

## Business in the Borderlands:

### American Trade in the South African Marketplace, 1871-1902

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter argues that the American diaspora anchored the United States' commercial relationship with Southern Africa between 1871 and 1902. The American diaspora imagined a "new west" in South Africa and worked alongside US consuls to shape economic behaviour by directing American goods to the region's growing cities and booming mines. Central to this process was information on market prices and opportunities supplied by American consuls. As a result of their efforts, the US became the Cape's largest trading partner after Great Britain. Closer attention to US-Southern African trade reveals that the United States dominated trade only in select sectors and that US consuls struggled to understand the complex global commodity chains American goods passed along before they reached Southern African markets.

**Keywords:** US Empire, American migration, consuls, Boer War, commodity chains

Between the Kimberley diamond rush of 1871 and the end of the second Boer War, thousands of US engineers, missionaries, and adventurers flooded Britain's South African colonies hoping to capitalize on their new-found mineral wealth. For many, the British Empire's most troublesome settler dominion was a new west. 'Here can be found all the natural conditions that made the U.S. what it is today', enthused Frederick Russell Burnham after joining the rush of American migrants.<sup>1</sup> Burnham had spent his career in the violent borderlands of the Arizona-Sonora copperbelt where he fought Apache raiders and prospected for minerals. In South Africa, he enlisted in the British South Africa Company's forces and in 1893 crossed the Crocodile River to colonize Matabeleland. His imagination fired by the prospect of commercial opportunities and his heartrate quickened by the region's fabled mineral wealth, Burnham wrote home that he would 'like to see the Stars and Stripes float over this fair land'.<sup>2</sup>

American migrants were central actors in the drama of industrialisation, imperial consolidation, and fierce Anglo-Boer contestation that transformed the Southern African borderlands. While American engineers spurred the development of the South African mineral industries, the industrialising borderlands created huge demands for products not serviced by the British imperial economy and a space into which American firms expanded with the help of US consuls.<sup>3</sup> American communities in Cape Town, Kimberley, and Johannesburg anchored US commercial expansion. From their offices and social clubs, migrant Americans directed the economic energies of Americans back home and carefully managed the mechanisms of long-distance connection through which market information and commodities travelled. Taking a tour of the Cape in 1899, one American diplomat noted with pride that Americans had their ‘hand on the throttle valve of this great engine’.<sup>4</sup> Cape Town was ‘under control of the Americans’, proclaimed the *Los Angeles Herald*.<sup>5</sup>

The economic imagination of American migrants and merchants was translated into action with the help of the US consular system which provided the intelligence and generated the trust necessary to connect domestic producers with overseas consumers. Trade did not simply follow the anonymous pull of “market forces”, but, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, was shaped by cultural assumptions and the availability of information. This is especially true of the late-nineteenth century when there was no single world market, but many, segmented marketplaces. ‘Small as the world is becoming’, wrote the American diplomat Truxtum Beale in 1897, ‘buyers and sellers in it are still groping for each other in the dark’.<sup>6</sup> To overcome this, the American consular service operated, one expert on American trade wrote, as ‘an auxiliary to the commercial activity of the nation’.<sup>7</sup> To translate “imagined” markets into economic realities required constant vigilance and energy from American consuls. But, in a global economy in which far-flung commodity chains stretched across multiple markets and in a region in which war regularly redrew the pattern of business, American consuls often struggled to keep track of “American” trade with Southern Africa.

Overseas market expansion in the United States’ Gilded Age and Progressive Era has hardly been overlooked by historians of US imperialism. It was in this period, the influential New Left historians argued, that the market-oriented character of American empire lay. In New Left scholarship, the universal pursuit of overseas markets became the driving force of US foreign policy both as an ideology and as a structural necessity of American capitalism, which was cursed with over-production.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this chapter is not to fire another volley in the long running controversy generated by this work, but it does aim to reflect on one of its unintended consequences.<sup>9</sup> Because of the New Left’s insistence that we take seriously US exporters’

arguments that trade with China was the most effective route away from domestic over-production towards global power, their interpretive framework has determined which markets have been illuminated by historical inquiry – and which have disappeared from sight.

In other words, New Left scholarship let the vocabulary of their actors define, and in this case delimit, the geographic horizons of the US Empire. At stake is not simply an issue of recovering a lost venue of American trade, but the spatial imaginary of American imperial historians. By stepping outside of the traditional geographic boundaries of US imperial scholarship, new questions can be asked about the intersections and entanglements of United States imperialism with the labour regimes and productive sites of European empires and how its overseas market expansion was conditioned by the opportunities these offered.<sup>10</sup>

It may surprise readers from other fields that the United States' economic interconnections with the British Empire have been overlooked. Yet, it is a symptom of most historical writing on Empire in this period that transimperial connections are ignored.<sup>11</sup> During these decades the United States' industrial and agricultural sectors grew into powerful engines of economic growth and that they did so in the context of the “great acceleration” of global social and economic exchange is no coincidence.<sup>12</sup> Historians are well-aware of the international imperial competitiveness this produced, but historical actors were as attuned to the profound role of the British Empire in shaping US commercial expansion. ‘The expansion of the British empire and the opening of new markets tend to promote American industrial interests’, wrote one analyst in January 1901.<sup>13</sup> Everywhere British colonial ‘markets are flooded with all descriptions of American manufactures’, wrote the *London Chamber of Commerce Journal*, which were endeavouring to drive out British goods with ‘an alarming promise of success’.<sup>14</sup> But how did US commercial expansion occur within British colonial spaces, and, how was it shaped by local dynamics of imperial extraction, state-building, and war-making? This chapter hopes to deepen our understanding of these processes.

## I

Diamonds and gold lured more than 10,000 Americans to Southern Africa.<sup>15</sup> Whether expatriates, sojourners, or part of a transnational professional diaspora, together they remade the borderlands. Some carved breath-taking open-pit mines in the landscape, others dammed rivers, dug reservoirs, or sank gold-seeking shafts deep below the Highveld out of which rose huge tailings of quartz and rubble. Still others attempted to bring order to the borderland's tumult of people: in attempting to direct the migration patterns of black African labourers toward the mines they razed pastoral economies and households and collaborated in the introduction of

new, rigid structures of racial hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> Americans could be found all over Southern Africa, managing, shaping, and re-ordering the borderlands, but they concentrated overwhelmingly in Kimberley and Johannesburg.

Figure 1. Americans in Southern Africa, c. 1890s



Source: Created by the author.

The first Americans came for diamonds. In Kimberley, there were close to 1,000 Americans engaged in diamond mining and opening new markets for American goods. American farming implements were imported, as were omnibuses, wagons, carriages, and buggies to support this hub of industrialisation.<sup>17</sup> George Hendrie, an American working as a claim overseer for the diamond mines of the London and South African Exploration Company in Dutoitspan and Bulfontein, wrote home to Albany that the diggings were ‘far from being the “Wilderness” you all think it is’.<sup>18</sup> ‘The country is said by some to be the “California” of S. Africa’, Hendrie wrote in 1882, ‘Without doubt I believe there is a great future before South Africa. It is abounding in all kinds of minerals, and the farther north you go, the soil will grow everything under the sun’.<sup>19</sup> While he could get peaches from Delaware, apples from New York, sardines, salmon, and tomatoes from California – all canned – fresh potatoes were ‘luxuries ... and bring fancy

prices'.<sup>20</sup> 'Unless you frequent the saloons [sic] or billiard rooms, there is nothing to do but work and sleep', he noted.<sup>21</sup> The leading American engineers and capitalists in the city organised themselves into the American Association of Kimberley, sometimes known as the American Association of Diamondopolis, and like their counter-parts around the world celebrated national holidays like the Fourth of July and Washington's Birthday.<sup>22</sup> Kimberley created some opportunities for American expansion to flourish, but in the free-wheeling borderlands of the Boer states more was to come.

In 1886 Johannesburg was a mere mining camp. But it already felt the cravings of an enormous industrial thirst. Soon it was 'all rush'.<sup>23</sup> Transformed by gold and railroads, by 1914 its population had reached 100,000.<sup>24</sup> The boom pushed the city's footprint from five square miles in 1898, to 82 square miles in 1903.<sup>25</sup> In 1895 alone an astonishing 2,538 buildings were constructed in the city.<sup>26</sup> John Hays Hammond, a self-promotional Californian in the employ of Cecil Rhodes, was impressed with the 'cosmopolitan atmosphere' of the city, where 'salaries were high and markets were plentiful'.<sup>27</sup> For one well-heeled resident it was a 'great, fiendish, hell of a city which for glitter and gold, and wickedness, carriages and palaces and brothels and gambling halls, beat creation'.<sup>28</sup> To Earnest Wiltsee, an American chemist employed by Barney Barnato, it was 'the greatest camp in the world'.<sup>29</sup>

Johannesburg's Americans were at the centre of the industrialisation of the Rand and controlled 'nearly 90 percent of the technical management of the mining industry'.<sup>30</sup> The engineers were joined by artisanal birds of passage who migrated between mineral booms to take on specialist roles as pitmen, dynamiters, and engine drivers.<sup>31</sup> By the mid-1890s, between 2,500 and 3,000 American hands worked amongst the *Uitlanders* of the Witwatersrand.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, in the Cape Colony there were just 249 US residents in 1890, which had doubled by the time of the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War and continued to grow as more Americans landed in the Cape with the scores of transports that brought mules and horses from New Orleans – more on which below.<sup>33</sup>

This number continued to grow as the first wave of miners to the Rand was followed by merchants and agents from American firms seeking tenders from the Boer government or hoping to expand into Southern African markets.<sup>34</sup> Individual agents established branch houses in Cape Town, Johannesburg, or Port Elizabeth, such as the American Trading Co., which imported foodstuffs, California redwood, and Oregon pine through Cape Town and Port Natal.<sup>35</sup> Others travelled between the industrial centres of production demonstrating goods and machinery, taking orders, organising delivery, and addressing faults. Those not actively engaged in trading were employed in the sectors that surrounded it including the insurance industry.

In the early years of mining on the Rand, the majority of the American diggers and skilled engineers resided in the Rand's boarding houses, which were either located on the mining property itself or in one of two working class suburbs – Jeppe in the east and Fordsburg in the West. These areas were little more than an overgrown mining camp, renowned for their drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution. Early migrants established an American Society of South Africa to acclimatise new arrivals to life on the gold fields and American travellers and prospectors might seek the comforts of home in the American Hotel or the California House, and might also join the local American baseball club.<sup>36</sup> Though an overwhelmingly male city, the wives of Americans in Johannesburg founded the Martha Washington Club in the early twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> For the diggers, foremen, and their families this world of American institutions maintained connections with US national culture, celebrations, and provided a familiar waypoint in an alien land. Or as William Hammond Hall, a San Franciscan irrigation expert, put it to his wife, it helped overcome the 'the deuced far-off-ed-ness and danged long-time-ed-ness-of the-I-no-see-you-ed-ness of the situation'.<sup>38</sup>

Later, the wealthier consulting engineers built homes in the city's grandest suburbs Old Doornfontein, Belgravia, Hospital Hill, or Park Town out of sight of the mining headgear. Away from the clamour of the booming mines, American engineers rubbed shoulders with their British employers at the Rand Club or in afterhours trading outside the Stock Exchange. Here, boosters and investors hatched schemes to transform the city itself. William Keller induced a group of Californians to invest in new street railways; William B. Hall convinced a coterie of leading capitalists to sink cash into an "American" steam laundry, and other projects to impose order in this borderland city.<sup>39</sup> They could also be found in the rooms of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, or in one of the many associations they founded to facilitate their professional life including the Cyanide Club and the Mine Managers Association. 'Johannesburg ... is like an American city', marvelled the one mining expert in 1887 – just a year after the gold rush began.<sup>40</sup> 'You shall all come and we will end our days in the new Utopia in the heart of Africa', wrote another Californian to her family in Pasadena.<sup>41</sup>

## II

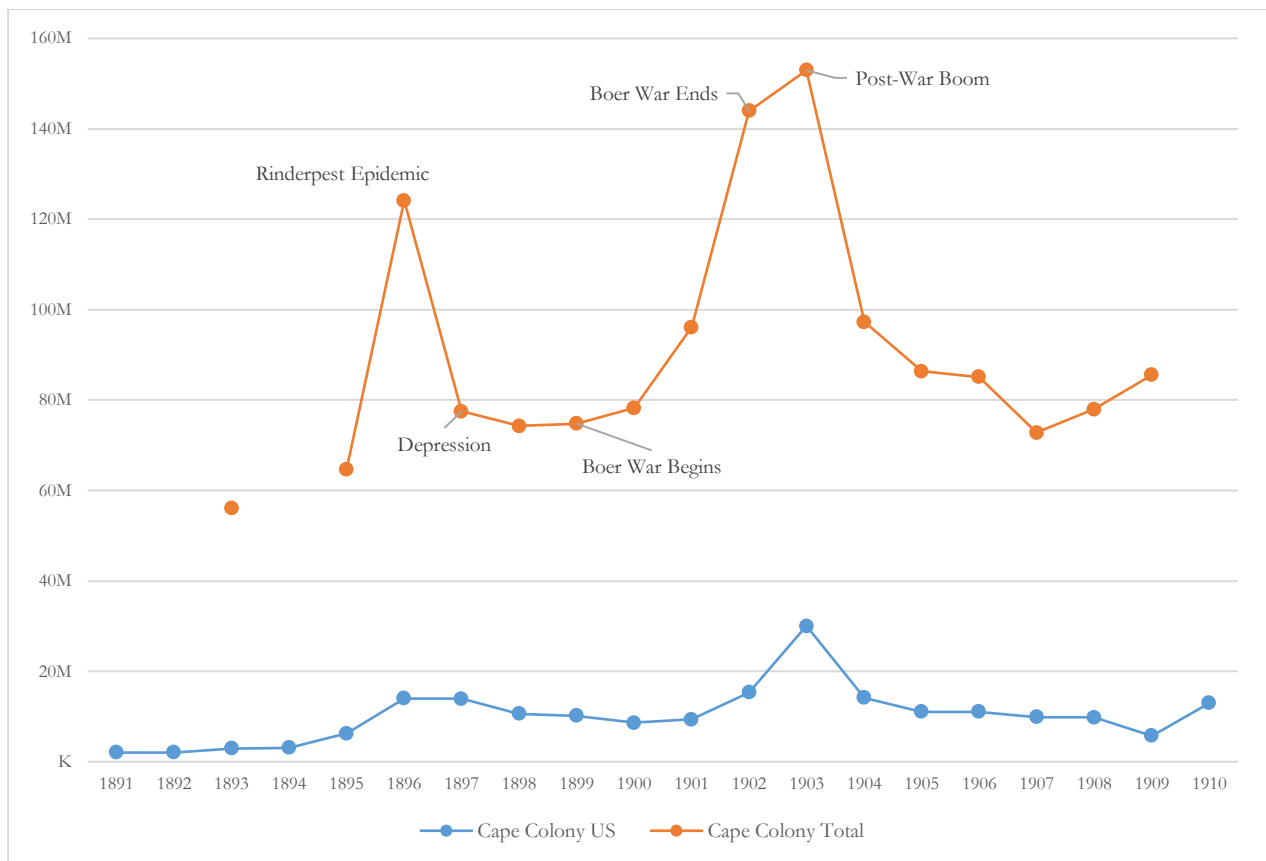
By 1899, the Transvaal was the world's leading producer of gold, attracting more than £75,000,000 in foreign investment and stimulating enormous population growth across the sub-continent.<sup>42</sup> Expanded markets for US goods grew alongside major injections of capital to develop the transport and communication infrastructure connecting ports to the mineral fields and the booming cities that sprang alongside them. Railways arrived on the Rand from Cape

Town in 1892 and from Durban in 1895. Supplying commodities to settlers, equipment to the mines, and to the railways themselves stimulated American enterprise. ‘With such population as South Africa contains, and with such a country as will be developed by the extension of English control’, wrote one author in the Bostonian literary magazine *The Arena*, ‘it can safely be asserted that a market will be opened to the manufacturers of the United States that is almost limitless’.<sup>43</sup>

The imaginative construction of the South African market in the United States ranged from the specific to the highly speculative. But through the American print media an image emerged of a region whose future prospects were closely aligned with the American economy. US newspapers and journals provided carefully compiled accounts of the colony’s opportunities and its congruence with American interests, while specialist journals such as the *Engineering Magazine* detailed South African geography and geology, ore composition and extraction techniques most applicable to the diamond pipes and gold reefs.<sup>44</sup> Broader audiences of middle-class readers were reached through popular journals in which the commercial opportunities of the region were expressed through travel accounts.<sup>45</sup> *Scribner’s Magazine*, for instance, depicted the region as ‘a veritable El Dorado for enterprising spirits from Europe and America’.<sup>46</sup> Essential factors in capturing the imagination of American investors and entrepreneurs were the gold and diamonds themselves, which fired the imaginations of those hoping to capitalise on an imagined ‘Elysium’ for American goods in Southern Africa.<sup>47</sup>

American exports to the Cape Colony rose from less than \$2,000,000 in 1890 to an average of \$14,000,000 for the period 1896-1898, rising to \$16,000,000 in 1899, and peaked in 1903 at more than \$30,000,000.<sup>48</sup> Imports for the Boer states also came through the port of Lourenco Marques in Portuguese East Africa after the completion of the Delagoa Bay railway in 1894. Wheat, maize, lumber, and munitions all entered the Transvaal from the United States via the British-owned Atlantic and South African Steamship Company’s route between Pensacola and Lourenco Marques.<sup>49</sup> Americans may have imagined a ‘limitless’ market for their goods, but caution is warranted. US trade in the region was dwarfed by imports from Britain and never amounted to more than 15 percent of the goods landing in the Cape. Nevertheless, this proportion compared favourably with Britain and the United States’ chief rival in the region, Germany, which surpassed the United States share of trade in 1908 and 1909 only as a result of the Panic of 1907.

**Chart 1.** US Imports into the Cape Colony, 1891-1909 (\$million).



Source: compiled by author from *Commercial Statistics of the United States*.

US trade with China, long depicted as the great white whale of American exporters, compared favourably to South African trade, multiplying at a similar rate between 1895 and 1899 from \$3,200,000 to \$13,100,000.<sup>50</sup> US commentators correctly pin-pointed the importance of British imperial markets – by 1900 trade with the British Empire amounted to £193,398,322 making it the Empire’s largest trading partner.<sup>51</sup> ‘The development of the Tropics and of the Southern Hemisphere has been essentially the work of Britain’, observed one American periodical, ‘and how necessities caused by that development have made markets for American natural products, the wealth drawn from which has enabled the United States to become, in turn, a great industrial nation’.<sup>52</sup> Henry Birchenough, special commissioner for the Board of Trade, was more succinct: ‘America is undoubtedly our most formidable rival present and future’.<sup>53</sup>

The expansion of American commerce played to existing US strengths or to firms producing new products such as industrial mining equipment. Here the connection with the American diaspora was clear-cut: American engineers and mine managers preferred to import US-made equipment. ‘American trade has already a strong foothold in South Africa, owing in part to the numerous Americans occupying responsible positions in the mines’, opined *Dun*’s.<sup>54</sup> As a result, American-engineered heavy mining machinery from the Ingersoll-Sergeant Drill

Company, Milwaukee's Edward P. Allis Company, and Chicago's Fraser and Chalmers (taken over in 1897 by Rand Mines and Wernher, Beit & Co.) were at the forefront of the empire of American goods in Southern Africa.<sup>55</sup> By 1903, the inspector of machinery in Johannesburg estimated that the United States supplied 55 percent of the air compressors, 76 percent of the air drills, and 59 percent of the crushers used in the mines.<sup>56</sup> As can be seen from Table 1, the United States soundly beat its nearest competitor in the field, but was still far behind Britain. British companies continued to dominate the supply of boilers, winding engines, and headgear, however, leading American trade journals to exhort manufacturers to compete by sending stock directly to South African wholesalers.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 1.** Principal Importers of Mining Machinery into Cape Colony, 1890-1903 (£)

Source: compiled by author from *Statistical Register of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1890-1903).

American manufacturers who succeeded in South African markets were often those profiting from the managerial revolution taking place in the United States. Backwards integration of firms along the supply chain and the rationalisation of production enabled many US corporations to produce in larger quantities, at greater speed, and at lower prices than their British counterparts.<sup>58</sup> By 1900, thanks to the standardization of products and large batch production, it took the Baldwin Locomotive Works just sixty days to build a 65-ton locomotive, while British railway companies manufactured a proliferation of equipment in small batches and struggled to clear their orderbooks.<sup>59</sup> With the rapid expansion of South African railroad mileage, the Cape Government Railways (CGR) began importing American locomotives from Baldwin and the smaller Philadelphia firm Dickson & Co. to pull freight.<sup>60</sup> Yet, as Table 2 shows, American rolling stock and rails were often imported when British firms couldn't keep up with demand and fluctuated greatly as a result. In 1899, as British industry recovered from the engineers' lockout of 1897 and 1898, CGR imported 40,691 tons of steel rails from the Carnegie Steel Co. of Pittsburgh – at 20 percent below English quotations.<sup>61</sup> Two years later, Sir Charles Elliott, special railway commissioner for the CGR, travelled to Pennsylvania where he placed orders for 29 locomotives, and a further \$5,000,000 of steel rails and rolling stock.<sup>62</sup>

**Table 2.** Principal Importers of Railway Material into Cape Colony, 1890-1903 (£)

Source: compiled by author from *Statistical Register of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1890-1903).

American produce also fed the booming cities. The United States was the dominant exporter of wheat, rye, samp, and flour to Southern Africa, eclipsing Britain (a net importer of grains) and its closest rivals (although in the case of fodder, bran, and maize the Argentine Republic was the leading nation). American farmers and producers enjoyed a boom both during and after the Boer War, when foodstuffs were especially in demand to feed industrial armies, alleviate sieges, and to care for prisoners and civilians alike.<sup>63</sup> For the farming that did take place, American machinery enjoyed a strong position in the South African market (Table 3). Reapers, binders, and harvesters from the McCormick Harvester Company and the Deering Harvester Company tilled South African farmland.<sup>64</sup>

**Table 3.** Principal Importers of Agricultural Machinery, 1890-1903 (£)

Source: compiled by author from *Statistical Register of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1890-1903).

In 1902, McCormick, Deering and three other firms emerged from the so-called “harvester war” in the United States as International Harvester (IH). The new conglomerate controlled 85 percent of the total production of harvesting machines in the United States.<sup>65</sup> The firm quickly established a network of sales agents overseas. 3 were sent to South Africa and 8 to the British Empire in total (to provide some sense of scale, that figure amounted to just one half of the number who were sent to Mexico, but was roughly the same as the number sent to Europe). By 1910, foreign sales made up on third of IH’s total sales.<sup>66</sup> As Mona Domosh has highlighted, IH viewed the spread of their products overseas as missionary work, extending modernization and civilization to colonised landscapes.<sup>67</sup> But the commercial landscape they sought to reshape required constant maintenance and management, relying not only on private energy and enterprise but the support of the state’s consular apparatus.

### III

In all these areas, US commerce relied upon a vast web of information. The penetration of South African markets required careful management and constant maintenance. This task fell to US consular agents, who kept a ceaseless vigil for commercial opportunities. The American consular service operated, in the words of the words of one leading review of international relations, as ‘a sort of bureau of information at the expense of the state’ for American exporters and the consul existed to ‘invent and find new markets’.<sup>68</sup> As George F. Hollis, Consul General at Lourenco Marques put it, the consuls ‘may be considered commercial missionaries’.<sup>69</sup>

The US consular service underwent a significant transformation in this period. Procedural and institutional changes to the consular system were one part of the creation of what Emily Rosenberg has labelled the ‘promotional state’ that aimed to promote the expansion of US corporations overseas, which were then enlisted as instruments of US foreign policy.<sup>70</sup> Beginning in 1880, the State Department published consular reports on a monthly basis, in addition to the Bureau of Statistics’ annual volume *Commercial Relations of the United States*. Under the direction of Frederick Emory, the Bureau of Statistics gradually expanded the scope of publications to include ‘Advance Sheets’ three or four times a month and Special Consular Reports detailing customs regulations, packing requirements, and local consumer habits. In 1894, the Bureau’s mailing list included 1,200 newspapers and journals, all members of Congress, 600 libraries, 150 boards of trade, and 3,000 individuals and firms.<sup>71</sup> Local chambers of commerce in turn circulated government publications to their members. In 1897, Secretary of State John Sherman created the Bureau of Foreign Commerce, which began publishing daily reports and issuing circular instructions to US consuls aimed at stimulating their attention to American manufactures in foreign markets. For the public, these were vital guides to consumer demand.

Markets, then, were not imagined wholesale. The economic imagination may have been stimulated by lush advertising and appeals to exceptional economic futures, but conducting economic activity depended on reliable market information. American merchants, who did not rely simply on luck and foresight, depended on the information provided by consuls as hard evidence of the credibility and security of foreign markets. Consulates could therefore shape and direct economic behaviour. As the career-diplomat Eugene Schuyler expressed it, consular information was the tonic to the ‘inertia of obstinacy’ among many American firms reluctant to enter overseas markets.<sup>72</sup> It was for this reason that the consular system in the United States became a target for civil service reformers seeking to remove the hold of party bosses over these plum posts.<sup>73</sup> If the consul or consular agent was not a man of standing, how could American manufacturers send stock overseas with confidence? For Americans trading with European empires confidence was underwritten by the consular system and its close connection to the American diaspora. Migration underwrote the supply of market information and, through their close connections with the US Consular system, facilitated the smooth operation of overseas trade.

Some American observers argued that the consulates were the ‘advance guard of ... commercial interests’ and ‘a pioneer in the opening of new markets’, but they were wide of the mark.<sup>74</sup> In South Africa, at least, commerce preceded consular agencies. The United States Consul General at Cape Town was the centre of American trade and diplomacy and managed a

network of consular agents throughout the sub-continent. These agents were appointed directly from the American communities where they resided (although some were British subjects). Since the Consul General was appointed by Washington he could not engage directly in business, but the consular agents under his direction were embedded in the American trade, which facilitated the collection of reliable market information. Cape Town's vice consul, Clifford Hume Knight, was senior partner in the shipbroker, merchant and coal importers Thomas, Watson & Co. J.C. Manion, US consular agent in Johannesburg between 1895 and 1904, settled in the city after completing a round-the-world tour for the Ingersoll-Sergeant Drill Company. In Johannesburg, Manion founded Chapin & Manion Ltd. an agency for Ingersoll with Robert W. Chapin as partner – who served as consular agent in Manion's absence. In Kimberley, Gardner Williams and later his son, Alpheus C. Williams, were both leading diamond engineers at De Beers.

As the economies of the Cape and Transvaal boomed, so American commerce increased – and with it the United States' consular presence. Between 1898 and 1901, James G. Stowe, a wealthy exporter of agricultural tools and machinery from Kansas City, acted as U.S. Consul General in Cape Town. Throughout that time, Stowe maintained a steady flow of information with the State Department and American companies of prices, investment opportunities, and of contracts being tendered by the public works departments in Pretoria and Cape Town.<sup>75</sup> 'Contracts for the building of railroads, supplies for the army, jails, prisons, public and private institutions, railroad materials, oils ... are open for bids', Stowe wrote McKinley's Assistant Secretary of State in 1899.<sup>76</sup> Among his regular correspondents were export representatives such as the influential National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), which was founded to promote collective, private action to expand American business. By 1900, NAM had a membership of 1,000 and a revenue of more than \$1,000,000. Its publications *American Trade* (1897-1902), which later became *American Industries* (1902-1914), reprinted consuls reports of foreign opportunities.<sup>77</sup>

Recognising the growing importance of trade with the Transvaal, the State Department appointed Charles E. Macrum to a new Consular post at Pretoria in 1898. Appointed shortly after a small depression in the region in 1897, Macrum moved quickly to shore up the confidence of American exporters. 'There is a great field open here for our American manufacturers', he wrote one company in Illinois, 'if only our exporters had the same confidence in the dealer here that he has in the dealer at home'.<sup>78</sup> 'The sooner our American manufacturer goes DIRECTLY after the foreign trade with the characteristic vim and push and energy he displays in seeking out the trade at home, the quicker will be his progress', he told the Exporters' Association of America.<sup>79</sup> As the essays in this volume make clear, trade expansion was often mediated through perceived national characteristics, which portrayed the mundane processes of

establishing market presence in culturally favourable terms. Echoing both the settler-frontier narrative discussed previously, the *San Francisco Examiner* claimed that the ‘reason the American has been in such demand in South Africa, is because of his adaptability. He can pioneer as none of the Europeans can’.<sup>80</sup>

The importance of this knowledge dissemination is hard to quantify. Undoubtedly, the greater supply of information about South African markets increased the range of options open to American producers and manufacturers for overseas expansion.<sup>81</sup> But, the caution of contemporary observers was surely warranted. ‘There seems to be current an exaggerated notion of what consuls can do for trade’, wrote Schuyler. ‘In reality they can do little more than furnish information, or be in a condition to procure it, give advice, and see that the merchant in foreign lands stands in no worse position than those of other countries.’<sup>82</sup> American successes hid startling dependencies. US commerce hitched a free ride on British imperial infrastructure: British ships carried 58% of American foreign trade worldwide – US ships carried only 8% of the nation’s foreign tonnage (although its domestic shipping amounted to one quarter of the world’s total).<sup>83</sup> ‘The only disagreeable feature about the American invasion’, wrote Ray Stannard Baker, ‘is that it is being made largely in foreign ships’.<sup>84</sup> ‘If Great Britain has increased her trade by having ships, the banking facilities, and the great merchants located in foreign countries, *is it not an object lesson for the United States*, and should not the United States ... go and do likewise [?]’, an exasperated Stowe asked in one despatch home.<sup>85</sup>

The freight infrastructure through which American goods travelled indicates that the United States was often only one element of a far larger commodity chain. This point has been made forcefully by Steven Topik and Allen Wells who caution that ‘there was not one world market, but myriad, often segmented, and ever-evolving markets’.<sup>86</sup> This was especially evident in the second Boer War (1899-1902). Colonial wars were not only fought to open new markets, but amplified the consumer activities of industrialised armies. The Boer War dramatically redrew patterns of US-South African trade, producing a boom in American exports. Between 1901 and 1902, American trade rose by more than \$100 million over pre-war levels and reached its peak in 1903.<sup>87</sup> Where the trade in mining equipment dropped, animal products and foodstuffs boomed. To feed and equip its Army of 447,000 troops and their black African allies, the British imported tons of US products including Quaker Oats, boots, munition belts, hay, saddles, and Studebaker wagons.<sup>88</sup> British Army and Naval purchasing agents touring the United States in search of supplies were aided by a favourable diplomatic context in which the neutral US government allowed all but the most obviously military goods to be exported.<sup>89</sup>

To pull wagons, haul artillery, and maintain the manoeuvrability of the Army, mules and horses were a necessity. The United States supplied both in large quantities. The export of American horses and mules grew steadily following price collapses during the Panic of 1893 and increased demands from the US Army in the Philippines. But it was the Boer War that transformed the export trade. As the US Department of Agriculture noted, the war created ‘extraordinary demand’ for remounts for both the British Army which lost 1,000 horses a week to combat and sickness.<sup>90</sup> To coordinate this transatlantic trade, the Foreign Office despatched a remount commission to the United States, consisting of thirteen officers, including veterinary surgeons. Once there, the officers established a central headquarters at Kansas City, Missouri, from where purchasing agents were sent to Oregon, Kansas, Texas, and New Orleans.<sup>91</sup> In all, some 109,839 horses (one quarter of all horses imported by the remount department) and 81,524 mules (close to half of all the mules used by the British Army) were shipped into Durban before transportation to the front at a cost of £3,084,006.<sup>92</sup>

US animal products boomed as a result of the war. American preserved meat exports to South Africa tripled between 1899 and 1902 from close to 4 million lbs (£99,026) to almost 11.5 million lbs (£342,326).<sup>93</sup> The Armour Packing Company of Chicago was the chief American beneficiary in this trade having already supplied the British Army in Sudan, where the firm’s owner, Philip Armour, boasted that British troops had eaten 2 million pounds of Armour canned meat.<sup>94</sup> This was hardly an unqualified story of American success, however. Army quartermasters estimated that some 30 percent of Armour’s product was rancid (it was typically preserved with boric acid and nitrate of potash) and dumped 20,000 cases in the sea.<sup>95</sup>

We might pause a moment here to consider the precise relationship between the cultural identity of goods and the trade data historians use to track their movement.<sup>96</sup> “American” articles could be easily transformed into “British” ones. In 1900, 4,000,000 pounds of American-produced frozen meat was landed in London and transported to Smithfield where it was cured and relabelled as British produce.<sup>97</sup> Meat packing in the American Midwest – primarily in Chicago and Cincinnati – was a lucrative business for British investors who participated in the industry ‘on a formidable scale’.<sup>98</sup> In the early 1890s, British investments in U.S. cattle ranches, slaughtering, hog packing, and stockyards exceeded \$80 million.<sup>99</sup> Such patterns are a reminder to historians to trace carefully, where possible, the channels of investment that underpinned multinational industries and the circuitous travel of goods along international commodity chains.

By the turn of the century, US Consuls struggled to come to terms with the sheer breadth of these commodity chains and were confounded by the mutability of “American” goods in the global marketplace. ‘What the shipments of United States products from England

amounts to we shall never know’, Stowe wrote the State Department.<sup>100</sup> ‘Admitting that much that is made and produced in the United States is sold through other countries to this colony and country’, wrote another agent, ‘the question arises, is the United States getting credit for exports to South Africa?’<sup>101</sup>

#### IV

The American professional and merchant diaspora anchored the United States’ growing entanglement with the wider world in the late nineteenth century. Through them we can see what creating and managing markets meant in practice. By participating in the transformation of Southern Africa, the American diaspora shaped economic behaviour and managed the United States’ commercial expansion into this rapidly developing region. Information was central to this process, as was the vigilance of merchants and consuls who connected producers and consumers, responded to new opportunities, and coordinated the mechanisms of global trade.<sup>102</sup>

In 1902, the American businessman Ulysses Eddy wrote that the blossoming of US trade with the British Empire ‘amounted to a Declaration of Independence of England commercially by the colonies of England’.<sup>103</sup> Yet, this was arguably the sign of an over-active economic imagination. For all the hyperbole that surrounded the supposed “Americanization” of Britain and the colonies, the British Empire remained a highly competitive market.<sup>104</sup> American merchants did not have it all their own way in the Cape – far from it – but they did, however, exploit the British World’s openness to the world economy. ‘The maintenance of [the British] empire excites no jealousy in us, and presents no inconvenience’, wrote one State Department strategist. ‘On the contrary’, he continued, ‘we should prefer to see the colonial markets of the world controlled by a state ready to throw them open to all comers’.<sup>105</sup> US policymakers viewed the knots of entanglement described in this chapter as opportunities for competitive expansion and by tracing them more carefully US imperial historians can expand the spatial imaginary of the United States’ market expansion in the late-nineteenth century.

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<sup>2</sup> Burnham to Josiah Russell, 23 June 1893, in *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Tuffnell, ‘Engineering inter-imperialism: American miners and the transformation of global mining, 1871-1910’, *Journal of Global History*, 10 (2015), pp. 53-76.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Events in South Africa’, *New York Times*, 23 July 1899.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Cape Town trade’, *Los Angeles Herald*, 22 March 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in: Richard Hume Werking, *The master architects: building the United States Foreign Service, 1890-1913* (Lexington, KY, 1977), p. 24.

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- <sup>8</sup> Walter La Feber, *The New Empire: an interpretation of American expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, 1963); William Appleman Williams, *The tragedy of American diplomacy* (Cleveland, OH, 1959).
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- <sup>10</sup> Paul Kramer, 'Embedding capital: political-economic history, the United States, and the world', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 15 (2016), pp. 331-362.
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- <sup>14</sup> Quoted in: La Feber, *New Empire*, p. 195.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Bigham to United States Senate, 26 March 1902, College Park, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), US Consular Records Johannesburg, Vol. 32, RG84/350/26/14/1,
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- <sup>17</sup> 'Trade with the dark continent', *Alta California*, 8 June 1882.
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- <sup>19</sup> George Hendrie to John R. Hendrie, 14 September 1882, SML, Box 2, Folder 18, MS 1556, South Africa Historical Collection.
- <sup>20</sup> George Hendrie to mother, 28 January 1880, SML Box 2, Folder 17, MS 1556, South Africa Historical Collection.
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- <sup>22</sup> Alpheus C. Williams to W.D. Gordon, 19 February 1901, NARA, US Consular Records Johannesburg, Vol. 19, RG84/350/26/14/1; William D. Gordon to Alpheus S. Williams, 21 February 1901, NARA, US Consular Records Johannesburg, Vol. 43, RG84/350/26/14/1.
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- <sup>33</sup> James G. Stowe to Thomas Cridler, 18 December 1899, NARA, US Consular Records Cape Town, Vol. 30, RG84/350/18/24/1.
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- <sup>40</sup> *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 3 December 1887.
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