

**Stereotyping and the Pacific
Railway Issue, 1845-65**
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An individual may find it impossible to share his most subtle perceptions with his closest friend, much less with his block, town or nation. Therefore, when a group mandate, or consensus, is required regarding a public issue, communication is apt to take the form of stereotypes. To certain members of society, mostly those well-versed in the details of the problem at hand, these stereotypes appear to be oversimplified, generalized, and distorted shadows of reality. So they are, especially if one assumes non-relative truth and omniscient observers. They have been defined as constructs realistic enough to make identification plausible, and romantic enough to make it desirable.¹ Yet no historian concerned with defining an issue as it was understood by the public at a given time in the past can neglect study of the stereotyped arguments then popular.

One such issue, in the mid-nineteenth century, was whether the United States should build a railroad to the Pacific Ocean. In speech-making and newspaper coverage of this issue, there can be located eight distinct stereotyped arguments, which are here designated "Seal of Union," "Highway of Nations," "Inlaid Fortress," "Challenge to History," "Desert Rain," "Crucible for the Republic," "Path for Providence," and "Victory of Will." While there were others, these eight are most often repeated, in all types of settings and in all geographic areas. Through them, it was hoped, the concept of a Pacific railroad would begin "fastening itself upon the public mind, and twining its tendrils around the common interests of the American people." Insofar as the mobilization of mass opinion upon the Pacific railway issue was concerned, the question of the exact relation of these to a reality not accessible to the relatively uninformed need not be considered. To "outsiders," who constituted the public at large, these repeated verbal constructs were the reality upon which they acted in this case. Nor is it certain that "insiders" were not influenced by a set of stereotypes of their own. As Walter Lippmann, the former idealist planner, resignedly put it in the early twenties: "Certainly at the level of social life, what is called the adjustment of man to his environment takes place through the medium of fictions."²

Historians have been divided about how seriously the scholar should take the public rhetoric surrounding great issues. Sometimes, as in the debate over the causes of the war 1812, decades of study result at last in the conclusion that the rhetoric of the time was not so far wrong. On other subjects the debunkers hold sway, believing that, whatever the public thought, the course of action was determined by the concrete, usually economic, motives of a few men, unaffected by stereotyped delusions. Most earnest in taking seriously what they have called myths, archetypes or symbols has been the American Studies school. Certainly Henry Nash Smith's definition of myth as a fusion of reason and emotion, or Richard Slotkin's description of "a complex of narrative that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors," are useful in discussing stereotyping. What both are driving at is that perhaps all communication, but certainly communication which significantly influences public opinion, simplifies and telescopes much individual experience in such a way as to "reconcile and unite ... individualities to a collective identity."³

Lippmann's "stereotype" seems more at home with the nineteenth century than terms with classical or Jungian overtones. No claim is made here that the Pacific railway stereotypes represented the spirit of the age, or defined the national character through time; only that they were necessary devices for achieving public support, changing in content as requirements changed. It is not required in order to demonstrate their importance to say that their originators were unselfish romantics. William Gilpin had political ambitions, Thomas Hart Benton stood to benefit economically from the railroad, as did Asa Whitney, and every newspaper editor was looking for ways to build circulation. Nowhere did the stereotypes deny that a central purpose of the railroad was to create wealth and power for the country and for individuals. Also, it should be remembered that what they handed out needed not, inevitably, be taken up. It is assumed that the public, upon issues that could not well be hidden from it, required convincing, and that the stereotypes helped to do that. Anyone who reads newspapers, magazines and widely circulated pamphlets of the period, not just works of literature or private correspondence, should recognize that the stereotypes dominated the media easily available to the average man. If the masses knew anything about the Pacific railroad, they knew it through the stereotypes. To assume that what they knew played little role in determining their attitudes, that they would believe anything at all if certain men proposed it, or that their attitudes were unimportant in determining the course of federal policy, is to be more discouraged about human society than ever Lippmann was.

As indicated, however, the most extravagant forms of stereotyping

were more important in forming a public constituency than in guiding the private meditation of experts. The engineering trade journals of the railroad industry favored a continental road, and surely shared some stereotypes about the kind of world that technology was creating. But they ridiculed the inflated rhetorical approach. The *American Railroad Journal* denigrated "crude, vague, off-hand thoughts," as well as the "nonsensical gabble," which it admitted was common. The journal held that eloquence bore a direct relation to ignorance. That was true. But those ignorant of railway engineering could not be educated in the time allotted for decision upon the new road, if ever; nor did they want to be. There is no reason to believe that viewing the railroad question purely as an engineering problem, as did many trade journals, was any more realistic than talk about the trade of the Indies.⁴

The railway trade journals were almost alone in the fifties in their negative attitude toward the form public information took. However, criticism of what the *Nation* called "Highfalutin," "Blow," "contemptuous vulgarisms," or "the clumsy ostentation of erudition," spread to some high-toned eastern newspapers and magazines in the sixties. This indicates, not that stereotyping was irrelevant, but that the issue underwent evolution. A central point of the stereotypes had been that a will found a way. The hesitation of the public about a new idea was overcome by twenty years of stereotyping, so that the country was willing, after the passage of the Pacific Railways Acts of 1862 and 1864, to allow the stance of the financial and technical experts toward the challenge of practical accomplishments to dominate. Given the oversimplified nature of the mandate, and the overspecialized view of the expert, it is little wonder that the Gilded Age, which followed, was filled with controversy about the business.⁵

What one magazine called "the language of expanded thought," took as its first task the creation of an audience with a frame of mind (one writer has called it "mythopoetic consciousness") receptive to the absorption of the new railroad's stereotyped benefits. To do this, an editorial or speech quickly passed over partisan, or narrowly practical considerations, and "took a broad spat at all creation," before returning, with a different humor, to things more specific. Especially effective in luring the hearer into the realm of the visionary were verbal images of the railroad and its mechanisms which stimulated what could be called the "mind's eye." River towns were treated to images designed to bridge the gap in imagination between the old technology and the new. The railroads, it was said, were "the rivers of these latter days," and the Pacific road would be like a river "free, deep and clear of obstructions." Upon this "river of iron," trains would sail as ships on a prairie sea, while the spires and chimneys of urban life dropped below the horizon

"like the topmasts of a fleet at anchor." Other audiences were warmed with other images. The road became an "artery" along which the national blood would flow, or a "great nerve" with towns acting as "ganglions, knots, and supports." It was sometimes the handle of a fan, the conduit for a sprinkler, a steam-forged bridal ring, an iron hand with a "fraternal grasp," a horse, the backbone of a skeleton, a girdle, a rope, the rod of Aaron, a link in a chain, the lever by which Archimedes could move the globe.⁶

Readers of Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* will not be surprised that a common characteristic of these snapshots was that they linked technology to nature, especially animate nature, in order to comfort the audience about seeming invasion of a pastoral paradise. The well-known "Iron Horse" image had enough variations to fill a book. Linked to river images and ancient direction symbols, it could provide a packed hall with a scenario consisting of a "leviathan engine," which was "harnessed" to "rolling palaces of stately splendor," and, "slaking its thirst at the Father of Waters," plunged off toward the sunset. One speaker, again borrowing from the Book of Job, gave an apocalyptic description of "a fiery steed of steam, whose breath is flame, whose sinews are brass and steel, whose neck is clothed with thunder, whose 'eyes are the eyelids of the morning,' & whose hoofs are iron." Similarly, the national bird was linked with the railroad after an English poet created a phrase about "resonant steam eagles." These animal-mechanical combinations – horses with lightning eyes and steam powered eagles – were before the public throughout the 1850s debate over the railroad. As late as 1866, Senator Nathaniel Banks, speaking on behalf of the Northern Pacific, mentioned the "steam eagles." However, the press of the mid-sixties made so much fun of the unusual posture of the federal symbol that Banks did not allow his speech to be printed in the *Congressional Globe*, nor is a copy to be found among his private papers. Yet the technique of animating machines did not die with the public decision on the Pacific road. It was common in describing the machines at the Centennial Exposition of 1876, and got much attention in 1872 with the publication of a poem entitled "Song of the Steam:" "I've no muscles to weary, / No breast to decay, / No bones to be laid on the shelf; / And soon I intend you may go and play, / While I manage the world myself."⁷

Two other rhetorical techniques, which may be called the "cornucopia" and "prophetic journey" devices, were used. The former lulled the listener into a mood of euphoric trust by a liturgical chanting of riches which would be brought by the railroad: "Crepes, nankeens, the delicate shawls of cashmere, carpets of Persia – jewelry, trinkets and toys – the hemp of Manila – luscious fruit dried and preserved." The latter impressed the hearer with the possibility of the project by taking him on a

detailed imaginary journey on the future flawless road. When the eight stereotyped arguments were inserted into this created mood, the appeal to the mass mind was complete. Then, as Thomas Hart Benton put it, was "the great idea . . . abroad, walking over the land."⁸

The "Seal of Union" construct came closest to being the *sine qua non* of any Pacific railroad article or speech. The railroad (later called the Union Pacific) would provide, it was said, a "kind of solder" which would "bind the seaboard like ears to the head," and insure that "spell-created" California would no longer be "a mere fungus on the body politic of the Union." The fragility of the loyalty of gold-rich California was stressed in an elaborate wedding metaphor. The bride, California, measured "with timid eyes" the fearsome desert, hesitating, while foreign suitors waited to carry away "her shining dowry," to surrender to her intended – the "noble nurse of greatness," the Union. One scholar has noted that this "iron wedding" may have been a form of sublimation for sexual impulses considered unworthy of the nineteenth century man. Eli Todd, writer of the anti-masturbation *Student Manual*, was at Promontory Point in 1869, speaking of "a marriage, consummated under the bright sun." Be this as it may, the marriage images were a subsidiary device associated with the central stereotype of the railroad as "Seal of Union." Legislation could no longer be distorted on its long journey from Washington to the Pacific. Did not the Romans always build a road to a new province before they considered it conquered?⁹

According to the "Seal" stereotype, the Union thus created would be a better place. The railroad would "soften the asperities of political feeling," both by educating the ignorant and by providing an outlet for potentially destructive energies. Opponents of the railroad were charged with failure to throw off their partisan past in order to share the broad self-sacrificing vision of the post-railroad statesman. They were, in speeches, "the contemptible caterpillars of a commonwealth," or "cracked segments in the wheels of progress." A California Senator in 1861 said that fastening "an iron girdle round our loins" would be the best means for the U.S. to symbolize to the world its indissoluble Union. Time after time, Puck's speech in *Midsummer Night's Dream* about throwing a girdle round the earth was repeated in a context which Elizabethan England would have never fathomed. "We will grapple iron hands upon the summits of the Central Mountains," cried a proponent, "and when there we grasp these iron hands of ours, this nation, from its Atlantic to its Pacific shores, will send up such a voice as will make the silent air tremulous with triumph." Wrote another: "Shall we weave a starry girdle fit for liberty to wear?"¹⁰

Not only did the U.S. face internal disarray without a railroad, but the world could be united through its agency. After the Mexican War, the U.S. fronted on both Europe and Asia, allowing the new continental road

to be stereotyped as a "Highway of Nations." Asia and Europe were imagined as much in need of "a metallic wire to feed their distant nerves with electric life." Thomas Hart Benton and John Fremont talked about this constantly, noting that "the golden vein which runs through the history of the world will follow the iron track." They said that the commercial world itself was in motion "following the track of the sun to its dip in the western ocean."¹¹

In its early forms, found in the pamphlets and addresses of George Wilkes, Asa Whitney, Benton, Gilpin, and Dr. Hartwell Carver, this stereotype concentrated so much upon the "voluptuous East" that it is no wonder Henry Nash Smith, in his study of frontier mythology, included railroad speeches in the "Passage to India" construct. A study of other writers, however, indicates that the content of this best-known of western stereotypes changed. The U.S., in the later form, was to benefit more by being a channel for trade from both East and West than the final destination. The broader focus on control of world trade allowed this stereotype to remain powerful, despite increasing scepticism about the "gorgeous descriptions" of Sinophiles like Benton and Gilpin. Some doubted if the China trade would be diverted at all, or whether it was worth diverting. These were amazed that "men with beards on their faces" could propose building a railroad for the sole purpose of improving the flavour of tea by avoiding a trip through the tropics. Even the speeches of Benton and Gilpin changed after 1850 in response to this; broadening the "Passage to India" to the "Highway of Nations," as well as balancing the China appeal (the first of the stereotypes to emerge in point of time) with other stereotypes. There were, wrote Gilpin, "an infinite number of things which swarm up and demand to array themselves in its advocacy." That the China trade stereotype is so exclusively connected, in general histories, with the Pacific railroad argument, is due to an accident of scholarship, not to any overriding importance it enjoyed among the several stereotypes employed.¹²

A third stereotype was created by those who saw the railroad as an "Inlaid Fortress," with great military value. It would protect western travelers; it would allow troops to move against Indian uprisings; and it would provide for protection of the Pacific coast at a great saving in the cost of forts. Thus, the military, dangerous to liberty if allowed to become too large, could be reduced in numbers, and these men could be used to build the railroad, rather than sitting idle promoting future wars. The military stereotype allowed proponents to use the different budgetary calculus appropriate to measures of national defense. Said Senator William Gwin: "Does . . . [anyone] count the value of this Union by the amount of dollars and cents that must be necessarily expended to give security and protection to all parts of the Republic in time of war?"¹³

Lest this seem overly bellicose, the "Fortress" theme was embroidered with peaceful overtones. The line could ensure the bloodless conquest of the world by commercial means. It could establish an "army" of settlers to protect the desert by occupation rather than arms. It could provide what William James later called a moral equivalent for war. That is, assuming people needed challenge, danger and excitement, the Pacific road would temper their warlike tendencies by providing these. As one man put it: "The whistle of the steam engine was more consonant to the ears of the people than the trumpet of war." It was time, said another, to stop glorifying war heroes "while those who build up cities and open the forest, who chain steam with steel harness to the iron car, and send men's thoughts on the lightning's wing, far away through space, outstripping time, are called 'operatives.'" The locomotive, argued a speechmaker in 1858, was one of the "great civilizers of modern times."¹⁴

All this had the advantage of making the difficulties of building the railroad, pointed out by engineers, into something positive. The national heart, said one writer, had grown turbulent through excess prosperity, and "its spasmodic beatings" could be ordered only by the doing of some great work. "Young America" was viewed as an adolescent, "full of roast beef," and pugilistic. Why should it follow the "hackneyed play" of war, when the iron way could be "a conductor through which the electric vigor of our national muscle can be discharged into the far Pacific." The greater the challenge, the better, for the country was "a mettlesome steed who glories in the ground he leaves behind."¹⁵

The "Fortress" stereotype had a negative side as well, used by those who viewed the railroad as a way to increase bureaucratic power. This version noted that forts would be built with or without the railway, and additional forts would be required to protect the new line. Far from being efficient, building by the military would result in bureaucratic bungling. "It is not the scientific doctors of the schools, the bureaux and the military wings of Government," said Gilpin, "that have hewed out this republican empire from the wilderness." It also might promote war by giving government greater control, and increase the power of economic elites by prostituting the national dignity to the interests of the "traveling and trading classes." This negative version did not reflect the "true," as contrasted with a "mythological" approach to the question, but rather was a stereotype to oppose a stereotype. Gilpin's adherence to the negative view of the military construction is evidence that there was choosing among the important stereotypes by railroad speakers facing different constituencies.¹⁶

The men of the fifties were much concerned with locating themselves in relation to history. Therefore, the Pacific railroad, one of the mighty material acts which would represent them in history, was stereotyped as a "Challenge to History." Appius Claudius was remembered for his road,

the Egyptians for their pyramids, and the Incas for a 2,000 mile highway cut through rock. Should not the U.S., with "the elements as our agents, and the lightning of heaven as our slave," build a railroad, which was, compared to these ancient wonders, as "dots to lengthened lines – as sand to mountains"? Richard Rush wrote that, when Benton talked in this fashion, it was terribly stimulating:

When you burst upon us with reflections, illustrations, and facts . . . it plumps up the mind. . . . It fires us with a desire to do great things, by bringing back to our contemplation the great things that have been. . . . When you carry us back to all these things in the past, it seems to unhinge one's reason. Startling moments come over us. It makes us half afraid lest in our days we have dwindled down to pigmies, . . . with little hope of our ever being wound up to the boldness and grandeur of those old fellows who lived so long before us.

The Pilgrim fathers were watching, as were Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, to see how the nation faced this newest challenge. With such an audience, many concluded that the country should "consider nothing done while anything to which wisdom and honor prompts remains undone."¹⁷

There was an audience in the future as well, to whom the railroad campaign would be history, and the iron track a monument. "Men may die, generations may pass away, but the railroads remain. The fiery steed, the snorting iron horse, is still on the track doing the bidding of the teeming millions that come after us whose fathers and grandfathers are yet unborn." The Pharaohs built for glory alone, but the U.S. should construct something useful. Standing at Fort Harker, Kansas, in 1867, Senator D. C. Hubbard thought that, looking out at the Union Pacific, Eastern Division line, he could "behold the grand procession of the centuries." Said another at the same spot: "All history . . . cries out Yes! Yes!"¹⁸

For those concerned with the space between the Father of Waters and the Golden Horde, the railroad was presented as a "Desert Rain," fertilizing the waste places. No topographical barrier bothered the stereotyper, who could lay the mountains low in imagination. The railroad would provide safe conduct across the desert and eventually eliminate the arid region by bringing in "noisy shops, clattering mills and thundering forges." Often in speeches the bleached bones of overland travelers, or the waterlogged corpses of those who chose the sea, were paraded before the mind's eye in mute testimony to the goal. A few, like a trapper who complained that "this hure dam rale rode has ruined the kontry," or a trade journal which made up its own image of a tree-eating monster with "bones as strong pieces of brass," worried about the ecology. But the public at large saw the West as a theatre in which the "magic boat" and the "flying car," sometimes known as the "steam twins," could perform.¹⁹

The political changes such an economic innovation could bring led to the "Crucible for the Republic" stereotype. This was used by politicians

unsure of the constitutionality of too hasty response to the public will, as well as by members of the public wishing to change the government if necessary in order to get the railroad. Politicians who argued against the railroad were charged with purposefully introducing additional information in order to "perplex and scatter the energies of the citizens, whose unanimous resolve it is to plough open a great central trail to the Pacific." Fremont, full of clichés, was seen by the masses as more important than "a whole herd of ranting restaurant politicians." The railroad itself was described as a "democratic institution" more powerful "than law, or popular consent." These people regarded any delay to collect more data as a "claptrap" party trick, and viewed statesmen who urged careful study as "nincompoops" attempting to use the railroad issue as a "pet hobby." That the stereotyping on this issue could reach such a pitch suggests that the devices of coalescing public opinion might, ironically, endanger the republican form of government to which popular consent was presumably basic.²⁰

In the Congress, the railroad was sometimes viewed as a temptation to government to overstep its constitutional limits. It could become a mighty engine for patronage, and could lead to an industrial growth too rapid to be healthy. If given government aid, it might become another "monster bank," which would "run riot" to the Pacific, out of control. A congressman protested that, while the "steady circumspect tread" of the Constitution could not keep up with the flights of the railway stump speaker, he would cling to it "as a mariner to the last plank, amid the tempest and the storm." Why, on behalf of a railroad, should Congress become involved in "throwing into hotchpotch all the enumerated powers of the Constitution – the whole eighth section, with the preamble – and mixing them well, pack them away for use, as exigencies may demand, labeled 'National Works,' 'National Defense,' 'National Glory,' 'National Ends,' 'National Results,' 'National Greatness'?" Senator Andrew Johnson stood against the railroad on constitutional grounds, and was described by the press as a "torpid toad." But in his own stereotyped view, public aid to the line put the Republic in danger.²¹

In addition to reading history and the Constitution, men of the fifties read the Bible, and spoke of the railroad making a "pathway through the wilderness" – "a highway for our God." Making the crooked ways straight through railroad building not only pleased the Deity, but fulfilled the destiny of the young Republic. The "Path for Providence" stereotype envisioned a "bright halo" around the head of Liberty, as she breathed upon the wilderness with her new steamy breath until "dry bones became living men, and the deserts green pastures by sweet flowing waters." The "Great Architect" was credited by geopoliticians with having laid out a path upon the land for the railroad to follow. Its space annihilating characteristics would convert the heathen and destroy, by the spread of

wisdom, both the power of the Pope and the anomaly of Mormonism. No wonder proponents spoke of preaching a "gospel," going through conversions, or even seeing the faces of angels, while speaking on the benefits of the railroad. For, it was said, God had appointed commerce and the Pacific railroad as His instruments in a progressive day. Inventions came at the call of great necessities, and the necessities were created by God. Therefore, "the inventive genius of man is but an answer to the voice of Him who gave man his capacity to thus reply." "He harnessed steam to iron anatomies, gave them life, action and power, and commenced thus the era of clothing the world with fabrics spun and woven by the iron horse." Ralph Waldo Emerson had noted some years before that when science was learned in religious love, the railroad and the insurance office could be turned to divine use.²²

Timing was important, as divinity might look with favor only once. The early fifties, when Europe was involved in the Crimea, seemed right. Technology and oratory were sufficiently developed, and public opinion, with its "peculiar foresight and heavenly gifts," was primed. Asa Whitney sent Pacific railway arguments to ministers all over the country, which they used in their Thanksgiving sermons in 1850. Did not the hand of Providence, went the sermons, insure victory over Mexico so that treasures locked in the wilderness might be used to smash pagan altars in the Orient? "Mind has brought the lightning from heaven, and chained it to our will." Dr. Hartwell Carver wrote in 1847 that the railroad would create an "earthly millenium" and a new church, "a part of whose worship will be to praise God and bless the Oregon railroad."²³

Only occasionally was there a warning that "Young America" might, in bowing to progress, be worshipping something other than the one God. The *Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review*, again part of that group of magazines appealing to a specialized audience, asked in 1848 whether the rhetoric was not taking undue advantage of a primitive tendency to personify the forces of nature, and so creating a pagan pantheon of fire and steam gods. Quoting *Macbeth* that "Oftentimes to win us to our harm/ The instruments of darkness tell us truths;/ Win us to honest trifles, to betray us/ In deepest consequences," the magazine warned against too easy acceptance of truth as portrayed in stereotypes: "People whose minds are not disciplined to precision of thought are mystified by this personification of our own passions as deities; and soon find themselves involved in a labyrinth from which there is no escape."²⁴

Humility, surely, was not a characteristic of the public at this time. As John Ward has noted in his study of Andrew Jackson, Americans put alongside Providence a large dose of pure will. The "footprints of the geometrical Giant" need but mark the spot and America would "not only ... overthrow all theories of physical science, but ... grapple with the

great globe itself, to crush the mountains with a conqueror's step, and make the rugged wilderness more humble to its purpose than the cringing sea." In the "Victory of Will" stereotype, the eighth and last, the "impracticability" of the railroad was again turned into a virtue, as it would be a fit test for supermen. The *London Times* characterized the American public majority as so "conscious of its own absolute and irresistible power" that it was "as little inclined as any oriental despot to surrender its passions and its desires to mere objections of law." "King Railway," speakers said, was "like a cloud of devouring locusts and overshadows the whole nation. He swoops down upon us as the hordes of yellow-haired barbarians swarmed down upon Rome in the days of her decadence." Against this, more conservative minds held little sway. One writer called the Universe to attention and bid the nations do an about-face in recognition of the railroad. Another saw America transformed: "'Young America' goes by steam, traverses earth, or unchains the lightning, mounts upon the electric current and stares through the trackless fields of space, seizes the fiery appendage of the comet as it flies athwart the upper ether, counts the stars, weights the planets, paints the arena of heaven and unwinds the perpetual dances of the sky, or mounting the velocipede of thought, dances to the music of the spheres, or flies to the invisible world and speculates upon the illimitable hereafter, and even promises to grasp, fathom and comprehend Divinity." Wrote the conservative *Presbyterian Quarterly Review*: "Posterity . . . will look with amazement at these times."²⁵

The conclusions of this little history must be Lippmannesque. There were, to be sure, critics of extreme forms of stereotyping. Yet, while not universal, the stereotypes surrounding the Pacific railroad may safely be said to have formed the environment which the mass public, as public, took for its reality. Individuals in their private hearts no doubt saw them as compromises; no doubt they noticed, as Lippmann wrote, that the more profound the individual vision, the more its meaning suffers "as it is sluiced into standard speech and then distributed again to alien minds." Yet in a democracy, this is a necessary dilemma, resulting in a society which is egalitarian but which communicates in the most simplified stereotypes. This society may eternally "like Hamlet . . . stab Polonius behind the rustling curtain, thinking him the king."²⁶

Understanding the form of stereotypes which would be most effective is of great importance in wielding power in a society where public opinion counts for something. Those politicians, then and now, who would be powerful, needed to understand how to organize compelling word patterns which would reflect to the public things resting in their own minds. Those who understood stereotyping enjoyed an advantage over those who did not. The *Alta California* concluded in 1851 that: "Public opinion

is a medly of incongruities . . . A great portion of thought is but reason in leading strings. Like a railroad car or a locomotive, it travels fast. . . . But its course is only along the prescribed route, over the rails that have been laid by others." This comment, from a newspaper that contained a great number of the stereotyped arguments outlined above, suggests that the stereotypers were not so much people who did not understand reality as those who understood one important facet of reality terribly well, i.e., the way what passes for thought in large groups is formulated and influenced. One journal noted that "when people give full scope to their fancy, their imaginings in time become realities to them." Scholars will do well not to value too highly materials to which the public had no access, while ignoring the types of arguments which pervaded the public media.²⁷

The present division among students about the nature of reality in the past seems hardly necessary. Henry Nash Smith is doubtless correct in his response to his critics when he explains that "our perceptions of objects and events are no less a part of consciousness than are our fantasies." That is, truth may well be relative to the perceiver, as well as to the purposes to which perception must be put. To note that perception as it is revealed in public opinion takes a different form than it might for some individuals, is not to take a Platonic, or "crude Cartesian" view of reality. Stereotypes do not mark one kind of pre-existent reality, and the musings of the railroad engineering journals another. They are only expressions of the different forms in which consciousness is communicated to different audiences for different purposes. All must be taken seriously if the human enterprise is to be taken seriously. Even then, as C. G. Jung aptly put it, the scholar must realize that he also, as an observer, shares the foibles of observers before him: "Even the best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language (indeed language itself is only a metaphor). The most we can do is to dream the myth onwards and give it modern dress. And whatever explanation or interpretation does to it, we do to our own soul as well, with corresponding results for our own well-being." Hart Crane, in *The Bridge*, writing of the "white pervasive paradigm" that was the American past, wrote a stanza regarding the country's stereotyped response to the airplane, which reflects poetically very well the atmosphere of the Pacific railway issue seventy years earlier:

Now the eagle dominates our days, is jurist
of the ambiguous cloud.
We know the strident rule
of wings imperious . . . Space, instantaneous,
Flickers a moment, consumes us in its smile:
A flash over the horizon – shifting gears –
And we have laughter, or more sudden tears.

Dream cancels dream in this new realm of fact
 From which we wake into a dream of act;
 Seeing himself an atom in a shroud – Man hears himself
 An engine in a
 Cloud. . . .²⁸

NOTES

- 1 Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1961), p. 164. Lippmann's book was first published in 1922.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 13; George Simpson to editor, Nov. 23, 1855, in *Railroad Record* (Cincinnati), III (Jan. 31, 1856), 774.
- 3 Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), pp. 6, 8.
- 4 *American Railroad Journal* (Philadelphia), XXVII (May 6, 1854), 273, XII (Oct. 13, 1849), 647, XXVI (Dec. 31, 1853), 833; XXVII (July 22, 1854), 451 are all examples of criticism of rhetoric.
- 5 *New York Times*, Dec. 24, 1858, 4:2; *Nation*, II (May 22, 1866), 649–50.
- 6 *Railroad Record*, II (Jan. 19, 1854), 740; Slotkin, *Regeneration*, p. 7; Thomas Karnes, William Gilpin: *Western Nationalist* (Austin, 1970), pp. 221–22; Robert Russel, *Improvement of Communication with the Pacific Coast as an Issue in American Politics, 1783–1864* (Cedar Rapids, 1948), p. 22; Thomas Allen in *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), July 2, 1850, Nov. 19, 1850; *Missouri Democrat* (St. Louis), May 7, 1853; *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), June 19, 1855; *Alta California* (San Francisco), April 7, 1858; *American Railroad Journal*, III (Oct. 11, 1862), 801; *National Intelligencer*, June 7, 1853, March 20, 1855; *Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review*, XXII (Feb., 1850), 147; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess. XXIII (May 29, 1854), Appendix, 866; *Alta California*, Dec. 15, 1858; *Daily Examiner* (San Francisco), Aug. 25, 1865; *Missouri Republican*, July 6, 1851.
- 7 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York, 1964); *Railroad Record*, III (Dec. 6, 1855), 643; *Ibid.*, II (Jan. 19, 1854), 740; *American Railroad Journal*, XXV (Dec. 18, 1852), 804; Alonso A. Hopkins, *The Life of Clinton Bowen Fisk with a Brief Sketch of John A. Brooks* (New York, 1888), p. 152; Edward Miller, *Address: Delivered by Request, Before a Railroad Meeting of the Citizens of Cooper County . . . April 3, 1858* (St. Louis, 1858), pp. 12–13; see index to *Cong. Globe*, 39th Cong., 1st Sess. XXXV, liv; *Nation*, II (May 22, 1866), 649; poem quoted in *Sedalia Weekly Democrat* (Missouri), Aug. 13, 1872; Craig Miner, "The United States Government Building at the Centennial Exhibition, 1874–77," *Prologue* (Winter, 1972), p. 212.
- 8 Two good examples of cornucopia are Karnes, Gilpin, p. 253 and Thomas Allen in *Missouri Republican*, Feb. 4, 1850; for prophetic journey, see the same Allen speech and "Through Tickets to San Francisco: A Prophecy," *Atlantic Monthly*, XIV (Nov., 1864), 604–17; *American Railroad Journal*, XXII (May 5, 1849), 278.
- 9 *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess. May 29, 1854, XXIII, Appendix, 863, 866; Burlington Hawkeye quoted in *Missouri Democrat*, Aug. 3, 1853; Karnes, Gilpin, p. 318; *Alta California*, Dec. 15, Dec. 27, 1858; *Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review*, XX (Feb., 1850), 147; *Cong. Globe*, 30th Cong., 2d Sess., Feb. 7, 1849, XVIII, 473; *Chronicle* (San Francisco), May 9, 1869; Ben Barker-Benfield, "The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth Century View of Sexuality," in Michael Gordon, ed., *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York, 1973), p. 344.

- 10 *Alta California*, Dec. 14, 15, 1858, Sept. 14, 1851; *American Railroad Journal*, XXIII (Aug. 17, 1850), 520–21; *Cong. Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 5, 1861, XXX, 254; *Ibid.*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 25, 1859, XXVIII, 585–87; *Ibid.*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., May 29, 1854, XXIII, Appendix, 866.
- 11 *Missouri Democrat*, June 28, 1853, June 19, 1854; *National Intelligencer*, Dec. 11, 1854.
- 12 Dr. Hartwell Carver, *Proposal for a Charter to Build a Railroad from Lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean* (Washington, 1847), p. 16; *Alta California*, May 16, 1851; *Missouri Democrat*, Oct. 2, 1866; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 16, 1855, XXX, 148–49; *Ibid.*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 25, 1859, XXVIII, 583; *National Intelligencer*, Oct. 2, 1856; William Gilpin in *Missouri Republican*, June 7, 1850. The best collection of the rarest Pacific railroad pamphlets (rare now, though common then) is in the Library of the Association of American Railroads, Washington, D.C.
- 13 *Railroad Record*, IV (Feb. 25, 1866), Supplement, 6. Particularly good on the Indian question are *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 2, 1856; *Cong. Globe*, 32d Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 27, 1853, XX, 424; Silas Seymour, *Incidents of a Trip Through the Great Platte Valley to the Rocky Mountains and Laramie Plains in the Fall of 1866* (New York, 1867), pp. 89., 122; *National Intelligencer*, May 12, 1853; *Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review*, XLII (May, 1860), 553; for the international threat see *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Dec. 14, 1858, XXVIII, 55; *San Francisco Herald*, Feb. 18, 1851; *Missouri Democrat*, Oct. 28, 1854; *American Railroad Journal*, XXIV (Jan. 18, 1851), 35; *Ibid.*, XXXVI (Feb. 28, 1863); *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Dec. 14, 1858, XXVIII, 51–52.
- 14 *National Intelligencer*, Jan. 20, 1852, Feb. 19, 1853; *Alta California*, Aug. 8, 1851, *Missouri Democrat*, June 30, 1853; Miller, *Address*, p. 11.
- 15 *National Intelligencer*, Jan. 20, 1852, Feb. 19, 1853; *Alta California*, Aug. 8, 1851; *Missouri Democrat*, June 30, 1853.
- 16 *New York Times*, March 24, 1862, Dec. 11, 1858; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., June 7, 1854, XXIII, Appendix, 882; *Ibid.*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 27, 1859, XXVIII, 629; Gilpin in *Missouri Republican*, June 7, 1850; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., XXIII, Appendix, 825, 827; Z. Kidwell in *H.M.D.* 44, 34th Cong., 3d Sess., Feb. 12, 1857, pp. 2, 46 (Serial 5911).
- 17 *National Intelligencer*, May 21, 1853, Feb. 8, 1855, June 25, 1853; *Missouri Democrat*, June 24, May 17, 1853; *H. Rpt.* 773, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., July 13, 1846, p. 46 (Serial 491); *Missouri Republican*, April 11, 1850; *American Railroad Journal*, XX (Jan. 23, 1847), n.p.
- 18 *Washington Union* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 27, 1853; *Missouri Democrat*, June 25, 1853; *National Plan of an Atlantic and Pacific Rail Road and Remarks of Albert Pike, Made Thereon at Memphis, November, 1849* (Little Rock, 1849), p. 6; *Senatorial Excursion Party over the Union Pacific E.D. Speeches . . . on the Pacific Rail Road Question . . .* (St. Louis, 1867), pp. 47–48; *H. Rpt.* 773, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., July 13, 1846, p. 10 (Serial 491); *Alta California*, Dec. 15, 1858; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., May 29, 1854, XXIII, 866; J. Longborough, *The Pacific Telegraph and Railway. An Examination of all the Projects for the Construction of these Works, with a Proposition for Harmonizing all Sections and Parties of the Union. . .* (St. Louis, 1849), p. 50.
- 19 *H. Rpt.* 358, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., Oct. 2, 1856, p. 1 (Serial 870); *National Intelligencer*, July 30, 1853; *Cong. Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., March 15, 1850, XVII, 539; *Missouri Democrat*, Aug. 6, Sept. 3, 1853, Jan. 27, 1854; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 16, 1855, XXIV, Appendix, 73, 79–81; *American Railroad Journal*, XXIII (Aug. 3, 1850), 489–90; “Through Tickets,” p. 607; *Examiner* (San Francisco), Jan. 31,

- 1870; *American Railroad Journal*, XXI (Sept. 9, 1848), 581–82; *Missouri Republican*, Nov. 13, Sept. 20, 1850.
- 20 *Missouri Republican*, June 8, 1850; *Missouri Democrat*, May 31, 1854; *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1858, 4:2; *Alta California*, March 5, 1858, Jan. 31, 1859; *Sedalia Democrat*, Dec. 5, 1872; *A Few Remarks Upon the Subject of a Rail Road to the Pacific by a Member of the Philadelphia Bar* (Philadelphia, 1853), p. 3; D. R. Atchison, *Address of Senator Atchison to the People of Missouri* (n.p., /1854/), p. 9.
- 21 *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., March 8, May 20, June 7, 1854, XXIII, Appendix, 407, 892, 920–22; *Ibid.*, 32d Cong., 2d Sess., Feb. 24, 1853, XXII, 815–18; *Ibid.*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 27, 1859, XXVIII, 630; *Ibid.*, 33d Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 15, 1855, XXIV, 129–31; *Ibid.*, 35th Cong., 2d Sess., Jan. 25, 1859, XVIII, 579, 584.
- 22 *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1858, 2:3, April 19, 1854, 2:5; *Cong. Globe*, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., May 25, 1858, XXVII, Appendix, 428; *Alta California*, Jan. 25, 1855, May 4, 1853; *Missouri Republican*, Jan. 17, 29, 1850; *American Railroad Journal*, XXIV (Jan. 11, 1851), 24–27; *Ibid.*, XXIII (Aug. 17, 1850), 521; *Morning Chronicle* (San Francisco), March 4, 1869; *National Intelligencer*, May 17, 1856; R. W. Emerson, “Art,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (12 vols.; Boston, 1903), II, 368–69.
- 23 *Missouri Republican*, Sept. 20, 1850; Asa Whitney in *American Railroad Journal*, XXI (Dec. 16, 1848), 806; George Wilkes, *Proposal for a National Railroad to the Pacific Ocean, for the Purpose of Obtaining a Short Route to Oregon and the Indies* (New York, 1847), *passim*; Rev. Joseph Wilson, *The Pacific Railroad: A Discourse Delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church of Lafayette, on Thanksgiving Day. . . .* (Lafayette, 1850); *passim*; Rev. Calvin Colton, *Lecture on the Railroad in the Pacific. Delivered Aug. 12, 1850, at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, at the Request of Numerous Members of Both Houses of Congress* (New York, 1850), *passim*.
- 24 *Merchant’s Magazine and Commercial Review*, XVIII (April, 1848), 391–94.
- 25 *Speech of William Moseley Hall of Buffalo, N.Y., in Support of His Resolution Which Passed Unanimously in Favor of a National R. Road to the Pacific, on the Plan of Geo. Wilkes. . . .* (Chicago, 1847), p. 5; *Missouri Democrat*, July 12, 1853; *San Francisco Herald*, July 11, 1851; *Cong. Globe*, 33d Cong., 2d Sess., Feb. 23, 1855, XXIV, Appendix, 204–06; *Washington Union*, Aug. 14, 1853; *American Railroad Journal*, XXII (Oct. 6, 1849), 630; *London Times* quoted in *National Intelligencer*, Nov. 11, 1852; *Railroad Record*, III (Jan. 31, 1856), 777; *Sedalia Democrat*, May 20, 1869; *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* quoted in *National Intelligencer*, June 18, 1859.
- 26 Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, pp. 67, 7.
- 27 *Alta California*, Aug. , 1851.
- 28 Bruce Kuklick, “Myth and Symbol in American Studies,” *American Quarterly*, XXIV (Oct., 1972), 435–50, is one of several recent articles speculating critically about the connection of myths and realities; C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, ed. by Jolande Jacobe (New York, 1961), p. 40; Waldo Frank, ed., *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* (New York, 1946), pp. 57, 32. Early in the poem, Crane uses what might serve as a hymn to the stereotypers of the Pacific railroad: “to you . . . whom fear and greed adjourned, – I bring you back Cathay.”

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Hawthorne's Politics in
The House of the Seven Gables
RICHARD CLARK STERNE

Reasonably enough, discussions of Hawthorne's politics in his most political romance¹ have focussed on the economic relations between Pyncheons and Maules, and on Holgrave's social ideas. But the roles played by Ned Higgins, evidently a child of working-class parents,² the young carpenter, Matthew Maule, and the Negro figures, Jim Crow and Scipio, deserve more careful consideration than they have received. It is clear that in dealing with the problem of property Hawthorne drew upon the ideas of Locke, Proudhon and Fourier.³ What is not so clear is the relationship between Hawthorne's explicit comments on slavery – in his 1852 campaign biography of the anti-Abolitionist Franklin Pierce, as well as in his *Atlantic Monthly* article of 1862, "Chiefly About War Matters" – and the depiction in *The House of the Seven Gables* of "aristocrats," blacks, and poor whites. I think that a careful analysis of all these matters may lead to a more satisfactory definition of Hawthorne's politics than that of Russell Kirk, who considers Hawthorne an outstanding conservative,⁴ or that of F. O. Matthiessen, who interestingly but cryptically refers to a "peculiar kind of social understanding" which "made Hawthorne hold to both the contrasting terms of [the] paradox of being at once a democrat and a conservative."⁵

Ned Higgins and Jim Crow make their appearance in "The First Customer," the ambiguously amusing chapter in which Hepzibah sacrifices her gentility by opening a cent shop. She has delayed this sacrifice by presenting to Holgrave as a gift the biscuits which he wished to buy. But after he leaves, the door to the shop is "thrust open" – "forced quite open," Hawthorne emphasizes, a few lines further on – by an urchin who stares at her a moment, "as an elder customer than himself would have been likely enough to do," (49–50) then holds out a cent and asks for the Jim Crow in the window. Squeamish at the sight of the coin, and ashamed "to take the child's pocket-money, in exchange for a bit of stale gingerbread," Hepzibah again avoids consummating a sale: she gives Jim Crow to the astonished child, who leaves the shop only to reappear, the "crumbs and discolorations of the cannibal-feast exceedingly visible about his