

The Anglo-Saxon Supremacy:
Anglophilia in the *North American Review*,
1890-93

“In proportion as the North American republic grows powerful and overshadowing, grows the anxiety of Englishmen to have it understood that this potent factor in the world’s affairs is what they term Anglo-Saxon; that it is Anglo-Saxon in race, feeling, and literature.”

– John C. Fleming, *North American Review*, August 1891

Submitted by Steve Casburn
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Introduction

Despite winning the Civil War, many scions of the Yankee gentility of New England and New York were deeply disturbed by that war's consequences. With the antebellum sectional dispute settled, Americans devoted their newly available attention and capital not to literature and the arts, but to steel and steam. The resultant industrial boom, with its creation of millionaire barbarians and its importations of Catholic and Jewish factory workers by the million, signaled the beginning of the end of the Yankee ascendancy in the United States.

Faced with this threat from *nouveau riche* and *nouveau citoyen*, the Yankee in the 1890s overcame his ancestral antipathy to England, and proclaimed that America at its finest was the daughter of the "mother country." The Anglo-Saxon race had built the two most powerful countries on Earth, and it was the duty of those two countries, in combination, to bring Christianity and civilization to the rest of the world. Years before Rudyard Kipling coined the term "white man's burden," New Englanders who saw their world slipping away from them had been avidly seeking to take up that burden.

As the major political voice of Yankee gentility, the *North American Review* during the early 1890s devoted a generous portion of its pages to furthering the cause of cultural and political unity between the British Empire and the United States. Of the many ways the *North American* attempted to advance this goal, three stand out: one, in stressing the cultural legacy Americans owed to Britain; two, in deploring the unprecedented size, distribution, and consequences of immigration into the United States; and three, in claiming a racial kindred between Britons

and Americans. To the *North American* and its readers, the British people (and their American descendants) were where the United States should turn for political leadership, cultural greatness, and superior breeding stock.

Anglo-American Relations in the 19th century

Before the flood of immigration brought new issues to the fore, New Englanders had been relatively hostile toward England. The two wars America had had to fight against the mother country had never been forgotten, nor had English reluctance to support the Union during the Civil War gone unnoticed. In addition, English sea power in the Atlantic and land power in Canada – and the supercilious English attitude that went with this power – angered and frightened Americans.

This dislike and mistrust of Britain began to change during the 1870s and 1880s as the American position vis-a-vis Great Britain changed. As the United States surpassed the British Empire as the leading economic power in the world, the British began to ally itself with America by stressing a common Anglo-Saxon heritage and political development. For their part, Americans saw the British Navy as the protector of American commerce on the high seas. Add these geopolitical concerns to American worries over non-WASP immigration and British worries about the newly united German Empire and you have the makings of a beautiful friendship.

The *North American Review*

This British-American friendship was nurtured extravagantly in the pages of the *North American Review*. The *North American* was a scholarly journal of politics and culture that had been founded by Boston literati in 1815 as a counterpart to the English literary journal, the *Edinburgh Review*. According to Henry Adams, “for fifty years the *North American Review* had been the stage coach which carried literary Bostonians to such distinction as they had achieved.”¹

In 1877, Allen Thorndike Rice took control of the journal, and changed its focus from the literary efforts of Boston to the political and cultural currents of New York and Washington. By 1891, the *North American* was at the height of its influence, with a circulation of 76,000 and regular contributions from influential (and disparate!) figures such as William Gladstone, Andrew Carnegie, Terrence Powderly, Anthony Comstock, James Bryce, James Cardinal Gibbons, and R.G. Ingersoll.

Though the *North American* ran articles from a wide variety of contributors (as the above list suggests), its politics were the reforming Republicanism of their upper-class subscribers (not everyone could afford the *North American's* \$5 per year subscription cost). It deplored the corruption symbolized by Tammany Hall and the rest of the urban Irish Democracy,² and stood for the high ideals, cultural depth, and good taste symbolized by the “mother-country,” Great Britain.

¹ Adams, Henry. *The Education*. Chapter XV.

² See any article written by E.L. Godkin for the *NAR* during this period.

Anglophilia in the *North American Review*

In the early 1890s, the British Empire was the most powerful military force in the world, and had extensive cultural, political, financial, military, and sentimental ties to the United States. It is not unreasonable, then, that a serious journal of current events like the *North American Review* would cover the English scene. The lengths to which the *North American* went to carry out this responsibility and the tone it used, however, are breathtaking.

The eight volumes the *North American* published between January 1890 and December 1893 included 495 articles (excluding the “Notes & Comments” section, which were primarily shorter letters to the editor). Of these 495 articles, 78 (or, 16%) were about Great Britain or the British Empire. An additional 35 articles were written by British subjects on other topics, and 26 articles on top of that made significant reference to a facet of British cultural, economic, military, or industrial practice or achievement.

	BRIT	BW	BR	OTHER
1890	21	9	8	77
1891	18	9	5	85
1892	18	12	4	96
1893	21	5	9	98
Total	78 (16%)	35 (7%)	26 (5%)	356 (72%)

Table 1 – British writing in the *North American Review*, 1890-93

In other words, more than one in every four articles that the *North American* ran during the early 1890s had some British connection. Almost every one of these articles was favorable toward Britain, and a sizeable

number of them referred to an “English-speaking people” and/or “Anglo-Saxon race” that provided a common ground between the United States and the British Empire. In these four years, two articles were published about Westminster Abbey and several were published about the London social scene (the only similar articles published during this period about American society were written by Englishwomen passing judgment).

The *North American* of the early 1890s was suffused with a pro-British glow. Even articles that did not have any connection to Great Britain or the British *per se* were favorable toward the British people and their accomplishments. An article about urban lighting began with the sentence “England and America are the freest countries in the world.”³ When asked for their choice of the best book of 1891, six of the seven contributors chose British books (the seventh person chose a French book).⁴ Even an article about *cooking* could not escape the rampant Anglophilia: “And what of sack – *Falstaff’s* sack – that made England the merry England of yore [...] surely if we knew its secret, we should learn how to laugh once more.”⁵

At times, the *North American* took its Anglophilia to extremes. In 1893, it published an article by Andrew Carnegie calling for a “race-federation” between the United States and the British Empire. Carnegie cited commonality of race, improvements in communications and travel, better defense against military attack, and a vastly increased common market as reasons why such a union would be feasible.⁶ The sole response

³ Thomson, Sir William. “Electric Lighting and Public Safety.” *NAR* 150.2 (1890): 189.

⁴ Arnold, Edwin, et al. “The Best Book of the Year.” *NAR* 154.1 (1892): 85-116.

⁵ Repplier, Agnes. “Humors of the Cookery-Book.” *NAR* 152.4 (1891): 469.

⁶ Carnegie, Andrew. “A Look Ahead.” *NAR* 156.6 (1893): 685-710.

to Carnegie that the *North American* printed criticized Carnegie only for being too hasty – Americans should focus first on a union with Canada.⁷

The situation of Canada was one of the few points on which the *North American* opposed Great Britain. As the Governor-General of Canada pointed out, “the prevalent belief in the States is that [...] ultimately all Anglo Saxons in North America will range themselves under the banner of one huge republic,”⁸ and the *North American* was eager to start this process, publishing several articles calling for a unified North American Anglo-Saxon nation. But, obviously, even this opposition to Great Britain was carried out in the name of Anglophilia.

The opposite of Anglophilia is Anglophobia, and the *North American* was outspokenly opposed to it. In an article titled “The Hatred of England,”⁹ Englishman Goldwin Smith complained that “the American people could not help rejoicing in any reverse that might befall England,” and wrote on the “practical reasons for allaying Anglophobia” among Americans. Smith gave three reasons: first, the possibility of war “between the kindred nations;” second, that British emigrants were spurning America for Australia “at a time when the self-governing element in this country is in danger of being swamped by alien elements and stands in need of reënforcement;” and third, the barrier it puts in the way of an American-Canadian union. Of the eight responses that the *North American* printed in its next number¹⁰, only one attempted to argue that Americans *should* hate England.

⁷ Smith, Goldwin. “Anglo-Saxon Union.” *NAR* 157.2 (1893): 170-85.

⁸ Lorne, Marquis of. “Sir Charles Dilke’s New Book.” *NAR* 150.6 (1890): 726.

⁹ Smith, Goldwin. “The Hatred of England.” *NAR* 150.5 (1890): 547-62.

¹⁰ Higginson, T.W., et al. “Does America Hate England?” *NAR* 150.6 (1890): 749-78.

English writers did not merely attack the Anglophobia that stemmed from the Revolutionary War; they also took aim at its related Francophilia. The curator of Westminster Abbey wrote of the memorial to General Wolfe, the martyred English hero of the 1759 Battle for Montréal, “whose dear-bought victory we might almost say that we owe the momentous [...] result that English – not French – is the speech, English – not French – the race, of the masters of North America.”¹¹ And what God-fearing, red-blooded American could possibly side with the Gauls after finding out that “[no] Saxon hand would ever dabble in the foul corruption which seems to be the native element of certain Parisians.”¹²

But the French were the least of the problems facing the Anglo-Saxons. Far more serious was the threat posed by the uncivilized Slav, poised to charge out of the Eurasian steppes and destroy Western culture. The *North American* was not blind to this threat, and published an article calling for “American and English friends of Russian freedom” to start “a new crusade [...] against the great sinner of the East, the Russian Tzardom [...] until that nightmare of modern times, the Russian autocracy, is conquered, and compelled to accept the supremacy of the triumphant democracy.”¹³

An article in a similar vein, on the Russian threat to British India, can be appreciated only by quoting it at length (with verbosity trimmed when possible), reminding ourselves as we read it that this was considered fit for publication in one of America’s premier political journals:

[T]he vast, powerful, and enlightened trans-Atlantic portion of the Anglo-Saxon family should truly understand what is the magnificent

¹¹ Bradley, G. Granville. “In Westminster Abbey.” *NAR* 151.2 (1890): 208.

¹² Hazeltine, Mayo W. “Married Women in Fiction.” *NAR* 152.4 (1891): 436.

¹³ Stepniak, Sergius. “What Americans Can Do for Russia.” *NAR* 153.5 (1891): 608, 596-97.

charge laid in Asia by Providence upon the shoulders of the cis-Atlantic portion of the breed [If Americans visited India,] the majority of them would come back, I know, full of a new sense of the noble task which England performs towards all those scores of millions of their Aryan relations – since the people of India proper are really very nearly akin to our Anglo-Saxon blood; much more closely, indeed, than, say, the Hungarians, the southern Italians, or the Russians. [...] As a sister people of our speech and of our mighty common line, the American Republic has a special share in the British control of India.

[...It is not] an indifferent matter to civilization generally, and to Americans in particular, whether Russia should ever seriously challenge the British possession of India and [even] succeed in ousting us from the peninsula. [...] It would be the triumph of the Slav over the Saxon, and would set back the development of Asia, and the advancement of the human race generally, at least a thousand years. [...It] would mean the breaking-up and decay of our ancient empire; the eventual spread of Slavonic and Mongolian hordes [...]; the march of sciences, arts, religions, arrested as when Omar burned the Alexandrian Library [...]¹⁴

But the threat from the “inferior” races was not confined to the subcontinent of India. Rapid American industrialization required the importation of “flawed” breeding stock from southern and eastern Europe, and Yankee scion Representative Henry Cabot Lodge (R-Massachusetts) wrote two articles in 1891 to urge Congress to restrict this immigration. (On a more sinister note, the *North American* had published an article the year before by the father of Eugenics, Francis Galton.¹⁵)

In his articles, Lodge amassed statistics and reports about the trends in American immigration, then contrasted “the generally good character of the immigration from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries” with that of “races most alien to the body of the

¹⁴ Arnold, Edwin. “The Duty and Destiny of England in India.” *NAR* 154.2 (1892): 168-69.

¹⁵ Galton, Francis. “Kinship and Correlation.” *NAR* 150.4 (1890) : 419-31.

American people and from the lowest and most illiterate classes among those races.”¹⁶ Lodge noted that immigration from the former was declining as immigration from the latter was increasing, and worried that immigration from inferior stock would lower the American “standard of civilization.”¹⁷ Lodge also noted the threat a larger pool of wage-earners – many of whom sent money home – might have on the American standard of living.¹⁸ In 1893, Senator W.E. Chandler deplored “the vast increase [...] in of degraded immigrants from Italy, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and Russia proper” and argued that “we cannot safely undertake the assimilation of the ignorant and debased human beings who are tending towards us from such sources.”¹⁹

Lodge fretted about the political effect of this immigration. Mob violence had broken out against the unruly immigrants and their secret societies, a development Lodge saw as a possible prelude to a breakdown in the political order of the country.²⁰ In the close presidential elections that characterized the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, immigration has brought in “enough voters to decide a Presidential election, if rightly distributed.”²¹

Other articles in the *North American* raised doubts about whether immigrants from alien cultures could fit into an American system that was based so firmly in British traditions. In the then-raging controversy over the conduct of House Speaker Thomas Reed, which the *North American* covered in depth, several references were made to precedents from England’s House of Commons and unwritten Constitution. An article

¹⁶ Lodge, Henry Cabot. “The Restriction of Immigration.” *NAR* 152.1 (1891): 28, 32.

¹⁷ Lodge, Henry Cabot. “The Restriction of Immigration.” *NAR* 152.1 (1891): 34-36.

¹⁸ Lodge, Henry Cabot. “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration.” *NAR* 152.5 (1891): 608.

¹⁹ Chandler, W.E. “Shall Immigration be Suspended?” *NAR* 156.1 (1893): 7-8.

²⁰ Lodge, Henry Cabot. “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration.” *NAR* 152.5 (1891): 602-06.

²¹ Lodge, Henry Cabot. “The Restriction of Immigration.” *NAR* 152.1 (1891): 27.

about British capital profits in the United States called for “a practical union of material interests” between the two countries, which shared “the same lineage, the same language, the same laws, and the same literature” as well as “the achievements of the Anglo-Saxon race.”²²

But Britons and Americans weren’t the same in all respects, and the *North American* ran many articles pointing out how much the latter could learn from the former in culture (Americans did not read nearly as much or as well²³), manners (American girls were more vulgar and forward than their English counterparts²⁴), domestic service (American servants were better-paid but saucier than English servants²⁵), shipbuilding (American ships cost more, but were better built²⁶) and writing style (“Melville is essentially American: [Richard Henry] Dana writes as a straight-headed Englishman would; he is clear, convincing, utterly unaffected”²⁷).

Michael Davitt argued that “the two great English-speaking parts of the industrial world” were becomingly more alike politically, as democracy overtook aristocracy in Britain.²⁸ One would hardly realize this from reading the *North American* – most of the articles that were written by Englishmen were written by members of the nobility or of Parliament. But the illusion of the comity of similarity was important to the *North American*, and after reading through four years of it, one wants

²² Wiman, Erastus. “British Capital and American Industries.” *NAR* 150.2 (1890): 234, 225.

²³ Bunce, Oliver B. “English and American Book Markets.” *NAR* 150.4 (1890): 470-79.

²⁴ Sherwood, M.E.W. “American Girls in Europe.” *NAR* 150.6 (1890): 681-91.

²⁵ Faithfull, Emily. “Domestic Service in England.” *NAR* 153.1 (1891): 23-31.

²⁶ Cramp, Charles H. “The First Cost of Ships.” *NAR* 154.1 (1892): 76-84.

²⁷ Russell, W. Clark. “A Claim for American Literature.” *NAR* 154.1 (1892): 141.

²⁸ Davitt, Michael. “Labor Tendencies in Great Britain.” *NAR* 151.4 (1890): 459.

to believe the Duke of Argyll when he states that “in writing for American readers mainly I feel as if I were addressing friends.”²⁹

Conclusion

The *North American Review* was a journal that prided itself on publishing articles from all sides of an issue, and it did, indeed, print some scathing comments about Great Britain and the idea of an American Anglo-Saxon bond with her. Among other examples, General Benjamin Butler wrote of England, “Her government is continually making war on small nations and hiring someone else to do the fighting.”³⁰ An article about Shelley argues that “there is something fatal to genius in modern English life.”³¹ An article titled “Are We Anglo-Saxons?” takes the negative view, stating that “Europe, not England, is the mother of America.”³²

But comments like these are the exception rather than the rule. The *North American* printed many, many articles about Great Britain, the British Empire, and Anglo-Saxonism in general, and the predominant sentiment in these articles was Anglophilic. This Anglophilia was pervasive in the journal during the early 1890s, and the idea that Americans had a racially and culturally based brotherhood and common cause with Britain was frequently asserted and rarely challenged.

²⁹ Argyll, Duke of. “English Elections and Home Rule.” *NAR* 155.1 (1892): 129.

³⁰ Butler, Benjamin O. “The Behring Sea Controversy.” *NAR* 154.5 (1892): 567.

³¹ Ouida. “A New View of Shelley.” *NAR* 150.2 (1890): 258.

³² Fleming, John C. “Are We Anglo-Saxons?” *NAR* 153.2 (1891): 253-56.

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