

## INTRODUCTION

The renewed activity of US corporations and the military support provided to them in the aftermath of the Vietnam War has inspired some historians to return to studying the history of empire, particularly in the years since the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq. The role that the mainstream media and popular culture played in winning popular support, particularly for the invasion of Iraq led by the US, is well documented.<sup>1</sup> From the use of pro-war Generals as ‘impartial’ news analysts to the *Sturm und Drang* of the news programmes themselves, the invasion was presented as a war on tyranny and the only reasonable course of action. The fact that Saddam Hussein’s career originated on the CIA payroll and that he was assisted by US aid was never mentioned. Mainstream news outlets were vocal about his use of poison gas on the Kurds in the 1980s but silent on the fact that he bought the gas from a US corporation with the blessing of the Reagan administration. The weapons of mass destruction that would allegedly create a mushroom cloud over New York if we did nothing were known not to be there by weapons inspectors before the invasion, but the mainstream media ignored this. Prime time television programmes such as *24* rationalized and even glorified the use of torture. It was hard to read a newspaper, watch television, or even go to a sporting event without encountering a narrative that assumed the invasion was on the side of the angels. In the aftermath of this flurry of militarism, it seems compelling to ask when this cultural support for what is now generally called ‘American Empire’ began and what this support initially looked like.

This book engages the myth-making qualities of frontier performances to establish a spectrum of assumptions and study how they work to perpetuate, or resist, imperial expansion. The myth-making and myth-perpetuating qualities of performances make them useful for studying the history of the assumptions embraced by societies.<sup>2</sup> In this case the focus is on indigenous and colonial societies of the late colonial, revolutionary and early republic period in English-speaking North America to the Civil War. In surveying this spectrum, I look at performances ranging from the rituals and ceremonies of indigenous peoples to the theatre culture of the colonial society.

The focus of this book is to discover what imperial culture, in the form of performance, looked like *qua imperial*. In this endeavour it seems reasonable to ask to what extent the propensity for conquest was built into the political economics of the society itself. Indeed, colonialism – the process of occupying and appropriating the land and resources of an indigenous population (and in this case the labour of involuntary colonists) – is at the very heart of so-called western society. To this day, the ‘Empire’ is dependent upon the exploitation of labour and resources to maintain its currently tottering economy. That this system is not only bankrupt but unsustainable is a point at last coming home to all but the most recalcitrant observers. For example, the observation that with five percent of the world’s population, the US consumes twenty-five percent of the world’s resources while producing about one third of its pollution has almost become a cliché in some circles. These are, as writer and activist John Perkins has pointed out, the properties of a failed system, a system that certainly cannot be adopted universally.<sup>3</sup> What, culturally, has prevented the majority of people from responding to this situation? What, historically, created this culture of denial, wilful ignorance and repression?

The vast majority of the initial concentrations of wealth in the US, as in other imperial economies, was produced by expropriating the land of the indigenous inhabitants of North America, the forced labour of these ‘Indians’ and Africans, or both. Some argue that the triumph of Enlightenment rationalism overshadows these injustices.<sup>4</sup> However, the awareness of the scientific process, discovery and the constructive application of these ideas through technology could have proceeded without the profound destruction visited upon Native Americans or via the Atlantic slave trade. There are numerous examples of coexistence between indigenous peoples and colonists as well as colonists who embraced indigenous culture. What fuelled the attitude of conquest was the desire to obtain massive material wealth and accompanying political power. Whether one characterizes the resulting system as mercantilism or capitalism, the striving for individual wealth and power couched in the pursuit of the national interest, employing technological developments, religious justification and the normalizing of this process by a growing imperial culture has been the engine driving these developments. It is to the last of these that this study turns its attention.

Empire, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the colonial expansionism inherent in the libertarian economics of the British Empire and its scion, the United States. This includes economic and military expansion, linguistic dominance in the renaming of geographical features and even of people, and the use of debt and reward to coerce those whose land and resources the economic titans desired.<sup>5</sup> The proverbial ‘market economy’ reduced the independence of the indigenous peoples of North America by coaxing them into abandoning traditional skills for European manufactured goods. This dependence proved to

be their downfall, more so than disease or war, because it enabled speculators, jobbers, government officials and others to ply the Native Americans with these goods while sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly appropriating their land base. If negotiations failed to achieve desired results, the military was brought in to force the issue. As historian Kathleen Wilson observed in her study of empire and the popular press of England, 'empire was at heart about trade, commerce, accumulation, and consumption, and as such augmented national, as well individual standing, wealth and power.' It also fed ethnocentric formulations of power as well as enthusiasm for the exotic and primitive; and it legitimated empire to its 'domestic customers.'<sup>6</sup> This was also the case in the Anglo-American Empire of North America.

The analysis and critique of this empire has, of course, been going on as long as the empire itself. Since the Second World War, literary and cultural scholars were among the first to argue that the United States was an empire from its beginnings. Dating back to Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* and Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, a body of historical literature that resisted the assumptions of imperial economics blazed a trail that historians have increasingly acknowledged and followed.<sup>7</sup> By the 1970s, works by Richard Slotkin, Robert Berkhofer and others confronted the mythic dimension of American historical thought, serving a function not unlike that of Charles Beard earlier in the century: confronting imperial views of violence, hegemony and economics that were cloaked in a mythic rhetoric of nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Recent literary scholars have continued the trend. Felicity Nussbaum, Amy Kaplan, Donald Pease and Andy Doolen have all focused on America as empire.<sup>9</sup> Increasingly, historians are also coming to this conclusion. Works by Walter Nugent, Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, as well as Andrew Bacevich, have acknowledged that American Empire existed from the beginning and conquered North America before it sought resources and markets elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Catherine Hall, Kathleen Wilson and Ann Laura Stoler have significantly interrupted the traditional narrative of British and US history as spreading Enlightenment rationalism, giving 'new imperial history' a place at the historiographical table. It is no accident that women should be in the vanguard of critical imperial studies, having been marginalized for much of this history. In addition to their own writing, each of these scholars has edited at least one anthology that delves into the race, class and particularly gender aspects of imperial repression.<sup>11</sup> What is particularly potent about these works is their attention to how empire affects, disrupts and re-orders the most intimate details in the lives of ordinary people. Rape, slavery, national identity, narrow definitions of citizenship and the interaction of oppressed peoples to breed resistance are all hallmarks of empire; as are shadow governments, manipulation of patriotic sentiment and institu-

tionalized deceit. These phenomena are increasingly well documented in this emerging critique of empire.

The history of Indian/White relations is central to this study, spanning as it does the frontier line. In this area, recent works by Cynthia Cumfer, David Andrew Nichols and an older book by Dorothy V. Jones have helped set the stage, as it were, for the present study. Cumfer has engaged a topic that is increasingly difficult to dismiss: that there was indeed an indigenous (and African American) discourse in the period of the early American republic. Nichols has provided a needed nuance that is neatly summed up in the title of his study *Red Gentlemen and White Savages*. He explains some of the complex difficulties the first US government faced regarding Indian/White relations on the frontier. Jones's study of Indian treaties and how empire was furthered by them is a political and diplomatic history of material I approach in a cultural context.<sup>12</sup> The legion of treaty minutes, ethnohistories and ethnographies that provide much of the source material for the present study are too numerous to summarize here, but they can be found in the book's endnotes and bibliography.

As much as this seeks to take a place in the literature of critical imperial history, it is perhaps even more embedded in the discourse of ritual and theatre performance. What makes this study unique is that it compares and contrasts the entire spectrum of performance from indigenous rituals to colonial and national theatre on and near the cultural frontier of British and Euro-American expansion with a critical eye to the process of empire. In this regard, the separation of 'indigenous' from 'colonial' and the point where the transformation from one to the other occurs is key.

When referring to the 'colonial', I am using the adjectival form of the concept of control by a culturally foreign power over an indigenous, dependent area or people, or policies advocating such control.<sup>13</sup> The use of the adjective 'indigenous' refers to the native, or 'that which is produced within' a particular region, to extrapolate from the Old Latin origins of the word. Representations of the indigenous culture are found in the local environment, and they display an intimacy with the resource base absent in colonial culture. Important in the dichotomy between indigenous and colonial is that the colonial culture, politics and religion are definitively non-native. In North America during the period of this study, the expanding colonial empire 'practised' a religion originating in the Mediterranean and Near East that centred on an omniscient Semitic god of war. This empire bore mores, philosophies and folklores that emerged in the European environment. North America, to the purveyors of empire, was seen as a source of wealth, power and independence from old regimes. Policy makers, whether British or Euro-American, put libertarian economics and the pursuit of resources and markets ahead of considerations that those focused on the 'indigenous' worldview might choose. For natives, not only was religion entwined with

all other aspects of daily life, it involved local phenomena. The equivalent of the Europeans' Bible stories took place not in Damascus or Galilee, but in Lake Erie, or in the Alleghenies, or under the Platte River. The resource base, to use a colonial expression, had not been de-sacralized as it had for those following the Hellenic-Judeo-Christian-Islamic view of the world. In this Manichean view, many immigrants to North America were as dogmatic about Classical concepts as they were about religion; indeed Humanism was a descendent of Hellenism. As economic empire increased its influence in the New World, the commoditization of resources, including the land itself, became an assumption which spread into the homes and villages of some of the indigenous peoples. Profit, and power for acquiring more profit, were placed above all else. Where, for example, the women leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy weighed decisions based on their potential impact on future generations, imperial power-brokers weighed decisions based on maximizing profit-potential in the immediate future. I hasten to add that I am not arguing that this was a Manichean world of evil Europeans *versus* benevolent Native Americans. These are concepts I am defining, not people I am describing. Many Europeans expressed deep concerns over long-term impacts of policies, and many Indians pursued their own short-term gain. But generally speaking, the concepts of 'indigenous' and 'colonial' provide useful analytical tools for assessing the impact of economic empire in North America and, more importantly for this study, how the performances on the frontier both revealed and created the expression of the colonial and indigenous and helped shape the identities and assumptions associated with each.

Historians and literary scholars have marked the beginning of an association between the theatre and the rising market economy as early as the Elizabethan period in England. For example, Jean-Christophe Agnew's *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* is an analysis of the theatre and the market in Tudor and Stuart England. Agnew shows how these institutions grew together as the market became more abstract and theatre became more commercial. Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, operating within the expanding market economy, helped to 'explain' to its audiences the new economic system that arose out of the 'Mediterranean System' of trade. In so doing it created what Agnew calls 'another nature', an artificial world in which the market and the theatre became increasingly abstract entities. The market became abstracted in the sense of moving away from being a specific *place* to a way of doing business through investments and commodity manipulation. The theatre became abstracted in the sense of moving away from a numinous ritual based on seasonal events associated with rites of passage, ceremonies and agriculture,<sup>14</sup> to representing individuals engaged in the culture of an abstract market economy. This culture, a way of life constructed around the transaction and the contract,

is what I am calling 'colonial', which is to be taken synonymously with the terms 'culture of empire' or 'imperial culture', terms I frequently use in this study.

The transformation of the market from a *location* to a *concept* was pregnant with empire's need for expansion. The spread of this concept through society was abetted and accompanied, Agnew shows, by its long time companion on the fringes of English traditional society: the theatre. Individuals within this empire increasingly saw themselves in ways that came to be defined, in part, by these two entities that had existed as 'worlds apart' from the medieval farm and village.<sup>15</sup> It was also, I argue, a world apart from the indigenous paradigm where the human and the non-human were unified. Agnew established that from the outset of the late medieval and Renaissance eras, theatre and market economics became joined at the hip. As this economic system grew and the demand for more natural resources and markets increased so did the push for national expansion, and such demand was reflected in theatre performances.

In theorizing and defining the interpretation and analysis of the 'indigenous' quality, the present study relies on the fieldwork of anthropologists, especially A. Irving Hallowell, Frank Speck, Adrian Tanner, Gene Weltfish as well as religious scholars Kenneth M. Morrison, Benson Saler and Lee Irwin.<sup>16</sup> These scholars have all struggled with the problem of using western linguistic and ontological constructions to describe non-western phenomena, a perennial issue in cultural studies. As literary critic David Scott observed, 'Postcolonialism has been concerned principally with the decolonization of representation: the decolonization of the West's theory of the non-West.'<sup>17</sup> While there was no specific science of anthropology as we understand it today, there were a few astute observers in this period who wrote down some of their experiences, supplying most of the historical record of Native American performance. There is, nevertheless, a paucity of sources illustrating the contrast between the colonial performances of the Anglo colonists and the indigenous performances of Native Americans. As a result, I include examples drawn from other periods, both before and after the period under discussion, but from nevertheless a very similar cultural context to the historical moment under consideration. The danger of drawing ahistorical conclusions is noted and appreciated, but the goal is to establish a spectrum of performance between indigenous and colonial cultures. To that end, I believe this justifies venturing briefly out of the immediate time period under examination at times.

From the scholars mentioned above (and others), studies of indigenous cultures range from sixteenth-century New France to twentieth-century Labrador. While indigenous American cultures were as many and varied as those of pre-modern Europe, there were certain qualities that were fairly common and provide an 'indigenous' paradigm to serve as a foil to the 'colonial' in this comparative study. A. Irving Hallowell, for example, was convinced that there was

an 'indigenous' paradigm in North America. He was convinced that, contrary to assumptions projected onto them by colonial culture, the Ojibwa peoples he studied had no concept of the 'supernatural'. There were forces that were 'extraordinary' and differed from the 'ordinary' in their power, but there was no differentiation and therefore no terminology for a supernatural / natural dichotomy. Forces which acted on humans, Hallowell observed, were considered equal to humans; indeed, the English word that Hallowell's subjects used in translating the concept of these forces was 'person'. 'Persons' are entities that have power; that is, they can exert their influence on other entities. Some 'persons' are human and some are not; some you can see, some you cannot. The important point is that they have agency and need to be respected. These 'persons', including humans, are a part of the Universe, which has intelligence.<sup>18</sup> The obvious and important contrast with the culture of the expanding empire during the period under study is that 'persons' were human only. Humans were placed on a pedestal by the culture and religion of the colonists and *that* is at the heart of the 'colonial' view – that humans were above and could conquer the forces that acted on other species. That human agency, especially since the Industrial Revolution, has been growing in its seeming domination of the planetary unit as a whole, through technology, driven by the acquisition of resources, markets and, at base, private material gain, is not controversial. That this domination may have serious consequences for all the 'persons' on the planet is a central issue of our time.

The conundrum of cultural history is how to reliably describe a past reality given the paucity of sources that typifies investigations in this area. This is particularly true for audience studies. Studying 'rival representations', like 'colonial' and 'indigenous', has value in that it can reveal how one group imposes, or attempts to impose, its values on another. Representations in the social sphere 'give unconscious expressions to the positions and interests of social agents as they interact'<sup>19</sup> and describe society as those agents saw it. Creating assumptions also imposes order to a depth beyond the ability of any physical coercion, and in that regard this book is a study of the varieties of *mentalités* operating on the frontier of North America. This book is not, *per se*, a Foucauldian or *Annalistes* study of culture, although it is certainly influenced by those bodies of theory. This study is epistemologically shaped not only by the scholars mentioned above, but also by recent developments in the field of cognitive studies. In this regard, theatre historians Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart have both written essays and jointly edited an anthology on the potentialities of cognitive studies in cultural history.<sup>20</sup> I have found their discussions of 'reliable epistemology' involving 'simulation' and 'embodiment' – concepts adapted from cognitive studies – particularly compelling. Two aspects of lived discourse seem missing from studies of cultural history: experience and the acknowledgement of *embodied* subjectivity – that is to say, the presence of the mind in the body as

representing a body of knowledge not disconnected from the body but centring on it. Neither postmodern relativity nor objectivism acknowledges embodied experience, and this lack of embodiment is central in the separation of colonial from indigenous discourses. As Hart and McConachie observe, the attention to textual representation as the basis of an imperfectly understood reality on the one hand, and a naive positivist historical epistemology that strives for a Historical Truth on the other have dominated cultural history to this point. Neither seems satisfactory in moving the conversation of cultural history forward. Hart and McConachie turn primarily to the joint work of linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson for a scientific basis for their episteme.

This work is focused on maintaining a connection between linguistic, literary and other cultural phenomena and the presence of the body as their *a priori* source. The human body contains our 'sensorimotor apparatus, which enables us to perceive, move, and manipulate', and 'the detailed structures of our brains which have been shaped by both evolution and experience'.<sup>21</sup> Hart elaborates on the use of this notion in theatre and performance studies, developing the idea of 'embodied realism'. In a statement that is key to the theoretical construct of the present study, helping to blaze a path forward past the impasse of relativism and positivism, she observes that:

Both our experience of reality and our knowledge of that reality are contingent upon the brain and mind's shaping by the body, which is itself shaped by evolution and by the particularities of its experience. The relativity this gives rise to, however, is limited in degree since the body's particular experiences and the knowledge those experiences beget are both constrained by a positively experienced reality (positively in the sense that there really is a reality out there), specifically, by the cultural, historical, and environmental conditions in which the body is embedded.<sup>22</sup>

This acknowledgement of 'environmental conditions' is the keystone in my own epistemological construction for this book. What I am proposing is to utilize a combination of this vein of cognitive studies as applied to theatre and performance events and view toward, (or ignorance of), the environment in which our bodies are imbedded. As noted, differences in the performances in the times and places studied here can be charted on a continuum ranging from the 'indigenous', where the entire cultural milieu of the performances are embedded in the environment of the participating bodies; to the 'colonial', where the environment is notably absent or limited to the immediate spatial dimension that locates the performance.

Another important aspect of cognitive studies, adapted from the work of philosopher Robert Gordon that is useful to cultural historians is the idea of 'simulation'. Bruce McConachie explicates this usefulness in his critique of Eric Lott's groundbreaking book *Love and Theft*. In this book, Lott employs a psy-

choanalytical analysis of blackface<sup>23</sup> ‘wench acts’, and McConachie contrasts this with a description of a ‘simulation’ approach to historical analysis. In the simulation approach, the historian asks himself what it might have been like to see a white man dressed up as a black woman, acting the part and to suddenly see ‘big feet or strong knees’ erupt from under the wench’s dress. That the historian can know, understanding the cultural context of the time and through the empathetic projection of their own experience and humanity into the eyes of the audience, what that experience may have been like, albeit in a limited way, is the essence of simulation. The identification of the audience with the ‘true’ person, in this case the white male actor, under the blackface make-up and the dress, is an identification that the historian shares, although removed temporally and spatially from the event. McConachie cites historian Christine Stansell’s observation that, in the context of the 1840s and 1850s, females were gaining autonomy at home and in the workplace, creating a renegotiation of ‘what, exactly, men and women owed each other’. White, male, working class audiences, who had grown up in an environment where women had less autonomy, would have appreciated this representation of ‘putting females in their place.’<sup>24</sup> In terms of empire, I would add that the derisive depiction of black women as both prostitutes and slaves in these wench acts maintained an assumption of white supremacy and a rationale for slavery and the slave trade. As others have noted, this was a structural element in American imperial culture before, during and after the Civil War. Simulation is, in sum, the reasonable and intellectually honest projection of the historian’s experienced judgement into past situations to overcome the limitations of objectivism and relativism. This ‘breakthrough’ in the use of cognitive studies to help provide a reliable epistemology is a welcome opportunity to critique what is, by these definitions, a colonial paradigm that continues to *in-form* conversations in cultural history. In other words, scholars have been forced to use these colonially-constructed (that is, detached from the environment) concepts to describe the imperialist nature of the paradigm. Critics of power structures like Michel Foucault themselves employ a detached epistemology (‘colonial’ by my definition) to describe the power structures embedded in modern institutions. His discussions of these embedded power structures have been vital in the evolution of our understanding of that topic. However, nowhere in the writings of the main theorists of cultural history, to my knowledge, is the mention of this embedded-ness of the body in the environment – the vital role of the resource base in the existence of humanity. One must turn to what I am calling an ‘indigenous discourse’, the conversation with the environment that humans sustained for millennia before the de-sacralization of the world took us down the path we are currently on.<sup>25</sup>

The results of the ‘colonial discourse’ are striking. The ‘indigenous discourse’ enabled human beings to flourish, to varying degrees, for hundreds of thou-

sands of years. In a matter of centuries, a discourse that detaches humans from their bodies and places us on a pedestal above our fellow creatures and hence the environment, has fouled the waters, is poisoning the air, destroying mountains and spreading destruction on a massive scale. The difference between these two discourses centres on the reality that the body, home of the brain, must be fed. In colonial discourse, the mind exists independently of the body. There is no acknowledgement that these deep and complex discussions of philosophical moment would not be happening if the source of food failed. Food, the connection between mind, brain, body and the earth, does not, in a meaningful sense, exist in the colonial discourse. In the indigenous discourse, food is the centrepiece of the vast majority of performance activity and the society-at-large. This is not because people are starving or near starvation, but because it is central to their world view. This is why, simply put, when the colonists became the dominant culture, the health of the environment deteriorated, sometimes at breakneck speed. From Socrates and Aristotle to Kant and Saussure to Foucault and Derrida, the acknowledgement of the absolute necessity and vitality of the resource base – food – is missing. The indigenous world view builds this into its everyday life. Ceremonies welcoming the sunrise, acknowledgements of the sacred act of taking a life for food, seasonal cycles of ceremonies such as the Green Corn Ceremony gave thanks and expressed humility for the gift of sustenance. With the arrival of the colonists' mercantilist and capitalist systems, these natural resources and many others were counted as commodities, to exist at the whim and for the exploitation of those who financed and coordinated that exploitation. The vitality and absolute necessity of food and honouring its source was included, if at all, only as an afterthought, in the performances, discourses and religions of the colonists. This split between the colonial and indigenous, as manifested in the embodiment of discursive systems and revealed in performances, is the fulcrum point of this study.

Critical views of this epistemic approach will no doubt attack it as simply another historian romanticizing Native American culture. I wish to pre-empt this potential criticism by stating that Indians were and are human beings just like those of us of European descent. The cultures of pre-modern societies, American, European or other, is not what this study seeks to 'defend'. Indeed, if this study is defending anything, it is the earth itself, which is and has been under an onslaught of profit-seekers with little or no concern for the natural heritage they have inherited and consumed at a dear cost to unborn generations. There are elements embedded in indigenous cultures that place humans, rightfully, in their realistic setting. Henry David Thoreau's writings at Walden Pond describe serene nature, a world in which humans are mystically attuned to the infinite. But once thrust into the reality of having to obtain sustenance from nature, a deeper perspective is needed. This is the world of the 'indigenous'. Some years

after his stay at Walden, Thoreau hiked up Mount Katahdin in Maine, where his western mind encountered phenomena that induced ‘a virulent attack of metaphysical dread.’ Thoreau later described the experience of Katahdin as ‘a place for heathenism and superstitious rites – to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and wild animals than we.’ This is the world of the indigenous. ‘Think of our life in nature – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The *solid* earth. The *actual* world. The *common sense!* *Contact! Contact!* Who are we? *Where* are we?’<sup>26</sup> We are on the earth; indeed, we *are* the earth. But we have forgotten this most visceral of facts, and we have forgotten it because it is missing from our repertoire of myths and assumptions. This book is an effort to explore how this vital piece of mythology was suppressed and, by implication, how it might be restored.

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