs britanniques racontaient que Halifax à la fois ressemblait aux villes britanniques et en était différente par des caractéristiques qui confirmaient et en même temps remettaient en question la force de l'Empire britannique. Ils qualifiaient d'« anglaises » les manières de l'élite de Halifax et de « britannique » la loyauté politique démontrée par la population, mais ils ne voyaient pas d'un si bon œil la structure de classe plus démocratique et les minorités noire et autochtone vivant dans la pauvreté. C'est là la preuve tant de la capacité de l'Empire à se reproduire dans une capitale coloniale en Amérique du Nord, que de son échec à surmonter les différences.*

*In their accounts published before Confederation, British travellers represented Halifax as both similar to and different from British towns in ways that simultaneously confirmed and questioned the strength of the British Empire. They judged the manners of the Halifax elite “English” and the political loyalty of its general populace “British”, but they were less pleased about the more democratic class structure and impoverished black and Aboriginal minorities. This is evidence of both the power of the empire to reproduce itself in a colonial capital in North America and the failure of that same empire to overcome difference.*

BEGINNING HIS TOUR OF NORTH AMERICA at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1854, the Scottish publishing figure William Chambers was struck by how “everything was new, yet familiar”.<sup>1</sup> It was a common reaction among the almost three dozen British travellers who published accounts of their visit to Halifax from its founding in 1749 until its incorporation into Canada in 1867. For most, Halifax was not a tourist destination but their first port of call in America. Here expectations of North America and overseas empire first confronted personal experience. Many, like Chambers, chose to enter North America through Halifax because of its prominent place in that empire and its transportation networks, but were en route to the United States. Such an itinerary made comparisons to the republic inevitable. Was Halifax American or British? New or familiar? It was a relatively young, colonial and emigrant society in North America in close proximity to the United States, but it was also part of the

<sup>1</sup> W. Chambers, *Things As They Are in America*, (1854), p. 24. I have learned a great deal from audiences in Milwaukee, Fredericton and Toronto who listened to earlier versions of this paper and the perceptive, if divergent, reports of the three anonymous readers.

British Empire – populated mostly by emigrants from the British Isles or their descendants, situated in the North Atlantic and a seat of imperial governance with a visible army and navy presence. Halifax forced travel-writers to articulate what assimilated the town to or differentiated it from “home”.

Specific judgments varied and remind us that consensus was rare, but the pattern of evaluation remained remarkably consistent across individual authors and texts. This suggests a strong and enduring framework for understanding similarity and difference in the empire – a framework that had three principal elements. First, what most marked Halifax as “familiar” was its elite sociability and popular loyalty. Both were evident inside, in the homes of the town. What travellers found most “new” was its class structure and “racial” diversity, both evident out-of-doors. Thus, two senses of home – as the imperial and normative centre from which these visitors came and as a properly ordered domestic space – joined to denote the safe and familiar. Both ensured that representations of women were prominent markers of how Halifax was understood. The role of social class was the second principal element of the framework by which travellers judged Halifax. Whether familiar and “inside” or new and “outside”, social class provided a leading axis by which Halifax was plotted within the empire. Third, despite a desire to experience novelty by travelling, most travellers preferred the familiar because it bolstered imperial self-assurance over the new as the new often cast doubt on the strength and rectitude of Britain’s empire. Indeed, as neither entirely similar nor different, Halifax occasioned considerable anxiety about that empire throughout the period although the sources of that anxiety had shifted by the 1850s. Such anxiety about British imperialism and its effects on collective identities were only imperfectly submerged beneath travellers’ more obviously self-confident, frequently arrogant and often ill-informed judgments that rendered Halifax almost, but never quite, home.

### **Empire as Culture**

Inspired by the work of literary critic Edward Said, historians of the British Empire have come to focus on cultural representation or on how cultural exchange reflected and shaped power relations and the role of colonies and non-Europeans in defining and solidifying what it meant to British. This and other collective identities have thereby been problematized as relational and performative – constructed through an ongoing process of engagement with difference – rather than essential. As concrete connections between metropole and colony, travellers and their texts are obvious, much-used sources to study that process. Such difference, often serving as a mirror or foil, had to be marked, categorized and understood in relation to travellers’ sense of their own and their readers’ identities. The resulting travel narratives were a principal means by which the British reading public came to understand itself and its empire as an important site of self-reflection, social experiment and difference.<sup>2</sup> As a result,

2 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993). In addition to works cited in the following notes, I found Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York, 1996) and Kathleen Wilson, “Introduction: histories, empires, modernities”, in Wilson, ed. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1-26, particularly useful.

colonials were sensitive to criticism in these narratives, often responding with indignation and wounded pride if aspersions cast on Nova Scotia might damage the colony's reputation in Britain.<sup>3</sup> These travel narratives also contributed to a particularly conservative view of Halifax that local historians have worked hard to dispel.<sup>4</sup> Cultural historians of the British Empire, however, are less interested in attempting to gauge the accuracy of travellers' observations and have more recently shied away from the tendency in much Said-inspired scholarship to pit a monolithic "West" able to impose its own representations of the "other" on an equally monolithic "Orient".<sup>5</sup> Rather, historians such as Linda Colley and Kathleen Wilson emphasize the importance of local context, the limits of imperial mastery and the degree of ambiguity and anxiety experienced by diverse metropolitans as they try to understand and relate to Britain's vast and varied empire.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the emphasis on the multiple sites of empire, much of this new imperial history focuses on the period before the American Revolution or on the "high" imperialism of the late-19th century as well as on colonies of conquest rather than colonies of settlement. The empire's so-called "swing to the East" after the loss of most of its North American colonies in 1783 meant that the majority of overseas subjects of British rule were neither Christian nor white. Yet, as Catherine Hall's magisterial *Civilising Subjects* on the West Indies amply demonstrates, a formal British Atlantic in which colony and metropole shared a common frame of reference persisted after the American Revolution.<sup>7</sup> In fact, it was precisely in these decades that Britain's remaining North American colonies developed as neo-British settler societies. Not only have they been largely absent from the emerging cultural history of empire, but that history is thereby distorted by taking non-temperate colonies of

- 3 See, for instance, "Notices of Nova Scotia", *Halifax Monthly Magazine*, 1, 4 (1 September 1830), pp. 136-8, that dismissed a travel account reviewed favourably in the *New Monthly Magazine* (London) as a "vague and in some instances paltry book". See also Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 252-62. For the most famous local writer's lowly opinion of the genre, see Darlene Kelly, "Thomas Haliburton and Travel Books about America", *Canadian Literature*, 94 (Autumn 1982), pp. 25-38. Ironically, Haliburton influenced travellers' own perceptions of Halifax as evident from several quotations in this essay. Yet when writing for a local audience, other colonial commentators might echo travellers' complaints. See, for instance, D.A. Sutherland, "Nova Scotia and the American Presence: Seeking Connections Without Conquest, 1848-1854", in Stephen J. Hornsby and John G. Reid, eds., *New England and the Maritime Provinces: Connections and Comparisons* (Montreal and Kingston, 2005), esp. pp. 149-50.
- 4 Judith Fingard, Janet Guildford, and David Sutherland, *Halifax: The First 250 Years* (Halifax, 1999).
- 5 Perhaps the most egregious example is David Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, 1993).
- 6 Linda Colley, *Captives: The Story of Britain's Pursuit of Empire and How Its Soldiers and Civilians Were Held Captive by the Dream of Global Supremacy, 1600-1850* (New York, 2002) and Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003).
- 7 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago, 2002). On the post-1783 empire and the greater sense of difference it created, see Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument", *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (October 1999), p. 324 and C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London, 1989), pp. 3, 9.

conquest as synonymous with British colonialism as a whole.<sup>8</sup> The result has been a too-easy equation of empire with the alien “other”, of colonies with non-Europeans and of the distinction between colonizers and colonized with distinctions of “race”.

British travellers to Halifax certainly situated the port in an empire-wide context. Even as they search for novelty, tourists are notorious for wanting to feel “at home” or not entirely displaced; but the texts of 19th-century travellers to Halifax also reflected and contributed to broader public debates in Britain and throughout the empire. Alexis de Tocqueville was only the most famous visitor to North America interested in what the continent revealed about the effects of greater social and political democracy. The barrister Henry Tudor arrived in Halifax with a copy of Frances Trollope’s just-published *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) in hand, setting off for the United States convinced that Trollope had been too critical of the republic and had thereby harmed Anglo-American relations. The intense interest in issues of race in these decades, whether it was the fate of the empire’s Aboriginal populations or the morality and economics of free versus coerced labour, also shaped what was recorded at Halifax and the lessons drawn from it. Thus the cleric Robert Everest reported a debate on slavery between American and English passengers on his voyage to North America, setting the stage for his own observations on “the coloured race” once he disembarked at Halifax. Certainly British reviewers read the resulting accounts in light of such debates. The radical *Westminster Review* found further evidence in William Scarth Moorsom’s portrayal of Halifax society for its critique of the fiscal and other costs of colonial military establishments during peacetime while a more conservative reviewer of another account of the “interesting remnants of that extensive transatlantic empire which once belonged to the British crown” concluded that it “ought to be in every public library in the empire, for it is by it that the truest conceptions can be formed of the value of our North American Dominions, which very shortly will become the subject of deep and anxious consideration in Parliament”.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the broad tropes of representation found in these accounts were common throughout the empire (and indeed were part of cultural contact more generally); but the scale of British emigration and the very different demographic and gender balance of colonies such as Nova Scotia compared to colonies in South Asia or the Caribbean meant considerable variation in how common themes were articulated, their relative prominence and the meanings drawn from them. Thus, not only does the new imperial history offer something to historians of early Canada, but

8 Thus, the work on British North America that makes the most sustained use of the new imperial historiography, Adele Perry’s *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto, 2001), pp. 6, 14, 17, does so, in part, by emphasizing the degree to which mid-19th-century British Columbia had more in common with colonies of conquest than colonies of settlement elsewhere on the continent. Radforth’s *Royal Spectacle* should encourage more historians of British North America to extend their engagement with this literature beyond such topics as wilderness tourism and representations of Aboriginal peoples.

9 Henry Tudor, *Narrative of a Tour in North America . . .* (1834), vol. 1, pp. v-xi; Robert Everest, *A Journey Through the United States and Part of Canada* (1855), pp. 2, 5; Article XII, *Westminster Review*, 13 (July 1830), pp. 180-1; Z., “The British North American Provinces”, *Fraser’s*, 5 (February 1832), pp. 78, 84.

early Canada offers something to practitioners of the new imperial history. For instance, the Halifax case reveals how familiar, domestic spaces could be found outside the British Isles such that ascriptions of similarity, not just difference, were central to definitions of “self” and “other” in a colonial context. Both were evident at Halifax and the tension between them raised troubling questions about the nature of Britain’s empire, suggesting that dramatic watersheds such as the “Indian Mutiny” of 1857 or the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 were not solely responsible for raising doubts about empire. Representations of Halifax also suggest that issues of “whiteness” and the sexuality and reproduction to maintain it, while not absent, were less pronounced in North American settler societies. Differences along class lines among those of European descent thereby emerged more clearly in ways not always recognized by those imperial historians who now emphasize culture at the expense of political economy.<sup>10</sup> Social class and economic behaviour were, in part, themselves questions of cultural identity. As the capital of a settler colony, Halifax forced British travellers to address questions of identity in an imperial context unlike those most commonly studied. In doing so, they also remind us how problematic attempts can be to integrate early Halifax into a national, pre-Confederation Canada narrative instead of an imperial one.

### **Imperial Halifax**

Despite a few half-hearted attempts to identify the most “romantic aspect” of Halifax harbour or to invest it with patriotic grandeur by associating it with the sinking of the French fleet in the Bedford Basin in 1758,<sup>11</sup> Halifax was rarely a place of pilgrimage or tourist destination – the sort of places that attracted numerous travellers and the scholars who study them. Sharing important features with other Atlantic seaports, Halifax is easily assimilated into scholarly accounts of Anglo-American travel literature or ignored.<sup>12</sup> Yet the town was not devoid of symbolic import as evident from the self-contained and often considerable attention travellers paid to it in their published accounts. On the threshold of North America and empire, Halifax held a particular place in travellers’ geo-political and cultural imagination.

Halifax was, after all, an imperial project; it was founded in 1749 as an administrative, military and naval outpost with a population of about 2,500 to assert

10 See also Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in A Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 18, 27-8.

11 Anon. [William Hunter?], *Letters from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, illustrative of their Moral, Religious, and Physical Circumstances, During the Years 1826, 1827, and 1828* (1829), p. 146; John McTaggart, *Three Years in Canada: An Account of the Actual State of the Country in 1826-7-8 . . .* (1829), p. 333; Francis Duncan, *Our Garrisons in the West or Sketches in British North America* (1864), p. 18. See also W. Moorsom, *Letters From Nova Scotia: Comprising Sketches of a Young Country* (1830), pp. 22-3.

12 For assimilation, see Christopher Mulvey, *Anglo-American Landscapes: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-America Travel Literature* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 8, 142, 144, 149. For ignoring Halifax, see the bibliography of Jane Louise Mesick, *The English Traveller in America, 1785-1835* (New York, 1922), which includes many works of North American travel with an index in which Halifax does not appear. For the importance of ports of call, see Angela Woollacott, “‘All This is The Empire, I Told Myself’: Australian Women’s Voyages ‘Home’ and the Articulation of Colonial Whiteness”, *American Historical Review*, 102, 4 (October 1997), pp. 1003-29.

British control over Nova Scotia and to protect the New England colonies from the French empire and its allies in the region. In the wake of the rebellion that brought independence to those colonies, Halifax remained part of the empire, offered a haven for Loyalist refugees from that rebellion and served as a strategic port in the subsequent wars with the new republic and France. An orphaned emigrant ruined by the American embargo and the Napoleonic Wars turned to patriotic verse in hopes of generating an income: “There Halifax, of bless’d renown, / Still smiles, a wooden, warlike town”. Almost 90 years later another, albeit more famous, imperial visitor and poet, Rudyard Kipling, immortalized Halifax in *A Song of the English* as “The Warden of the Honour of the North”.<sup>13</sup> As a colonial capital, naval station and army garrison, empire was a physical presence in Halifax. The strategic and commercial importance of its harbour continued to impress visitors and, as thousands of British emigrants began arriving in the region in the post-Napoleonic decades, Halifax became part of the larger imperial experiment to create neo-British settler societies although the town’s own population remained less than 15,000 throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Would imperial design and cultural inheritance suffice to keep Halifax “British” or would North American geography and American republicanism triumph? What did answers to such a question reveal about the long-term possibilities of empire? In sum, Halifax served important cultural as well as strategic and economic functions within the British Empire.

Who visited and wrote about the town reflected those functions. While travellers’ accounts of 18th-century Halifax are too few to trace perceptions, improved transportation opportunities and large-scale British emigration after the Napoleonic Wars directed more attention to the British American colonies. The single largest group of post-war travel-authors were military officers stationed in the town or region who, almost by definition, were gentlemen. Other formal agents of empire who published accounts of Halifax included a handful of naval officers, at least three Protestant missionaries, several scouts for economic opportunities and purveyors of emigration advice, and a civil engineer employed by the British government. More informal agents of empire for whom Halifax was usually a port of call formed a larger group. It was the closest mainland North American centre to Britain geographically and a year-round transportation hub – especially after the inauguration of the Cunard steamship line from Liverpool to Boston via Halifax in 1840. Many were thus en route to the United States or, less frequently, to other parts of British North America. For a few, Halifax marked the end of their North American tour.

Like the army and navy officers official duty brought to Halifax, visitors who wrote most extensively about the town were overwhelmingly genteel – if from the professional and business classes rather than the landed gentry itself. They included scientific gentlemen like Charles Lyell and James Johnston, the retired clothier and antiquarian Henry Wansey, and the professional travel-writer, lecturer and former Member of Parliament James Silk Buckingham. Each commanded the financial resources to travel on business or for pleasure, to restore their health or visit relatives,

13 Thomas D. Cowdell, *A Poetical Journal of a Tour From British North America to England, Wales & Ireland . . .* (1809), p. 13 and Kipling excerpted in John Bell, ed., *Halifax: A Literary Portrait* (Lawrencetown Beach, NS, 1990), p. 108.

or out of curiosity. The nature of Halifax and the British travel-writers it attracted meant that published accounts of the port were even more genteel, male (only one was penned by a woman) and self-consciously imperial than those of other ports of call. They included English and Scots, Anglican and dissenter and conservative and liberal but, as C.A. Bayly concludes about opinion-makers more generally, such divisions “which bulked large in England, often dissolved in the colonial context. To this extent, colonial projects helped reinforce a national consensus at home”.<sup>14</sup> Such divisions sometimes shaped the particular lessons drawn from Halifax, but the topics chosen to amuse and instruct their readers and the often sweeping generalizations travellers indulged in were remarkably common. Likewise, their precise itinerary, the purpose and length of their stay and their degree of interaction with local informants appear to have had little impact on the basic signs and categories by which Halifax and its place in the mental map of empire were understood, suggesting the strength of the convictions and cultural assumptions travellers brought with them. Robust and resilient, this economy of representation repeatedly rendered Halifax “new, yet familiar”.

### **An English Society?**

“We were now”, recorded the Protestant missionary Joshua Marsden of his arrival at Halifax, “in the new world”. Writing from the port in the summer of 1829, Captain William Scarth Moorsom, an engineer and son of an admiral, recalled how his expectations of that world had been shaped by boyhood stories of adventure and scientific exploration and by menacing “Sunday prints” of wild buffalo, “savages armed with tomahawks”, and “a creature scarce human, covered with furs, and wielding a ponderous axe, with the superscription ‘A New Englander’”. To a third visitor, such images ensured that strangers were “astonished and almost angry to discover” that the local “natives” were “not savages, that their dresses are as couth, and their manners as polite” as their own.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the “exotic” empire of popular imagination, Halifax was part of the empire of settlement. The “natives” were fellow Britons, not the Mi’kmaq for whom Chebucto, as they had named the site, had served as a gathering place generations before Halifax had been founded without their consent. Such anticipations of radical otherness should not be read literally, but as a

14 Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 137. Only by studying the full range of published accounts can the existence of an enduring framework for how Halifax was understood as well as individual variations within it be established. This approach differs from the more common one of focusing on one or only a handful of often prominent literary figures and it comes at some cost. It shifts attention away from how individual texts were constructed and incorporates works by authors about whom little is known. Of course, one wishes for more precise biographical detail, but the argument here is that there was remarkable commonality in the broad framework across social, religious and political divisions. Moreover, armed with such information it would be tempting merely to assert a reductive social explanation for particular observations that were, in fact, shared by others and that may have had other, more immediate, causes. For instance, while authors typically wrote about their first physical encounter with Halifax, as one anonymous reviewer reminded me, several were already familiar with it from other sources, notably Haliburton’s *Clockmaker* series.

15 Joshua Marsden, *The Narrative of A Mission to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Somers Islands . . .* (1816), p. 15; Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 3-4; Anon., *Letters from Nova Scotia*, p. 146.



rhetorical device to underline the similarity between metropole and colonial outpost.

Travellers had crossed the Atlantic, gone from “old” world to “new” and arrived in America, but expectations that distance would translate into difference were quickly displaced by a discourse of similarity that bolstered imperial self-confidence. Indeed, as early as 1796 travellers were equating Halifax with various English towns. Just before Confederation its population was declared “more English in manners and ideas than any other I have met in America”.<sup>16</sup> George Head’s *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds of North America* (1829) opens at Halifax where “although now on the other side of the Atlantic, I found myself as it were in an English town, among English people, and everything else much more English in appearance than one would expect to meet with so far distant”. For travellers in search of novelty, it was all a bit of a let-down. Approaching Halifax, the Englishwoman Isabella Bird “heard the well-known British bugle; I saw the familiar scarlet of our troops; the voices which vociferated were English; the physiognomies have the Anglo-Saxon cast and complexion; and on the shores of the western hemisphere I felt myself at home”. Deprived of “the pleasurable feeling of excitement which I had expected to experience under such novel circumstances”, Bird nevertheless joined other travellers in equating Halifax with “home” – a testament to the power of Britain to reproduce itself. The empire’s role in marking the boundaries of Englishness is well-known, but at Halifax this was most explicitly achieved by degrees of similarity not difference. Indeed, “Britain never seems so wide”, marvelled another visitor to the town, “as when some thousand miles of sea bring you to yet another England”.<sup>17</sup>

While Head and Bird relied on initial “sights and sounds” to equate Halifax with England, what made the town most like home were the “English” “manners” or “habits and customs” of its inhabitants – or at least of those with whom travellers interacted socially.<sup>18</sup> As Marjorie Morgan has emphasized, everyday details of individual comportment and social intercourse were more important to British travellers than the wars, the public events and celebrations, and the museums and monuments often emphasized by historians of national-identity formation.<sup>19</sup> Readers of their accounts were assumed to know what English manners were, although depictions of their violation were revealing. For instance, Colonel Charles Leslie

16 Henry Wansey, *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America, in the Summer of 1794* . . . (1796), p. 24 and Duncan, *Our Garrisons in the West*, p. 23. See also Sir Charles H. Doyle, “Journal, September 1831 to November 1831, covering voyage from England and visit to Halifax”, reel 10236, p. 13, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management; Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 95-6; E.T. Coke, *A Subaltern’s Furlough: Descriptive Scenes in Various Parts of the United States, Upper and Lower Canada, New-Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, During the Summer and Autumn of 1832* (1833), p. 125; and Rex Ewing, letter, 14 June 1867 in Margaret Howard Blom and Thomas E. Blom, eds., *Canada Home: Juliana Horatia Ewing’s Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869* (Vancouver, 1983), p. 9.

17 George Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds of North America; Being a Diary of a Winter’s Route from Halifax to the Canadas* . . . (1829), p. 2; Isabella Lucy Bird, *The Englishwoman in America* (1856; Andrew Hill Clark, ed., Toronto, 1966), p. 13; John MacGregor, *Our Brothers and Cousins: A Summer Tour in Canada and the States* (1859), p. 2.

18 Duncan, *Our Garrisons in the West*, p. 23; McTaggart, *Three Years in Canada*, vol. 2, p. 335.

19 Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (London, 2001), pp. 120-54. Charles Churchill, *Memorials of Missionary Life, in Nova Scotia* (1845), p. 151, makes the point most clearly.

ridiculed the table manners of one rural member of the Nova Scotian assembly, thereby confirming the superiority of English customs and the need for a superintending imperial elite even in a predominately “white” colony with representative institutions.<sup>20</sup> Exposure to alternatives through travel might occasionally challenge previously accepted customs, but only a doubly displaced observer struck a truly relativistic note; Bénigne Charles Fevret de Saint-Mesmin, a refugee from the French Revolution delayed at Halifax while en route to Santo Domingo by slave revolts there, concluded that “all customs being purely routine, each nation sees none better than the ones for which it has contracted the habit”. Having lived among fellow Frenchmen in London, “it was in Halifax that we began to practise the English customs and way of living”.<sup>21</sup> Less metropolitan, the colony was more purely English than London itself. Feeling less displaced and therefore less self-conscious in Halifax, British travellers simply equated “English” manners with the height of civility – an assumption reinforced at Halifax more by finding them adopted outside Britain than by the contrast with colonial alternatives.

This discourse of Englishness was overwhelmingly class-specific. More than a national identity, it identified and reinforced an imperial ruling class based on its superior manners. Travel authors established their social credentials by shamelessly drawing attention to the governors, judges, generals and commodores they socialized with in what appears in some accounts as an almost endless round of dinners and balls, amateur theatrics, regattas and races, and picnics and excursions that created what one visiting officer called “a very gay quarter”.<sup>22</sup> British visitors naturally expected imperial officers and officials sojourning in the town to set its social tone, but were especially struck by the “Englishness” of its broader elite. “Invited out to parties almost every day”, Buckingham was able to judge “the general society of Halifax” as “more like that of an English seaport town, than any we had met with since leaving home”. Here, as elsewhere, “society” meant the polite society of “ladies” and “gentlemen”, not the generality of the population.<sup>23</sup> At Government House or in private homes, guests “have insensibly forgot that they were not in England – the language, the manners of the ladies and gentlemen, the style of dress, dancing, the *entregent* or small talk, the apartments, the furniture, the refreshments, are all so truly alike, so much akin to England”, gushed John MacGregor, a failed merchant turned commercial expert – clearly not referring to the homes of most

20 Joseph Leslie, *Military Journal of Colonel Leslie, . . . Whilst Serving . . . the 60th Rifles in Canada, &c. 1808-1832* (1887), p. 291 and also Doyle, “Journal”, np.

21 Saint-Mesmin, “Journal of our Navigation Leaving from the Port of Falmouth in England to that of Halifax in Nova Scotia [1793]”, in Gustave Lanctot, ed., *Report of the Department of Public Archives for the Year 1946* (Ottawa, 1947), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

22 Doyle, “Journal”, p. 14. For the emphasis on polite society, see also Saint-Mesmin, “Journal”, p. xxvii; Leslie, *Military Journal*, pp. 285, 287-8, 292; and N.B. Dennys, *An Account of the Cruise of the St. George on the North American and West Indian Station During the Years 1861-1862* (1862), pp. 124, 146-57.

23 James S. Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the other British Provinces in North America, with a Plan of National Colonization* (1843), p. 341. For similar concerns about gentility in British accounts of US seaports, see Christopher Mulvey, *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 19-27, 103-4, 125-6, 134, 149.

Haligonians regardless of their nationality.<sup>24</sup> The use of social etiquette or a behavioural code of apparently universal value to identify the pinnacle of the social hierarchy and to legitimate the exclusion of most Halifax residents from it seemed to transcend issues of class. Yet the code had a class meaning and the ability to adopt it was rooted in material privilege. Class and the degree to which membership in the imperial elite was materially based were concealed, not transcended, as a set of distinctions defined in national terms.<sup>25</sup> Halifax was assimilated to England by way of social class, not national identity. Such assimilation bolstered imperial self-confidence by demonstrating that a ruling class defined by its civility and thus its fitness to rule could maintain itself in a colonial port.

Since the houses and the other quasi-domestic spaces of fashionable society were crucial theatres for this class-specific definition of Englishness, the dress, complexion, physical beauty, accomplishments, moral character and comportment of elite women formed an important index of civility and thus of national character. Chambers assured his readers that “ladies” at a Halifax ball displayed the “charms of Englishwomen” while his fellow Scotsman MacGregor anxiously reported that several English gentlemen had, on visiting Halifax, told him of “their admiration of the beauty, genteel manners, and intelligence of the ladies”. By charming privileged male visitors, elite women at Halifax not only secured their own membership in polite society, but also the English identity of their town and, indeed, the moral superiority of Englishness itself.<sup>26</sup>

Just as it assimilated Halifax to England, the performance of social class distinguished the empire from the neighbouring republic. Scrutinizing the population, John MacTaggart, a poet and civil engineer for the British government, concluded that “English habits and customs are well preserved” because “manners are untainted by American influence”. Colonel Leslie enumerated the “many sterling John Bull qualities” of colonial gentlemen to soften his indictment of the “blemishes” he attributed to “local habits and the democratic state of society”.<sup>27</sup> Leslie and MacTaggart differed on how well-preserved Englishness was among those they socialized with at Halifax, but they agreed that any local or American influence was a “blemish” or “taint”. In this corner of empire, the “other” threatening to contaminate Englishness and subvert imperial dominance was not a local indigenous society or another “race”, but the similar population of former colonies of the same empire.

Leslie dissented here from the received wisdom on one of the elements that made

24 John MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2 (1832), pp. 80, 82.

25 Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, 1996), pp. 39, 87-9 and Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31, 1, (January 1989), pp. 39-41. Theoretically inclined readers will notice the nod to Pierre Bourdieu here.

26 Chambers, *Things As They Are*, p. 29; MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 83. In general, see Wilson, *Island Race*, pp. 19, 21, 24, 26. For other uses of female bodies, see Saint-Mesmin, “Journal”, p. xxviii; McTaggart, *Three Years in Canada*, vol. 2, p. 336; Leslie, *Military Journal*, pp. 284, 288, 290; and James F.W. Johnston, *Notes on North America: Agricultural, Economical, and Social*, vol. 1, (1851), p. 3. For a more nuanced assessment see Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, pp. 342-3 and for a partial dissent due to “certain American Fashions” having crept in, see Doyle, “Journal”, p. 14.

27 McTaggart, *Three Years in Canada*, vol. 2, p. 335; Leslie, *Military Journal*, pp. 290-1.

Halifax English, but he revealed both how “Englishness” worked to obscure the material basis of imperial privilege and a degree of anxiety about the extent to which English manners could be reproduced overseas. Many Halifax merchants had prospered, especially during the War of 1812 when US merchant ships confiscated by the Royal Navy had been auctioned in the port as prizes. According to one visiting naval officer, such riches helped form that “very respectable society, which is no small resource to the officers of the ships and regiments stationed here”.<sup>28</sup> Leslie was more wary of such social mobility. Wealth did not always beget gentlemanly manners and could not compensate for conceit, over-familiarity and a “blunt style of independence”. Being born in either Britain or North America was immaterial. Having “left the mother country in search of fortune”, Leslie thought many British-born residents of Halifax “began the world with but small means, and, by industry and enterprise” had “accumulated considerable wealth”. Yet “while some retain their former simplicity of manners”, he continued, “others, not a little purse-proud, endeavour to ape those of more refined attainments; their original ideas and habits, however, and their *parvenue* style are but too evident”. Emulation may have acknowledged the superiority of true gentlemen, but it was not always successful. Indeed, with the local elite engaged in the public world of business, even Leslie – quick to distinguish true gentlemen from their colonial imitators – conceded that “the ladies . . . have decidedly the advantage” over colonial “gentlemen in personal appearance and manners”.<sup>29</sup> Represented as largely confined to more domestic spaces, elite women were more purely English despite their colonial location. Manners rooted in social class and best displayed at home, not wealth or place of origin, defined “sterling John Bull qualities”.

Other visitors who, unlike Leslie, were not army or navy officers instead emphasized the gentlemanly qualities of men of commerce and the professions like themselves. Yet ultimately such insistence on the Englishness of Halifax gentlemen sounded defensive, paradoxically exposing the same anxieties about empire Leslie had. Thus, MacGregor and Buckingham were careful to note that British officials and army and navy officers “mix”, in the words of the former, “very generally with the merchants and gentlemen of the learned professions; and most of the leading residents whether engaged in commercial or other pursuits, are men of genteel education and intelligence”. Gentility remained the mark of an English society, but a liberal education and social mixing and intermarriage with imperial representatives could guarantee English manners in the absence of English social structures.<sup>30</sup> Precisely because gentility was thought incompatible with earning or being seen to earn a living, visitors

28 Fred. Fitzgerald De Roos, *Personal Narrative of Travels in the United States and Canada in 1826 . . .* (1827), p. 109. On the impact of the war on mercantile fortunes, see David Alexander Sutherland, “The Merchants of Halifax, 1815-1850: A Commercial Class in Pursuit of Metropolitan Status”, PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1975.

29 Leslie, *Military Journal*, pp. 290-1. See also Duncan, *Our Garrisons in the West*, p. 23. Conversely, Captain Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 29-30, worried that a young officer stationed at Halifax “finds himself raised at once at a level above that accorded to the scarlet cloth at home” to the detriment of his character.

30 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 80; Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, pp. 341-2. See also Anon., *Letters*, p. 147. On social mixing at another British North American port, see T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 50-2.

stressed the gentlemanly qualities of the local elite. They worked hard to convince readers that the imperial tie was strong enough to sustain a polite, “English” society without the significant numbers of the families of inherited and predominately landed wealth typically thought indispensable to gentility in England itself.

By the 1850s concern among such non-military travellers about the incorporation of merchants into a polite society dominated by imperial appointees had shifted as Britain’s second empire left its aristocratic origins, in the reaction against the American and French revolutions, for its more liberal or bourgeois phase.<sup>31</sup> Whereas Colonel Leslie had been anxious that English gentility was diluted by such social mixing, William Chambers, a self-made businessman visiting in the age of free trade, worried instead that incorporation into the fashionable world of imperial elites had diluted the entrepreneurial spirit of the local elite. Greater ambition and attention to business would have fuelled the more rapid pace of economic development Chambers associated with the United States. Other mid-century visitors joined Chambers in noting how limited the trade of Halifax remained despite the promise of its harbour and the resources of its hinterland. They contrasted the “lethargy” of Halifax with the “air of bustle and an appearance of prosperity” of Saint John, New Brunswick, and the United States. The Rev. Robert Everest, former chaplain of the East India Company, wondered aloud if the example set by army and navy officers stationed at Halifax “of a life of idleness and amusement, balls and horse-races, parties and gossiping, be, or not, prejudicial to the sober and business habits of a mercantile community”. Thus, Halifax became a colonial test case for contemporary debates about the relationship between gentlemanly values and entrepreneurial culture.<sup>32</sup> Everest was more certain that the significant army and navy presence explained the prevalence of prostitution and the abuse of alcohol in Halifax he associated with garrison towns in England as well.<sup>33</sup> Catching the new tone of evangelical earnestness, “all the amusements and sports incidental to military life” at Halifax were presented in Captain Maximillian Hammond’s memoirs as so many threats to his spiritual well-being. After his religious conversion, Bible study and prayer replaced moose-hunting, the Halifax races and other extravagances shared with fellow officers.<sup>34</sup> Such sentiments suggested that the empire – its political structures,

31 See Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 8-11, 137, 160-3, 235-47.

32 For that debate and the later historiographic controversy, see F.M.L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture, Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford, 2001).

33 T.D.L.[andon], *A Peep at The Western World; Being an Account of a Visit to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada, and the United States* (1863), pp. 21, 26-7 and Everest, *Journey Through the United States and Part of Canada*, pp. 5, 15. Everest, pp. 19-21, also identified Crown-created monopolies, the inability of soldiers and officers to make good settlers, and the tendency of Crown patronage to reward British favourites over local talent. For other economic comparisons of Halifax and Saint John at the expense of the former and of both to the United States, see Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, pp. 17-18, 22, 80-1, 83-4, who was influenced by Haliburton’s satires and, more generally, Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, pp. 255, 257, 259-60. For a colonial visitor’s perspective on the costs of being too English in America, see Andrew Learmont Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-Noses; or, Reminiscences of a Tour Through New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, During the Summer of 1862* (1863), pp. 134-5. The *Halifax Morning Journal* (1854) agreed that colonial status meant that the “aristocracy of rank” was more valued than the “aristocracy of commerce” (quoted in Sutherland, “Nova Scotia and the American Presence”, p. 149).

34 [Egerton D. Hammond], *Memoir of Captain M.M. Hammond* (1858), p. 20.

trade policies and military and naval establishment – might be responsible for the economic and moral backwardness of Halifax. Even if it could be reproduced there, might “Englishness” be inappropriate in America?

If anxieties about empire were evident in discussions of the Englishness of Halifax’s elite, the tension between a North American social structure and English manners could not be contained once travellers stepped outside the homes of polite society and into the streets. For instance, it was in a public crowd that the agricultural chemist James Johnston was “struck, on this my first day’s residence in North America, with the less constrained and more equal intercourse which appeared to prevail between what we should call the different classes of society. The servant and the mistress, the mechanic and the barrister, with little distinction of dress and behaviour, discoursed on a perfect equality, and persons filling the highest political offices were jostled about as unceremoniously, and were as familiarly hailed, as the humblest of the crowd”. For Johnston, this threat to deference and indeed to all social distinction was rooted in the same opportunities for social mobility in a colonial setting that had worried Leslie about the elite: “So I suppose”, Johnston concluded, “the sense of equal opportunities being open to all entitles each man in these provinces to a more equal consideration”. He did not sound so sure, although an earlier visitor had reacted more favourably.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever the verdict, such patterns of social interaction assimilated Halifax to common views of the United States and thus were attributed to their shared North American environment rather than to the republican institutions of the latter. “The longer, indeed”, the geologist Charles Lyell said he remained in Nova Scotia, “the larger were the deductions I found it necessary to make from those peculiarities that I had imagined, during my sojourn in the United States, to be the genuine fruits of a republican as contrasted with a monarchical constitution, – of an American as distinguished from a British supremacy”.<sup>36</sup> Halifax may have been “more like” England than elsewhere in North America, but it was not *in* England. Travellers devoted considerable effort to convincing readers that the imperial connection upheld English manners in a commercial port in America in the absence of an English gentry but, outside the domestic settings of the imperial elite, efforts to stretch the boundaries of home to include Halifax were strained as a shared environment with the United States trumped constitutional difference.

Efforts at cultural assimilation could also be undone by overstatement. Reviewing the streets of Halifax, several travellers agreed with Moorsom that “there is a striking difference to an eye accustomed to the busy Strand, to the gay *ensemble* of Regent-street, or even to the more sober aspects of our county town”.<sup>37</sup> Halifax was not London. It may have been “English”, but it was provincial and colonial. Yet John MacGregor refused to concede, insisting that “many of the fashionable sprigs who exhibit themselves in the streets and lounging-places of Halifax . . . might even in Regent Street be said to have attained the *ne plus ultra* of ‘dandyism’”. MacGregor was unrelenting in his emphasis on the “Englishness” of Halifax – its “style of living,”

35 Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 4 and Anon., *Letters*, p. 147.

36 Charles Lyell, *Travels in North America, in the Years 1841-2; with Geological Observations on The United States, Canada, and Nova Scotia*, vol. 2, (1845), p. 231.

37 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, p. 9. See also Anon., *Letters*, p. 146 and McTaggart, *Three Years in Canada*, p. 335.

balls, “ladies” and theatre as well as the gentility of its professionals and merchants. Concerned his own testimony might not suffice, MacGregor frequently enlisted “the opinion of other travellers, as well as my own”.<sup>38</sup> The anxious tone may have reflected his emigration to Nova Scotia with his parents at the age of six. Three years later, they moved to Prince Edward Island where MacGregor eventually became a local merchant and land-agent, and served as sheriff and member of Parliament before returning to Britain in 1827.<sup>39</sup> As a colonial returned “home”, MacGregor had more invested in the identify of the two than most other travel authors. He even pronounced that “the most splendid edifice in North America is, certainly, the ‘Provincial Building’ of Nova Scotia”. Hugh Murray’s *Historical and Descriptive Account of British America*, which borrowed liberally and often literally from MacGregor and other travellers, noted that “The Provincial Building . . . is generally described as the most splendid in all North America. This must of course”, Murray continued, “be understood in a qualified sense, when compared especially with those in the United States”.<sup>40</sup> The “of course” spoke volumes. The case for cultural assimilation could be ruined by the enthusiasms of an ex-colonial.

However English its elite, Halifax was part of North America. Its built environment, the social interaction among its classes and its inability, for better or worse, to replicate the fashionables of Regent Street bore witness to its colonial, new world status. Englishness was used to identify part of the overseas empire with home, to insist that manners rather than wealth or place of birth defined its ruling elite and to bolster confidence in the imperial tie especially in the face of the nearby republic. Englishness was also used to cement the distinction between metropole and colony in ways that ensured the latter’s dependence on the former. The metropole provided the model and personnel that the colony emulated as best it could. Halifax was English, but only in “a qualified sense”.

### **Was the Empire British?**

Despite the imperial context, in none of these discussions did travellers refer to “British” manners or customs. In fact, Scottish travellers such as John MacTaggart and John MacGregor were among the most determined champions Halifax’s Englishness. As Catharine Hall has observed, “English was constituted as a hegemonic cultural identity in this period”.<sup>41</sup> Of course, even the first published travel account of the town acknowledged that its population was “of different countries”, not English in the national sense of the term, thus reinforcing the point that social class, not nationality, was at issue.<sup>42</sup> While two subsequent visitors recorded celebrations of the patron saints’ days of the three kingdoms – one thought that emigration actually strengthened the sense of Scottish and Irish nationality<sup>43</sup> – the manners in question at

38 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, pp. 80-3.

39 J.M. Bumsted, “MacGregor, John”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 547-9.

40 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 77 and Hugh Murray, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of British America; . . .* (1839), p. 157. See also Anon., *Letters*, p. 147.

41 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 22, 25.

42 John Robinson and Thomas Rispin, *A Journey through Nova-Scotia . . .* (1774), p. 7.

43 Leslie, *Military Journal*, pp. 291-2 and MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 84.

Halifax were English as the height of gentility, not British much less Scottish or Irish. Thus, travellers saw identification with Britain as overlaying rather than replacing older national identities within the British Isles and reserved Britishness for adherence to the imperial state. Englishness denoted the character required to rule such a state, but its characteristics were in principle open to Scots and the Irish as well as the English.<sup>44</sup>

“British” was thus strictly a geo-political term. Just as Bird referred to the bugle of imperial troops at Halifax as “British” and the voices of its residents as “English”, while another visitor measured the extent of Britain’s empire by the reproduction of England overseas, when Buckingham judged Halifax gentlemen as “entirely British in their feelings” he was referring to their political loyalty and not their manners or nationality.<sup>45</sup> Chapters in travel accounts devoted to the colonial capital typically included descriptions of the government, laws and courts of Nova Scotia, emphasizing their proximity to British models. Such proximity demonstrated the colony’s ongoing commitment to the empire and the relevance of those models outside the British Isles. Charles Dickens spent only seven hours at Halifax, but witnessed the opening of the colonial parliament – a ceremony so closely copied from London “and so gravely presented on a small scale, that it was like looking at Westminster through the wrong end of a telescope”.<sup>46</sup> It was both the same and different – reassuring about both the strength of the empire to produce colonial copies and the superiority of the original.

Such identification with the empire was especially gratifying to British travellers when found among the town’s general population, adding a more socially inclusive element to their equation of Halifax with home. Captain Moorsom liked “to stroll around the neighbourhood . . . to enter the dwellings of those who form the mass of the people; to converse with them upon all their little daily concerns, and draw them out upon their petty topics of importance. How delighted was I, in my early rambles here, to find them all designating Britain as ‘the old Country’ and although in most instances never having visited it, yet regarding it as home, and respecting those who announce themselves as pertaining to it”. In the homes of Haligonians, Moorsom found fellow imperialists who esteemed formal agents of empire such as himself, not republicans or colonial nationalists who had been remade politically by the American continent. Likewise, as an Englishman, the Wesleyan missionary Charles Churchill was “peculiarly endeared” that Nova Scotians identified themselves and everyone from the three kingdoms as Britons and called “‘the old country’ *home*” even if they had spent their entire lives in Nova Scotia.<sup>47</sup> It was in the empire of settlement, largely populated

44 These findings from a colonial context confirm those of Linda Colley in her “Britishness and Otherness”, especially pp. 315-16 and, more generally, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1992). Yet E.P. Thompson’s critique of Colley in “The Making of a Ruling Class”, *Dissent* (Summer 1993), pp. 377-82 was surely right to insist that the search for an identity to meld the constituent elements of the British Isles together was as much about forging a ruling class as about national identity. At Halifax, however, this class-specific function was performed by a sense of Englishness rather than Britishness.

45 Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, p. 342. For similar findings, see Morgan, *National Identities and Travel*, pp. 196-7.

46 Charles Dickens, *American Notes, and Reprinted Pieces* (1842; repr. 1868), p. 13.

47 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 7-8 and Churchill, *Memorials of Missionary Life*, p. 152. See also MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, pp. 83-4; De Roos, *Personal Narrative*, p. 109; and Bird,



and ruled by representatives of the various national components of the British Isles, that a British identity made the most sense. Emigration had severed neither familial nor political ties to Britain. Here was proof of the power of culture over geography and thus of the feasibility of empire. The American Revolution need not be repeated.

British travellers assimilated Halifax to home because of its elite sociability and were delighted when ordinary residents reciprocated by identifying Britain as home, but there was an important difference. Whereas travellers themselves identified the town's elite with England, they merely reported ordinary residents' identification with Britain. Thus, while Lyell remarked on Nova Scotians' ambition to "go home", he put them in their place – both geographically and in terms of precedence – by translating for his readers that going "home" . . . means to 'leave home, and see England'.<sup>48</sup> Home was an ambiguous, metaphorical place. Political identification was welcomed and reassuring, but England was home for the Scottish-born Lyell in a way it could never be for those who had left Britain for overseas, even when they had remained within its empire and continued to identify it as home.

### **The Geography of Race**

British travellers strove valiantly to assimilate Halifax to home as part of the empire, culturally as English at the top of the social hierarchy and politically as British throughout. These were the aspects of the town Chambers found most familiar but, like other travellers, he was struck by two principal differences. The first, interaction among the town's social classes, has already been discussed. The second, the town's racial diversity, received greater attention but, like the first, was found outdoors, exposed anxieties about empire and subsumed a significant class element. Even John MacGregor, so committed to similitude, conformed here: "It is in the streets of Halifax that we most forcibly feel that we are not in Europe", he opined, since there one encountered "a parcel of lazy, miserable negroes [and] . . . a group of Micmac Indians, probably drunk". Aide-de-campe Charles Doyle, later lieutenant-governor of the colony, was equally forthright in the unpublished journal of his voyage to Halifax: "That which stamps it as a foreign place is the groups of Indians and Mulatto Blacks which are occasionally met with herding[?] in different corners of the streets". Almost always mentioned in tandem, "coloured people" and "the Micmac Indians" were the principal "novelties to a stranger in Halifax". On no other issue was such attention lavished and such agreement secured. Beginning with Henry Wansey's visit in the 1790s, the visible presence of blacks, Indians and occasionally French Acadians on the streets of Halifax distinguished it from Europe and the foreign from home.<sup>49</sup>

*Englishwoman in America*, p. 25. Everst, *Journey*, pp. 15-16, was the lone dissenting voice on the issue of Halifax's loyalty.

48 Lyell, *Travels in North America*, vol. 2, pp. 195-6.

49 MacGregor, *British America*, pp. vol. 2, 85-6; Doyle, "Journal", p. 13; Johnston, *Notes on America*, p. 7; Wansey, *Journal of an Excursion*, p. 24. See also Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, pp. 320, 340; Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, pp. 19-20; and MacGregor, *Our Brothers and Cousins*, p. 2. Such perceptions crossed class lines. Robert Beckett, an enlisted private stationed at Halifax, wrote to this mother at Bolton that "there is as many blacks and whites hear [*sic*]" and to his uncle that "when we landed on the shores of america there was people came[?] round us of all coulors [*sic*]". See 1 November 1842 and 28 April 1844, Walsh and Beckett family fonds, MG40-M11, Library and Archives Canada.

The geography of race in Halifax was clearer than its lessons for empire. Moorsom conducted his readers on a tour of the town: “Down this street pour a troop of negroes. . . . Here and there a French Acadian . . . Still lower down, a few strange-looking beings, the aborigines of the land . . . The heat, and myriads of flies in the lower streets, render speedy escape desirable; and a few paces up the hill, on the side of which the town is built, soon conduct to a more respectable scene”.<sup>50</sup> Respectability was a haven from racial diversity. Emphasizing the foreign-ness of finding blacks and Aboriginal people in Halifax constructed home, both in Britain and among the respectable at Halifax, as unstructured by race. British travellers juxtaposed a pure English home that spanned the Atlantic against a racialized and thus foreign out-of-doors. The purity imputed to the former spoke to the power of British norms to police boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in a colonial setting.

Representations of race at Halifax could bolster British self-confidence further by distinguishing the empire from antebellum America. Johnston informed his readers that “people of colour enjoy, I believe, in all the British colonies of North America, the same political privileges as are possessed by other classes of her Majesty’s subjects” and was “both surprised and pleased to see a perfectly black man sitting” as a juror in the courtroom of the colony’s most famous judge and literary figure, Thomas Haliburton; this suggested both the superiority of the British judicial system and the ability of at least some black men to assume the responsibilities of British subjects.<sup>51</sup> Blacks in Halifax, who numbered more than 500 in 1838, were also, as Chambers put it, “free, of course, but not seemingly much the better for being at their own disposal”.<sup>52</sup> Britain had abolished slavery in the empire by the time Chambers visited and its judicial and political institutions were formally colour-blind. But any sense of imperial achievement was undermined by widespread disappointment that legal freedom had not made most blacks industrious, self-sufficient economic agents.

Just as class was obscured by defining the social elite in terms of national customs, it was obscured at the opposite end of the social hierarchy by race. Scholars now recognize the degree to which the same negative characteristics were ascribed in much the same vocabulary to the English working class, European peasant populations and African and Aboriginal populations throughout the empire.<sup>53</sup> Halifax was no exception. Travellers were largely uninterested in Halifax workers of European descent (although a couple noted in passing that they seemed more comfortable than their counterparts in Britain, hinting at anxieties about the social costs of

50 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 9-10.

51 Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7. Did Johnston identify the judge by name because of his literary fame and, if so, was his surprise, in part, a function of the highly derogatory portrayal of blacks in Haliburton’s fiction? No visitor mentioned activities that would have suggested greater individual and community agency, on which see David A. Sutherland, “Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the mid-Victorian Quest for Reform”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 7 (1996), pp. 35-54 and Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (Burlington, 2006).

52 Chambers, *Things as They Are*, p. 27.

53 See Stoler and Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony” and Susan Thorne, “‘The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable’: Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain”, both in Cooper and Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire*, pp. 1-56 and 238-62. See also Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, 1978).

industrialization).<sup>54</sup> Instead, race rather than class provided travellers with a foil for the economic values they championed. Implicitly, the Halifax population of European descent divided into classes by the language of Englishness was reunited by discussions of race even as that discussion too was informed by class distinctions. Thus, being seen “in the streets of Halifax acting as porters, and in other humble employments” or “hanging about the towns” like vagabonds, gypsies and other social marginals seemed to substantiate the charge that most blacks and Native people were poor, “indolent” or “lazy” with only a tenuous connection to the town.<sup>55</sup> One of the few other places travellers recorded encountering blacks was in hotels and private homes as servants, reinforcing the connection between the “class structures of capitalism and the racial hierarchies of colonialism”.<sup>56</sup>

So natural was the elision of social class in favour of race that MacGregor could end one paragraph by noting that the best livery stable in town was “kept by a negro” only to then proceed, in the next paragraph, to distinguish Halifax from Europe by finding “a half-starved horse, and generally a negro driver” on its streets instead of “the huge horses and carts and frocked carters of England”.<sup>57</sup> Britain abolished slavery in this period, not the correlation between race and social class expressed as either indolence or service. The Mi’kmaq were not associated with regular employment, humble or otherwise, but for Johnston the comparison only showed them “less patient of restraint than the negroes”. In the context of black chattel slavery on the continent, this was no compliment for the latter.<sup>58</sup> Another visitor agreed that blacks made good servants, but attributed their success to “their being able to gratify their love of smartness in dress, and ludicrous affection of gentility”. Other motives for working, such as a desire for independence, were thought ineffectual among this group while, as black and servants, emulation of the genteel was “ludicrous”. It inverted class and racial hierarchies simultaneously. “The proud strut of the well-fed and well-dressed negro-servant” galled travellers.<sup>59</sup> Clothing was, of course, central to the visual performance of identity. In contrast to women in polite society whose dress defined fashion, black females, “decked in colours and tawdry handkerchiefs wrapped around the head”, became subjects of mockery and disgust while other blacks were depicted as “ragged, and without stockings and shoes”.<sup>60</sup> Given travellers’ relative disinterest

54 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 83 and Duncan, *Our Garrisons in the West*, p. 23.

55 Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7. See also Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 9-10; MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 85; Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, pp. 2-3; and Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, pp. 340-1.

56 Woollacott, “All This is The Empire”, p. 1012. On blacks as servants, see Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, p. 19; MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 85; Campbell Hardy, *Sporting Adventures in the New World; or, Days and Nights of Moose-Hunting in the Pine Forests of Acadia*, vol. 2, (1855), p. 19; and MacGregor, *Our Brothers and Cousins*, p. 3.

57 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 85.

58 Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7. For references to “Sambo” see Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 2, p. 19 and Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-Noses*, p. 134.

59 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 85. See also Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 2, p. 19 and broadly, Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-noses*, p. 134 and Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, p. 21, who conceded that their bright clothing reflected the reward for their “industry”.

60 On black women’s bright clothing, see Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, p. 9 and also [Hammond], *Memoir*, p. 14. For ill-clad blacks in general, see Wansey, *Journal of an Excursion*, p. 24 and also Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, p. 30 and Everest, *Journey*, p. 5.

in the town's poor of European descent, race substituted for social class at the bottom of the social hierarchy just as nationality did at the top. The extent to which the privileges of empire were rooted in material advantage was concealed while the formal equality offered by the British Empire and the inevitably subservient position of blacks within it were highlighted.

Yet while other classes were incorporated into narratives of Halifax if they identified Britain as "home", travellers implied that blacks did not belong at all. Empires moved peoples as well as goods and ideas; some movements, such as those of blacks to Halifax, were more problematic than others, including the arrival of white emigrants, imperial functionaries and, of course, British travellers themselves. Thus, by the 1850s several of the latter felt compelled to explain to their readers how blacks were to be found in Nova Scotia at all – often in ways that reinforced the difference between them and white emigrants who were presented as more self-directed. In particular, the relocation of the Black Refugees from the United States to the Halifax area during the War of 1812 was portrayed as an act of imperial benevolence although perhaps a misguided one.<sup>61</sup> Particular peoples were associated with particular geographies, ensuring that blacks were widely portrayed as ill-suited to Halifax as evident from their general poverty and failure to rise above the status of servants. They also suffered from its cold winters, required benevolent uplift and relied on charity for survival – and "this in a country where any man able and willing to work, can never be at a loss for permanent employment and at a wage beyond that of the English labourer", exclaimed a frustrated Chambers.<sup>62</sup>

It was also in the 1850s that published travel texts began to pay some attention to skin pigmentation and thus to suggest, however obliquely, anxiety about racial boundaries. Johnston observed that some of the town's "coloured people" were "apparently full blooded negroes", implying that others were not. More bluntly, an army officer informed his readers that the town's "negroes" were "of every shade and colour, from the creole to the blackest nigger".<sup>63</sup> Greater effort to explain the presence of blacks in Halifax combined with more attention to skin colour probably reflected the increasingly biological conception of race and the hardening of racial attitudes scholars have traced to the 1850s. If the free blacks of Halifax were any indication, optimism among 19th-century humanitarians about the transformative power of British freedom and access to colonial lands had been misplaced. No British traveller endorsed slavery in their account of Halifax but, based on their observations of blacks there, faith that blacks in general could fulfill their moral obligation to labour to maintain themselves and contribute to the imperial economy outside the context of

61 Chambers, *Things as They Are*, p. 27; Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 2, p. 18; Bird, *An Englishwoman*, p. 21. Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7, seems a more varied account; Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, p. 341, a somewhat earlier one.

62 Chambers, *Things as They Are*, pp. 27-8. See also Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, p. 341; Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7; Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 2, p. 19; and Everest, *Journey*, p. 5.

63 Johnston, *Notes on North America*, p. 7 and [Hammond], *Memoir*, p. 121. In his earlier unpublished "Journal" (p. 13), Doyle had referred to the "Mulatto" population. I say "obliquely" because there was no discussion of miscegenation or suggestion that it had occurred in Halifax and, as we have seen, the predominate fear of contamination was cultural and from the United States, not sexual or race-based.

slavery might appear misplaced.<sup>64</sup> Travellers' observations, before and after emancipation, about blacks' apparent inability to succeed in a British settler colony that promised formal equality and economic opportunity proved that they were out of place in Halifax, but also cast doubt on the entire emancipation experiment.

Although Halifax had been built on a traditional gathering place for the Mi'kmaq, ultimately British travellers concluded that they did not belong in Halifax either. Unlike those of blacks, however, portrayals of Native people were heavily influenced from the late-18th century by romantic notions of the sublime and picturesque.<sup>65</sup> Their presence – their wigwams, handicrafts and displays of skill in canoes – added the local colour trans-Atlantic visitors sought. Charles Lyell and his wife had been in Halifax all of six hours when they posted letters back to Britain giving “an account of the harbour of Halifax, of the Micmac Indians with their Esquimaux features, paddling about in canoes of birch bark, and other novelties seen on the shores of the New World”.<sup>66</sup> Yet romantic expectations of the Noble Savage or “native children of the forest” quickly turned to dismay. “How miserably are all these ideas levelled with the dust”, complained Moorsom, “at first sight of the abject beings” he saw loitering in Halifax. Thus, while “groups of native Indians were almost alone sufficient to remind” George Head “that I was breathing the air of another hemisphere . . . it was not, therefore, without considerable disappointment, that I saw a few squalid miserable-looking beings, straggling in idle listlessness about the streets, and inferior in point of appearance to the wandering race of gipsies [*sic*] in England”. Others “were to be seen grovelling on the ground, or reeling in a state of intoxication about the streets”.<sup>67</sup> Personal observation turned anticipated novelty to ugly difference.

The poverty and dissolute habits associated with Mi'kmaw individuals sharpened the contrast with the more refined parts of Halifax. Their supposedly declining numbers, degraded condition and inability to adapt to colonial settlement confirmed the inevitability and justice of British imperial expansion. If travellers told of how blacks had come to Halifax to emphasize their foreignness, several recounted Native people's attacks on the village of Dartmouth, across the harbour from Halifax in 1749, in terms that contrasted the orderly founding of a new outpost of British civilization with what Moorsom termed a “massacre” and underlined how irrevocably the balance of power had swung in the former's favour. For instance, Buckingham's discussion of the Earl of Halifax's plans, the building of a town “with great regularity” and the establishment of its government was immediately followed by an account of how “Indians” had “scalped and murdered” early settlers “whenever they had the

64 For the importance of this question with regards to Jamaica in the same decades, see Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

65 Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 7-14.

66 Lyell, *Travels in North America*, vol. 1, p. 4. See also Sir James E. Alexander, *L'Acadie; or, Seven Years' Exploration in British America*, vol. 2, pp. 231-2 and [B.W.A.] Sleigh, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings; or Travel, Life, and Adventure, in the British North American Provinces* (1853), p. 48.

67 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 108-9 and Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, pp. 2-3, 5. On panic at first sight, see Karen Dubinsky, “Vacations in the ‘Contact Zone’: Race, Gender, and the Traveler at Niagara Falls”, in Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, eds., *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington, 1998), pp. 255-6.

opportunity. Sometimes they took them into the interior by long and perilous journeys, under an infliction of cruelties far worse than death itself". The Mi'kmaq, "then powerful in this territory", now posed no military threat. Indeed, they had become, Head concluded, "a cowardly race of people, and submit themselves readily to Englishmen".<sup>68</sup> British superiority was self-evident.

Yet the conditions of the Mi'kmaq observed at Halifax also exposed the failure of imperial and missionary efforts to "civilize" and "protect" indigenous populations. Seeing "a great many Indians lying by the door-steps", Isabella Bird combined humanitarian concern with the widespread belief in their inevitable moral and numerical decline. They had learned the vices of "civilization" rather than its virtues and were now "tottering along to their last home, under the burden of woes which contact with civilization ever entails upon the aborigines" of Britain's colonies. Nonetheless, "at some future day a mighty voice may ask of those who have thus wronged the Indian, 'where is now thy brother?'" Because the Nova Scotian "Indian" had been converted to "a corrupt form of Christianity" by the previous French empire, Bird was able to ease the conscience of her British readers and limit the demands on a benevolent British empire to consoling its victims. "It is true that frequently we arrived too late to save them as a race from degradation and dispersion; but we might have spoken to them the tidings of 'peace on earth and good will to men' – of a Saviour 'who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through his gospel'".<sup>69</sup> Faced with a Catholic Aboriginal population Protestant Britain could not reverse its decline, but retained a moral obligation to console its members on their way to extinction.

Imperialism had transformed the Mi'kmaq, but it had destroyed rather than converted them. Such observations confirmed British superiority and excused Britain from responsibility for the conditions travellers reported. They did so, however, only by exposing the force and dispossession that underwrote all empires and the failure of humanitarian efforts to "save" and "protect" – either physically or spiritually – the Aboriginal population of Nova Scotia.<sup>70</sup> The distinction between colonies of settlement and colonies of conquest blurred. The justification for empire as a vehicle for moral good confronted observations of dependence and decline and the persistence of difference. Optimism in the ideals of British humanitarians, closely related to those of the abolitionists, seemed to give way to resignation – even disillusionment – at Halifax.

Thus, however frequently Mi'kmaq were seen in or around Halifax or associated with its founding, romantic sensibilities positioned them in the "wilds" – separated from the town and the colony's future as a white settler society. As Head concluded:

68 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 28-9; Buckingham, *Canada, Nova Scotia*, pp. 325-7; Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, p. 6. See also Doyle, "Journal", p. 12 and Alexander, *L'Acadie*, p. 233.

69 Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, pp. 19-20 (emphasis in original).

70 On the humanitarian impulse and the loss of faith in it by mid-century, see Andrew Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism", in Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 198-221 and Andrew Bank, "Losing Faith in the Civilizing Mission: The Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism at the Cape, 1840-60", in Martin Dauton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 364-83.

“In Halifax a fair specimen of the North American Indian is not to be met with”. Lieutenant Campbell Hardy agreed, but as a big-game hunter he was anxious to report that a few still resided in “the remoter districts of the province”. These “fair specimens” of Indian-ness were conscious of their status as outsiders in ways that proud black servants were not: “Outcast, as it were, in their own country, and sensible of their position, they bear themselves with becoming haughtiness towards the mob of staring Europeans in the crowded streets; and, hastily purchasing their few necessaries, they retreat, as they came, to their hunting grounds in the interior”. Whether found loitering in Halifax in wretched conditions or visiting briefly from the “wilds” that preserved their romanticized nobility, the area’s Native people were indeed “outcast . . . in their own country”.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Marketplace of Difference**

As Hardy’s reference to the purchase of “necessaries” reveals, the Halifax market attracted non-resident Mi’kmaq and blacks to the town. Given concerns about the supposed indolence of these populations, their active participation in the town’s marketplace might have elicited praise. Certainly, European travellers were generally anxious to promote economic development and the further integration of peoples into the market economy.<sup>72</sup> Instead, however, by bringing the town’s diversity to the fore, the Halifax market created something of an outdoor spectacle of race that recast, in economic terms, the sense that these populations were out of place by what they had to sell, how they sold it and what they did with the proceeds. As Patrick Joyce has argued, urban markets were sites of anxiety and potential disorder as people mingled and boundaries were marked and crossed. Enumerating the elements of Nova Scotia’s population, an American visitor noted that “on market-days in Halifax, representatives of each can be seen mingling together, offering for sale their representative wares but still gathered in isolated groups of their own kith and kind”. For a second visitor, “the shifting crowd, in all costumes and in all colors, Indians, negroes, soldiers, sailors, civilians, and Chizzincookers [Acadians], make up a pageant of no little theatrical effect and bustle”.<sup>73</sup> This theatre of economics allowed travellers to test the place of the colony’s minority populations in the imperial economy.

It was on market-day, for instance, that Head claimed to observe one Mi’kmaq family in particular. The parents “were both sitting down on the ground with things to sell. The man had the skin of an otter and some partridges, and the woman baskets neatly manufactured of birch bark”. “The little boy” used “a bow and blunt arrow very dexterously, by shooting at a halfpenny set up on the top of a stick, which he hit at a distance of twenty yards several times successfully”. The father’s pelt and fowl and the boy’s use of bow and arrow associated the Mi’kmaq with “nature” and hunting

71 Head, *Forest scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, p. 5 and Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 1, pp. 30-1.

72 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992).

73 Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003), pp. 81-2, 85; Charles Hallock, *The Fishing Tourist: Angler’s Guide and Reference Book* (1873), p. 120; Frederic S. Cozzens, *Acadia; or, A Month with the Blue Noses* (1859), p. 26. See also Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-Noses*, p. 133.

rather than “civilization” and commerce. Even when its fruits were brought to market, hunting was anachronistic in the commercial capital of an agrarian colony.<sup>74</sup> Father and son marked the Mi’kmaq’s inability or refusal to exchange the tools of the chase for those of the farm and thus to “improve” themselves and the colony.

The symbolic equivalent of animal pelts for blacks in the market was, as Moorsom put it, “strawberries gathered wild in the woods where these people are settled”. Like game, berries were gathered rather than produced by industry, wild rather than domestic and from the woods rather than fields or factories. Almost two decades before Thomas Carlyle’s (1849) stridently racist depiction of blacks in the Carribean who, once no longer enslaved, chose to eat pumpkins that grew without cultivation rather than work to produce sugar, a similar equation of blacks with uncultivated fruit and thus with idleness was made at Halifax.<sup>75</sup> Although none of Carlyle’s racial venom was presaged in Moorsom’s narrative, both authors used the equation to make the same point: without industry there could be no virtue or civilization, and the inability or refusal to labour, except in the context of slavery or servitude, put blacks beyond the pale of Englishness.

It was also in the context of selling that many visitors to Halifax commented on the Acadians who, as descendants of the region’s original French colonizers, numbered among the town’s novelties. By their simple dress that appeared to MacGregor “much in the same fashion as that of her ancestors a century and a half past”, as well as by what Moorsom described as “upholding to the best advantage the little surplus of her poultry-yard and dairy”, Acadian women became stock figures representing a static, pre-industrial peasant society. Hardy bought wild strawberries in bark cartons from the “French girls” he encountered on their way to the market “partly out of charity” rather than mutual economic advantage.<sup>76</sup> Rendered a harmless folk society by romanticism, they too were external to and served as a useful foil for Halifax and the commercial possibilities of the more progressive empire to which the region now belonged.

Still, the Mi’kmaq did sell goods they had made, including the baskets Head saw with the Mi’kmaw mother. No matter how “neatly manufactured” they were, however, they did not reflect industry or entrepreneurship. Again, Moorsom was particularly clear about the distinction, reporting that the Mi’kmaq in the market were “indolently holding in their hands, as if for sale, a few baskets and trinkets worked with beads, or fancifully stained with various colours”.<sup>77</sup> They were indolent despite their presence in the market to sell goods, could only mimic the act of trade and had little in quantity or value to sell anyway. Economic exchange in the marketplace was

74 Head, *Forest Scenes and Incidents in the Wilds*, pp. 3, 6-8 and, more generally, Jeffrey L. McNairn, “Meaning and Markets: Hunting, Economic Development and British Imperialism in Maritime Travel Narratives to 1870”, *Acadiensis*, XXXIV, 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 3-25.

75 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, p. 9. See also Cozzens, *Acadia*, p. 26. On Carlyle, see Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, pp. 62-5 and Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, pp. 48, 348-50. Despite observing black families in the Halifax market, Spedon, in his *Rambles among the Blue-Noses*, (pp. 133-4), concluded that “their habits and manner indicated an indolent disposition”.

76 MacGregor, *British America*, vol. 2, p. 86; Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, pp. 9- 10; Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 2, pp. 20-1.

77 Moorsom, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, p. 10. See also Spedon, *Rambles among the Blue-Noses*, p. 133. The term “Mi’kmaq” refers to a people while “Mi’kmaw” is the adjectival form.



as much a social performance of identity as table manners at the governor's ball. That these baskets and other handicrafts were predominately manufactured and sold by women only underscored the inadequacy of the Mi'kmaw economy as well as its perversion of Victorian gender roles. When husbands were portrayed as frittering away the proceeds, especially on alcohol, the sense that the Mi'kmaq made inadequate and inappropriate use of markets was complete.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, searching for his favourite Mi'kmaw guide to accompany him moose-hunting in the Nova Scotian interior, Hardy found him and his son in the Halifax market "where they were selling a large quantity of moose-meat, Joe's eyes beaming with ferocious satisfaction as he pocketed the dollars by a ready sale". "Joe" belonged in the "woods" where he acted with honour and skill, not in the town's market which, ironically, made him more "savage". Moreover, Hardy was convinced his presence there brought no material advantage. Instead of saving or investing, he bought overpriced luxuries for his wife so that, despite their considerable income from his hunting and her quill work, "Joe" was "always hard up" even to the point of begging British officers for cash.<sup>79</sup> The Mi'kmaq were rhetorically excluded from the marketplace they were observed in. They belonged either in the "wilds" as the "real Indians" of travellers' romantic imagination or assimilated into the settler population as industrious yeomen who conformed to prescribed gender norms.

What travellers could not accept or even acknowledge was that Native people strove to retain their distinct identity by, in part, creating niches in the market economy, including meeting the demand for "authentic" Native handicrafts and displays of skill created by visitors such as themselves. Thus, Head appeared oblivious to the income-generating intent of the Native boy's demonstration with bow and arrow. The youth likely expected passers by to replace each half-penny he shot down with one of their own as a visitor to Fredericton of lower-class status quickly realized from observing a similar performance.<sup>80</sup> Aspects of Mi'kmaw culture were being commodified by the very expectations travel-authors reported as unfulfilled, but the Mi'kmaw entrepreneurship such commodification reflected was dismissed because it was part of their attempt to sustain rather than erase difference. Travellers could not conceive of the Mi'kmaq as both new and familiar – as both an Aboriginal population having an autonomous, if evolving, culture and as economic agents participating in European markets. They had to be one or the other; they had to be either part of what made Halifax like home and thus confirmed faith in British imperialism or an interesting, harmless novelty for tourists outside of the town and its market. Other forms of difference were troubling since they suggested the limits of empire and the irreducibility of its diversity.

Confidence in Britain's superiority mingled with disappointment at the failure to

78 Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 1, p. 29. See also Saint-Mesmin, "Journal", p. xxvi; Dennys, *Account of the Cruise*, p. 128; and, more generally, Daniel K. Richter, "'Believing that many of the red people suffer much for the want of food': Hunting, Agriculture, and a Quaker Construction of Indianness in the Early Republic", *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19 (1999), pp. 601-28.

79 Campbell Hardy, *Forest Life in Acadie: Sketches of Sport and Natural History in the Lower Provinces of the Canadian Dominion* (1869), pp. 89-90 and Hardy, *Sporting Adventures*, vol. 1, p. 183-4.

80 John Mann, *Travels in North America: Particularly the Provinces of Upper & Lower Canada, and New Brunswick*, . . . (1824), pp. 12-13.

“civilize” either of its principal subject populations, both of whom loom large in accounts of Halifax. While travellers remained focused on issues of civility, dress and economic culture, assumptions that difference was only cultural and environmental were nonetheless undermined by their persistence at Halifax and elsewhere in the empire during the first half of the 19th century. Such persistence helped lay the foundation for new, more biological, conceptions of race later in the century.<sup>81</sup> Observing the town’s black and Mi’kmaw populations, travellers defined appropriate economic norms and behaviour by negative example; they also confronted the power and limits of British imperialism itself.

### **Resilience and Ambiguity**

Charles Dilke coined the term “Greater Britain” to refer to the “English-speaking countries” he toured in 1866-67. Later popularized by J.R. Seeley’s *Expansion of England* (1883), the term conveyed both men’s sense of the common racial stock of an England not confined to the British Isles and conveniently marks the origins of British imperial history. Arriving in North America as Nova Scotia and two other British American colonies federated as the new Dominion of Canada, Dilke did not visit Halifax. His published account mentions the town only as the eastern terminus of the new transcontinental entity that was itself of little significance in the wider Anglo-Saxon world compared to the United States. At the dawn of a new imperial age, the lowly status Dilke accorded Halifax is ironic given its importance to earlier imperial travellers as part of a greater Britain. Halifax, at the physical and cultural threshold of Europe and America, forced travel-authors to articulate what it meant to be English and British, collective identities the meaning and resilience of which were not found solely within the British archipelago. A formal “British Atlantic” important to the ongoing negotiation of identities within diverse power relations persisted after the American Revolution.<sup>82</sup>

Published travel accounts of Halifax also remind us that while we typically think of travel and empire as primarily about hierarchies of difference, they were also about similarity. They stretched the boundaries of home across distance and difference, although never to the point of closing the gap between metropole and colony that justified empire in the first place.<sup>83</sup> Who travellers’ “we” were and where “home” was were especially unclear in certain imperial contexts such as the urban capital of a temperate and predominately white settler society. British travellers to Halifax were relieved to feel at ease in “their” empire with its English manners among the social elite and the political identification of ordinary townspeople with Britain. They sought novelty, of course, and were disappointed when Halifax was too familiar. But they were more troubled by the differences they did encounter, whether it was the more democratic interaction among social classes or finding poor blacks in what was

81 Porter, “Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism”.

82 Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries During 1866-7* (1869), especially pp. v-vi, 61, 67 and David Armitage, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” *American Historical Review*, 104, 2 (April 1999), pp. 429-30, 438.

83 For valuable insights on this gap in various imperial settings, see Catharine Hall, “What Did A British World Mean to the British? Reflections on the Nineteenth Century”, in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005), pp. 21- 37.

supposed to be a prosperous white settler colony or the failure of the local Mi'kmaq population to assimilate. Such differences undermined faith in an imperialism simultaneously bolstered by its ability to recreate home on the other side of an ocean.

Social class provided a principal axis along which these tensions were negotiated. Manners that made Halifax familiar to British travellers were expressed in national terms, but were defined by the gentility of an imperial ruling class. Similarly, the racial diversity that made Halifax foreign rested on perceived cultural differences that included economic norms and behaviour. This is not to argue, as David Cannadine has for a somewhat later period, that class trumped race in the empire but that nation, race and class were mutually constitutive and that the more explicit discussion of the two former categories, especially in accounts of colonies of conquest, obscures the importance of class and economics more generally to the cultural history of empire.<sup>84</sup> There was also an important gender dimension to each category. "Home" – both in the sense of domestic space and the imperial centre – was marked by particular gender expectations whether it was how some women conversed at dinner parties or how others sold domestic manufactures in the marketplace. The absence of any comment on women in discussions of Britishness confirms its more political nature and the extent to which distinctions of the new and familiar were gendered.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, place mattered. Identities were negotiated in local contexts. While common themes pervade imperial travel literature, Halifax was a particular vantage point from which to gaze on the performance of social rank, political identity and race.<sup>86</sup> As a port of call and the capital of a British settler colony, Halifax occasioned different reflections on questions of nation and empire than the tourist destinations, wild hinterlands and colonies of conquest that have drawn more attention from scholars of tourism and empire. Place mattered within Halifax as well. British travellers positioned themselves as internal to what was "English" and pertained to the imperial elite. Even discussions of political attachment to Britain were couched in the familial language of kinship and home, suggesting a benevolent and reciprocal relationship. What told travellers they were not home was found in the town's streets and marketplace and thus was presented as external to themselves and their own identities. Greater distance, both literal and figurative, was created between travellers and the foreign and between the "English" and the "other", but both were found in Britain's empire and both were sources of ambivalence as well as self-confidence. The emphasis on the streets and market as sites of difference also reinforced the economic and class dimensions of travellers' analyses as they drew and redrew the fraught boundaries of home and away – new and familiar – in ways that suggested both the power and fragility of empire.

That fragility was all too evident in the outburst Isabella Bird recorded in her private journal: "What tardy grumbling unenterprising backward old world despicable people these 'blue- noses' [Nova Scotians] are . . . keeping one of the finest of our

84 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

85 Grewal, *Home and Harem*, p. 135.

86 This is not to argue that Halifax was unique. A comparison with Victoria, British Columbia, would prove particularly revealing, a point suggested to me by Professor Jean Barman. See also J.F. Bosher, "Vancouver Island and the Empire", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 33, 3 (September 2005), pp. 349-68.

Colonies a mere cumbrous excrescence on the vigorous young republic. I should like to sweep the whole rabble, sodgers, niggers, Injuns, and blue noses out of Halifax and sending our troops to fight in the Crimea[,] replace the red cross of St. George with the Stars and Strips”. Although far from uncritical of Halifax in her published account, that Bird advocated no such transfer of sovereignty there – and could still declare that “I felt myself at home” – speaks eloquently to empire’s resilience.<sup>87</sup>

87 Bird’s private journal, quoted in Andrew Hill Clark, “Forward”, p. xix and Bird, *Englishwoman in America*, p. 13. Clark speculates that Bird or her publisher worried about the reaction of British readers. Influenced by the fictional writings of Thomas Haliburton, the idea that colonial Nova Scotians were Blue Noses, more a separate colonial type or folk society than fellow Britons, was increasingly common by the 1850s.