

**RE-OPENING THE WEST:  
THOMAS JAMES, JOSIAH GREGG,  
AND THE RHETORIC OF THE "PRAIRIE OCEAN"**  
by George L. Sebastian-Coleman

Frederick Jackson Turner posited 1890 as the "closing of the frontier" because population density figures in that year's census indicated that large tracts of uninhabited land no longer existed. This claim essentially restated the long-standing Anglo belief that the New World was originally "empty."<sup>1</sup> When Anglos did not simply ignore, underrate, or deliberately deny the existence of Native Americans, they relied on a rhetoric which claimed that "primitive" peoples didn't count as occupiers of land, and so had no claim to possession. At most, Anglos recognized Indian title to villages and farms, but denied them larger claims to territory because the Indians did not occupy the land full-time and so did not "possess" it—an argument based upon British common-law which ruled such land to be "common-land." In general, however, Anglos relied simply on the rhetoric of an "empty" continent to legitimate their acquisition of new territory.

Ironically, the creation of Indian Territory and the removal of eastern Indians to it in the 1830s marked the Anglos' recognition that America had not been "empty." But in emptying the East, the removals filled the West. The creation of Indian Territory granted these Indians legal possession of the land, negating the earlier rhetoric of non-occupation, and since Indian Territory was also conceived as being inviolable—Anglos were not to enter it, even in transit—this act effectively "closed" the frontier sixty years earlier than Turner would claim.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, analyses of Anglo settlement have rarely noted any variance in the rhetoric of "manifest destiny" which Anglos utilize to legitimate their continental expansion. However, the struggle to develop a new rhetoric of settlement to deal with the reality of a delimited and populated frontier is apparent in the contrast between Thomas James's *Three Years Among the Mexicans and Indians* (1846), which retains the rhetoric of "conquering the wilderness," and Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* (1844), which, through his metaphor of the "prairie ocean," reopens the frontier without excluding its inhabitants.

Although the official recognition of Indian title did little to slow the spread of a populace that, for two-hundred years, had nurtured a belief in an "empty continent" and the promise of unlimited land to the west, it did force a change in the rhetoric of western settlement, particularly in the Southwest. If Anglos retained a culturally legitimated belief in their innate right to expand, it was now politically necessary to argue it in new terms. The creation of Indian Territory not only drew new lines on the map, carving up the "wilderness" and specifically

acknowledging Indians as legitimate residents on that land, it also implicitly granted these same rights to Indians farther west. That such promises and acknowledgments had been made and broken many times before, and would be again, should not blind us to the immediate political necessity of acting as though they were inviolate, and to the notion that the people at the time believed them to be so. Obviously not all writers attempted new justifications. Francis Parkman and other champions of Manifest Destiny wasted little rhetoric on justification, new or old. However, those writers with a stake in the region, or simply more familiarity with it, invented new arguments to legitimate U.S. expansion.

Both the Santa Fé and Oregon trails crossed Indian Territory, a violation of both the intent and letter of the act which created that domain. But, in the usual pattern of Anglo/Indian relations, it required only a "renegotiation" of treaties to provide for access across the territory while leaving it, theoretically, inviolate.<sup>3</sup> These two trails came into being for markedly different reasons. The Oregon Trail was a route of emigration—or, more properly, migration, as the travelers considered themselves to be moving to another piece of U.S. territory. Though the Oregon territory was at the time jointly claimed by Britain and the U.S., the emigration of large numbers of U.S. citizens was justified as a move onto land already held by the U.S. (not in need of conquest) and, simultaneously, as strengthening the U.S.'s claim to sole possession. As territory already conceived as belonging to the U.S., Oregon settlement engendered little new rhetorical justification, despite the existence of many Native American tribes in the region. In addition, though the area was contested by the U.S. and England, both these groups were "Anglo" and despite the acrimony between them they shared a common culture. The Southwest, however, was in the possession of Mexico whose heritage and culture were Spanish, and Anglos on the Santa Fé Trail were keenly aware of their outsider status. Moreover, the Santa Fé Trail was opened as a route of international trade with the newly independent Mexico and not (ostensibly) as a route of territorial expansion.<sup>4</sup> Though the trail opened in 1821, commerce on it remained sporadic until the 1830s, coinciding with the establishment of Indian Territory, and significant Anglo settlement did not occur until U.S. acquisition in 1846. Because Anglos had no prior claim in the Southwest, nor a shared common heritage with its occupants, and due to the issues raised by the creation of Indian Territory during its existence, writings from the Santa Fé Trail display a growing need to legitimate the Anglo presence.

A member of one of the caravans which opened the Santa Fé Trail, Thomas James writes of the West as a wilderness open to Anglo conquest.<sup>5</sup> His *Three Years Among the Mexicans and Indians* though recognizing the existence of other peoples in the West, relies on the stock rhetoric of the Anglo conquest of America—the opposition of "civilization" to "primitive"—to dismiss these people's rights to possession of the land. A wide-ranging text covering a series of expeditions onto the Great Plains from 1809 to 1822, *Three Years* is a personal account to a large degree dedicated to explaining why his several ventures were

all commercial disasters.<sup>4</sup> But this personal vindication, however important it may have been for him psychologically, is not the immediate cause of his writing the book. James, writing two decades after his adventures, is as much concerned with the future as the past.<sup>7</sup> Though, like Gregg, James was engaged in commerce, his title appeals to the reader of travel and adventure writing—recounting a journey “among” the Other—but as his opening paragraph indicates, his purpose goes directly to American territorial expansion:

I have often amused myself and friends, by relating stories of my adventures in the West, and am led to believe . . . that my life in the Prairies and Mountains for three years, is worthy of a record more enduring than their memories. I have passed a year and a half on the head waters of the Missouri and among the gorges of the Rocky Mountains, as a hunter and trapper, and two years among the Spaniards and Camanches [sic]. I have . . . *acquired considerable information illustrative of Indian and Mexican character and customs.* By a plain unvarnished tale of western life . . . I hope to amuse the reader who delights in accounts of wild adventure. . . . If my reminiscences, as recorded in the following pages, *serve to awaken my countrymen of the West and South-west, now thank God, including Texas,* to the importance of peaceful and friendly relations with the most powerful tribe of Indians on the continent, the Camanches, I shall not regard the labor of preparing these sheets as bestowed in vain. (emphasis added)<sup>8</sup>

What begins as a grandfatherly tale of frontier adventure ends up as military reconnaissance. Not that James defaults on his promise of frontier adventure, for there are plenty of the, now typical, Indian encounters, fights, struggles with nature, and the like—but the work’s driving force is ideological. The adventure tales are warnings which he hopes will “serve to awaken his countrymen” to the dangers in the West and the need for allies. Allies against whom? one may ask. As his reference to Texas suggests, the danger does not come from Indians or nature, but from foreign powers. One needs allies to free this land from the despotic rule of Mexico, or more broadly, from the lack of any rule. Though there are Indian groups which James finds dangerous, his financial failures are finally due not to physical attack but the inability to recover monetary damages from theft or to receive payment when he extends credit. On the Plains he wishes the U.S. to impose its law on the Indians, whom he considers to have no law, and in the case of the Santa Fé trade to displace the “bad” or despotic law of Mexico. It is not “wilderness” with which James contends, it is the failure of the U.S. to properly extend itself, its law—a task which he hopes his work will fulfill. Though his problems are in fact “international,” his insistence that anything other than U.S. law is no law at all effectively denies the legitimacy of Indian and Mexican cultures. Thus, despite writing in 1846, James still images the West in the pre-Indian Territory terms of his own experiences from 1809 to 1822.

For James, the trans-Mississippi west is a "wilderness" in which the irruption of Spanish settlements in New Mexico appears no more unusual than Indian settlements across the plains, and he grants little more legitimacy to their territorial claims than he does to those of the Indians. Though he acknowledges Mexican rule in New Mexico he clearly sees the land as "up for grabs"—that is, unmarked by legitimate territorial boundaries.

Late in the work, James notes that, "I have always been true to my country, and uniformly studied to advance the interest of my countrymen in all my transactions with the savages and Spaniards. . . ."9 This phrasing raises the issue of who is civilized and who is not, and thus who is entitled to this new land. This might seem an unremarkable usage reflecting normative nineteenth-century distinctions between barbaric (Indian) and civilized (Spanish) peoples, but with an opening that advocates an alliance with the Comanches and which thanks God that Texas is free (from Mexico) it suggests that, rather than making a distinction between savage and Spaniard, James here equates them. Either reading, however, contradicts the attributes he grants to the two groups earlier in the work. James arrives in New Mexico just in time to help celebrate Mexico's independence from Spain. Because the Mexicans "said they knew nothing of the rule of proceeding in such cases," James creates a Fourth-of-July style ceremony complete with liberty pole, a flag, and military salute.<sup>10</sup> This formal ceremony completed, the Mexicans proceed with their own style of celebration, "a scene of universal carousing and revelry. . . . No Italian carnival ever exceeded this celebration in thoughtlessness, vice and licentiousness of every description."<sup>11</sup> James generalizes his repugnance of Mexican ways to all Mediterranean peoples with his analogy to an Italian carnival, thus marking a distinction between Anglos and even other Europeans (probably reflecting Protestant and Catholic antipathies as well). After documenting further specifics of this celebration, James finishes his description of the Mexicans by saying, "I saw enough during this five days revelry to convince me that the republicans were unfit to govern themselves or any body else."<sup>12</sup>

Having dispensed of Mexican "rights" to home rule, James turns his attention to the Indians: "The Indians [Pueblos] acted with more moderation and reason in their rejoicing than the Spaniards." Then, describing how well and richly dressed these Indians are and that these are products of their own manufacture, he adds:

The Americans with their Tariff and "protection of home industry" might learn a lesson from these *wise and industrious* Indians. I heard nothing among them of a Tariff to protect their "domestic manufactures." They worked and produced and protection came of itself without the curse of government interference.<sup>13</sup>

In these comparisons, as elsewhere in the work, James links domestic virtue to public policy. Clearly, at least in comparison to the Mexicans, these Indians share the domestic values James champions and, equally clearly, the lack of these domestic values and industry on the part of the Mexicans makes them, in James's opinion, unfit to govern even though they now espouse "republican" principles. Moreover, not only are they unfit to govern themselves but James implicitly sets the Indians free of their custody as well by implying that they could set their own tariffs. But James sets the Indians "free" of Mexico only to degrade Mexican authority not to establish Pueblo autonomy. Although his celebration of Indian "industry" threatens to make them superior even to Americans, because for James they remain just Indians, the description appears more as an indication of their potential worth as trading partners and allies—natural resources of the New Mexican wilderness—rather than as an acknowledgment of their right to the land.

We may also see in James's criticism of tariffs an argument for U.S. expansion. James's criticism is directed at tariffs because as "protection of home industry" they reflect an attitude of isolationism, an unwillingness, even fear, of expansion. Implicitly, James suggests that we might well expect the unproductive Mexicans to require a tariff, but the U.S. which must be at least as capable as the Indian should not need one. Further, such tariffs apply to international trade, between the States there are no such tariffs, so James's chiding of his fellow Americans—in 1845—is another argument that they should not fear acquiring this territory.<sup>14</sup>

As will Gregg, James fills much of his account of time spent in Mexico with other anecdotes of the lack of justice in Mexican law, all of which serve to further undermine the legitimacy of Mexican government and justify U.S. expansion. In addition, although the fever of "manifest destiny" may not have required it, James does his best to make some aspect of (New) Mexico desirable. As noted, his description of the Pueblo Indians made them into model citizens, and he extends this quality to all the Indians of the territory even, significantly, unto coastal access to the Pacific:

all the tribes, the Utahs, the Navahoes, and others inhabiting the country *west of the Mountains to the Gulf of California*, like those in [New] Mexico, lived in comfortable houses, raised wheat and corn, and had good mills for grinding their grain. I saw many specimens of their skills in the useful arts, and brought home with me some blankets and counterpanes, of Indian manufacture, of excellent workmanship, which I have used in my family for twenty-five years. They are, generally far in advance of the Spaniards around them, in all the arts of *civilized life* as in the *virtues that give value to national character*. (emphasis added)<sup>15</sup>

Though a testament to the "virtues" of the Indian inhabitants, this passage serves primarily as an argument for the value of the land: this is territory worth fighting for.<sup>16</sup> And it should not escape our attention that if this is land worth fighting for, James does not conceive of that fight as being with the Indians—"territory" belongs to "civilized" cultures, the Indians just come with it. Despite James's characterization of these Indians as possessing the "arts of civilized life," he denies them the possession of territory. The "national character" to which they may "give value" will be that of the U.S.—once it takes possession.

Which returns us to "savages and Spaniards"—in this case, James's usage of "Spaniards" instead of "Mexicans" in his closing pages seems significant: Spain is "civilized," Mexico may be another matter. James's descriptions "savage" the Mexicans morally and politically, and inversely "civilize" the Indians, but James knows that this is just rhetoric. For James, and his contemporaries, this land belongs to Mexico and so it will be with Mexicans that war, if necessary, will be waged. Mexico by dint of its European heritage is not barbaric, but it can be rhetorically made so by showing it to have failed in the "civilizing mission" which would mark a truly civilized people—not only has Spain not civilized the Indians (to the extent that they are so James credits to their own industry) it is providing a negative example. In addition, as Gregg will make more explicit, Mexico is stagnant—no evolution, no civilization, and this also marks the limits of the "civilized" qualities of the Indians—the stagnancy of whose cultures will be a commonplace of nineteenth-century ethnography. As a result, the duality necessary to define Anglos as civilized is reconstructed and, further, they are presented with an object on which to exercise their "will to civilize."

James's central argument is that there is a need for the U.S. to extend its dominion over these lands in order to institute "law and order"—that is, civilization. Though he argues for an alliance with the Comanches in order to accomplish this takeover, his rhetoric remains that of conquering an "empty" wilderness—unmarked by territorial boundaries, whose inhabitants, because "uncivilized," can be ignored. Nevertheless, James's acknowledgment that these Indians possess civilized virtues and his recognition that New Mexico is possessed by Mexico begins the shift in the rhetoric of U.S. expansion to the west. There can no longer be the pretense of an uncontested spread of U.S. population into "uninhabited" lands, though it is still possible to deny the legitimacy of the inhabitants' claims. James argues for expansion, but without trying to imagine the consequences of the multicultural mixing which would be its result. It will wait for Josiah Gregg, as a professed resident of New Mexico, to attempt to resolve the contradictions inherent in continued U.S. expansion into "occupied territory."

Between James's Santa Fé expedition in 1821 and Gregg's first in 1831 the geo-political landscape changed. Gregg's Santa Fé Trail years occur during the resettlement of eastern Indians into Indian Territory. What for James was an unmarked wilderness on the other side of the Mississippi is for Gregg demarcated territory. The political realities of Indian Territory and the

recognition of Mexico's borders meant that for Gregg in 1831, "wilderness" only stretched for approximately 500 miles: from Council Grove, 150 miles west of Independence, Missouri, where the Santa Fé caravans formally organized, to a point "nearly a hundred and forty miles from Santa Fé" where they "abandoned the organization of [their] caravan" because of the dangers of the wild.<sup>17</sup> James apparently had no trouble reconciling his perception of the land as wilderness with his assumption that the U.S. government should and could have exerted its law across that wilderness. But for Gregg, the factual extension of U.S. authority—the creation of a "territory" of Indians, and the existence of the nation of Mexico—marked a closure of the wilderness. Gregg's trans-Mississippi West is delimited by a series of political borders, whose inhabitants have legal jurisdiction and must be taken into account. Or, in the technical sense, the land has changed from "wilderness" to "frontier"—that is, a territorial border.

Because of the structure of *Commerce*, Gregg's shifting attempts to deal with this new reality have been preserved. In his introduction, Gregg describes *Commerce of the Prairies* as having two components: his "personal narrative" and his "observations," or "natural history." The four chapters of "personal narrative" in Volume One chronicle his first trip to Santa Fé and speak primarily through the voice of the naive traveler, though occasionally interrupted by the voice of the older, more experienced Gregg. The subsequent chapters are a compilation of "observations" recorded throughout Gregg's ten years in New Mexico and, despite his claim that they have been "digested," often betray radically different attitudes toward particular events.<sup>18</sup> Though Gregg's shifting voice complicates the reading of the work it also enriches it, for if Gregg had more thoroughly "digested" his observations, his developing response to a delimited West would have been lost.

Gregg's "personal narrative" of his first trip displays a young man's desire to portray himself in the wilderness. He utilizes the standard rhetoric of the West, insisting on its characterization as an empty wilderness. But this attempt to deny the closure created by Indian Territory breaks down almost immediately, as evidenced in an early passage recording the trip through Indian Territory to Council Grove where the caravan will form. Although the lack of formal organization of the caravan until Council Grove is indicative of the settled nature of this territory he insists on the land's emptiness:

Early on the 26th of May we reached the long looked-for rendezvous of Council Grove, where we joined the main body of the caravan. Lest this imposing title suggest to the reader a snug and thriving village, it should be observed, that, on the day of our departure from Independence, *we passed the last human abode upon our route*; therefore, from the borders of Missouri to those of New Mexico not even an Indian settlement greeted our eyes. (emphasis added)<sup>19</sup>

In fact, Gregg has been traveling through settled Indian Territory, though the trail avoids those settlements, and, as he will describe, he routinely meets nomadic Indians on the plains who carry their "abodes" with them. But, even without acknowledging this he goes on to say, "All those who have travelled these *delightful* regions, look forward with *anxiety* to the day when the Indian title to the land shall be extinguished, and flourishing 'white' settlements dispel the *gloom* which at present prevails over this *uninhabited* country" (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> Although Gregg's use of "anxiety" here may be consistent with a definition of "anxious" as "earnestly desirous," the conflict between "delightful" and "gloom," and between "uninhabited lands" and "Indian title" suggests that it more likely reflects its definition as "uneasiness or trouble of mind."<sup>21</sup> Gregg's uneasiness of mind results from the conflict between the old rhetoric and the new reality of Indian Territory: he is caught in the double-bind of insisting on emptiness while calling for "extinguishing" the Indian's title to the land which his own government has just instituted. Yet, by the time he writes his ethnographies at the end of Volume Two he is able to revise his position and argue in favor of Indian Territory.

What eliminates Gregg's uneasiness of mind and need to deny the closure of Indian Territory, is his development of an analogy between the prairies and the ocean, and a concomitant distinction between "Frontier" and "Plains" Indians.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps led to this metaphor by his noting the "navigability" of the Missouri, Gregg describes Independence as "the general 'port of embarkation' for . . . the . . . 'prairie ocean.'"<sup>23</sup> Whether Gregg borrowed this metaphor—as his setting it in half-quotes suggests—or invented it—in which case its continually being set off in quotes would be for emphasis, he will hereafter use the metaphor as a literal description. Repeatedly, Gregg remarks on his use of sextant and compass to determine his position as he navigates across this "'prairie ocean' . . . [where] not a single landmark is to be seen. . . . All is level as the sea, and the compass was our surest, as well as principal guide."<sup>24</sup> Or, bemoaning the lack of authority of caravan "captains," he notes that it is "to be regretted that some system of 'maritime law' has not been introduced" to give them legal authority over their charges.<sup>25</sup> And late in the work he issues a call for an international agreement to provide protection for the caravans, "whereby the armies of either [Mexico and the U.S.] might indiscriminately range upon this desert, as ships of war upon the ocean."<sup>26</sup> This last is of particular note because Gregg is aware that the area in question—wilderness or not—is not unclaimed territory. But his concern for protection is not from the claimants—Mexico and the U.S., but from the occupants—that is, the Plains Indians, including James's desired allies, the Comanches.

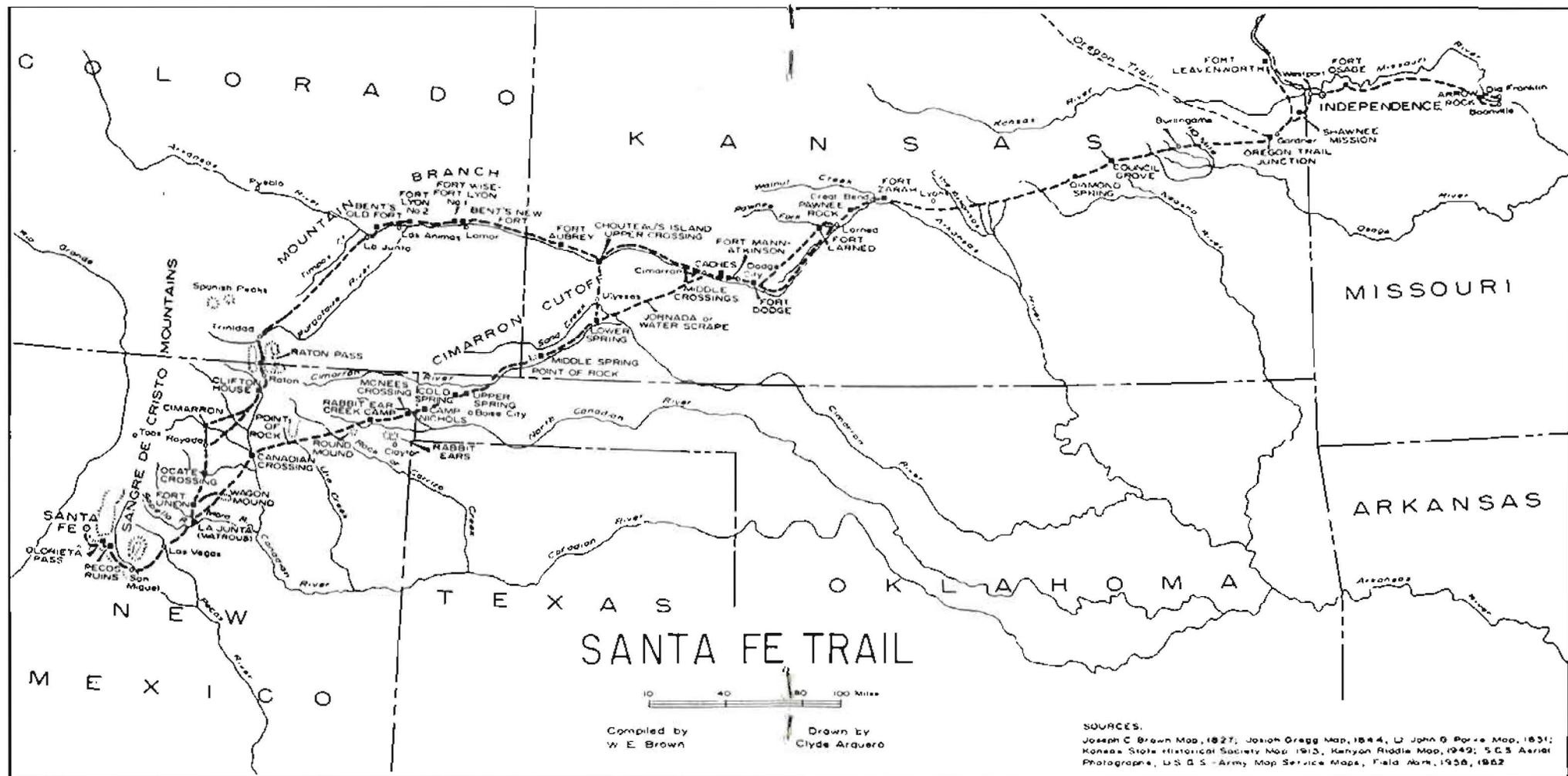
It is in regard to the question of "territory" that "prairie ocean" shifts from simple metaphor to rhetorical argument. The status of Indians to the west of Indian Territory was ambiguous, but the logic of the resettlement of Eastern Indians beyond the Mississippi suggested that Indians to the west would be

allowed to remain where they were. The rhetoric of the "prairie ocean" allows Gregg to distinguish the "Plains Indians" from the "Frontier Indians" to whom his government has granted title to Indian Territory. By making the "desert" into a "prairie ocean" Gregg turns their land into water and makes occupancy, and so claims of possession, seem absurd. The "Plains Indians" become akin to whaling fleets roaming the sea—albeit in search of buffalo.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, they become pirates when they demand goods in exchange for passage through their lands. Gregg dislikes Mexican tariffs, but he recognizes their right to have them. He makes no such concession for the Plains Indians whom he has literarily cast adrift. However, if Gregg denies them rights and makes of them pirates, by doing so he overturns James's assumption of authority over them and returns them to the "wilderness."

Gregg's "prairie ocean" reopens the West not by characterizing the Great Plains tribes as illegitimate occupiers, but by characterizing the land as uninhabitable. Just as Pike had declared the southern plains useless because a desert, so too Gregg ironically emphasizes their "ocean" status by their lack of water: "It will now readily be inferred that the Great Prairies . . . are, as has before been intimated, chiefly uninhabitable—not so much for want of wood . . . as of soil and water . . . they are mostly of a sterile character. . . ."<sup>28</sup> This characterization insists that this space will remain an open wilderness. Uninhabitable, it cannot be territorialized and thus it becomes a place upon which "armies . . . might indiscriminately range . . . as ships of war upon the ocean."

This rhetoric of the ocean, though it reopens the West for Gregg, carries with it a problem: in order for it to remain open, it must remain uninhabitable. There is of course no point in reopening the West if it is nothing but ocean, there must be someplace to get to. Thus the rhetoric of the "prairie ocean" makes an even more striking if only implicit argument: if the land beyond Indian Territory is an ocean, on its far shore must lie a new world into which Gregg's generation of Anglos can expand—and for Gregg that is New Mexico. But, this "new world" was not only already inhabited but claimed, territorialized, by another "civilized" power. Unlike James, Gregg is very conscious of the question of boundaries, and he comes too late on the trail to pretend ignorance. James "emptied" New Mexico (opening it to settlement) through a radical description of the inhabitants which negated their claims—an extension of the rhetoric that had "emptied" the East. Whereas Gregg will use his geographical analogy not to empty New Mexico but to isolate it so as to open it to a new concept of settlement.

Rather than declare the inhabitants "unfit" as did James, Gregg geographically isolates New Mexico so that it may be conceived as independent of either the U.S. or Mexico, and thus potentially open to a "new" settlement. Particularly for Anglo-Europeans the "empty" New World had represented a place to start afresh, but by the mid-nineteenth century such dreams were



*Courtesy National Park Service*

severely constricted. The western frontier served to keep the concept alive, but the political and demographic realities of the spread of European powers and peoples were rapidly "filling" even the West. Gregg solves the dilemma of reaching an occupied new world on the far shore of his ocean by making New Mexico a "desert island" not the territorialized mainland.<sup>29</sup> His descriptions of the desert lands between the New Mexico settlements and his next point of trade to the south, Chihuahua, make them the equal to the ocean he has crossed on the Great Plains. If he fails to call them an ocean, it is perhaps due to a reluctance to infringe too deeply on Mexican authority.<sup>30</sup> His opening paragraph of Chapter Seven, "Geography of New Mexico," however, makes this isolation absolute:

New Mexico possesses but a few of those natural advantages, which are necessary to anything like a *rapid progress in civilization*. Though bounded north and east by the territory of the United States, south by that of Texas and Chihuahua, and west by Upper California, it is surrounded by chains of mountains and prairie wilds, extending to a distance of 500 miles or more, except in the direction of Chihuahua, from which its settlements are separated by an *unpeopled desert* of nearly two hundred miles—and *without a single means of communication by water with any other part of the world*. (emphasis added)<sup>31</sup>

We may first note the contrast between Gregg's lack of "communication by water" and James who specifically gave New Mexico access to the Gulf of Mexico through his assertion of continuous Indian settlements to the west. This lack may seem gratuitous due to Gregg's own characterization of the prairies as ocean, but a real ocean—"a natural advantage"—would make New Mexico accessible to any civilized power. But, "desert oceans" are readily "navigable" only by Americans with their advanced, wheeled technology. The Mexicans conduct all their transport trade to and from the interior of Mexico by mule train.<sup>32</sup> This lack of access creates the lack of "anything like a rapid progress in civilization," and that lack of progress is what makes New Mexico desirable. Desirable, because "lack of progress in civilization" is equivalent to "uncivilized," and so if not an empty wilderness at least open to imagining a new civilization.

But if the "prairie ocean" has reopened the frontier closed by Indian Territory, imagining New Mexico as an "island" accepts another form of closure. The island of New Mexico may allow Gregg to conceive it as a "new world" open to Anglo settlement, but it admits that even this world is delimited. Further, Gregg's geographic isolation of New Mexico cannot "empty" it. Though in his defense of the Indian Removals at the end of his work he will revert to an argument of the essential nature of Indians as migratory, such an argument is ineffective against New Mexico's Mexican and Pueblo population. As a result he is forced to "accept" the current residents and develop new rhetorical strategies to legitimate Anglo presence.

Fortuitously, Gregg's "encod[ing of] the physical terrain as just as much a player in the drama of contact as the human participants, with the landscape variously enabling, thwarting, or even evoking human actions and desires," allows him to do just this.<sup>33</sup> By "containing" New Mexico through its geographical isolation he rhetorically frees its inhabitants from external political and cultural forces, allowing Anglos to view them simply as other people (not the Other) among whom they will settle in New Mexico. Just as his invention of the "prairie ocean" allowed him to make a distinction between the rights of Frontier Indians and those of the Plains, his making an island of New Mexico allows him to isolate Mexicans from Mexico and Pueblos from other Indians and accept their presence in his "new world."

This use of the land marks a significant difference between James and Gregg. Because James retains the logic of the "empty" wilderness, he must legitimate the "conquest" of New Mexico through a radical description of the people—Mexicans are savages, the (Pueblo) Indians civilized—thereby removing the Mexican's "civilized" claim to territory, while making the land desirable because of the civilized qualities of the Indians (to whom he nevertheless denies possession). Gregg, on the other hand, by allowing its own geography to isolate New Mexico—to make it available—is able to deradicalize the description of its inhabitants. As in the following passage describing Gregg's first arrival in Santa Fé, which otherwise mirrors James's first experience, the Mexicans become exotic rather than threatening:

The arrival produced a great deal of bustle and excitement among the natives. "*Los Americanos!*"—"Los carros"—"*La entrada de la caravana!*" were to be heard in every direction; and crowds of women and boys flocked around to see the new-comers; while crowds of *léperos* hung about as usual to see what they could pilfer. The wagoners were by no means free from excitement on this occasion. Informed of the 'ordeal' they had to pass, they had spent the previous morning in 'rubbing up;' and now they were prepared with clean faces, sleek and combed hair, and their choicest Sunday suit, to meet the 'fair eyes' of glistening black that were sure to stare at them as they passed.<sup>34</sup>

Only the *léperos* mar this entrance, even if we detect some irony in the "fair," black eyes. Unlike James who stands appalled at the "vice" of Mexican celebrations, Gregg notes that "the wagoners, and many of the traders, especially the novices, flocked to the numerous fandangoes. . . ."<sup>35</sup> Not only are the Mexicans in Gregg not threatening, they are welcoming. By relying on geography, Gregg is able to convert New Mexico's residents from a problem to an asset. Indeed, as he further develops them, Gregg's descriptions of New Mexico and its inhabitants initiate a rhetoric of "multiculturalism" that will become central to Anglo settlers' cultural identity as "New Mexicans."<sup>36</sup>

But this passage also marks the shift in voice, Gregg is no longer one of the "novices" flocking to fandangoes, instead, the voice of the experienced Gregg intervenes in the spectacle of the arrival to discuss trade tariffs which "are extremely oppressive." Geographical isolation can only take Gregg so far and his turning to the subject of tariffs allows him to begin a process of politically isolating New Mexico. Gregg's discussion of this tariff reveals that it is controlled in New Mexico by the whim of Governor Armijo, who at one point "established a tariff of *his own*, entirely arbitrary" (emphasis original).<sup>37</sup> Though Armijo's tariff is later revoked and only the official tariffs imposed, "How much of these duties found their way to the public treasury, [Gregg] will not venture to assert."<sup>38</sup> But the despotic rule which James had invoked to undermine the Mexican people, Gregg uses to reinforce the isolation of New Mexico from Mexico. Gregg is consistently careful to separate "Mexicans" from Mexican law and even more so to shift Mexican law into Mexico—Governor Armijo represents the external power of Mexico not the indigenous population.

James's *Three Years* recorded only what "was" in New Mexico, or from his point of view, only what "is," for even though writing a quarter-century after the fact he makes no acknowledgment that things might have changed. As a visitor, James records the seen as the real; he makes no attempt to put any actions into context, to imagine how he fits into the moment he records. He stands aloof, a witness to a *fact* which he imagines as having neither a past nor a future in which he plays a part. In contrast, following his "personal narrative," Gregg declares himself a resident of New Mexico and proceeds to write its history—not merely out of a pedantic desire to record it—but to place himself within that history. Not surprisingly then, his history records a series of "political" moments in the settlement of New Mexico concluding with the years of his residency, in which he himself is a player.<sup>39</sup> It is then very much *his* history—Gregg is no longer an alien visitor but a logical component of the region, and his history is written from that perspective.

As a result, the ensuing chapters, "Geography of New Mexico," "Mines of New Mexico," "Domestic Animals," "Arts and Sciences," "Dress and Customs," "Government of New Mexico," etc., can no longer be read as spoken from outside the culture. Though much of their content describes "otherness," they do so through a voice placed in a relation to it. This is not to imply that Gregg has abandoned his Anglo identity, nor that he attempts to diminish the distinctive qualities of Mexicans or various Indian tribes. To the contrary, his descriptions are dedicated to enumerating the differences. But because he has placed himself in this history, these differences cease to be the oppositional pairing of Civilization versus the Other. Rather, Gregg is in the process of developing a new identity for his island new world: "New Mexican"—an identity in which he (implicitly all Anglos) along with all these groups will participate.

Gregg's invention of the "prairie ocean" reopens the frontier "closed" by the creation of Indian Territory, but it cannot return the wilderness. Gregg is only

able to "re-open" the West by creating a new enclosed space—the "island" of New Mexico. Long before Turner would declare it, Gregg and others were forced to acknowledge the delimiting of the West and acknowledge the presence of Others in the New World. Gregg's "island" of New Mexico is a new world upon which he can still project his desires, but it requires a new rhetoric—no longer one of denial or displacement of other cultures but of negotiation with them.

#### NOTES

1. I follow the commonplace Southwest usage of "Anglo" as a general referent to "Americans" of European descent because it provides a useful group label (no more accurate or inaccurate than "Indian"), and, more importantly, because it avoids the problem of implicitly accepting the European-American presumptions of right to possession which the use of "American" would suggest—or the unwieldiness (with little gain in precision) of "United States citizens."

William Cronon, "Turner's First Stand" in *Writing Western History*, ed. Richard Etulain (Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 1991), 82-83, notes that Turner meant land "free of rents" not "inhabitants." While Turner did acknowledge the existence of Indians, they effectively "disappear" following this acknowledgment, leaving the land empty. Moreover even Turner's more technical usage is incorrect. If individuals did not pay exorbitant rents to landholders, there was, nevertheless, a substantial monetary cost to Indian displacement. The Indian Removals established a national policy of compensating Indians for land, thus incurring a large and ongoing cost to the federal government. Beyond these direct payments, the cost of maintaining the Army of the West (dedicated to eradicating or containing Indians) was enormous. Turner emphasizes economics as central to American development, but by ignoring the price paid for western lands by the government he still erases the Indian from the landscape. Similarly, Michael C. Steiner, "Turner and Western Regionalism" (Etulain, *Writing*, 122), quotes Turner's "Wisconsin palimpsest"—mound builders, Indians, French, New Yorkers and Vermonters—to support claims of Turner's inclusion of Native Americans. But this series of "peoples" masks the binary division between Native Americans and Europeans in the movement from "Indian" to "French." The "mound builders" and "Indians" disappear, the Europeans remain.

2. For a full discussion of the creation and expectations for Indian Territory see Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1991), especially Chapter Four, 85-118.

3. The lack of coherent thinking regarding U.S. policy toward Indians may be seen in the contradiction between the fact that the Santa Fé Trail was established as a route of commerce prior to the creation of Indian Territory, but when Indian Territory was established this was not taken into account—though this may be attributed in part to the relatively low level of activity on the trail until the 1830s.

4. Before there could be a Santa Fé Trail it was, of course, necessary for the U.S. to become aware of New Mexico. Perhaps not surprisingly—given the history of European expansion into the New World—despite New Mexico's having been a Spanish territory for two-hundred-fifty years, Zebulon Pike "discovered" it in 1807. To be fair, unlike Columbus, Pike knew it was there, he just claimed he didn't know where. Pike's mission put New Mexico on the map, but his analogy of the southern Great Plains to the Sahara gave them their reputation as the Great American Desert and put a damper, in both the official and popular imagination, on U.S. colonizing interests in the area. Pike's expedition did however lead to the expansion of the fur trade into the Rocky Mountains and following Mexican independence in 1821, which opened the border to trade, aided in plotting the trail to Santa Fé.

5. Though James publishes *Three Years Among the Mexicans and Indians* in 1846, two years after Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies*, he retains the rhetoric common at the time of his travels, 1809-1822, while Gregg's work reflects his experience from 1831 to 1844.
6. James's adventures begin when he joins the Missouri Fur Company in 1809 and goes fur-trapping along the upper Missouri. He returns in 1810, broke, spends the next ten years in trade in the U.S. and in 1821 leads one of the two caravans to New Mexico whose journeys are considered to mark the "opening" of the Santa Fé Trail. This too is a commercial failure. The next year he makes one more trading expedition onto the Great Plains to trade with the Comanches. Moreover, James is writing from memory. Though he kept a journal of his travels, it was destroyed in one of his mishaps. As a result, though he includes dates and writes as though he has facts at his finger tips, this loss, combined with the lapse of twenty-five years between his travels and his writing "frees" him to shape his recollections to suit his present purposes—lending both a more romantic air to his adventures and an ideological drive to his analysis.
7. As James states, explicitly, in the last pages of the work he has already cleared his debts: "The whole is not paid: in the twenty years which have intervened, I discharged all my debts . . ." and he has the "consolation of being able to recall to my mind several manifestations of the confidence and esteem of my fellow citizens. . . ." and now he can "look forward cheerfully and hopefully on the coming days . . ." (Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Mexicans and Indians*, [1846; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962], 164 and 165). As may be seen in the subsequent quotes, James's rhetoric is strikingly similar to Benjamin Franklin's in his autobiography, and much of his "vindication" follows a similar ethic of being able to expunge the record of the past by subsequent actions.
8. Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Mexicans and Indians*, (1846; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1962), 2.
9. James, *Three Years*, 165.
10. James, *Three Years*, 87. James alternates between using Spaniard and Mexican, an understandable response in 1821 because Mexico had just declared independence. But we should not forget James is writing in 1845, and thus his ambiguous identifications serve to further undercut Mexican authority or capability for self-rule.
11. James, *Three Years*, 88.
12. *Ibid*, 89.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Further, James's snipe at tariffs also appears to be an anachronistic comment on contemporary (1846) policy not those in effect in 1821.
15. James, *Three Years*, 90.
16. James's assertions about the nature of Indian settlements to the west is simply untrue: the Hopis in northern Arizona are the last "Pueblo" settlements; the rest of the area is sparsely populated by nomadic Apaches or further south by the more sedentary, but not pueblo building, Yaqui. Even James's assessment of New Mexico, itself, stands in contrast to Gregg (who, as is hereafter discussed, was decidedly less expansionistic than James), who says of New Mexico, "There is no part of the civilized globe, perhaps, where the Arts have been so much neglected, and the progress of Science so successfully impeded" (Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, [1844; Norman: U Oklahoma P, 1954], 140).
17. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, (1844; Norman: U Oklahoma P, 1954), 75. It is even arguable that, considering that military escort (when it was provided) went another 250 miles beyond Council Grove to the recognized limits of U.S. jurisdiction and Indian Territory, the wilderness was reduced to half that.
18. Gregg, *Commerce*, 7-8.
19. Gregg, *Commerce*, 29.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Definitions of "anxiety" from *OED* 1st ed.

22. Although this distinction is made throughout the work, the last four chapters of Volume Two are an ethnography which, though Gregg's desire for scientific objectivity is apparent, include subjective distinctions between the 'Frontier' and 'Plains' tribes which reinforce Gregg's political goals.

23. Gregg, *Commerce*, 23.

24. *Ibid.*, 50.

25. *Ibid.*, 58.

26. *Ibid.*, 343, note 15.

27. In this context it is interesting to note that in his narrative of his first "crossing" of the 'prairie ocean' Gregg addresses the issue of the dwindling number of Buffalo: "There is a current notion that the whites frighten them away; but, I would ask, where do they go? To be sure, to use a hunter's phrase, they 'frighten a few out of their skins;' yet for every one killed by whites, more than a hundred, perhaps a thousand, fall by the hands of savages. From these, however, there is truly 'nowhere to flee;' for they follow them wheresoever they go: while the poor brutes instinctively learn to avoid the fixed establishment, and, to some degree, the regular travelling routes of the whites" (Gregg, *Commerce*, 71). One hears an echo here of Melville who did not fear the extinction of the whale because the whaling ships could not chase them into the Arctic waters. Even more interesting to the modern eco-aware reader is his implication that "fixed establishments" that is 'white' cities act as a conservation measure, and thus the implicit, if you exterminate the Indian you would save the buffalo—something akin to the current Alaskan debate about killing wolves to keep the elk herds big enough to hunt. Further, this passage is one of the markers of Gregg's own shifting views. In a passage recorded after ten years on the trail, Gregg notes that the buffalo are almost gone and now admits that the Anglo "pleasure of taking life is the incentive of these brutal excesses, I will not pretend to decide; but one thing is very certain, that the buffalo killed yearly on these prairies far exceeds the wants of the traveller, or what might be looked upon as the exigencies of rational sport" and in a note to this passage he adds "The same barbarous propensity is observable in regard to wild horses" (Gregg, *Commerce*, 324).

28. Gregg, *Commerce*, 355.

29. Gregg's isolation of New Mexico is structured into his work as well. Originally published as two volumes, Volume One begins with his first trip to New Mexico and ends with what he believes will be his last. He ends the first volume explaining that he will not "detain the reader with an account of my journeyings between Mexico and the United States, during the seven years subsequent to [his] first arrival in Santa Fé"; instead these are intertwined with the Mexican adventures from the later period in Volume Two (212). Volume One, consisted almost entirely of New Mexico—four chapters are devoted to the initial journey there (76 pages) and one thirteen-page chapter to the return journey, the remaining eleven chapters (144 pages) are a history of the trade, a history of Santa Fé, and a descriptive catalogue of the resources, geography, and peoples of New Mexico. The second volume begins with his return to the Santa Fé trade, though this time his goal is specifically Chihuahua, and he does not separate the descriptions of Mexico's geography and people from the descriptions of his journeys. The last hundred pages of Volume Two are dedicated to chapters on the geography of the Great Plains, and ethnographies on the frontier and the Plains Indians. The 1954 edition which I use is published in one volume, but the original volume distinctions are retained and in any case the structural separation of New Mexico from Mexico is evident. Although I will not be examining the second volume at length it is worth noting that much of his description of experiences there is dedicated to pointing out the vagaries of Mexican law, and its general distastefulness to Americans. Arguably these descriptions are as much

"evidence" for justification of U.S. takeover as James's, but Gregg's separation of New Mexico and fuller descriptions there argue for his desire to familiarize New Mexico while presenting Mexico "proper" as better left to itself. This is again consistent with Gregg's career in international trade. Turning New Mexico into a U.S. outpost provides a close and ready staging area for Mexican trade while leaving the profitable side of the international trade undisturbed.

30. Though as the book was being written the Santa Fé trade was suspended due to conflicts with Mexico, Gregg expected to continue in the trade; throughout the work he is conscious of the potential ramifications of his writings on his future trade relations.

31. Gregg, *Commerce*, 98.

32. Gregg is very thorough in noting the lack of wheeled vehicles in New Mexico—only the highly inefficient *careta* is in use. Marc Simmons, *Coronado's Land: Essays on Daily Life in Colonial New Mexico* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1991), 78-84, provides a history of the *careta* in New Mexico—from which the following description is largely derived. The *careta* is a two-wheeled cart usually made solely from a cottonwood tree. "Tree" being the operative term, no cut lumber, no iron; the bed and feneer were made from branches lashed together, another branch formed the "axle," which was fixed, around which rotated two discs cut from the largest part of the trunk and adzed into a roughly circular shape which served as wheels. These wheels were made as large as possible (approximately five feet in diameter) to reduce wear on the axle "bearings"—when a sufficiently large trunk was unavailable extra pieces would be pegged onto it. All in all it weighed significantly more than it could carry, and though it served as the common means of transport from farms to villages, it was unsuitable, and uneconomical, as a means of long distance transport.

33. Annette Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions" (*American Literature* 64:1, March, 1992), 3. Kolodny makes this comment to describe what should be the practice of critics of "frontier literature." The effect of the land on its inhabitants is a common trope in American literature, but becomes especially prominent in the rhetoric of Anglo settlement in New Mexico in the late nineteenth century.

34. Gregg, *Commerce*, 78.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Though this multiculturalism is largely "just rhetoric," it nevertheless has significant repercussions on the culture and literature of the Southwest; the specifics of which I examine in a larger work "Writing the Relation: The Anglo Response to Multicultural New Mexico." Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1994.

37. Gregg, *Commerce*, 75.

38. *Ibid.*, 80.

39. As Gregg notes in his preface, he concludes his history just prior to the "Texan Santa Fé Expedition of 1841," and directs his readers to "Mr. Kendall's account of that ill-fated enterprise" because it so thoroughly covers the topic (Gregg, 7). Gregg may have been loathe to trespass on this topic, beyond his respect for Mr. Kendall, because of his own ambivalent feelings on the subject. The Texan expedition occurred almost at the end of Gregg's residency and was a contributing factor to the closing of the Santa Fé trade. As a businessman it meant the disruption of his livelihood, as a New Mexican—even one who leaned toward ties to the U.S.—he probably resented the idea of being "annexed" by Texas and losing the distinct identity of New Mexico he was nurturing.