

University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -
Papers

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

1-1-2015

The 'Missing link': Space, race and transoceanic ties in the settler-colonial Pacific

Frances Steel

University of Wollongong, fsteel@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Steel, Frances, "The 'Missing link': Space, race and transoceanic ties in the settler-colonial Pacific" (2015). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 2368.
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/2368>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

The 'Missing link': Space, race and transoceanic ties in the settler-colonial Pacific

Abstract

The inauguration of a steamship route between Canada and Australia, described as the "missing link," was envisaged to complete Britain's imperial circuit of the globe. This article examines the early proposals and projects for a service between Vancouver and Sydney, which finally commenced in 1893. The route was more than a means of physically bridging the gulf between Canada and Australia. Serving as a conduit for ideologies and expectations, it became a key element of aspirations to reconfigure the Pacific as a natural domain for the extension of settler-colonial power and influence. In centering the "white" Pacific and relations between white colonies in empire, the route's early history, although one of friction and contestation, offers new insights into settler-colonial mobilities beyond dominant themes of metropole-colony migration.

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

Steel, F. (2015). The 'Missing link': Space, race and transoceanic ties in the settler-colonial Pacific. *Transfers: interdisciplinary journal of mobility studies*, 5 (3), 49-67.

The “Missing Link”

Space, Race, and Transoceanic Ties in the Settler-Colonial Pacific

Frances Steel, *University of Wollongong*

Abstract: The inauguration of a steamship route between Canada and Australia, described as the “missing link,” was envisaged to complete Britain’s imperial circuit of the globe. This article examines the early proposals and projects for a service between Vancouver and Sydney, which finally commenced in 1893. The route was more than a means of physically bridging the gulf between Canada and Australia. Serving as a conduit for ideologies and expectations, it became a key element of aspirations to reconfigure the Pacific as a natural domain for the extension of settler-colonial power and influence. In centering the “white” Pacific and relations between white colonies in empire, the route’s early history, although one of friction and contestation, offers new insights into settler-colonial mobilities beyond dominant themes of metropole–colony migration.

Keywords: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, route, settler colonialism, shipping, transpacific, whiteness

“According to our ordinary habit of thought,” observed Scottish-Canadian engineer and inventor, Sir Sandford Fleming in 1887, Canada and Australia were “at opposite ends of the Colonial Empire, and are as far asunder as it is possible on this globe for two countries to be situated.”¹ Never heretofore linked by ocean travel, routes of migration to them from Britain stretched in opposite directions across the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Canada and Australia were separated besides by 300 degrees of longitude. Yet when looking across the Pacific, “by actual fact they are only 60 degrees asunder.” If the “agencies of steam and electricity” were applied to this ocean, Fleming enthused, Canada and Australia, “already one in language . . .

laws and . . . loyalty,” and having “the same mission in the outer Empire,” would “become neighbours.”²

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, perceptions of time and space contracted dramatically in response to the reach of industrial transport and communications. This engendered “new imaginative possibilities” for the British Empire, as historian Duncan Bell summarizes, insofar as distance posed less of an obstacle to realizing an integrated and unified whole, rather than a loose conglomeration of sea-sundered outposts.³ Fleming made his remarks to delegates at the first Colonial Conference of 1887, a forum where imperial and colonial statesmen debated the possibilities of opening new mail and telegraph communications. A steamship network to bridge Vancouver and Sydney, touted as the “missing link” or “last great link” in the British Empire, promised to materialize affinities between Canada and its “sister” colonies in Australasia, altering conceptualizations of the settler empire and its Pacific domain.

Settler-colonial mobilities are readily framed through the lens of migration, foregrounding the original transoceanic passages from the British metropole to its far-flung settlements across Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of South Africa.⁴ These formative “first crossings” of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans kept the Pacific at the margins of British imperial thought and space, as Fleming recognized at the time and as national historiographies have reinforced since. Histories of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada developed over the twentieth century largely in isolation from one another, plotting self-enclosed narratives of development from colony to nation. A preoccupation with national maturation and the gradual severance of ties with Britain and the wider empire accorded little room for themes of enduring intra-imperial circulation and exchange. At the same time, settler-colonial attitudes to other routes of international migration also figured the Pacific as more barrier than bridge. From the 1870s Britain’s self-governing settler societies imposed

increasingly restrictive legislative barriers to the entry of peoples deemed undesirable, particularly “Asiatics,” notably Chinese who, alongside British migrants, were on the move in significant numbers in this period. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada shared with each other and with the United States a commitment to building “white men’s countries” around what has since come to be termed the Pacific rim.⁵

In this article I aim to recenter the Pacific by examining the discursive processes and material practices that transformed the ocean as a medium of settler-colonial mobility, connection, and competition. In moving beyond mobility as one-way mass migration from metropole to colony, I explore the ways in which settler colonies promoted ongoing transoceanic connectivities, the perpetual “lifeblood” of empire, as Tony Ballantyne has recently stressed.⁶ I draw principally on public debates over the inauguration and early operation of a new sea route. The Canadian Australian (CA) Line, famous as the “All Red” Route, opened in 1893. It initially linked the ports of Sydney, Brisbane, Suva, Honolulu, Victoria, and Vancouver, with Auckland later replacing Brisbane. It was intended as the transpacific link in a longer imperial chain, part of an integrated service to connect with the Canadian Pacific Rail at Vancouver and transatlantic steamships to Britain. Designated “All Red,” in keeping with the cartographic depiction of Britain’s global imperial reach, the service would be entirely under British control and connect British territories.⁷ While integrating the Pacific into a wider imperial circuit, it also created space for the self-governing colonies to imagine new futures within this oceanic realm, often in ways that tested British metropolitan priorities and concerns.

Connections between settler colonies have not wholly eluded historical attention. The scholarly platform of the *British World* emerged in the late 1990s, partly in response to the “new imperial history” with its emphasis on metropole–colony exchange and, more particularly, the colonial imprint in Britain and the construction of racial difference. British

World proponents perceived in this work a relative neglect of the former white Dominions and looked to the spread and adaptation of shared “British” institutions, cultures, and identities within and between them. This scholarship emphasizes the “plethora of networks,” including familial, professional, religious, and educational ties, that bound white settlers closer to each other and to the United Kingdom from the late nineteenth century.⁸ It has, however, bypassed maritime networks and connections, and associated patterns and cultures of mobility across the oceanic empire. This relative neglect might be explained by the fact that transoceanic routes typically interrupted the “British world” by linking settler colonies via the dependent, nonwhite empire, as well as more ambiguous extra-imperial spaces.

At the same time, an extensive, if disparate, literature probes the relationship between empire and the maritime world. Histories of prominent shipping companies, key entrepreneurs and their commercial and political milieu are grounded in traditions of business and economic history.⁹ Drawing on wider interdisciplinary influences, sea-focused histories of empire labor, trade, travel, and tourism continue to expand the scope and range of knowledge.¹⁰ Processes and practices of transoceanic movement and exchange implicitly drive all these histories, yet the specific networks that connect, and mobility itself, are seldom key categories of analysis. In the Pacific World context, I have explored how the Australasian colonies harnessed the power of steam from the early 1870s to advance a range of commercial and cultural influences among islands in the southwest Pacific, demonstrating the extent to which settlers rather than the metropole drove British expansionism in the region.¹¹ I build on this work to chart steam’s promise in relation to longer-distance, transpacific connections, as the ocean was reimagined and reconfigured in larger ways as a commons and a new frontier.

Routes were as much systems of knowledge and representation as physical infrastructures. An emphasis on the material and immaterial, the functional and ideational,

lies at the heart of new histories of transport enriched by perspectives from mobilities studies. Such work examines the role of transport “in constituting individuals, communities and societies in ways that go beyond the functional movement of goods and people.”¹² In pushing beyond older emphases on material production, many studies center moving subjects and contested cultures of use. In focusing on the production end to explore the ways in which debates over a sea route produced space in the (imagined) act of bridging it, this article attempts also to bridge material, subjective, and cultural frames of study.¹³

British settlers expressed and understood empire belonging in the late nineteenth century in diverse and multiple ways: through ideas and emotions, networks and exchange, and from specific locations, as historian Tamson Pietsch elaborates. These were “imagined, material and local British *worlds*” that reflected people’s “lived experience of the globalizing connections of the period.”¹⁴ Drawing on these insights, I explore the multiple “worlds” of a specific corridor of imperial traffic. The CA Line was simultaneously ideational, material, and locally situated, leaving its “binding” power subject to competing and sometimes-incompatible aims. Colonial and imperial statesmen, newspaper editors, and shipping magnates articulated its import through appeals to sentiment and ideals of racial affinity, to speed or the prospect of opening new markets, and to the leverage it offered specific places in their relations with one another, the metropole, and sites beyond empire, notably the United States. Settler-colonial locations in the Pacific and the options open to them were different: Australia straddled two oceans and also prioritized imperial connections via the Indian Ocean; New Zealand was moored in the Pacific and transpacific pathways represented primary lifelines; Pacific connections did not bring Canada closer to Britain, but promised to center the colony in empire in new ways. In addition to overarching frames and conflicts of colonial, national, and imperial politics, commercial concerns introduced their own set of complications. Route ownership and itineraries changed, subsidies were committed,

withdrawn, and renegotiated. The CA Line was an ongoing debate rather than a clear achievement, for ideology and pragmatics were not seamlessly aligned.

In an analysis of debates over a proposed rail corridor in Chicago, urban geographer Julie Cidell deploys the term “trainspace” as “a way to think through conflicts over transportation infrastructure in relation to the places it passes through and connects.” She shows that trainspace was more than the material structures of tracks and railcars, and extended from places to networks to scales. Different actors constructed and mobilized these multiple spatialities differently, and contests over spatial boundaries and their character were always larger political struggles.¹⁵ The “steamer-space” produced in the Canadian Australian Line, as I go on to discuss, was similarly a site of connectivity and contestation, a highly politicized materialization engaging spatial scales from ports, colonies, nations, and oceans, and tying them to wider visions of the Pacific in a global settler empire.

The Making of the “All Red” Route

The impetus to draw Vancouver and Sydney closer together by steam aligned with wider metropolitan ambitions, at their height between the 1870s and 1900s, to consolidate and formalize the bonds between Britain and its self-governing empire. Appeals to a “Greater Britain”—the title of radical British MP Charles Dilke’s 1868 travelogue, but greatly popularized by Cambridge historian J. R. Seeley’s *The Expansion of England* (1883)—mapped Britain, not as a narrow island nation, but as an expansive, globalizing polity encompassing the colonies of mass British settlement. Unlike other European empires, Britain’s overseas territories had a unique edge, Seeley argued, because of an “ethnological unity.” Transplanted British subjects were perceived as united in their cultural and political outlook, sharing traits, traditions, beliefs, and institutions common to English peoples. Rival European powers and an expanding United States posed a potential threat on the world stage;

the time appeared ripe to mobilize this “powerful global British national identity” to formalize and strengthen “an enduring Greater Britain.”¹⁶

Appeals to the unity of the Anglo-British Empire gained widespread interest among the intellectual and political elite, generating extended debate about how best to achieve and sustain it. Proposals ranged from consolidating existing ties to more radical constitutional reform, notably the formation of an Imperial Federation. This entailed establishing a single state and a parliamentary system of universal representation. Such visions arose in the context of improvements in industrial technologies of transport and communication. The altered material conditions of empire, insofar as previously far-flung possessions were now “effectively contiguous” with railroads, steamships, and the telegraph, opened up practical possibilities for novel political association.¹⁷

Existing work on Greater Britain typically discusses these binding technologies in spatially undifferentiated terms, yet they had particular import in the Pacific, an ocean bordered by Britain’s largest white settler colonies in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as well as one of its rivals, the United States. An “All Red” route to link the former became easier to envisage after the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1885. A nation-building project to bridge Canada’s Atlantic and Pacific coasts, the railway also represented Canada’s emergence as a power “with a direct interest in the Pacific,” promoting interest in its westward transoceanic extension to settlements in Australasia.¹⁸ Some advocates linked this scheme directly to campaigns for Imperial Federation. For instance, the Canadian colonist and author Thaddeus H. W. Leavitt, who lived for a time in Australia (and edited *Australian Representative Men*), argued in a letter to the *Melbourne Argus* in 1886 that Australia would take a “practical step in the federation of the empire” by supporting the transpacific route, and a correspondent to the *Times* believed that the route “would afford a much greater prospect of a real federation than could be expected to result from appeals or

arguments based on the claims of kinship alone.”¹⁹ Imperial Federation was predictably never realized for lack of parliamentary traction in Britain, and self-governing colonies’ fears for their autonomy. Imperial Federation also represented the utopian end of broader aspirations for imperial “consolidation” and unity, that is, a binding together of interests without significant political and constitutional implications, through which colonial support for the “All Red” route was mobilized. This mirrored the fact that although Greater Britain was not achieved as a political federation, it endured as “an important economic and cultural reality.”²⁰

The 1887 Colonial Conference endorsed the desirability of the scheme, yet this did not bind governments to it. Running a scheduled liner network, where ships left set ports at set times regardless of passenger numbers or freight offering, was an enormously expensive proposition. Shipping companies relied on government subsidies to undertake such ventures. In 1893 the Australian shipping entrepreneur James Huddart secured a Canadian subsidy of £25,000 per annum to connect Sydney and Vancouver (one of a number of subsidies Canada proposed to attract traffic to the railroad). Huddart needed to raise more subsidies to secure the viability of the CA Line, and lobbied New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland for £20,000 at the height of a colonial depression (he dropped Brisbane as a port of call after Queensland could not raise funds). NSW granted £10,000, perceiving the route’s value in opening new trade with Canada and cementing its status “as the centre of the great Australasian group.” Racial kinship and brotherhood with Canada also figured prominently in NSW legislative council debates over subsidies. Free traders like the businessman and legislator Bruce Smith rejected such talk as “windy subjects more suitable for a debating society than for a house of parliament.”²¹ Yet for others such as the liberal statesman and five-time premier of NSW, Sir Henry Parkes, who had advocated for transpacific mail routes from the late 1850s, Canada was “part of the great empire to which we belong” and he failed

to see how one nation could approach another “without the existence of human sentiment . . . sentiment enters into the very highest form of civilisation.”²² His assertions aligned Parkes with the metropolitan promoters of Greater Britain, for whom sentiment had real “political efficacy” and was understood as “the very foundation stone of the global polity.”²³

Settler colonies understood their locations and priorities in empire in multiple ways and it soon became clear that the route’s binding power held multiple interpretative possibilities. The CA Line omitted a call at New Zealand, yet the colony sought inclusion (in exchange for a subsidy) along what it perceived as its “natural line of communication” to Britain, as representative Alfred Lee Smith, a prominent Dunedin businessman recently appointed to the New Zealand Legislative Council (Upper House), argued at the 1894 Colonial Conference. Existing networks to Britain across the Indian Ocean terminated in Australia, leaving New Zealand at the farthest possible point from London, reliant on branch services across the Tasman Sea to connect at Australian ports. From an Australian perspective, however, New Zealand’s inclusion on the CA Line would represent a “detour,” for the colony did not lie “in the direct line of communication” between Vancouver and Sydney. A New Zealand port would add days to the service and undermine the speedy carriage of mails and passengers to and from Australia. Yet without New Zealand’s inclusion, Smith declared, the imperial point of view (meaning the consolidation of the empire) “vanishes into thin air.”²⁴ Pressed on whether he intended the route to achieve speed, foster sentiment, or encourage commerce, Huddart segmented the service, designating the Atlantic as the ocean for swift passage and looked at the Pacific from “a federal point of view.” On this basis, New Zealand, “the third colony of the Empire,” should be included.²⁵ Australian opposition left New Zealand reliant on a branch connection from Auckland to join the transpacific steamer at Suva, the Fiji Islands more centrally placed in the western Pacific. The

colony also depended on a parallel connection established in the 1870s between Sydney and San Francisco for the carriage of imperial mails, a point I return to later.

In these debates, timetable imperatives defined locational advantage and disadvantage in the Pacific. Appeals to civilization and race did so in other ways. The Australian colonies, out of place in their physical proximity to Asia, might through the CA Line enjoy a direct link to their “correct” cultural hemisphere. The Southern Hemisphere, peopled “by coloured, inferior, partly civilized races,” left the British of the South “out of that world which means history, population, wealth, power and culture,” lamented Huddart’s agent and route promoter, journalist Frederick Ward, to an audience in Vancouver. “It will be good for us Southerners to have the feeling of race quickened by the contact of travel amongst the British of the North.” This route reminded them that they shared with Canadians the “great task” of “subduing and replenishing” the earth. Traveling across Canada from west to east offered instructive history lessons. Conditions in western Canada mirrored the Australian frontier; further east travelers would find “an older America,” with civilization built up over many generations: “We simple youth of the South, we children of a half-century,” he enthused, “should be made wiser by coming amongst you.”²⁶

This imagined relationship between race and the production of space bound together the white settler colonies in empire. By facilitating exchanges and learning between them, the CA Line and its racialized imaginaries of mobility consolidated the elevated status of Australia and Canada in empire. British commentators also perceived such merits. “Every steerage passenger” traveling by this route to and from the Antipodes could observe firsthand Canada’s agricultural progress and the “facilities and opportunities offered to enterprise within the Empire.” They might thereby recognize the value of their own future labor to the “unity of Empire.” The ocean routes via Suez and the Cape of Good Hope communicated the importance of British mastery of the seas. The “All Red” route, in placing Canada “upon a

common highway,” added “conceptions of territorial settlement” to everyday understandings of Britain’s globe-spanning dominance.²⁷ The choice and direction of route, and not simply the more abstract prerogative of unfettered mobility, bolstered the image of the white settler on the move as the engine of empire progress.

Such considerations were of little consequence, however, to the imperial government that was more focused on maximizing its strategic and military gains from any subsidy or investment. Thus while joining Canada in 1889 to subsidize a North Pacific route from Vancouver to Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong (with contributions of £45,000 and £15,000, respectively), it could not see its way to support the CA Line nor its extension across the Atlantic, for which Huddart sought a total subsidy of £300,000. The North Pacific route offered Britain the advantages of an alternate pathway to possessions in India and China in the advent of hostilities in the Mediterranean and any potential blockade of the Suez Canal. A connection to Sydney had no such pressing strategic importance. With Canada’s backing, Huddart lobbied imperial authorities throughout the 1890s, setting out advantages for the carriage of mail and passengers, trade, and defense, rounding off his appeal by concluding it “is of such an Imperial nature as to make it historic.”²⁸ Promoters of an “All Red” Pacific telegraph cable between Canada and Australia couched its merits along similar lines, but that project also stalled in its quest to secure Britain’s backing.

Besides reflecting strategic priorities, this refusal revealed concerns that new centers of regional influence might spring up wholly independent of Britain, marginalizing London as a global and imperial hub of power and information.²⁹ But a sea route did not require the same initial outlay or fixed track infrastructure as a cable or rail network and thus was not as hamstrung without Britain. It could also be terminated easily by pulling off the ships and this, Melbourne’s *Argus* insisted, “renders it easy” for a government to take the plunge and “really test the value of the project” while risking little.³⁰ In some respects, by declining to support it,

Britain ceded the Pacific to the white settler colonies that were now in a position to forge links without direct reference to the metropole. In any case, the CA Line was not a suitable trade route for Australasian producers in British markets given the difficulties of transshipment to Canada's Atlantic coast. Beyond improved postal communication, the prospect of intra-Pacific trade between Australia and Canada, and with Fiji and Hawaii, caught the colonial imagination (but such commercial advantages, Britain stressed, would not motivate its support).³¹ Indeed, the route appeared to express a natural and self-supporting complementarity. As Ward put it to the British Columbia Board of Trade: "Here you have, as the basis of exchange, reversed seasons, different climates and varying natural wealth. And the tropical waters between the two countries are studded with islands of great fertility and capable of supplying many products which are now imported from more distant territories."³²

To promote such a trade entailed a challenge to established hubs of Pacific exchange, suggestive of the route's value beyond strictly British lines. San Francisco dominated trade to Hawaii by the late nineteenth century. The CA Line put Washington and Oregon in closer communication with Hawaii (via Vancouver), newly enabling a section of the Pacific coast that had been "practically cut off from the trade of Honolulu" to compete with San Francisco.³³ A north-south feeder rail had recently opened between Vancouver and Seattle, "integrating these frontiers into a binational borderland economy," as Kornel Chang outlines, and this might now extend westward into the Pacific.³⁴ The *San Francisco Call* reported on the inauguration of the CA Line under the headline, "After Our Trade: A Scheme Directly Designed to Injure San Francisco's Commerce," and cited Vancouver's growing trade with Honolulu.³⁵ Yet Canada was primarily concerned with ease of transshipment. At Vancouver the Canadian Pacific Railway facilitated a direct connection across the continent. To transship from Pacific steamers at San Francisco and enter Canada along the fragmented U.S. rail network entailed a journey along two or three lines. This gave the CA Line "the

advantage for us,” the Canadian trade commissioner in Sydney stressed, rather than the prospect of undercutting Californian monopoly over Pacific trade.³⁶

Still, if not to displace California, it was a “decided advantage to Canada to connect with a tropical country,” Ward asserted.³⁷ His pitch dovetailed with an emerging Canadian interest in the tropics. Access to tropical territory was imagined as “crucial to national development and the fulfilment of Canada’s ‘destiny’ in the hemisphere,” as historian Paula Hastings has recently observed with reference to the West Indies.³⁸ In fact, the subsidization of the Pacific service sparked proposals from other interested parties for parallel shipping lines to the West Indies, a region seemingly ripe for Canadian annexation and the focus of significant investment in banking and utilities infrastructure.³⁹ The prospect of a Canada aligned to the tropics appealed initially to the centers of population density closest to the Atlantic coast, and support of the CA Line did not prompt parallel campaigns for the extension of Canadian sovereignty over islands in the Pacific.

The new ideology of tropical colonization in other bastions of white settlement served to weaken route connections. Although the service was ostensibly “All Red,” Honolulu in the Hawaiian Kingdom was not part of the British Pacific. Hawaiian sovereignty came under direct challenge with the overthrow of the Indigenous monarchy by American citizens in 1893 and the institution of an independent republic. After the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898 and incorporated the island group as part of its territory in 1900, it placed protective duties against Australian and Canadian goods, while also terminating the carrying trade to and from U.S. territory contiguous to Vancouver.⁴⁰

In other ways, the extension of white settler domination might improve route connections. The Australian colonies were on a course to federation in the late nineteenth century, forming the six states of the Commonwealth in 1901. New Zealand interests expressed concern that an “enlarged” Australia would promote a faster Pacific mail service to

its continued exclusion. Accordingly, New Zealand needed to “retain and acquire as many islands as possible” to forestall Australia, for “if we are outside the line of mail route between Australia and North America, Samoa and Fiji are fairly on it.”⁴¹ I now turn to the immediate effect of growing colonial nationalism, intercolonial competition, and British–U.S. rivalry on the operation of the “All Red” route.

Early Twentieth-Century Realignments

Throughout the 1890s, colonial governments tested the value of the CA Line as Melbourne’s *Argus* had encouraged. Ships stopped calling at Suva when Fiji withdrew its subsidy (£1,500) in late 1895 until 1897, and again between 1899 and 1902. Wellington replaced Brisbane for fifteen months from mid-1898 until the revival of a Brisbane call. This uncertain operating environment contributed to the liquidation of Huddart’s venture in 1898 and the route was placed under a caretaker arrangement. He was “never really the same man” after failing to secure Britain’s backing for the transatlantic extension and died bankrupt and destitute in 1901. The “All Red” route, one obituary concluded, was conceived “before its proper time.”⁴² Its flagging career echoed previous struggles over the operation of the parallel Sydney–San Francisco route, when individual colonies and businessmen-financiers were unwilling to make long-term commitments or investments. By the late 1890s, with managerial capitalism transforming the shipping industry, no “lone swimmer” could survive in the transpacific trades.⁴³

New exclusions along the San Francisco route prompted a shift in ownership of the CA Line. Following the annexation of Hawaii, Honolulu became a coastal port of the United States, with foreign ships barred from coasting between Hawaii and California. What had been from 1885 a joint operation by the Oceanic Steamship Company of San Francisco and the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand (USSCo), the Sydney–San Francisco

service (via Honolulu) was now placed solely in American hands. Not discouraged from engaging in the transpacific sphere, the USSCo mobilized its experience and reputation for sound management to take a half-share in the management of the CA Line in 1901 (securing full ownership in 1910).

The exclusionary policies of the new “white” Australian nation presented other challenges. Mail contracts were now a federal responsibility. When the CA Line came up for renewal in 1903, Prime Minister Edmund Barton advised the USSCo that, excepting NSW and Queensland, the states were largely indifferent to the route. However, he perceived “it would be a popular thing for a Federal Government in connection with the cry for a ‘White Australia’ to favour a local line employing local men.”⁴⁴ The legislative framework of White Australia, enshrined in the Immigration Restriction Act, the Pacific Island Labourers Act, and the Post and Telegraph Act, all of 1901, sought to exclude and deport non-Europeans from the new nation. Such racialized boundary marking exposed new tensions in a multiracial empire.⁴⁵ The Post and Telegraph Act enforced a preferential white labor clause on mail steamers under federal contract. This targeted the premier imperial firm, P&O, which employed Indian crew on the Suez route. The CA Line, as Barton perceived, might offer some leverage if P&O demanded higher subsidies in compensation for carrying white crew at higher wages.⁴⁶ From 1903, Australia granted the CA Line two-year renewals, also seeing its value in countering growing American commercial competition and in promoting trade with Canada despite continued poor returns.⁴⁷ Unlike the Indian Ocean, the Pacific was more immediately a domain of settler-driven engagements, with the accompanying assertion of “all British” as “all white.”

The transoceanic projects and ambitions of Britain’s settler colonies and the United States in the Pacific were at once interdependent and in tension. The Australasian colonies originally hoped that opening a link between Sydney and Vancouver might signal to the

United States their dissatisfaction with the operation of the Sydney–San Francisco service. American steamers employed Chinese labor, and the U.S. government, unlike Canada, offered no subsidies. The United States also placed protective tariffs against colonial produce.⁴⁸ This tension was felt most acutely in New Zealand, which, in contrast to Australia, was forced to continue subsidizing the Sydney–San Francisco service even after it passed into American hands because it was its only direct link across the Pacific and onward to Britain. Even this line was suspended in 1906 following the San Francisco earthquake. Meanwhile, however, the American connection ignited periodic anxiety, and in subsidy renewal debates political leaders variously stressed history and kinship to claim America as merely “one big British colony,” or took a more pragmatic line, arguing that networks (and the commerce they promoted) ultimately mattered more than their imperial and national connections. As the minister of industries and commerce, Joseph Ward, put it in 1904: “Trade follows the flag but nowadays it is the flag of the steamship-line, not particularly the flag of any country, though naturally we favour the supporting of our own.”⁴⁹

The fact that New Zealand continued to subsidize Oceanic’s service to San Francisco (known as the Australia and America Line, or A&A Line), underlined the extent to which it kept its Pacific connections in pragmatic perspective. Perhaps it was no small consolation that U.S. shipping could not rival British operations until the interwar years nor deploy the kind of earth-girding rhetoric underpinning British claims to global maritime ascendancy. For its part, Oceanic too tried to insert itself into the Pacific within a system facilitating imperial mobility, including drawing on the ideology of the empire to entice British and colonial passengers. As its brochures queried: “Have you Traveled Homeward via the A&A line? If not through America, why not!”⁵⁰ Shorter than the CA Line, the route via San Francisco—the “geographical route” and “the old gateway” to England, as Oceanic’s New Zealand agent stressed—offered colonial travelers a quicker and more convenient route to the mother

country. In doing so it sought to displace any performance of empire loyalty implicit in the choice of the company (and route) to the final destination.⁵¹ However, in the interwar years, American shipping began to represent an imperial as well as commercial threat in the face of British wartime losses and underinvestment in its mercantile marine. Appeals to “patriotic travel” became more strident as a means to promote the Sydney–Vancouver service, which meanwhile had also developed a New Zealand leg of call.⁵²

The “All Red” route never lost its capacity to stir imperial debate. At the 1907 Colonial Conference speed emerged as a matter for high politics when the Canadian prime minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, reviving Huddart’s mission, moved a resolution for a fast “All Red” service across the Atlantic and Pacific, connecting Britain, Canada, and Australia.⁵³ Achieving increases in speed of even a few knots on this route was estimated to involve considerable additional running costs and significantly higher government subsidies. As against the current subsidy of about £60,000 on imperial shipping in the Pacific (divided between Canada, Australia, and Fiji in the amounts of £37,090, £26,258, and £2,282, respectively), a realistic annual subsidy for the faster service across both oceans was estimated at £800,000, nearly half of which would have to come from Britain. Moreover, the construction of the proposed four fast ships for the Atlantic and five for the Pacific would be well in excess of £6,000,000.⁵⁴ The conference unanimously affirmed the (nonbinding) resolution whose only practical effect may have been to distract from the more modest improvements that companies such as the USSCo sought, leaving its director James Mills to lament the resolution as “wild talk.”⁵⁵

Metropolitan commentators also expressed dismay at the proposals, and in doing so reasserted imperial priorities defined from London. Stillborn proposals for a faster “All Red” route were perhaps the first victims of Britain’s naval strategists seeking to confront the growing German naval threat by increasing burden sharing within the empire. Despite his

reputation as an imperialist, the naval strategist Sir John Colomb deprecated a fast “All Red” route, once heralded as the practical expression of imperial kinship, as “the practical example of a spurious patriotism.” Colonial politicians, he contended, should contribute to naval upkeep before making demands for new investments in commercial sea routes. Britain had no claim over the “world’s commonage”; its true sea responsibilities, he asserted, were naval.⁵⁶ These views echoed liberal opinion, the *Economist* unsurprisingly rejecting the “glorification” of “All Red” routes as running “counter to geography” and representing “a fight against Nature” (which transshipping at both Canada’s Pacific and Atlantic ports appeared to do).⁵⁷

Britain’s Board of Trade considered the scheme, but dismissed it on the grounds that the transpacific leg would never pay. Canada, hopeful that combined Dominion pressure might encourage Britain to reconsider, lobbied Australia unsuccessfully.⁵⁸ By late 1909 the express scheme was “dead.”⁵⁹ Australia withdrew its Pacific subsidies in 1911, believing the Suez and Cape of Good Hope routes were adequate (the latter no less “All Red,” Prime Minister Andrew Fisher declared, in linking Australia and South Africa).⁶⁰ New Zealand’s diminished status was finally surmounted when, at Canada’s insistence, the 1911 contract included Auckland in preference to Brisbane.⁶¹ The route was renamed the “Canadian Australasian” Line to better reflect this (Canada granted £37,000, New Zealand £20,000, and Fiji £5,000). This represented the final itinerary alteration until the route’s termination four decades later in 1953.⁶²

A federated Australia might turn its back on the service, but NSW’s long-standing importance as a hub of Pacific shipping and trade could not be reversed so easily. Even without Australian subsidies Sydney remained the terminal port. The commercial logic of the network in a sense trumped the fractured political commitment toward it. Yet New Zealand now represented to Australia a series of obstructions over and above cost in time. A call at

Auckland was “a drawback and a danger to Australia,” Senator James McColl protested, citing cases where prospective migrants were persuaded to leave ships there instead of continuing to Sydney.⁶³ New Zealand exporters received preference for refrigerated cargo space over Australian requests, preempting them on the Canadian market. Canada admitted New Zealand produce at lower rates than Australian goods on the basis of their 1904 preferential tariff agreement. To grant an Australian subsidy would now equate to supporting a trade competitor. There was “no unfriendly feeling in Australia,” stressed Fisher, but it was a “matter of business, and there is very little sentiment in business when we are dealing with the affairs of our own countries.”⁶⁴

Conclusion

The “All Red” route, in the words of the British Conservative MP Sir George Baden-Powell in 1891, was predicted to become a “great Imperial artery, distributing life-blood all along its course, and assisting, with national pulsations, to develop oneness of aim and close co-operation among all these great provinces of the British Empire.”⁶⁵ Organic metaphors that connected the empire with the human body were typical of the era, as new transport and communications technologies made it possible to conceive of empire in its global entirety for the first time.⁶⁶ Splashes of red across world maps communicated the extent of Britain’s extraterritorial reach (even as sovereignty over these spaces was highly contested), yet the challenge remained to secure reliable connections between possessions dispersed across vast oceans. Integrated sea and rail routes would hold the empire together. Framing the steamer line between Vancouver and Sydney as empire’s “missing link” made it appear pressing and, indeed, imperative to bridge the Pacific in this way, a connection that would complete the imperial circuit of the globe.

Although propelled by ideals of global (Anglo) Britishness, without metropolitan backing the CA Line was effectively a settler-colonial project, orienting Canada and Australia to each other and the Pacific realm between. For proponents of the line, the two colonies had the “same mission in the outer Empire,” as Fleming put it, and this connection would foster understanding of a shared investment in building up civilization in new world territories. The Australian colonies, uncomfortable in their geographic proximity to Asia, would be placed in their “correct” cultural hemisphere through closer connections with Canada, learning from the progress of their white brethren. While these strongholds at the ocean’s rim might themselves be cohering as sites of racial exclusion, this was an expansive ideology, championing the ocean being carved out as a space for white mobility.

The route promised a mutually reassuring connection between two outposts of settler colonialism, but it was more than merely a means of physically bridging the gulf between Canada and Australia. Its promised mobilities promoted the expression of settler-colonial identity that was more overtly “white-minded” than Britain with its professions of multiracial imperial citizenship. Nor should the success or otherwise of the line, or the many pressures and constraints with which it had to contend, be allowed to distract from the expansive ideological visions to which it gave expression, both within and beyond the empire. In the longer run it became a prelude to reimagining a Pacific subdued into a benign, affirming, and familiar space by intensified settler activity, in which tropical island colonies were domesticated into secure nodes for white traffic and trade. The accompanying rhetoric mirrored the promise of “empty” lands, fashioning the Pacific as a virgin ocean and a new frontier, a natural domain for extending settler-colonial power and influence, and offering prospects of new markets, resources, and wealth. A self-assertive challenge to the imperial metropole, a zone of commerce unmediated by it across the Pacific between Canada and

Australia and with the United States and the islands in between, reinforced from a material standpoint, this “white” vision of the Pacific in a nominally multiracial empire.

¹ Research for this article was supported by the Australian Research Council (project DE120101731). Jeannine Baker and Helen Bones provided valuable research assistance. I would also like to thank Georgine Clarsen for facilitating this special section and her and Julia Martinez for their constructive feedback on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the journal’s three anonymous reviewers for their perceptive and helpful comments.

² *Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1887* (London, 1887), 12–13.

³ Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future World Order, 1860–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76.

⁴ Tony Ballantyne, “Mobility, Empire, Colonisation,” *History Australia* 11, no. 2 (2014): 7–37, here: 19.

⁵ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). But see also Penelope Edmonds, “‘I Followed England Round the World’: The Rise of Trans-Imperial Anglo-Saxon Exceptionalism and the Spatial Narratives of Nineteenth-Century British Settler Colonies of the Pacific Rim,” in *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, ed. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, and Katherine Ellinghaus, 99–118 (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

⁶ Ballantyne, “Mobility, Empire, Colonisation.”

⁷ The “All Red” claim was not exclusive to the Pacific setting but applied to other imperial shipping routes and communications infrastructures. For example, P. M. Kennedy, “Imperial

Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870–1914,” *English Historical Review* 86, no. 341 (1971): 728–752.

⁸ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, ed. Bridge and Fedorowich, 1–15 (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 6.

⁹ For example, Andrew Porter, *Victorian Shipping, Business and Imperial Policy: Donald Currie, the Castle Line and Southern Africa* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1986); Forbes J. Munro, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire: Sir William Mackinnon and his Business Network, 1823–93* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003); Freda Harcourt, *Flagships of Imperialism: The P&O Company and the Politics of Empire from Its Origins to 1867* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ See, for example, David Killingray, Margarete Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, eds. *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004); Miles Taylor, ed., *The Victorian Empire and Britain’s Maritime World, 1837–1901* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jonathan Hyslop, “Steamship Empire: Asian, African and British Sailors in the Merchant Marine, c. 1880–1945,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44, no. 1 (2009): 49–67. For an account more attentive to sea travel and the shaping of imperial space, see Tamson Pietsch, “A British Sea: Making Sense of Global Space in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Global History* 5 no. 3 (2010): 423–446.

¹¹ Frances Steel, *Oceania under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c. 1870–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

¹² Colin Divall, “Mobilities and Transport History,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, ed. Peter Adey et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 37.

¹³ Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, “Introduction,” in *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. Cresswell and Merriman, 1–15 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 7.

¹⁴ Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52 no. 2 (2013): 441–463 here: 441.

¹⁵ Julie Cidell, “Fear of a Foreign Railroad: Transnationalism, Trainspace, and (Im)mobility in the Chicago Suburbs,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographer* 37 no. 4 (2011): 593–608 here: 595, 597, 604.

¹⁶ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 264; Daniel Deudney, “Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis? Seeley, Mackinder, and Wells on Britain in the Global Industrial Era,” *Review of International Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 187–208. See also Edmonds, “I Followed England Round the World”; Deryck M. Schreuder, “Empire, Australia and Greater Britain, 1788–1901,” in *The Cambridge History of Australia*, ed. Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre, 511–534 (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 15.

¹⁷ Deudney, “Greater Britain or Greater Synthesis?” 190; Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, esp. ch. 3.

¹⁸ *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February 1886, 4.

¹⁹ *Argus*, 13 February 1886, 13; *Times*, 16 May 1893, 4.

²⁰ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 460.

²¹ *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Fifteenth Parliament, Session 1892–93*, vol. 66 (Sydney: 1893), 8171.

²² *Ibid.*, 8187–8188.

²³ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, 45.

²⁴ *Proceedings of Colonial Conference 1894* (London, 1894), 232.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 237–238.

-
- ²⁶ “From Australia Direct,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 9 June 1893, 8. See also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1893, 8.
- ²⁷ “The Colonies,” *Times*, 13 March 1894, 13.
- ²⁸ Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC), Agriculture Department, RG 17, vol. 772, File no. 90589, James Huddart to members of Imperial cabinet, 29 November 1893.
- ²⁹ Robert W. D. Boyce, “Imperial Dreams and National Realities: Britain, Canada and the Struggle for a Pacific Telegraph Cable, 1879–1902,” *English Historical Review* 115 no. 460 (2000): 39–70, esp. 51.
- ³⁰ *Argus*, 11 April 1893, 4.
- ³¹ *Proceedings of Colonial Conference 1894*, 233.
- ³² “Australian Trade,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 9 July 1893, 3; “The Canadian Mail Service,” *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 12 August 1893, 324; T. A. Coghlan, *A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia, 1895–96* (Sydney: Government Printer, 1896), 186. There were dissenting voices insisting Canada had no market for anything Australia could send, or that their products were too similar. For example, “Trade with Canada,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 June 1893, 6.
- ³³ “Prospects Are Bright,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 July 1893, 6.
- ³⁴ Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the US–Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 20.
- ³⁵ *San Francisco Call*, 30 September 1893, 1.
- ³⁶ “Trade with Canada,” *Otago Daily Times*, 7 December 1897, 3. For a discussion of this rail line as an “absolute system,” see Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Norton, 2011), 144–146.
- ³⁷ “From Australia Direct,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 9 June 1893, 8.

³⁸ Paula Hastings, "Rounding Off the Confederation: Geopolitics, Tropicality and Canada's 'Destiny' in the West Indies in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14 no. 2 (2013).

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v014/14.2.hastings.html

³⁹ For early proposals for steamship routes to the West Indies articulated with reference to the CA Line, see LAC, Sir Mackenzie Bowell, Correspondence. Letters received, MG26E, 1 (A), vol. 13-14-15, 16 June 1894; Papers of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, vol. 23, file no. 7993–7999, Microfilm: C-743, vol. 20, file no. 7265, 18 October 1896.

⁴⁰ "Australian Canadian Mail Service," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1903, 4.

⁴¹ "Our Relative Position," *Hawera and Normanby Star*, 18 April 1899, 2. Premier Richard Seddon, who pushed for the New Zealand annexation of British Fiji between 1900 and 1902, argued in 1900 for a New Zealand empire, for Australia "will think more of us as a nation . . . with islands of our own." Cited in Angus Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 271.

⁴² *Chronicle* [Adelaide], 6 April 1901, 6; G. R. Henning, "Huddart, James (1847–1901)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/huddart-james-3809/text6043> (accessed 27 November 2012).

⁴³ Gavin McLean, *The Southern Octopus: The Rise of a Shipping Empire* (Wellington: New Zealand Ship and Marine Society, 1990), 139.

⁴⁴ Wellington City Archives (WCA), USSCo Records, AF080: 148:7, Jackson to Mills, 31 January 1903. As also borne out in editorial commentary, for instance, *Evening News*, 16 August 1904, 7; *North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, 15 June 1904, 2.

⁴⁵ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, ch. 6.

⁴⁶ WCA, USSCo Records, AF080: 148:7, Jackson to Mills, 31 January 1903. For more on imperial politics and maritime labor, see G. Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives*, Canadian Australian Mail Contract, 1 July 1903. The subsidy now amounted to £24,000, paid by all states on a per capita basis (as compared to £72,000 for the Suez service for which the imperial government contributed an additional £98,000).

⁴⁸ This was the resolution of an intercolonial postal conference in Brisbane in early 1893, *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), F-4 (Wellington: Government Printer, 1893), 23–24.

⁴⁹ “Our Mail Services,” *Evening Post*, 18 October 1901, 2; AJHR, Industries and Commerce Report, 23 August 1904, H-17 (Wellington: Government Printer, 1904), 2.

⁵⁰ Huntington Library, John H. Kemble maritime ephemera collection, digital identifier 325234, 1903.

⁵¹ “Vancouver Mail Service,” *Marlborough Express*, 23 May 1907, 6.

⁵² Frances Steel, “‘Fiji Is Really the Honolulu of the Dominion’: Tourism, Empire and New Zealand’s Pacific, c. 1900–1935,” in *New Zealand’s Empire*, ed. Catharine Coleborne and Katie Pickles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, in press). See also, Greg Kennedy, “American and British Merchant Shipping: Competition and Preparation, 1933–39,” in *The Merchant Marine in International Affairs, 1850–1950*, ed. Greg Kennedy, 107–154 (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

⁵³ *Minutes of Proceedings of the Colonial Conference, 1907* (London, 1907), 566–567.

⁵⁴ “The All-Red Route,” *Times*, 18 December 1907, 11.

⁵⁵ Cited in McLean, *The Southern Octopus*, 134.

⁵⁶ “The All-Red Route: A Blue Look-Out,” *Times*, 25 December 25, 1907, 12.

⁵⁷ *Economist*, 22 June 1907, 1058–1059 and 3 August 1907, 1306–1307.

⁵⁸ National Archives of Australia (Melbourne), Postmaster General's Department, MP273/1/0, 1910/3791, "All Red Route" Report of R.M. Coulter re his negotiations.

⁵⁹ WCA, USSCo Records, AF080:36:1, Mills to Jackson, 20 October 1909.

⁶⁰ *Minutes of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference* (London, 1911), 351.

⁶¹ "Vancouver Mail Service," *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 156 (Wellington, 1911), 22–34.

⁶² For an account of the fortunes of the service to 1953, see Frances Steel, "Lines across the Sea: Trans-Pacific Passenger Shipping in the Age of Steam," in *The Routledge History of Western Empires*, ed. Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie, 315–329 (London: Routledge, 2013); J. H. Hamilton, "The 'All-Red Route,' 1853–1953: A History of the Trans-Pacific Mail Service between British Columbia, Australia and New Zealand," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 20 (1956): 1–126.

⁶³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates: The Senate*, 13 September 1911.

⁶⁴ *Minutes of Proceedings of the Imperial Conference* (London, 1911), 350, 356.

⁶⁵ Hocken Collections, USSCo Records, AG-292-005-001/031, enclosure: Sir George Baden-Powell, "The New Mail Route to China and Australia," *Supplement to the Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 10 February 1891.

⁶⁶ Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*, esp. 86–87.