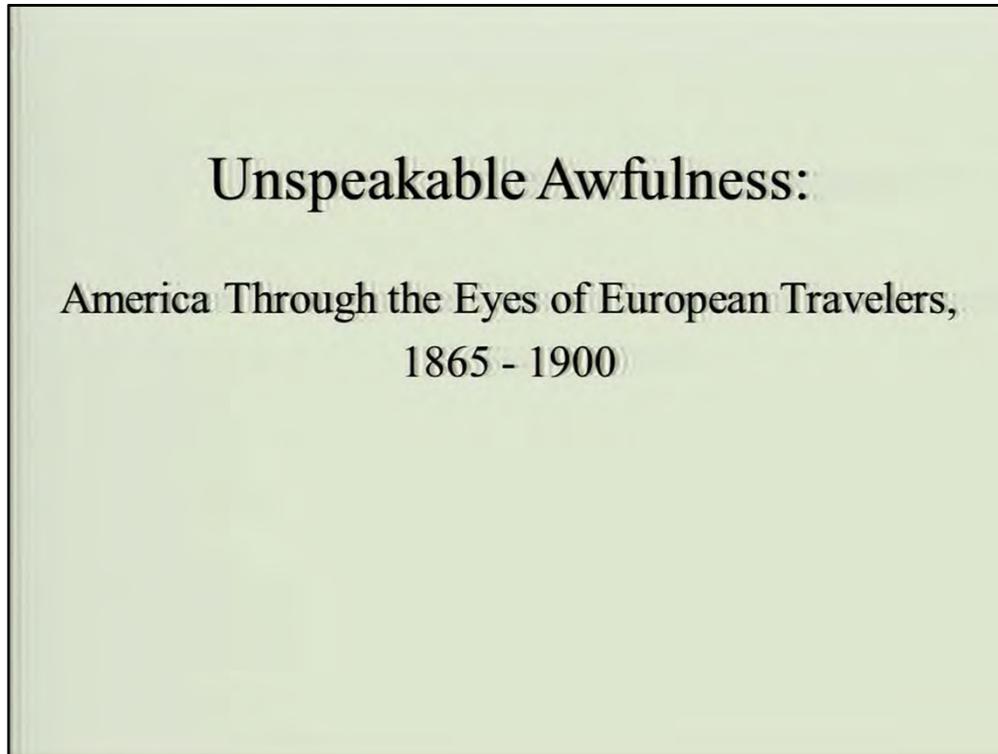


Introduction – Dr. Laird Easton: Thank you for coming. My name is Laird Easton, I’m Chair of the History Department. This is the second and the last of our history public lectures this academic year. I welcome you all. I want to remind you that after the talk we will have a period for questions and answers, and then after we have a reception waiting for you in the first floor of Trinity Hall [inaudible].

It’s my great pleasure to introduce my colleague and my friend, Ken Rose, who will be speaking tonight. He probably requires no introduction if you are a lover of Irish music because he is the bass player for the Pub Scouts, a famous Irish band in town... Also I was told that he was also the bass player for the group Roses O'Brien [assumed spelling]. Can you hear me? [Inaudible] career in music before he went off to grad school and earned his Ph.D from University of California, Los Angeles. And he'd been teaching here for about 20 years at Chico State.

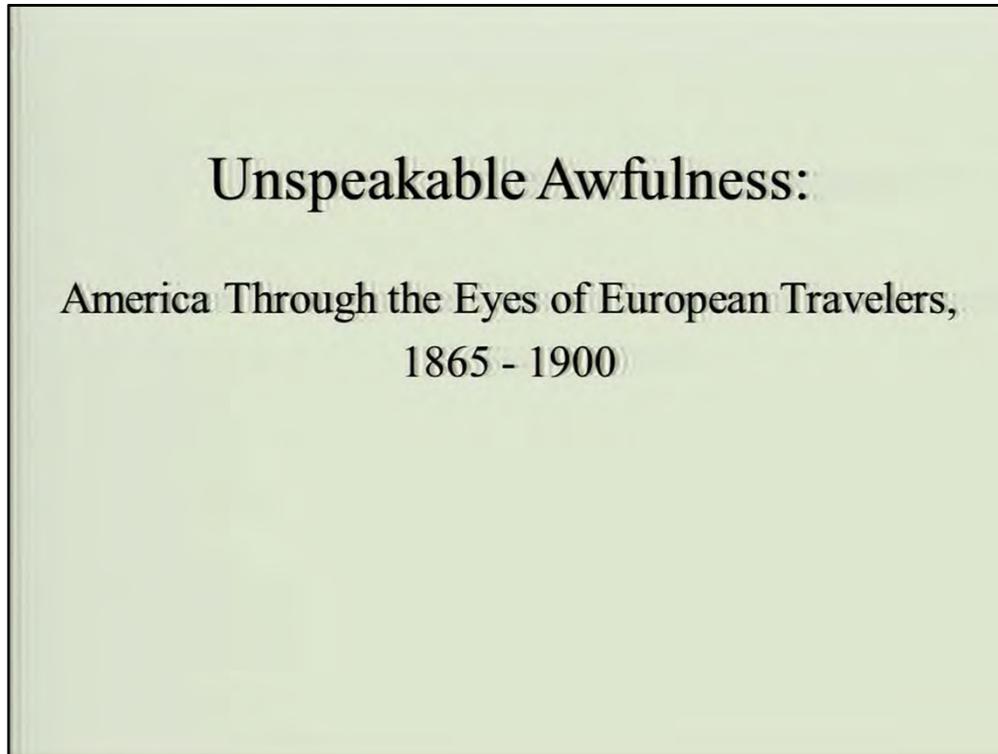
In that period, he has written three books, and the fourth book, the subject of tonight's lecture, will be appearing this summer. Their titles are: “American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition”; “One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture”; “Myth and the Greatest Generation: Social History of World War II”; and the forthcoming book on “Unspeakable Awfulness.”



This is quite a remarkable record considering his teaching load over these years. I think three things that occur to me when I think about Ken and his writing is – first of all, he chooses interesting topics. The book, “The Fallout Shelter,” was published at the time as a revival of interest in fallout shelters. He was interviewed on Japanese TV. He was mentioned in the *New York Times*. He's written a terrific book. One on “Myth and the Greatest Generation” – he takes a mighty hammer to the Tom Brokaw idea of the greatest generation. It's the single-best book on social history in the United States in the Second World War that I've ever read. And [inaudible]. The other thing he does is he writes extremely well. He's very [inaudible]. No jargon in his books, and I have to say I've come to admire that. And finally, to produce four books like that, you have to work very hard. He is amazingly disciplined, and if he has half an hour free he gets something written, whereas I'm only making tea to get something written. [Laughter] So he's a superb scholar as well as a very delightful colleague and you should enjoy tonight's talk. Ken?

[Applause]

Dr. Kenneth Rose: Thank you, Laird, and welcome everyone. Now, “unspeakable awfulness” is a phrase that European travelers could have used to describe any number of things in the United States. The roads in America were universally condemned as terrible, as was American cuisine.



In fact, the French actress, Sarah Bernhardt, actually used the term "unspeakably awful" to describe American food. Likewise, the American habit of spitting tobacco juice nearly every place and in heroic quantities sent Europeans reeling in search of metaphors that would adequately express their revulsion. The ubiquity of guns, the American obsession with making money, the viciousness of US political campaigns, the rudeness of American children -- all of these things could have earned the "awful" label. As it happens, the awfulness in question is used in perhaps its best sense of inspiring an all impossible to articulate. It originated with a stunned Isabella Bird, whose attempts to describe the magnificence of the Sierra Nevada Mountains finally coalesced in the phrase "unspeakable awfulness."



And here we see a landscape painted by Albert Bierstadt of the Sierras. For European travelers, America was, indeed, “awful” in every sense of the word. Famous visitors to America during this era included Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, Jacques Offenbach, Lilly Langtree, Robert Louis Stevenson, Anthonin Dvorak, but the less-than-famous also descended on America in droves. And whether famous or not, these people not only wanted to visit the United States, they wanted to write about it, as well. Now, the intensification of European tourism to the U.S. coincided with what is arguably the most dramatic period of change in American history. The beginning of this era, 1865, marked the conclusion of the Civil War. And when this era finally closed, the American frontier had officially ceased to exist, and the United States had made its first tentative steps toward colonialism with the conclusion of the war with Spain. In between, a massive shift of the US population took place with some 2.5 million moving from east to west between 1870 and 1900. More territory was settled at this time than at any other period in American history.

Now, tonight I want to look at aspects of the United States that European travelers found to be most strikingly different from Europe. These will include the wilderness of the American West, gun use in the United States, and American notions of class. James Rice claimed that the West was the most American part of America, because this was where the differences between America and Europe came out in the strongest relief.



For many visitors from Europe, the West seemed to promise an Edenic existence, free of the hypocrisy of modern European life, what one sportsman called "the delightful feeling of grand unrestraint." "Out West," said Robert Louis Stevenson, "the war of life was still conducted in the open air and on free barbaric terms, as if it had not yet been narrowed in the parlors." Parker Gilmore, who took an extended hunting trip through the American West in the 1860s, experienced what he called an "irresistible fascination in solitary communion with nature for the sake of which I would abandon the most brilliant scenes of life and civilized society."

Travelers' descriptions of the sheer physical beauty of the region are rapturous, bordering on the religious. When sportsman Wyndham-Quin first gazed upon the Yellowstone River, he absorbed the scene with something of the silent enthusiasm of the pilgrim who sees in the far distance Saint Peter's dome or the minarets of Mecca. In Colorado, Emily Faithful found in the American West glimpses of glory, and she referred to the "terrible precipices" of the Rocky Mountains.

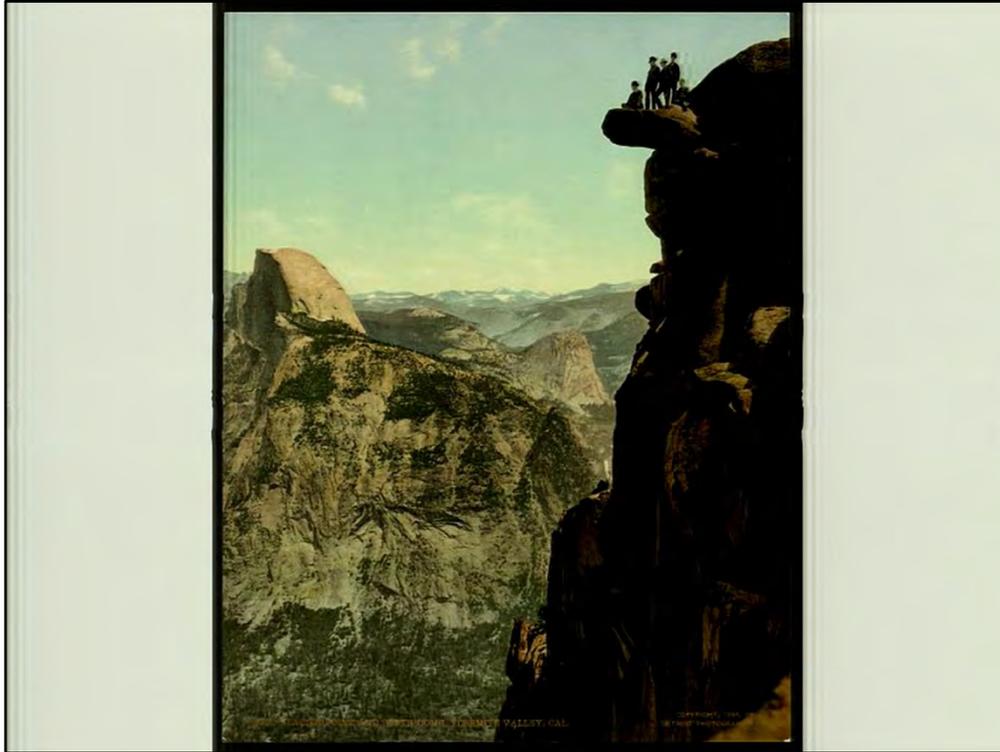
William A "Bill" Groman, likewise, felt something close to worship when he gazed upon the Tetons for the first time. "I wish myself alone," he said, "to do homage to what I then and still consider the most striking landscape the eye of a painter ever dreamt of."



And here we see a contemporary photo of the Tetons, and I have to say I had much the same reaction as this European traveler when I saw the Tetons for the first time. I thought I was looking at the most beautiful spot on the planet. But in their engagement with the Western wilderness, Europeans also found disturbing elements for which their aesthetic sense had ill prepared them. And in their descriptions we see the rapturous mixing with something resembling terror.

At Yosemite, J W Bottom-Lethen [phonetic] encountered “ghostly precipices and solemn falls and an indefinite vastness. The overall effect was a vague sense of imprisonment and oppression and a desire to flee Yosemite into the world once more.”

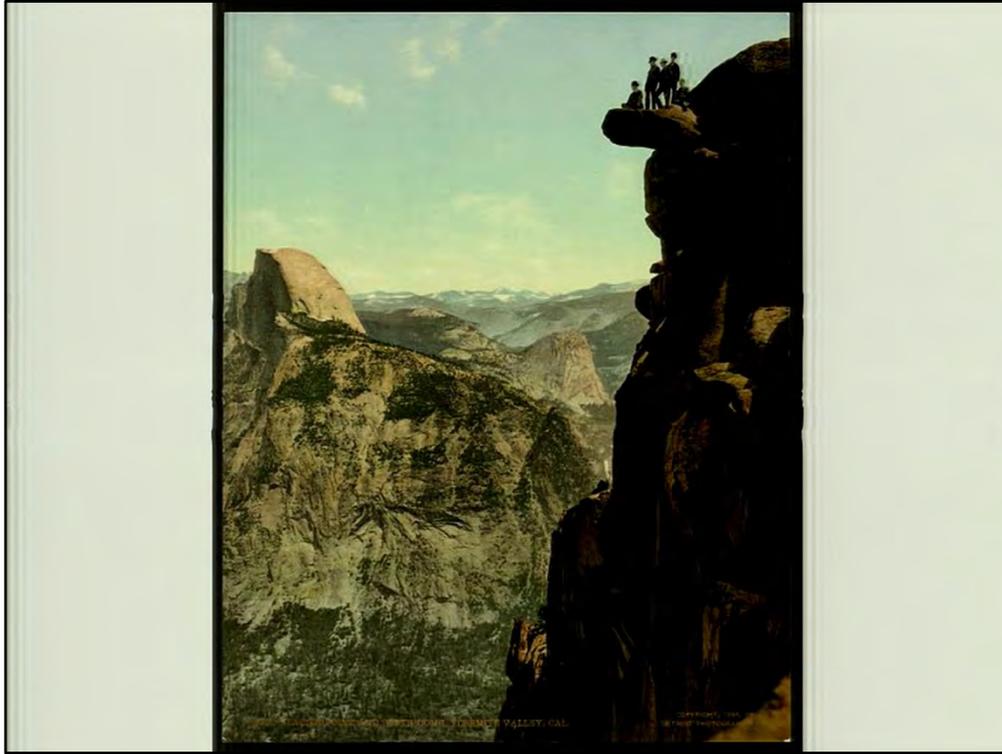
William Howard Russell was, likewise, stunned by what he called Yosemite's “awful granite portals.” And there we see that word “awful” again.



Now, this is a photograph of Yosemite from the 1890s showing Glacier Point and South Dome. I think the editors of my book are actually going to use this as the cover. In Colorado, Isabella Bird describes Long's Peak as "splintered, pinnacled, lonely, ghastly, imposing."

"Yellowstone," said one visitor, "combines some of the grandest and some of the most grotesque scenery." Now, most Europeans had been trained in the language of the picturesque. Well, what they found in the American West was not the decorous mingling of nature with the Gothic ruin, but something more sinister. Indeed, nature in the West seemed to embody both spiritual ecstasy and violent disorder. As for the human inhabitants of the West, Europeans voiced their disappointment in both American Indians and settlers, either because they were not romantic enough or savage enough. Now, Europeans had been fed a steady diet of novels celebrating the nobility and romance of the Indian. And of all the promoters of this idea, James Fenimore Cooper came earliest and arguably had the greatest impact. In fact, in one travel memoir after another, you see European visitors mentioning Cooper and their disappointment that real Indians in America did not correspond with the Indians in Cooper's tales.

"The Indian of romance," as one traveler put it, "could not be found in the squalid and repulsive outcasts of real Indians," while another complained that the Indians showed "no trace whatever of the warlike red man of romantic story."



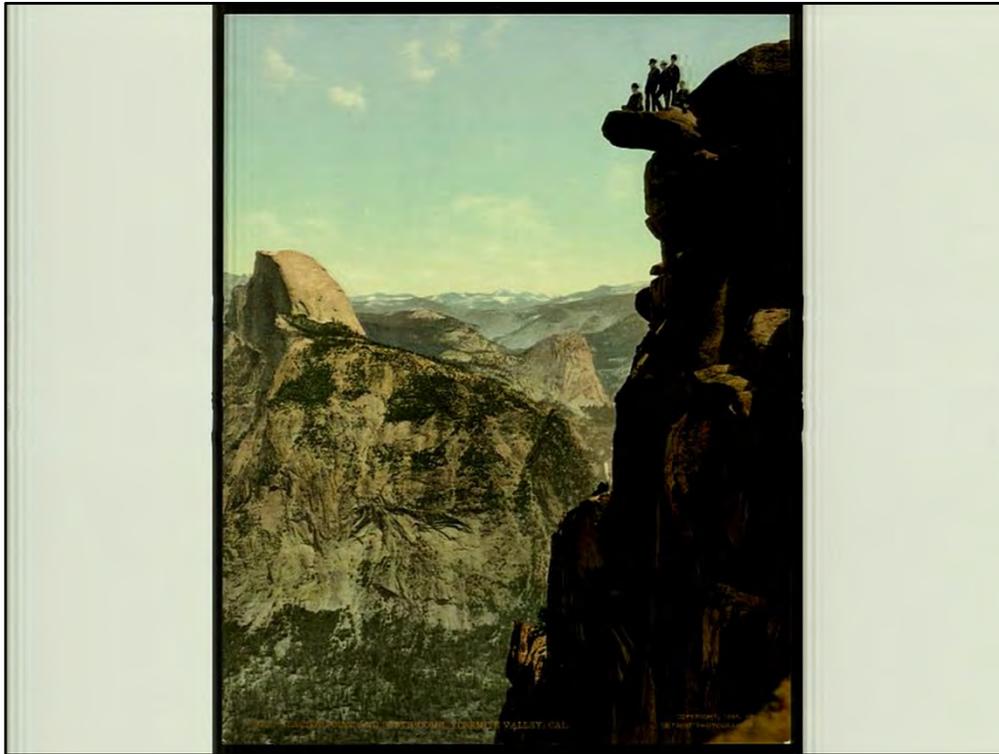
Rose Pender called Indians an insignificant and ugly race, then delivered what to a British aristocrat must have seemed like the ultimate insult: "a great many of them have the low-Irish type of features."

[Laughter]

Now, what most Europeans in America saw were "blanket Indians" who loitered around railroad depots and towns begging for coins, but few Europeans expressed any interest whatsoever in meeting Indians on their own ground. And because their disappointment in real Indians was so keen, they generally endorsed the views of white Americans that looked forward to the ultimate extinction of Indians.

Lady Duffus-Hardy called Indians "the most revolting specimens of the human race," claimed that their "cruelty was a quality native-born," and observed "the dog, poor brute, cannot help being mad, but it must be got rid of." Others, such as Charles Wentworth Dilke, counts the passing of Indians in terms of biology. "The extinction of the inferior races," said Dilke, "was both a law of nature and a blessing to mankind."

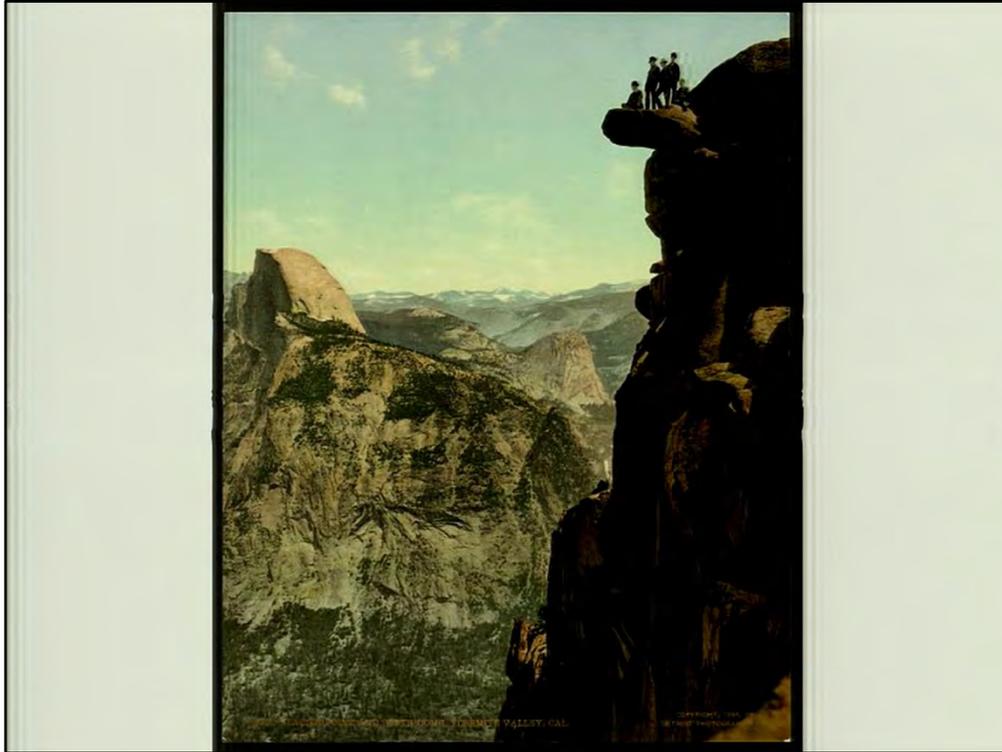
As for the settlers in the West, European observers generally agreed that a distinctive sort of American was drawn to the frontier regions.



William Howard Russell called them “the wild adventurers and daring spirits which society, in the process of formation, throws out as a sort of advanced guard. Virtually every type and race was represented as part of a society in extreme flux. No one seemed to have a fixed occupation, and some practiced a number of disparate occupations at the same time, such as the entrepreneur whose storefront sign read, "Homemade Bread, Job Printing, Rubber Stamps."

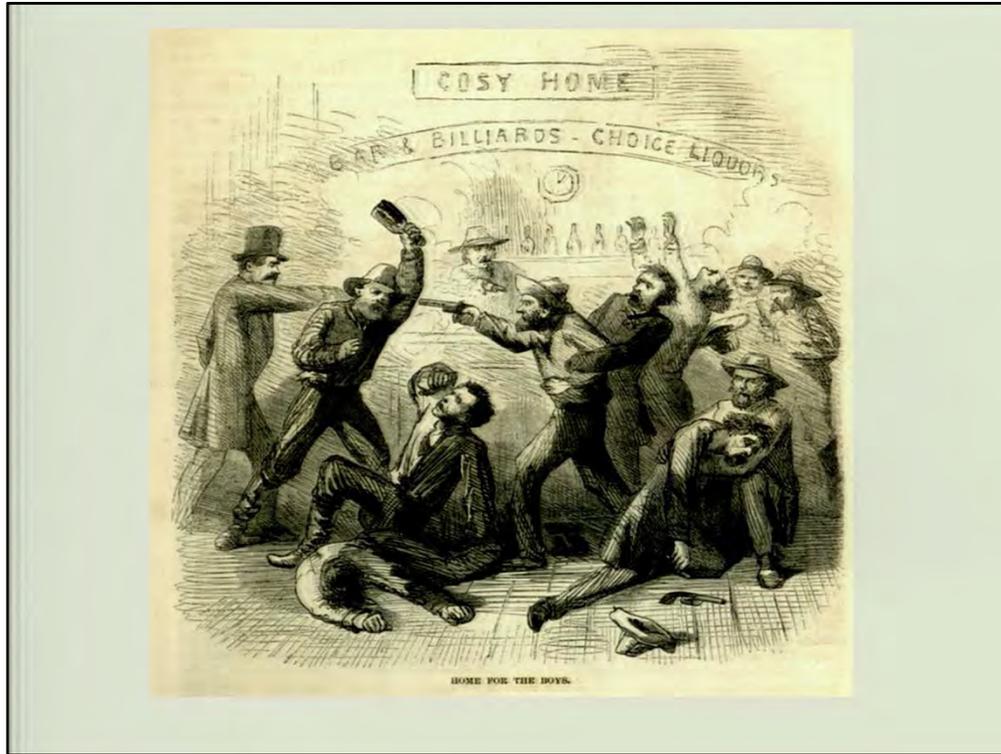
In Albuquerque, William A Bell made the acquaintance of the town's butcher only to discover the next day that the butcher was also the editor of the *Albuquerque Chronicle*. As for the behavior of the settlers in the West, disappointment often followed when Europeans, as I said earlier, found that Westerners were not savage or romantic enough. William A "Bill" Groman, who traveled through the US in the 1880s, said that “a European newly-arrived in a place like Denver or Cheyenne often hides a feeling of defrauded curiosity at not finding dead men lying about the streets or festooning the odd trees about town.”

In 1882, Phil Robinson visited Leadville, Colorado, seeking out what he called "exercises with bowie knife and pistol."



He pronounced himself to be “agreeably disappointed” by the well-behaved miners. Confessing to being “armed like some bandit in an opera,” Henry Schankowitz spent his first months in the United States carrying a revolver, brass knuckles, and a sword concealed in his cane. But after passing nights without incident in the lonely dwellings of ranchers, farmers, shepherds, and fisherman, Schankowitz abandoned his arsenal and concluded that he was safer in the United States than any other place on the planet.

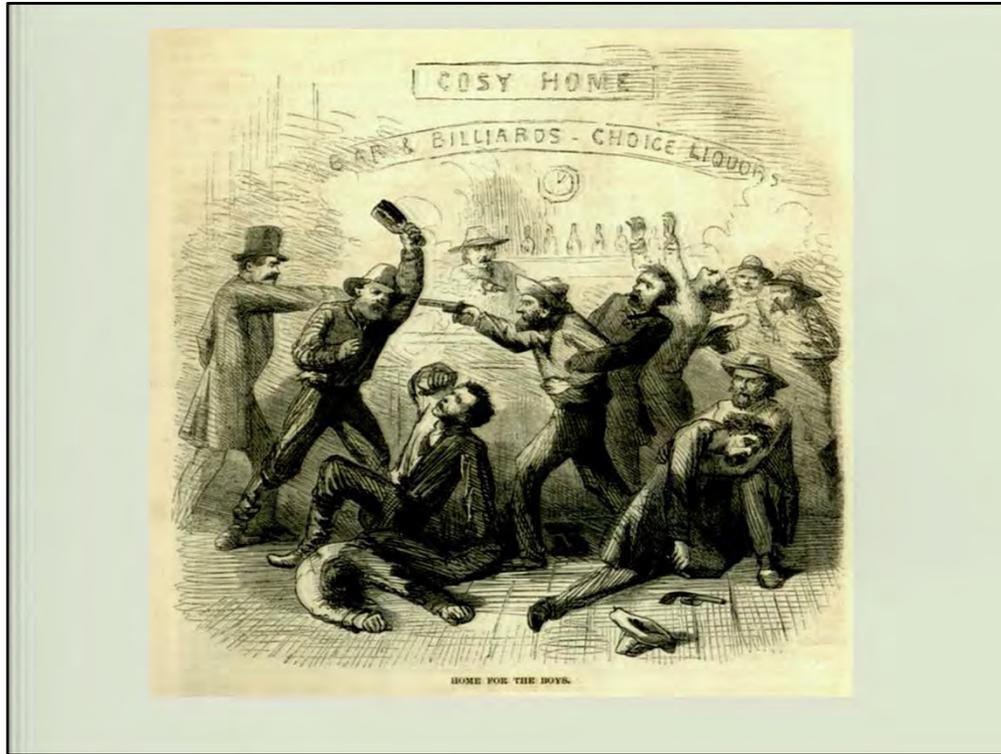
Now, at this point, I want to spend a few minutes talking about gun use in America – another practice that Europeans found to be foreign to their experience. Indeed, the legend of the pistol-packing American had been established from an early date.



This is an illustration from *Harper's Magazine* that shows a shoot-out in a Virginia City, Nevada saloon. Now, there is little doubt that gun ownership increased after the Civil War. Millions of men had been trained in the use of firearms for the war. Huge numbers of weapons had been produced for the war effort. And once this conflict was over, these guns were dumped on the civilian market. In addition, weapons were also available via mail order, with Sears doing a brisk \$3 million annual business in revolvers.

Now, in the South, as numerous foreign travelers testified, the disarmament of the Confederate Army after the Civil War apparently did not extend to individuals. One German traveler observed of the residents of Vicksburg that “they carry revolvers as a matter of habit, as they might pencils or toothpicks.” In one example of the ubiquity of firearms in the South, F. Barron Zinke [phonetic] was traveling on a train in the vicinity of Jackson, Mississippi when a cow was mangled underneath one of the cars, but remained alive. When the conductor asked the passengers for the loan of a pistol to put the cow out of its misery, in an instant, almost from every window on that side of the train, a hand was extended offering the desired instrument.

In fact, Southerners seemed to be willing to pull out their guns at the slightest of pretext. Charles Wentworth Dilke was on a steamboat that was cruising on Virginia's James River when an eagle alighted on a nearby tree. Travelers on all three decks of the ship shot off their pistols against the bird, which flew off unharmed.

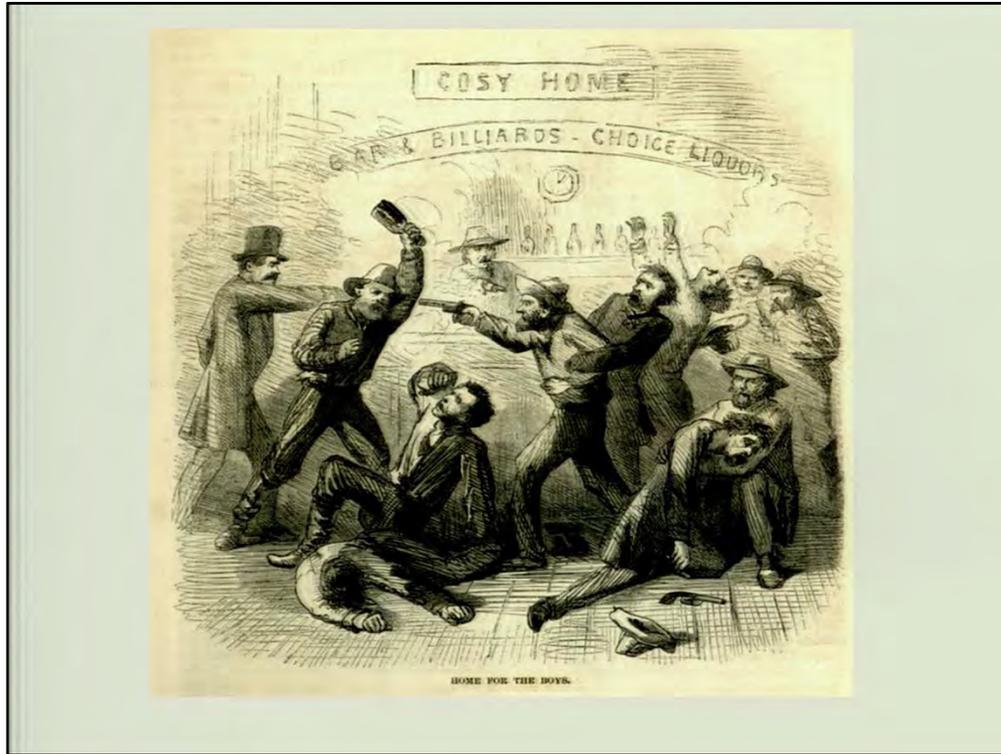


[Laughter]

In Louisiana, European travelers noted that passengers on their trains fired off their revolvers at flocks of ducks. Even in the North, gun use tended toward the casual. On a train between New York City and Albany, Frenchman Lucian de Art [phonetic] was taken aback when, "Several of my traveling companions shouldered their guns to fire past me from the carriage at an unfortunate crow."

It was in the unsettled West, however, where guns were most prominent. In the Nevada desert, a group of European tourists ran into a group of prospectors with whom they traded pleasantries until someone spotted a rattlesnake, whereupon every revolver discharged with a shout, all hailing successful shots, with a "Bully for you; that hit him where he lives." In California, James Fullerton Muirhead watched the engineer on his train shoot rabbits from the locomotive while the fireman jumped down, picked them up, and hoisted himself back on the still-moving train.

Now, historically gun ownership had been relatively rare in Europe and relatively common in the United States for a number of reasons. By the European Modern Era, hunting was a privilege mostly reserved for the European aristocracy. This had never been the case in America. Nor did Europeans need firearms to protect themselves from the Indians.



Now, Britain herself played a leading role in the creation of what we now call America's gun culture by permanently stationing large numbers of troops in the colonies at the conclusion of the French and Indian War. Now, residents of the American colonies saw the presence of these troops not as guarantors of their liberty, but as threats, as oppressors. And at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, Americans are going to write into their Constitution the right of citizens to bear arms as a counter-weight against any future occupying force.

European governments, on the other hand, fearing revolutions on their own soil, quickly moved to disarm the public. By the end of the 18th century, the French government was denying access to guns by individual French citizens. And much the same was accomplished in England when Parliament passed the Sixth Acts of 1819

For Europeans, the prospect of traveling among an armed population in the US was both frightening and titillating, and we can use the example here of W. G. Marshall. Now, in 1878, Marshall's train was passing through Julesburg, Colorado, which Marshall described as "the wickedest town in America." The train had been robbed here just a few days earlier and Marshall was clearly thrilled at the prospect of some gunplay. No robbery took place, however, and a disappointed-sounding Marshall said, "As yet we have had no occasion to use our revolvers."



Now, I mentioned Sarah Bernhardt earlier, and here we see her striking a characteristically theatrical pose. Well, she was in the theater, right? Sarah Bernhardt always carried a pistol with her, which she described as "a very prettily chaste revolver ornamented with cat's eyes," and on her tour of America, Bernhardt came closer to using her pistol than Marshall did his. Bernhardt traveled with a valuable cache of jewelry. And en route between St. Louis and Cincinnati, robbers plotted to steal this jewelry by derailing Bernhardt's train. Unfortunately for the robbers, they mistakenly derailed the train in front of Bernhardt's, and when Bernhardt and company came upon the scene, robbers and railroad detectives had just finished an intense gunfight.

For many Americans, a firearm was simply a necessary tool that one kept close by. There was also evidence that Americans carried guns when they deemed it necessary, but were willing to abandon them when that necessity had passed. On the train between Colorado Springs and Denver, Iza Duffus Hardy took note of the liberal assortment of deadly weapons carried by the male passengers. But at the Denver hotel where she stayed, she saw some of the same men checking their guns with the hotel clerk before proceeding into dinner. The clerk explained to Hardy that when the men found themselves in a peaceful community, they were willing to dispense with their firearms.



Now, while America certainly seemed to be a land of gun-carriers after the Civil War, was America a gunfighter nation as historian Richard Slotkin has alleged? Now, one convincing argument for the lack of extensive gun violence in the West put forward by Robert Dykstra is that it was simply bad for business. As Dykstra put it, "Entrepreneurial motives provided a powerful impetus for the suppression of violence."

Now, of all the parts of the West, it was the cow towns of Ellsworth, Dodge City, Wichita, Abilene, and Caldwell that had garnered the greatest reputations for being wild and lawless. And with the male-to-female ratio in Western Kansas standing at roughly 77 to 1 in 1870, these towns should theoretically have had extremely high levels of violence. While city businessmen obviously wanted the cattle trade, what they did not want was cowboys shooting up their towns. What followed were local ordinances forbidding the carrying of firearms, concealed or otherwise, in city limits. When someone came into town, he would check his guns with the Marshal, for which he received a metal token. And then when he left town, he would turn in the token and get the guns back. Gun control actually worked, with the average number of killings per cow town during the season --that is, during the summer -- standing at a modest 1.5 per year.



When Wild Bill Hickok was Marshal of Abilene, he killed just two men. One by mistake. In fact, he killed his deputy who was coming to help him, and he shot him by mistake. Wyatt Earp, during his tenure as lawman in Wichita and Dodge City, may have mortally wounded one law violator. William B. "Bat" Masterson killed no one in the years that he resided in and around Dodge. According to Dykstra, impressive numbers of violent deaths in the United States occurred not on the streets of Western towns, but in the vicinity of trains, where in a single year, 1893, some 433 men died in railroad accidents.

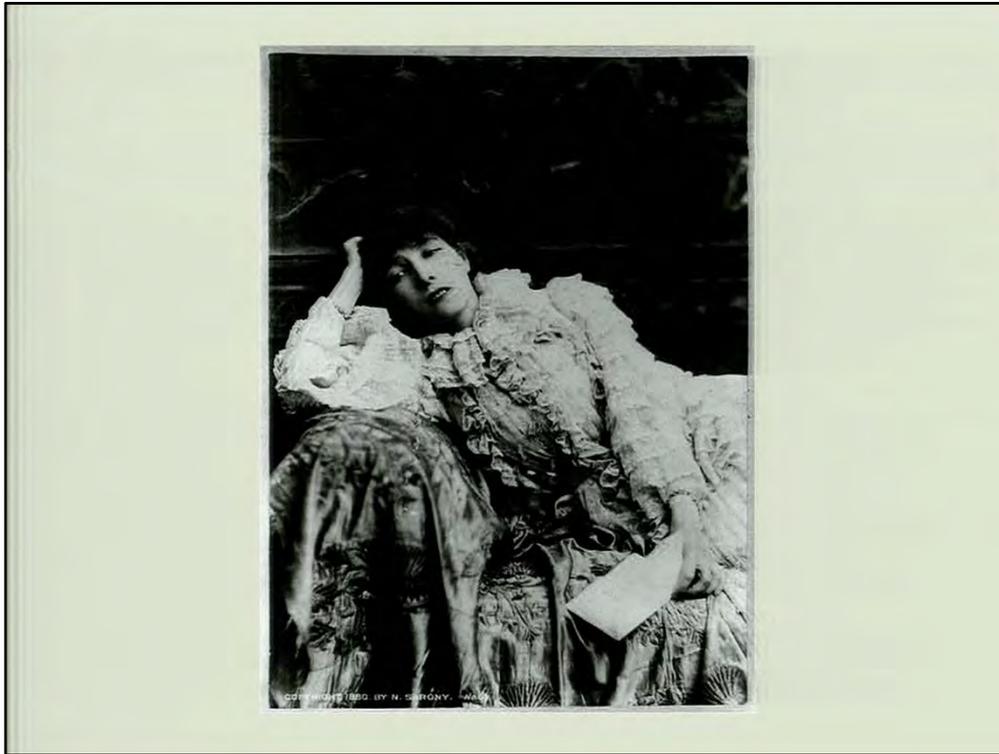
It's also possible to argue that the very wide dispersal of weapons in the United States may have inhibited their use as a way of settling arguments. One European visitor claimed that no people were more careful about giving offense than Americans, because from an early date in the United States, the pistol had always been simultaneous with the offense.

Now, of all the factors that forged the American character, perhaps the most important was egalitarianism. And while one can argue whether or not this notion is rooted in reality, Americans have overwhelmingly endorsed this idea down to the present day. In fact, just two months ago in Obama's second inaugural address, the President said, "We the people declare today that the most evident of truths, that all of us are created equal, is the star that guides us still."



Alexis de Tocqueville called the equality of conditions in America the focal point towards which all his observations converged. And the American resistance to any notion that they belong to a servant class was noted by virtually every European traveler from the earliest days of the Republic.

Egalitarianism continued to be central to American society after the Civil War. Democracy in America, said Henry Schankowitz, was not only political, but also social. "Everyone here stands on the same social level with no one towering above another." This fact was vividly brought home to Schankowitz when he hired a coachman to drive him to the home of a millionaire rancher. Upon arrival at the ranch, the coachman -- instead of staying with the horses -- entered the house, sat down on the sofa, and began to play with the host's daughter. "At first," according to Schankowitz, "this incident refused to penetrate my European skull. But it seemed quite natural to both coachman and host." The lesson, says Schankowitz, "is that while the millionaire American rancher might not have the refinement of the millionaire European, the American coachman ranks ten times higher than his European counterpart." As in the years before the Civil War, Scottish visitor David MacRae observed that domestic help in America did not like the word "servant." Instead, they preferred to be called lady's helps/companions.



Especially in the American West, European residents constantly fretted that their employees would desert them. And a good example is the English couple, Isabella and Jim Randall, who moved to a ranch in Montana in the 1880s. And they brought along with them an English servant couple that they had recruited, in their words, "from the slums of London." Isabella fumed when one of her neighbors invited the servants to tea. "How can anyone keep servants in their place," asked Randall, "when the people whom we associate with invite them into their homes as equals?" Relations between the Randalls and their servants continued to deteriorate, until finally, according to the Randalls, the servants got very independent. In the end, they quit their jobs, informing the Randalls on the way out that, in this country, people won't be hired servants.

European bewilderment at the behavior of what they considered to be the American servant class was considerable. Unlike servants in Europe, when American servants became disgruntled, they often vacated their posts without notice and frequently became vengeful when fired. A Boston acquaintance of E. Katherine Bates told Bates that when she fired her cook, the cook responded by mixing cinder dust with several pounds of mincemeat that had been prepared for Christmas.

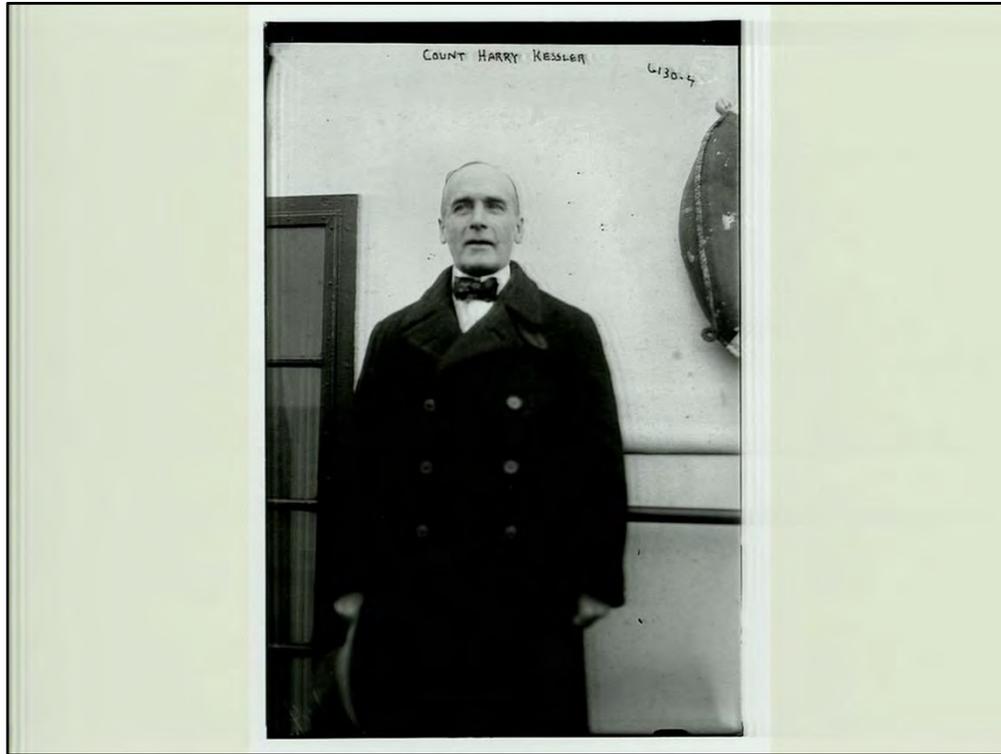
"Nobody in America," claimed a French visitor, "entertains the idea of living and dying a servant."



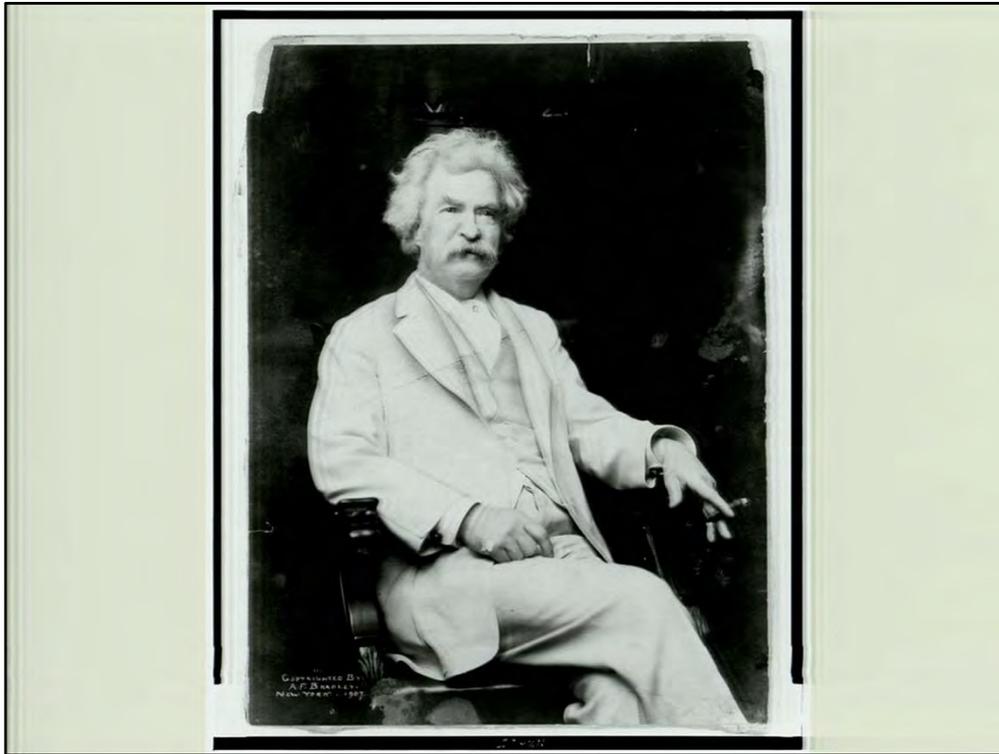
At restaurants, Europeans -- used to obsequious service -- first had to deal with the steward whom, according to Baron Hubner, "fixes your place at table with an authority no one dreams of disputing." Next, diners encountered the waiter. One French visitor described the typical American waiter as "Someone who was slow and who acted as if he were rendering a service." Of the waitresses who attended her in Miles City, Montana, Rose Pender complained that "Their insolent contempt of anything I asked them to do was very aggravating to my English feelings." According to another visitor, "The American waiter never replied to a request to bring food, but instead fetches it in silence and then leans over your chair listening to your conversation."

[Laughter]

Emily Faithful encountered the same impudence among American shop girls who chatted with each other while tending to their customers, and who nurtured the attitude that they were conferring a great service in providing the requested goods. In her experience with shop girls in the United States, French visitor Maria Teresa Blanc found that the more ordinary the shop, the more aggressive the sense of social equality. There was probably no profession in the country where workers displayed what Europeans believed was a fitting servility.



And here we can use the example of Harry Kessler. And if you want to know more about Kessler, I would direct you to my colleague, Laird Easton, who probably knows more about this guy than anyone should. Kessler was in New York when he reported that the proprietor of a hat shop whistled while he waited on Kessler, and that when Kessler asked for his keys, "The hotel porter cracked jokes with me." Another traveler found that those hocking their goods on American city streets did so with an air of almost aggressive independence and never thanked those who bought from them. One traveler confirmed that everyone in America should be presumed to be a lady or a gentleman. And this view was slightly endorsed by Mark Twain.

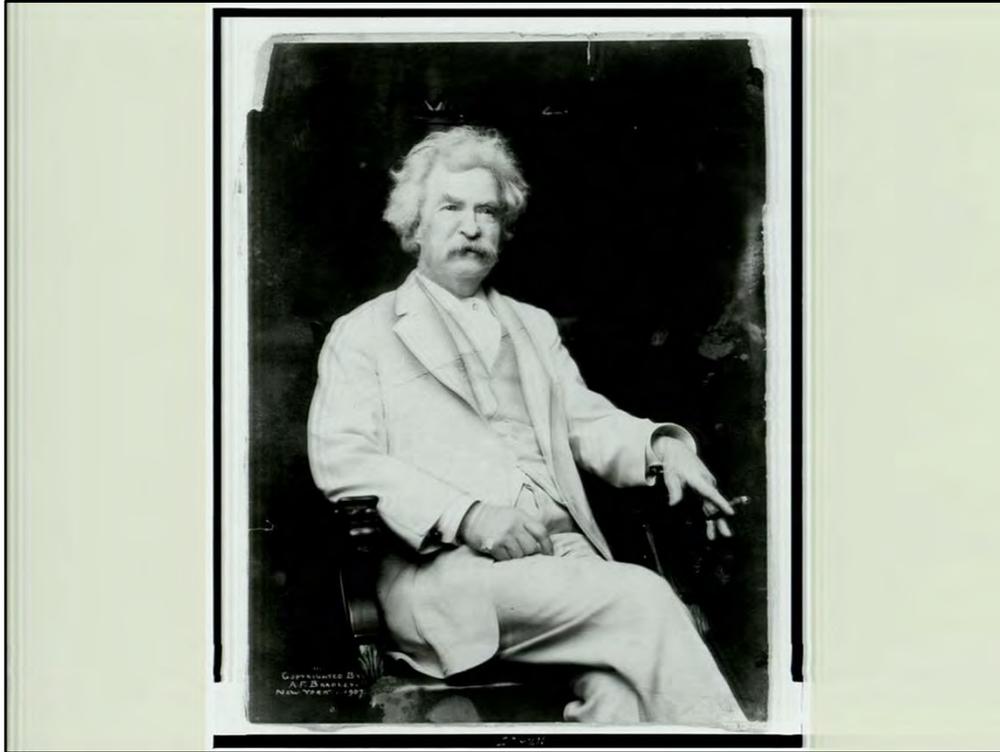


And here we have a photo of Twain. Contrasting the English spoken in America with that spoken in Britain, Twain observed, "Your words, gentleman and lady, have a very restricted meaning. With us, they include the barmaid, butcher, burglar, harlot, and horse thief."

[Laughter]

Now, the suspension of traditional class relations was especially prominent in rough frontier areas, where American men often dropped their surnames altogether and went by first names or nicknames, thereby eliminating all social distinctions. William Howard Russell noted that "The man who is in charge of watering his party's horses at Yosemite referred to the Duke of Sutherland as Sutherland, and even called upon the Duke to help with the watering bucket." Now, the Duke pitched in, but often when Westerners treating visiting Europeans with the same familiarity, this often resulted in an extreme case of ruffled feathers.

The Italian Felice Shribler [phonetic] complained that uncouth American miners treated people in his party like peers. "This," he said, "was really not pleasant." Even more disturbing was that guides on Shribler's hunting trip refused to show the proper deference to Shribler's companion, Don Leone Catani, Prince of Teanu [phonetic]. The guides refused to address him as Mr. Prince, and the Prince refused to address the guides as "Sir." A compromise, of sorts, was reached when the guides agreed to call him Mr. Leo.

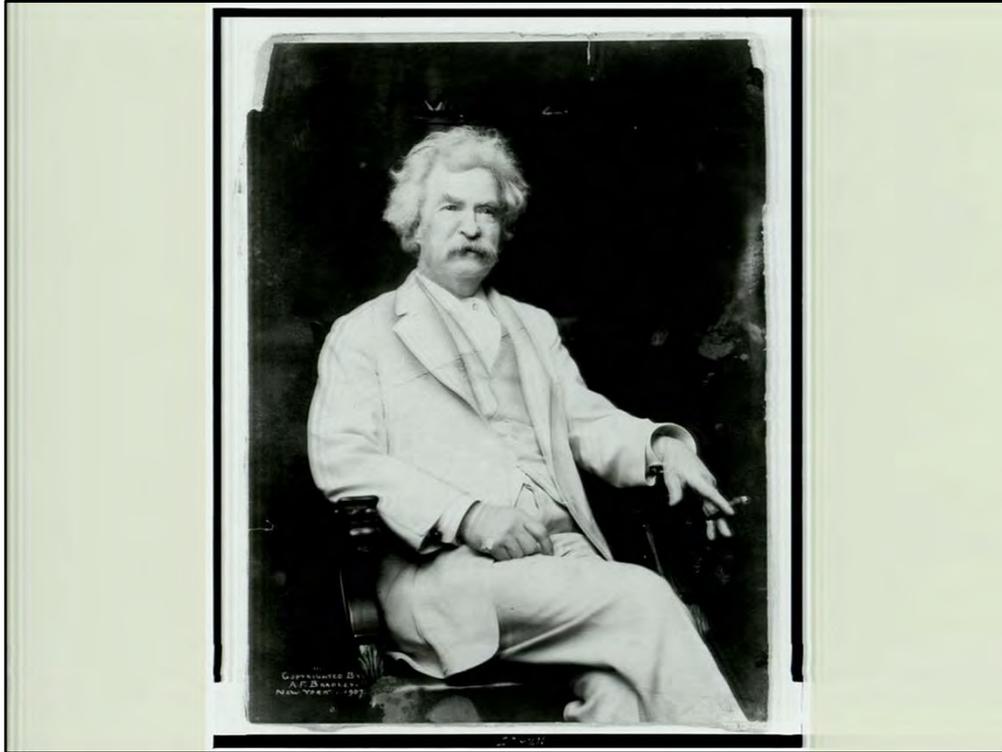


These Italians might have had a more pleasant experience if they had had time to absorb the lesson that one British resident had gleaned after 17 years in the United States around the campfire: all men are equal.

Now, there is very little resentment of the rich in the United States because, as one traveler put it, "The American seeks for equality in a higher sphere than that in which he was born and finds it. The European, on the other hand, despairing of attaining a higher position, strives to drag everyone else down to his level." Now, while there is little doubt that Americans admired the rich man, a person's wealth, by itself, was not sufficient reason for others to defer to him. The highly-placed understood this. And as one traveler put it, "The putting on of airs was the one unforgivable offense in America."

Everyone in the United States, regardless of class, was expected to work and society had little tolerance for what Europeans called "the leisure class." In one example, an English traveler tried to explain the concept of "gentleman of leisure" to an American. The American initially found this idea baffling, but finally brightened when he thought he'd figured out what the Englishman was referring to. "Ah, we call them 'tramps' in America."

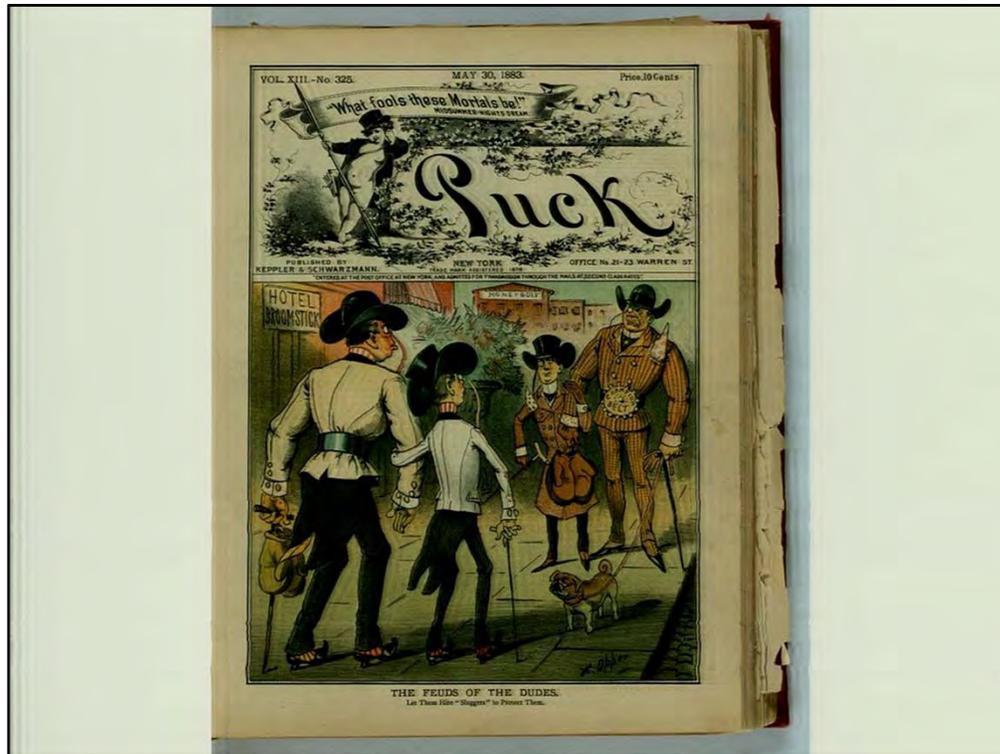
[Laughter]



It's virtually impossible to overstate the importance of egalitarianism to Americans because it was expressed in so many areas of the culture, even where egalitarianism would seemingly play no role. And here I'm going to use the example of dress and fashion. In Europe, it was easy to discern someone's social class by their dress. But Americans did not dress according to their station in life. And what we see in America after the Civil War is a vigorous democratization of luxury. Now, sartorial splendor was on daily display in the big cities in America.



This is a scene from New York City. This is on Fifth Avenue. This photograph is from about 1900. The class was not an impediment to sharp dressing. For instance, New York bartenders were renowned for spending a lot of money on their clothes, while other splendidly dressed young men assembled near New York's Windsor Hotel where they sucked on toothpicks and surveyed the crowds, especially the female portion. "These young men are 'dudes,'" explained Harold Bridges, "the American variety of the London masher."



And here we see a dude-on-dude confrontation from *Puck* magazine. It looks like things were about to get pretty ugly. Now, fashionable young American men could also appreciate one of their own when a holster-wearing member of Henry Irving's British acting troupe passed by a group of sharp-dressed men in Philadelphia. They noted approvingly, "Here's a dude."

But with some exceptions, dress was less important to American men than it was to American women. Especially in the West, women did their best to maintain standards in dress, while men generally did not. It can be argued, however, that Western men had a distinctive clothing style that had been forged out of necessity. One European who made this argument and who had plenty else to say about other aspects of aesthetics in the United States was Oscar Wilde.



And here we have a photo of Oscar Wilde, a bit of a dude himself, I'd say. Now, Wilde's trip to the US would by itself make an amusing book. In fact, I think someone did write a book about Wilde's American tour. His legendary capacity for alcohol tempted Americans from all walks of life to try and make him drunk, but no one succeeded. A *Denver Tribune* reporter accompanied Wilde on a tour of a Leadville mining operation. According to the reporter, Wilde was greeted by a dozen miners, each with a bottle. By invariable Western custom, every bottle must make the rounds. Within a few minutes, all have had twelve snorters. The miners without exception are rather dizzy, but Wilde remains cool, steady and collected. He is cheered loudly and voted a perfect gentleman. In fact, Wilde claimed that Western miners were the only well-dressed men that he saw in America.





And here we have a Frederic Remington sketch of some miners. Wilde enthused that “the wide-brimmed hats which shaded their faces from the sun and protected them from the rain, and the cloak, which is by far the most beautiful piece of drapery ever invented, may well be dwelt on with admiration. The high boots, too, were sensible and practical. They wore only what was comfortable and, therefore, beautiful.”

Now, tonight I've barely scratched the surface of what Europeans had to say about American life. The interest in the United States was intense, not only because America was so different, but also because of what this colossus in the West might mean for Europeans and their own world. Due to their outsider status, Europeans were in a unique position to make keen observations about the virtues and failings of Americans and their society that Americans themselves, because of their too-close proximity, often missed. I would argue that these travelers made a notable contribution to our understanding of America in the decades after the Civil War.

And while I have included in tonight's talk many of the negative reactions of Europeans to American life, I would emphasize that most of these travelers went out of their way to be fair in their judgments, even often at the expense of their own societies. One British traveler, for instance, said of Americans that "There is an absence among them of that narrowness, that mental tight-lacing which squeezes all charity out of human nature and which is so characteristic of the Old World. And there is a presence of an open-hearted fellowship between man and man of a rare and generous kind."



In the years after 1865, the United States was perhaps the most dynamic nation on the planet. W. E. Adams said of America in the early 1880s that "no other country undergoes such rapid and marvelous changes, and what was true in one decade may very well be untrue the next." More succinctly, Charles Dickens said, "Nothing lasts long in this country." But while change over time is inevitable, the details supplied by European travelers during this era reveal an undeniable continuity. Not only in the day-to-day activities of Americans, but in their general outlook on life. And surely one of the most important constants in American life going back to Colonial days was that in American one had the opportunity to succeed or to fail based not on their social class, but on his or her own abilities.

As Lady Duffus Hardy put it, "There has been no effete civilization here. Every man has depended on his own brains, his own hand, for his well-doing. It may truly be said in this land above all others, every man is the architect of his own fortunes." Let me emphasize once again that this was very different from conditions in Europe. And George Augustus Sala was one of many European observers who took note of the different expectations that workers in Britain and America had for their futures. Sala found that while the young English clerk rarely cherished the hope of rising in the hierarchy, the American clerk could not look into the mirror without seeing the features of a future president of the United States, or of a cabinet minister, or a judge of the Supreme Court.



Now, I'm not here tonight to argue for American exceptionalism in the sense that I believe the United States is better than other nations in the world. I don't think that. But I do make the argument that this country was founded on a radically different premise from other nations, and that historically, Americans have lived their lives in a strikingly different way from other peoples. Now, this idea is not original to me; this idea is confirmed in hundreds of European travel memoirs. Historian Gordon S. Wood probably puts it best. Wood argues that America has paid a steep price for creating what he calls "A nation based on common people with their common interests. The price has included American vulgarity, materialism, ruthlessness and anti-intellectualism. But," Wood adds, "there is no denying the wonder of it and the real earthly benefits it brought to the formerly neglected and despised masses of common laboring people."

I thank you.

[Applause]

Dr. Rose: Any questions? Yeah.

Audience member: [Inaudible question]



Dr. Rose: Well, I deal with European travelers rather than European immigrants, because I think immigrants are going to have a different perspective on life. Travelers know that they're going back, and I think they can be more free with their opinions. Europeans did make quite a few comments about immigrants in America. Most of them looked down their noses at immigrants in America, because they believed that the so-called "Anglo-Saxon purity" was being threatened by these "mongrel races," as they put it, from Eastern and Southern Europe, especially in the late 19th century. And they also had plenty to say about the Irish and the Germans, as well, and usually in not very complimentary ways. Yeah.

Audience member: I was just curious, they're talking a lot about white laborers, white shop girls. Those are the people who may have low positions. What did they think about the African-Americans, or any of the freed slaves?

Dr. Rose: There's not a great deal of sympathy among the white American working class for black Americans. And this is typical to see this sort of ethnic and racial clash going on. You'd think that they would make common cause that, you know, Chinese immigrants and Irish immigrants and other people would say, "Well we have a lot in common, so let's band together." That's not what happened. And as I emphasize in my classes, usually when two very different cultures come together, the result is usually conflict. The result is usually not neutral enrichment.



Audience member: [Inaudible] there's a whole in a lot of those letters about the equality of the brotherhood of the Americans and the bridging of classes, but that's kind of these other classes just aren't [inaudible].

Dr. Rose: Right. Especially with the blacks and the Irish. There's an extremely long-running race grudge between these two groups. And once again, they say their existence is being threatened because they're competing for the same small piece of the economic pie. Does that -- yeah? Anyone else? Yeah.

Audience member: I was going to ask you – in your research, did you find any commentary from the travelers about the situation of the emancipated blacks in the country right after the Civil War? And did they offer any insight as to what their future might be?

Dr. Rose: I did. These Europeans tended to travel in the South less than they did elsewhere in the United States, simply because transportation was still pretty wretched in the South. Plus, you know, after the Civil War, the South was not exactly an inviting place to travel to because there was so much damage, so much destruction. But the Europeans, most Europeans I would say, who did visit the South were skeptical that freed blacks would be able to assume any sort of equality with free whites, and there's a pretty ugly racial strain here, once again, once again, all this Anglo-Saxon stuff. Yeah.



Audience member: Were there travel agents who facilitated these tours or, you know, did people just strike out and go where they could?

Dr. Rose: A number of travel agencies were set up and began to tour America, especially after the Civil War. Because with the completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1869, these Europeans had access to almost every part of the United States. Before then, their access was limited. So the Cook's Company, for instance, started to have tours of America, and eventually they took, especially in Colorado -- Colorado was very popular with European travelers, because supposedly Colorado had these healing waters...that you could recover from any ailment. But there was one Cook's group that came in 1865, these visitors from Britain, and they toured American battlefields. And there were still bodies lying around on the ground. And the Europeans were fascinated by this, but such a ghoulish, ghoulish thing to do. But, and increasingly as the 19th century wears on, these big resort hotels are going to be built in the West and, of course, National Parks are also going to be opening up. And those were very popular with European travelers. Yeah.

Audience member: Would it be fair to say that most of the European travelers were coming to see the natural environment? And that the built environment was not really ... [inaudible].



Dr. Rose: I would say that's true, because, you know, Americans were very proud of their civilization, and they wanted to show Europeans around their cities and towns. They wanted to show them their trains and their mills and all this stuff. But Europeans for the most part weren't interested. They could see plenty of that stuff where they came from, right? They'd much rather see a beautiful natural setting in the West rather than going to Pittsburgh and seeing the steel smelter. And it's hard to blame them. In fact, nature tourism is almost totally dominated by Europeans until very late in the 19th century, as a percentage of people that are actually going to look at the natural world. And actually, Americans living out in the West would say to Europeans, "Why are you here? All we have are mountains and rivers and trees. Why are you here?" So yes, I would say mostly Europeans – they were most interested in the American West. But as I said, what they found in the West was something pretty different from their appreciation of nature in Europe. As I said, they could appreciate the Gothic ruin being run over by nature, and they could gaze upon it with a sort of melancholy. But they had a really different experience in the wilderness of the American West. Yeah.

Audience member: Just to explore the racial issues, you read the quote that "everyone around the campfire is equal." I would propose that Chinese people, Asians, or black people weren't invited to the circle around the campfire, and probably attitudes would have excluded them anyway.



Dr. Rose: Well, I mean, it depends on the situation. Robert Louis Stevenson took a cross-country trip and ended up in California, and he was very struck with how diverse the community was that he lived in and he met these different people. He met a Chinese person and an Italian and a German and a Mexican. He met all these people every day at the local cafe. So it really depends on location, which we were talking about. Yeah.

Audience member: [Inaudible] ...attitudes that Europeans had before they got here that – what role were you able to gage -- what role James Fenimore Cooper or Albert Bierstadt's paintings played in their expectations and then in their reactions to what they actually find? Is it a reaction to an idealized image?

Dr. Rose: That's a good question. And some people have said, "Look, you can't get anything decent out of these travel memoirs, because everyone arrives in a country with expectations, with an agenda." And that's true, you know. We all do that when we go someplace. We have expectations of what we're going to find. But overwhelmingly, these Europeans were willing to change their views when presented with reality. And you see it all the time. "These were my expectations, and I was totally wrong. I was totally wrong." One woman said, "Well," you know, before she left England, "Well, you need to be careful in the United States, because it's a matter of some debate how safe women are, and you'll find that everyone is very crude in their manners in the United States." After spending a year in the United States, she said, "I've never had a more pleasant twelve months in my entire life. And these expectations, these prejudices were totally wrong."



Audience member: I've had the same experience personally in Chico in the last a decade or so of people coming here from Europe and then being fearful that their lives will be in danger. And I spoke with three young men from Germany who were going to go to Los Angeles the next day and were reassured that you could get by in Los Angeles by speaking English. [Laughter] So I think in some senses, what's new is old again.

Dr. Rose: Yeah, and like I said, it's just human nature to have some expectation of what you're going to find when you go to a foreign country. And all of those who have done that have had these expectations and I think for almost all of us, reality is quite a bit different from what we expected it was going to be. And like I said, to their credit, most of these Europeans attempted to be fair in their judgment about the United States. And when their prejudices, when their expectations, were wrong, they would come clean and did say, "This is what I expected, and I was wrong." Anyone else?

Audience member: I know that Stevenson and Dickens and Kipling all write books about their American experiences. Are there any major Continental writers who...?



Dr. Rose: Jacques Offenbach wrote one. There are lots of French writers, German writers, writers from Norway, writers from Poland. Like I said, not only did these people want to visit the US, but they wanted to write about it, as well. So when I went into this, I just didn't know if there'd be enough sources, but I was just overwhelmed with sources. There are hundreds of these things out there. And one thing I'd like to do, I'd like to put in a plug for Google. I never thought I would do this, but Google has launched this project where they're downloading old 19th century and earlier manuscripts and putting them on the web. And I found a lot of these travel memoirs on this Google site called "Archive.com." And for anyone who's interested in researching stuff, especially stuff that's out of copyright, I would recommend it. And I was so lucky, because some of these things are pretty rare, and I would have had difficulty borrowing them from a library, because they'd be so rare and so frail. So Archive.com, if you're interested in looking at 19th century and earlier manuscripts. Anything else?

Dr. Easton: Well, thank you very much.

Dr. Rose: Thanks for coming, everyone.