Anglo-Saxonism in the Yukon: The _Klondike Nugget_ and American-British Relations in the ‘Two Wests,’ 1898-1901

Adam Arenson, *University of Texas at El Paso*
Anglo-Saxonism in the Yukon: 
The Klondike Nugget and American-British Relations in the “Two Wests,” 1898–1901

ADAM ARENSON

The author is a doctoral candidate at Yale University.

During the Klondike Gold Rush, Americans and Britons connected their joint local experiences with the simultaneous colonial conquests in Cuba, the Philippines, South Africa, and China through the ideology of Anglo-Saxonism. From 1898 to 1901 Dawson’s newspapers, memoirs, correspondence, and commercial photography demonstrated the power of this symbolic language of flags and balls, heated rhetoric and dazzling cartoons. The Klondike Nugget, the first newspaper in town and the only one run by Americans, took up the claims of global Anglo-Saxonism with the most fervor, although its sentiments were often echoed in the Canadian-edited Dawson Daily News. Differences re-emerged, especially over the boundary between Alaska and Canada, but this brief episode remained deeply imprinted in narratives of the “two Wests”—both of the North American frontier West and the West as Anglo-Saxon civilization—told at the turn of the twentieth century.

On the morning of January 19, 1901, readers of the Toronto Saturday Globe unfolded their newspapers to see a splendid party under way. Elegantly dressed women twirled around the dance floor, led by tuxedoed men. “ST. ANDREW’S BALL AT DAWSON, 4 A.M., DECEMBER 1ST, 1900,” read the caption, naming the capital of the new Yukon Territory, a town just outside the Arctic Circle that celebrated late into the almost-total winter night. The national holiday of Scotland was a popular celebration for the heavily Scottish imperial corps, and in Dawson it had been quite an event.

This article was begun in a seminar with Gerald Friesen and has benefited from his comments and those of Roxanne Willis, John Mack Faragher, Susan Armitage, Aaron Sachs, Jenifer Van Vleck, Barbara Arenson, and Rebecca Rosenthal. Thanks also to the anonymous referees for the Pacific Historical Review and the Journal of the Canadian Historical Association and to those who responded to the presentation of related papers at the Canadian Historical Association and Western History Association annual meetings.
“Youth and beauty, gallantry and charm, grace and gentility, starch and style will hold high carnival,” the Klondike Nugget announced, and fully half the following day’s edition described the grand march of dancers, the food served, and the dresses worn. Commercial photographers had “made their flash light pictures from the stage,” which were then reprinted locally in souvenir albums—and now in the Toronto Saturday Globe. “People in England have been accustomed to looking upon the Klondike region as a sort of wild mining country,” noted the Dawson Daily News modestly, but the Klondike Nugget had to boast: “It will undoubtedly surprise many readers of the Globe to know that such an elaborate affair could be undertaken in the extreme north.” The Nugget, the photographers, and the elegantly dressed town elite were proud of their fete and proud of their place in the world.

That a rowdy mining town sought to prove its refinement will not surprise modern readers, but perhaps the decorations at the St. Andrew’s Day Ball will. Although some Scottish symbols were present, “the principal feature of the decorations,” the Nugget reported, were “two monster flags,” with “the American flag on the left and the Union Jack on the right.” Photographs confirm this account, showing a painting of “the man dear to the American heart, Wm. McKinley,” while “overhanging the stage front” was “a large portrait of Queen Victoria.”

1. “GOETZMAN” [sic], “ST. ANDREW’S BALL AT DAWSON, 4 A.M., DECEMBER 1ST, 1900,” Toronto Saturday Globe, Jan. 19, 1901, p. 1. The attribution to M. W. Goetzman is incorrect; this image exists as George G. Cantwell, “Society Event of the Year—St. Andrew’s Ball,” n.d., in Cantwell, The Klondike, a Souvenir; Illustrations ([Seattle] 1900), n.p., Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter the Western Americana Collection). See Daily Klondike Nugget, Nov. 30, 1900, p. 3, and Dec. 1, 1900, p. 2; Dawson Daily News, Feb. 28, 1900, p. 2; and Daily Klondike Nugget, Feb. 23, 1901, p. 2. Beside Cantwell, the extant published image from that evening is [M. W. Goetzman], “893. St Andrew’s Ball Dawson” [1900], Hegg Album, Eric A. Hegg Photographs, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division. On the role of Scottish traditions and holidays in British imperial festivities, see T. M. Devine, Scotland’s Empire, 1600–1815 (London, 2003). Laura Beatrice Berton recalled that, even in 1907, when she arrived, “It was an eye opener to discover that within this motley collection of log cabins and rickety frame dwellings, the most elaborate events proceeded without cessation in the grandest Edwardian style” and that “The St. Andrew’s Ball was a very formal and very swish affair.” Laura Beatrice Berton, I Married the Klondike (Boston, 1954), 39, 53. The link to the Toronto Saturday Globe was likely the wife of the territorial secretary. Elizabeth Robins, The Alaska–Klondike Diary of Elizabeth Robins, 1900, ed. by Victoria Joan Moessner and Joanne E. Gates (Fairbanks, 1999), 271. Thanks to Erik Hirschmann for mentioning this source.

The men and women of Dawson were expressing pride not in one empire, but in two.

While the Klondike Gold Rush has long been seen as a seminal event in Canadian history, it also embodied the emerging ideology of Anglo-Saxonism at a turning point in British and American imperialism. The gold rush occurred at the same time that the United States and Britain were fighting wars of conquest and facing new, unfamiliar insurgencies: in Cuba in 1898; in the Transvaal beginning in 1899; in China in 1900; and in the Philippines from 1898 to 1901. In the Klondike, by contrast, Americans and

---

Britons successfully sought gold, displaced native groups, and lived together peaceably, implicitly providing encouragement for each other’s imperial adventures in distant lands. Rifts between Americans and Canadians (and their British protectors) soon emerged, especially regarding the boundary between Alaska and the Yukon. Still, this brief episode in the Far North reveals an important perspective on geopolitics at the end of the nineteenth century. In Dawson, the ideology of imperial Anglo-Saxonism flourished, if only for a short time—a fact that restores the Klondike Gold Rush to wider international significance.

This article defines the ideology of Anglo-Saxonism as a set of beliefs reflecting the self-proclaimed ethnic, political, and moral superiority of individuals and traditions of British origin. Historian Paul Kramer has quipped that, “as a discourse, Anglo-Saxonism was an echoing cavern of banalities out of which even a well-lit historian might never emerge,” but Kramer, Stuart Anderson, and Gail Bederman, among others, have sketched what Anglo-Saxonism meant to its proponents in the late nineteenth century. Anglo-Saxonism claimed Germanic-Celtic racial origins for English-speaking peoples whose amalgamation had long since entered the “natural,” Darwinistic contest of civilizations with such strength that it could brook no other mixing as it conquered purportedly inferior peoples in ever-more extreme climes. Many in the United States had long assumed such superiority for their own land, as had many Britons. But the ideology that emerged in the waning days of the nineteenth century represented something new—the conviction that “Anglo-Saxons,” regardless of their geo-


graphical location, had a joint responsibility to conquer, rule, and uplift other peoples all over the world. Rudyard Kipling expressed this in his tellingly titled poem, “The White Man’s Burden,” challenging Americans to join their British kinsmen in this daunting task. Partisans of both nations had a chance to practice this Anglo-Saxonism in the Klondike, starting with the first news of gold strikes on the Yukon and Klondike rivers.

The rush onto Canadian soil began in American ports when news of the gold strike reached Seattle and San Francisco in 1897; from there, the news was quickly telegraphed around the world. In the following years, stampeders charged up the seaways of Alaska and over the passes, bringing tens of thousands of Americans, Britons, and others to these formerly remote streams, before the next strike, at Nome, called them forth. As Charlene Porsild has argued, “Just 30 years after Confederation, an event of the greatest international proportions took place in the farthest northwest corner of the new Dominion. The Klondike actually gave Canadians something at a moment when we were struggling to define ourselves.” The conditions of the rush, from harsh winters to conflict with Canadian Mounties over rations, taxes, and the unclear territorial boundary, spawned legendary tales of adventure. Yet the Klondike Gold Rush also made a significant contribution to America’s sense of itself as a global power.


In the Klondike, Americans connected their notions of Manifest Destiny and continental expansion to a global imperialist calling through a sense of racial dominance that went beyond national differences. They understood that they shared aspirations and experiences with their fellow Anglo-Saxonists in Britain. Together they celebrated those ties in print, parades, and harsh racial rhetoric. Amidst colonial wars and extreme conditions, in the narrow window of the Gold Rush, voices in Dawson championed Anglo-Saxonism as a doctrine joining two empires. Even after the joint presence in the Far North ended, these experiences left a deep imprint on the narratives of masculinity and of racial and national dominance that Americans tell of the “two Wests”—both the continental North American West, whose frontier had recently been defined as disappearing, and the West as Anglo-Saxonist civilization being enacted around the world.7

The alliance between Britons and Americans was new in the 1890s. The developing accord on foreign policy and global principles replaced a long history of hostility between the two nations. After winning independence from England, the United States had fought one war and threatened many others to protect its territorial claims against Great Britain and to bolster its Monroe Doctrine. After the Civil War, when British interests had sided with their trading partners in the cotton-rich, rebellious South, the two countries continued to compete in low-intensity disputes over the waters of Puget Sound, Central American canal rights, and British claims to goldfields along the border between Venezuela and British Guiana. Only after 1897, with a resolution of the Venezuelan boundary dispute and Britain’s perceived assistance in Adm. George Dewey’s capture of Manila, could observers begin to conceive of what diplomatic historians have termed “the great rap-

7. This phrase and my understanding of continued American expansion after the “closing” of the American West follow Paul Sabin, “Home and Abroad: The Two ‘Wests’ of Twentieth-Century United States History,” Pacific Historical Review, 46 (1997), 305–335. My thinking about links between metropolitan and colonial spaces has been influenced, in addition to those cited elsewhere, by Catherine Hall, Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830–1867 (Chicago, 2002).
prochement.”⁸ The interests of the two powerful English-speaking nations had merged, and the fledgling alliance was expressed in the vocabulary of Social Darwinist slogans and aggressive claims for manhood identified with a so-called Anglo-Saxon race.⁹

As with any brash national and racial claim, the Anglo-Saxonism of the Klondike was a carefully constructed credo, with its loyalists, its promoters, and its detractors. When leaders like Theodore Roosevelt achieved political power, this strengthened the belief that British and American nationalism could be superseded by an all-encompassing Anglo-Saxonism, an ideology that, despite its contradictions, seemed at the time a clear enough guide to aggressive conquest, a narrative of invented noble lineage, and a justification of an imperial future.¹⁰

Such Anglo-Saxonism found a particularly powerful expression in literature. While scholars like Bederman and Matthew Frye Jacobson have connected the treatment of race and masculinity in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Tarzan* (1912) to the imperial projects of the era, these studies fail to address Jack London’s contemporaneous *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), which express similar themes in a Far North setting.¹¹ Kramer and John Plotz have mused that

---


“empires were entangled with each other in literary, imaginative, social, political, military, and economic interactions,” envisioning “their own histories . . . with templates borrowed from others.” Kramer has gone furthest in investigating how, for government and military elites, “their respective colonial wars in the Philippines and South Africa had been compared, fused, and exchanged.”

Scholars have also begun to explore the equations made between Alaska tourism and big game hunts. Yet these studies miss the larger claims of Anglo-Saxonist empire, from Dawson to Manila, Cape Town to Bombay. Rather than simply abstract agreements of trans-Atlantic diplomats, in the Yukon Territory these connections were lived realities.

An extensive reading of the region’s newspapers and an examination of thousands of commercial photographs reveal how this emerging world view played out in daily life, especially in the striking collection of newspaper editorials and images that united American and British symbols and destinies. Such strains were

---


14. Thanks to Benjamin Madley for pointing out the importance of the Yukon as an early testing ground for this connection away from merely elite or diplomatic settings.

15. This project is based on an analysis of each issue in the first three years of the Klondike Nugget and Daily Klondike Nugget, from June 16, 1898, to May 1, 1901, as well as nine months of the Dawson Daily News, from 1900 and 1901, and six months of the Skagway Daily Morning Alaskan, from 1899 and 1900. Hundreds of photographs of the Yukon in the years 1896–1901 were also examined; these include those available in the Western Americana collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and the extensive online digital collection of the University of Washington, at http://content.lib.washington.edu/alaskasearch.html. At the Beinecke, the most informative were: Cantwell, The Klondike, a Souvenir: Illustrations; George Max Estes’s Alaska Gold Rush Papers; M. W. Goetzman, “Photographs of Hunting, Mining and Scenery in Yukon and Alaska”; Eric A. Hegg, Souvenir of Alaska and Yukon Territory
particularly clear in the *Klondike Nugget*, the first newspaper in town and the only one run by Americans.\(^{16}\) Founded by Midwestern brothers Eugene and George Allen, the *Nugget* began publishing in the waning days of the Klondike gold rush, and was at its strength in the years 1898 to 1901, a crucial period in Dawson’s, and the world’s, transformation.\(^{17}\) The *Nugget* is featured because it took up the claims of global Anglo-Saxonism with the greatest fervor—although, in almost every case, its sentiments found echoes in the other independent newspaper, the Canadian-edited *Dawson Daily News*. The evidence also stretches beyond such self-conscious posturing, as glimpses of the streets and everyday life of Dawson suggest that the pairing of empires was a commonly expressed ideal for Dawson’s Anglophone elite. To read world events through the pages of the *Klondike Nugget* in these years is to see a high point of Anglo-Saxonist rhetoric.

“The star of empire has ceased to take its course westward,” began the *Nugget*’s first editorial, printed on June 16, 1898, for “the land of promise now lies in the direction of the polar regions, and

---

\(^{16}\) For the *Nugget*’s history, see the history and interview with the editors in Russell A. Bankson, *The Klondike Nugget* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1935), and Ian Macdonald and Betty O’Keefe, *The Klondike’s “Dear Little Nugget”* (Victoria, B.C., 1996), a slim volume of reprinted articles. On the first issue, see Bankson, *The Klondike Nugget*, 79–84.

Horace Greeley, if now alive, would doubtless advise the young man to go north instead of west.” With the bravura of mining town journalists, the newspaper addressed Dawson’s denizens through its American miners, sending “to our brethren in the states a message of good cheer.” In the only significant study of Dawson newspapers, Edward F. Bush pigeonholed the Nugget as an American newspaper, “particularly as an opposition organ to the territorial government,” and painted the government-sponsored Yukon Sun as having a “strongly nationalist and anti-American bias.” Bush titled his study “The Dawson Daily News: Journalism in the Klondike,” and he focused mostly on the lone survivor and the decades after the other local papers had closed. One must be wary of Bush’s claim that the News “restricted itself to copious factual reporting and catering to patriotic sentiment.” Indeed, on a number of occasions, the News participated in Yukon Anglo-Saxonism. When Bush noted a “typical . . . chauvinism found in all the Dawson papers,” he dismissed it, arguing that “this was not peculiar to the Klondike during the twilight years of the ‘white man’s burden’ and colonial empire.”

Bush far undervalued the importance of this language by focusing on U.S.-Canadian relations and not on the larger Anglo-Saxonist conquest just then encircling the globe. His analysis missed the unique place of the Klondike for both British colonialism and the nascent American empire.

Newspapers played a prominent role in announcing (some would say concocting) the Klondike Gold Rush. News syndicates sent men and women to cover events as they happened, with new technologies that made the rush one of the first real-time international news events. The reporters soon found out how isolated the Yukon truly was. As Scripps-McCrae correspondent E. Hazard Wells wrote in his diary on October 12, 1897, “next to a letter from home the most prized piece of reading matter is the latest newspaper, only a couple of months old.” Rumors flew up and down the trail; Wells wrote that, in the ice-locked North, they wondered if “Cuba may be free, Hawaii annexed and Africa partitioned; any of


the crowned heads of Europe may have died with a whole consequent recasting of European politics.” Wells listed these concerns even before worries of “the possibilities of death, fire, flood, financial crash, riot, etc., in our own beloved land!”  

The coincidence of the gold rush and the colonial wars fed local passions. When the U.S. war with Spain did come, another journalist-adventurer, Frederick Palmer, noted how the miner found his world reoriented by the news. “When he left home the Klondyke was the ruling general topic of the hour in the newspapers,” Palmer wrote; “When he reached his destination he [sic] was quite forgotten, and public interest was entirely absorbed in the invasion of Cuba.” Not being able to fight was a poor existence for an American, Palmer surmised: “Least of all he liked waiting in latitude 64 degrees for a month or more for news of progress of the only war yet waged by his country in his generation.” Kathryn Morse has noted that “American men were attracted to both mining and warfare,” and she found miners’ letters reflecting this dilemma. For instance, Lynn Smith wrote that, “had I been at home very likely I should have gone to the war,” while Jonas Houck opined, “I believe I had rather go to war than do what I am doing.”

Men who had never ventured beyond the Rockies were now connecting the Yukon to the Philippines, and to Anglo-Saxonist geopolitics as well. Palmer found that the lack of reliable information fed the miners’ “weakness of exaggeration”; he related how “twice, up on the creeks, I heard that the Continent has declared war against England and the United States; in the second instance, the detail of an Anglo-American naval victory off the coast of Bohemia perhaps was supplied.” Without missing a beat, Palmer continued from these imagined wars to the imagined community of the Yukon. “Such rumors were the natural fruit of the desire of Americans and Englishmen to pay compliments to one another,” he wrote, “at a juncture when the Anglo-Saxon alliance of the Klondyke

---


22. Palmer, *In the Klondyke*, 163; Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle, 2003), 122; Lynn Smith, Aug. 31, 1898, Robert Lynn Smith Correspondence and Diaries, box 1, Herbert Heller Collection, University of Alaska at Fairbanks, and Jonas B. Houck, June 30, 1898, Jonas B. Houck Papers, University of Alaska at Fairbanks, both as quoted in Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 122. Thanks to Kathryn Morse for alerting me to these letters.
was quite ready, without any assistance from London or Washington, to stand in arms against the whole world.”

By the St. Andrew’s Day celebrations in 1900, these exuberant claims gelled into picture-perfect form. But no consensus on how to balance national, racial, and international allegiances was obvious to the American editors back in 1898. In its first July edition, the Klondike Nugget saw cause to fly only the American banner on its pages, while its account of Canada’s Dominion Day festivities ran on page four of the same issue. The front page was dominated by the Americans’ Fourth of July events. The editors comically portrayed sleeping Mounties roused from their beds by Americans shooting off pistols at midnight in celebration and noted that barking dogs “stampeded as never before in their lives,” a description heavy with the symbolism of invasion. The revelers went to sleep only to rest before the sports contests of the next day, events that gathered men of all nationalities off the creeks to form teams. Even the local Native groups were invited to participate, as competition in foot races and in a “kickfest” of soccer in early years, and later as spectacle, for “Indian pie and bun-eating.” Resident Martha Black recalled, “in the afternoon there was a baseball game on the Sand Bar,” with “the bats made of boat masts and the balls of twine or wood blocks.” Celebrations concluded with a night of toasts to both the Queen and the President, and with the singing of both “God Save the Queen” and “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Editors Eugene and George Allen quickly came to understand holidays as times to celebrate national as well as personal fellowship and to boost Dawson’s importance by claiming two powerful homelands for the newly united Anglo-Saxonist adherents. The

images and rhetoric in the *Nugget* changed accordingly. The following year, the newspaper ran a cartoon showing both John Bull and Uncle Sam joyously sitting down with firecrackers to “observe the Fourth.” It noted how American organizers for the Fourth of July, 1899, spoke at their meeting of “the hospitable action of the British . . . in allowing the Americans to help celebrate the Queen’s birthday” and said that henceforth it would be a “mistake . . . to make the [Fourth of July] celebration a purely American affair.”

The Allens ran a large, front-page illustration of Victoria for her birthday and marked the New Year and the Fourth in 1900 by displaying the British and American flags together. The Canadian-run *Dawson Daily News* also learned to run the American eagle on the Fourth and an elegant portrait of Washington on his birthday; late in November the *News* declared, “EVERYBODY WILL EAT TURKEY.”

Even the Canadian government organ, the *Yukon Sun*, wrote on July 4, 1900, that “We assure our American cousins that so long as they continue to sojourn with us their rights and their feelings will be respected by Canadians and Britishers, from every corner of the globe.” In 1901 the *Nugget* displayed John Bull flirting with Lady America. National holidays were enshrined as joint Anglo-Saxonist affairs.

Holidays mentioned and flags displayed, of course, should not immediately be equated with a sense of forged bonds among the nationalities present. Flags, those deceptively simple markers of nation, were common in photographs of Dawson: American, British, and occasionally Canadian, French, Japanese, and Danish banners flew at sporting events and parades. But the large number of American flags in particular is striking. Even on the main street, the Red Ensign, the Canadian banner of the era, was forced to compete with the Stars and Stripes. Instances of pride in the

---

27. The cartoon appeared in *Klondike Nugget*, June 24, 1899, p. 1. Quote is from ibid., June 14, 1899, supplement 2. See also *Dawson Daily News*, May 1, 1900, p. 2, and May 25, 1900, p. 1, for Americans celebrating the Queen’s birthday.


Ensign seem to have been rare, while American and British symbols abounded. 31

While the strength and power of Anglo-Saxonist claims in the Klondike surprised the American editors, Canadian officials saw a more sinister edge. To the governments in Ottawa and London, the Yukon Territory had been empty before gold was discovered;

in order to avoid a feared American invasion from Alaska, Canada had invited a second British colonizing. Ottawa sent two different outfits of troops to the area—the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) and the Yukon Field Force. Drawn from throughout the British Empire, the military men squelched democratic sentiments and carried with them the rituals and trappings of the British in India and Africa. Historian William Morrison has described these events as the most obvious episode of imperialism in Canadian history: “Most of the police officers who served in the Yukon during the gold rush,” he wrote, “seem to have regarded the Territory not essentially as a distant part of Canada; rather, they viewed it as an outpost of the far-flung British Empire.” The cover of their gold commissioner’s souvenir booklet showed the Union Jack planted firmly over Dawson, with no other cities or boundaries marked—the imperial flag flying over the whole globe, including the supposedly independent Dominion of Canada.32

Imperial service was recognized by Canadians as a way to gain status for themselves and their country; new ties with Americans, although appealing, could not compete with the concrete rewards of medals and titles for those who survived battle. The British Empire remained at war in South Africa, and the News called for “ANGLO-SAXON UNION” and “IMPERIAL UNITY.” In fact, many NWMP officers performed their duty to the Empire by fighting for Britain against the Afrikaaner democracies, exchanging Klondike parkas for African khakis. Their exploits were followed closely by the Dawson Daily News and the Klondike Nugget. Both publications saw the introduction of those tested by the Yukon as “A METHOD FOR BRINGING THE BOER WAR TO A SUCCESSFUL TERMINATION.”33


More than details of Canadian worries, British battles, or American invasions, the *Klondike Nugget* proclaimed the larger coming together of the great English-speaking powers, with the promise of uplift for all loyal Anglo-Saxonists, even in remote Dawson. In the fall of 1898 the *Nugget* editors had reported that a “treaty of defense” between the United States and Great Britain “seems imminent” and asked, “WHY THIS UNANIMITY?” The *Nugget* could not decide whether it was “the racial similarities of the two great English speaking races which has lately drawn them together,” or whether “there is something more substantial at the bottom.” The disconnect between racial rhetoric and lived experience briefly troubled the editors. From their personal experience in Kansas, Chicago, and Seattle, the Allens knew that Americans were “not an Anglo-Saxon race,” for “by far the largest portion of its population is of different extraction.” Nevertheless, the *Nugget* embraced the Anglo-Saxonist cause, the editors writing that Americans and Britons “speak the same language, read the same books, worship the same God, engage in the same pursuits, study the same branches of learning and [can] be in constant, hourly telegraphic touch.” The *Nugget* concluded that such “intimacy eventually begets mutual respect and similarity of aims.”

Daily experiences in Dawson formed the basis for a new view of international relations.

---

quote is from a cartoon caption, depicting the departure of Samuel Benfield Steele for Africa. Although Steele is fondly recalled for his role as a Mountie, his renown likely derives as much from colonial wars as from frontier adventures. His war efforts were covered extensively; see *Daily Klondike Nugget*, Jan. 10, 1900, p. 1; *Dawson Daily News*, April 4, 1900, p. 2, and April 19, 1901; battle accounts appeared in February and May 1900 and February 1901 in both newspapers. When Steele was knighted, this event was also reported; *Daily Klondike Nugget*, March 14, 1901, p. 1. The *Dawson Daily News*, Aug. 24, 1900, p. 3, printed a letter from Steele back home to the Yukon. The connection is evident in the subtitle of his autobiography; Samuel Benfield Steele, *Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West with Some Account of His Service in South Africa* (New York, 1972). See also an account of Frederick Russell Burnham, *Scouting on Two Continents*, elicited and arranged by Mary Nixon Everett (Garden City, N.Y., 1926); Frederick Burnham was an American who fought in Africa with the British and left to join the Klondike Gold Rush, only to return to fighting in South Africa. Thanks to Jennie Sutton for alerting me to this source.

The *Nugget* spent the next spring testing out a new, racialized vocabulary. Following the American Memorial Day observance in 1899, the editors noted that Gold Commissioner William Ogilvie spoke of “the fact that Americans and British are all of the same stock,” and their own columns soon expressed similar sentiments. The newspaper could be playfully coy at times, but also hard-headed and essentialist. Countries that objected to boxing were ribbed as “weakly continental nations” that spurned the noble sport “of Old and New England.” Anti-imperialist positions were condemned in far more serious tones: “If left alone it would take the Filipinos hundreds of years to reach the same standard of national achievement which they will now reach in a decade,” the *Nugget* declared, defending the U.S. occupation. Even more boldly, the editors wrote that “the Hawaiians would never raise [sic] above the level of a lotus-eating, unambitious vegetation but for the fact than an energetic nation has her with a grasp of iron.”

In 1898 the United States had boasted proudly of liberating Cuba and the Philippine Islands from Spanish rule; by the next year, native Filipino fighters had turned against the Americans as just another oppressive presence. “Ironically,” Paul Kramer has written, “what the newly connected Anglo-Saxon imperial powers had most in common by 1899 was colonial revolt.” As word of renewed fighting in the Philippines reached the Yukon, the *Nugget* confidently unified American, Canadian, and British voices. The *Nugget* published a map of the campaign in Manila Bay, and, when the British began an incursion into the Transvaal, the newspaper provided a map of the battlefields in South Africa as well. “Every son of Uncle Sam—aye, every nation of the Anglo-Saxon race,” the article explained, “may cherish with grateful devotion” these lessons in “gallantry and bravery.” The *Dawson Daily News* also traced these connections; in its first edition, on July 31, 1899, it reported on the pressure on U.S. Secretary of War Russell A. Alger to resign,

---

given the failures in the Philippines. The *Nugget* admitted that “America’s present prolonged troubles” in the Philippines brought “much more charity . . . towards England’s similar troubles” with “the Afghans, the Arabs, the Zulus, Ashantes, Boers, etc.” Now, the editors wrote, “Americans are looking toward Africa and India” to find “how hundreds of millions can be restrained by a few handful of white troops.” As the headline put it, America found itself with Britain, “IN THE SAME BOAT.”

The theme of common imperial troubles gained a lasting form in Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden,” which in February 1899 addressed America’s new responsibility for Cuba, Hawai‘i, and the Philippines. The *Nugget* was soon quoting its now-famous phrase. Faced with “an unforeseen outgrowth” of invasion, the editors noted that “Uncle Sam is rapidly ascertaining the fact that the ‘white man’s burden’ is after all quite a heavy load to carry.” The *News* championed the local “Kipling fund,” a campaign for the widows and orphans of the South African war. It urged the community to donate the proceeds of a Washington’s Birthday celebration. Commissioner Ogilvie, again on hand, conveniently rearranged history to knit together British America. “If George Washington were here,” Ogilvie asserted, “he would join heartily in the spirit of this occasion”—donating to the widows and orphans—for “none respect and even revere him more than do up-to-date Canadians.” Such declarations of unity kept the *Nugget* confident that “the ‘white man’s burden’ will never rest upon shoulders more capable.”

The *Nugget* remained confident that the Americans and the British would face such challenges together. Those sentiments were most lavishly illustrated in the *Klondike Nugget*’s political cartoons.

---


Inked by Arthur V. Buel, a fellow American, the insightful and acerbic images matched the Allens’ fervor for Anglo-Saxonism. Buel’s art for the *Nugget* blended local, national, and international Anglo-Saxonist messages. One early cartoon, drawn for the Fourth of July, 1899, shows John Bull looking on approvingly as Uncle Sam dances with Cuba, the most refined—and, in Buel’s depiction, most light-skinned—of the new colonies. But trouble lurks at the margins of the dance floor. In an upper corner, a lonely American in Dawson drinks to the holidays and laments the Mounties’ ban on fireworks. Nearby, President William McKinley seems concerned, watching the dance and hearing the complaints of the military veterans in the band who demand pensions. George Washington follows his own warning against entangling alliances, and, disapproving, begs off responsibility, saying, “I wasn’t there, I cannot tell a lie.” Along the edges, an American leads childlike, racialized figures who hold sparklers and American flags, while a figure with the exaggerated features of a blackface character stands at Dawson’s waterfront, setting off firecrackers and chasing dogs into the river. Still another figure smirks and remarks, “A bad day for the coon.” This extravagant image, full of swagger and some mystery, matches the early American vocabulary about Dawson and the new American colonies. The cartoon celebrates the American conquest and America’s acceptance by Britain but seems cautious about the country’s new responsibilities toward those depicted as racial inferiors.39

A depiction of a military man spanking a dark-skinned figure hung over the band in this Fourth of July image. With an American flag flying over Manila, the drawing showed Admiral Dewey punishing Emilio Aguinaldo, the leader of the Filipino independence movement. Buel repeated the pose in his November 15, 1899, cartoon, which paired the challenges faced by the two

---

Anglo-Saxonized empires and equated British and American actions. Here, John Bull and Uncle Sam sit facing one another, the skylines of their separate colonial spaces, South Africa and the Philippines, behind them. Each figure is using his shoe to spank the insurgent leader: Paul Kruger, president of the Transvaal Republic,
on the left, and Aguinaldo on the right. With matching expressions of anguish, the imperial leaders shared in the caption’s sentiments: “BOTH HAVE THEIR TROUBLES.” As the wars dragged on, the *Dawson Daily News* came to pair these figures as well, in the raw language of the age: “President Kruger has already commenced the same game of hide and seek that has distinguished the military career of that self-appointed dictator, the greaser Aguinaldo.”

The most nearly complete merging of Anglo-Saxonism—American, British, and Canadian—came as the Great Powers of Europe, now with the United States included, threatened war with China. The *Nugget’s* headline read, “STARS AND STRIPES
AND UNION JACK—John and Jonathan Will Invade China Hand in Hand,” while the Dawson Daily News cheered it as “the grandest sight that ever greeted the eyes of the nations . . . the Anglo-Saxon nations.” The News wrote warmly of “our friends across the border” and declared, “the colonial system of the United States may now be considered as sufficiently well established” for comparison with “the English crown colonies.”41 Yet at precisely this moment, a visit that could have enshrined the efforts of Yukon Anglo-Saxonism revealed its weaknesses.

Among all the local squabbles, the most immediate flashpoint was always the border with Alaska. By the summer of 1899, conflict over exactly where the boundary between Alaska and Canada lay had led to talk of war. Although a modus vivendi was quickly found and a British-American-Canadian commission was appointed to mark the permanent boundary, the issue continued to rattle in the background, causing Canada’s Governor-General to plan a visit to what he called “the debatable frontier of Alaska.”42 When he visited Dawson in August 1900, these tensions again came into public view—although they did not appear in the Nugget’s columns.


By statute, Governor-General Gilbert John Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, the Fourth Earl of Minto, was the most important imperial officer in the Dominion of Canada; by temperament and training, Lord Minto fit the part. Minto held a “firm belief in the empire, the military, the Anglo-Saxon and God” that, according to the editors of his papers, was “instinctive and unphilosophical.” Yet he was loyal to Canada and suspicious of enthusiastic Anglo-Saxonism as an American plot. “It’s all very well for people in England to romance about the sentimental love of the Anglo Saxon Races,” Minto wrote to his brother Arthur Elliot, a member of Parliament, on February 26, 1899, “but mercifully England has the ocean between her and her love—here there is nothing of the sort.” Minto saw such bluster as “an idea encouraged by political leaders & taken up by the newspapers.” He wrote that the Canadian is left to “[read] with wonder the so-called rapprochement of the old country with a people . . . whom he thoroughly distrusts.” Sizing up America, Minto wrote to his brother that “we can, if they go on with their colonization ideas, be of immense use to them,” while “they can do very little for us.”

The *Nugget* and the *News* announced Minto’s visit the last week of July. As the day approached, both papers reported on plans for floats, dog teams, and “a general procession” of city organizations, all to be reviewed from a grandstand being constructed on First Avenue. Most significant, according to the *Nugget*, were “three large and beautiful arches” raised over the streets, “festooned in evergreens, flags, pictures, the coat of arms of Great Britain and monograms of the house of Minto.” No longer could Dawson be dismissed as “a barren wilderness”; the visit, the *Nugget* declared, “should mark a turning point in the history of this extreme northwestern portion of the Dominion.” Although a city as “cosmopolitan” as Dawson should hardly notice an imperial officer, the *Nugget* should hardly notice an imperial officer, the *Nugget*

---

43. Stevens and Saywell, “Introduction,” in Minto, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers*, 1: xix. Minto’s role in American-Canadian relations has been much debated; see Carman Miller, *The Canadian Career of the Fourth Earl of Minto: The Education of a Viceroy* (Waterloo, Ont., 1979), 156–171. Eton- and Cambridge-educated, Minto was a newspaper correspondent during the Carlist crisis in Spain before serving in the second Afghan War and in the Cape Colony with Lord Roberts. After leaving Canada in 1905, he became Viceroy of India; he retired in 1910.

44. Minto to Elliot, Feb. 26, 1899, in Minto, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers*, 1: 38. The sentence ends, “and he reads with wonder the so-called rapprochement of the old country with a people with which he, the Canadian, has no sympathy and with whom he thoroughly distrusts.”
postured, the newspaper acknowledged a “spontaneous feeling of gratification.”

Lord Minto and his entourage arrived on Tuesday, August 14, 1900. That morning the *Nugget* and the *News* both printed the details of the parade and the text of the welcoming letters from the leaders of the community. While “a majority of our population are other than British subjects,” the *Nugget* wrote, “the community as a whole is unanimous in extending a welcoming greeting”—a vision the newspaper saw as confirming the melding of Anglo-Saxonist empires. The *Nugget* gushed, “had Lord Minto seen fit to resign his present position and stand for a seat in the Yukon council . . . he would take a lead from the start and win out hands down.”

Minto’s own response to Dawson was far more subdued. Complaints about gold-dust circulation and his own observations on the possibility of taxing gambling or liquor filled most of his notes. Minto mused, “the knowledge I have gained must give me a strong position on Yukon affairs at Ottawa,” while Dawson itself left the impression of a small colonial town. Minto wrote in his journal about “this remote part of the world” and counted “its rough, adventurous, gambling population” as “about 17,000—of which 70% U.S. subjects of mixed races”; he thereby seemed to be negating the *Nugget’s* claims both to refinement and to the imagined Anglo-Saxon community. Quaint, Minto thought: “The town is a wonderful creation—all wood of course. . . . We have come away full of nuggets.”

Upon their departure, Lord and Lady Minto were accompanied by Elizabeth Robins, an American-born actress whose Yukon travel diary would soon provide material for a successful literary career on both sides of the Atlantic. “At the boat there are more

---


47. Minto, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers*, 1: 387–388. Lady Minto was presented with a “little basket of virgin gold” as a “souvenir of the miners,” according to the *Dawson Daily News*, Aug. 24, 1900, p. 6, which also reprinted her thank-you note for the nuggets.
presentations and pleasant speeches, and then the band strikes up the national air,” Robins wrote. “Most of the men uncover. I was sorry all did not.” Robins did not say which anthem was played, but the *Dawson Daily News* reported it was “God Save the Queen,” which by other lyrics is also “America (My Country ’Tis of Thee).” Given Robins’s account, it seems some Americans resisted the call to salute his lordship.\(^{48}\)

More significant than the imperial officer’s condescension or some caps left unremoved was a controversy that circled about the ceremonial arches. Although the newspapers failed to mention it, photographs by M. W. Goetzman reveal that the British insignias the *Nugget* had described were accompanied by the American eagle, American mottoes, dozens of small American flags—and a solitary tricolor, meant to represent the French Canadian population. Such a snub in symbolism in front of an imperial officer of Canada became a grave insult, upon which the *Nugget* never reported. The French consul soon complained in the *Dawson Daily News* that he had been overlooked during Minto’s visit. The issue festered, and when Commissioner Ogilvie wrote to Minto a few months later, he felt compelled to mention that, “shortly after you left, . . . a prominent French Canadian [spoke] to me about the Arch erected in Your honour on Third Street.”\(^{49}\) “Your Excellency may remember,” Ogilvie continued to his superior, “that [on] one side of this Arch was pictured clasped hands draped with the Union Jack and Stars and Stripes with the words ‘One tongue one people.’” Ogilvie saw the display as “evidence of good will between the two great English speaking peoples, British and Americans,” but “those words it appears gave offense to some French Canadians who resented the ‘one tongue’ idea.” Ogilvie apologized for having to raise the issue, but nevertheless, Canadian officers like Ogilvie and Minto knew this “instance of a very undesirable feeling” had to be addressed.\(^{50}\) The *Nugget* remained silent on this as well.


\(^{50}\) Ogilvie to Minto, Nov. 25, 1900, in Minto, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers*, 1: 440.
The international display that greeted the Earl of Minto and the conflict it engendered provide a pendant image to the St. Andrew’s Day Ball photographs. Minto’s gate stood close to the end of the Klondike Gold Rush, and Anglo-Saxonist claims faded as the truly multiethnic, multilingual nature of Dawson emerged. Its events were reshaped and remembered into a key moment in formulating an allegedly true Canadian identity. Yet it is important to recover the ways in which these claims were shaped in reaction to a Yukon Anglo-Saxonism, an ideology that had called for a joint, and complete, global conquest.

---

51. In her community study *Gamblers and Dreamers*, Porsild has used the social history and demography of Dawson to move beyond fables of mining adventure to emphasize that Americans were never a majority in Dawson; that men, women, and children of many nations and classes shaped Dawson from its origins; and that factors of ethnicity served as the foundation for many of the first social networks in a city where “stability, or persistence, was at least as strong a force as transience in this northern community.” Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 23.
On December 10, 1900, the *Nugget* ran its most explicit editorial on the importance of the Klondike experience for a global racial unity. “The Anglo-Saxon is remarkable in nothing so much as for his ability to adapt himself,” the editors began, explaining that, while “his natural home is in the temperate zone. . . . it is his nature to prove himself master of circumstances.” The editors volunteered the Yukon as evidence: “No better example of this peculiarity could be advanced than is contained in the history of this territory during the past three years,” where there is now “a city in which every comfort and luxury is obtainable,” despite “the inhospitable nature” of the region. Continuing its chronicle of Anglo-Saxonist conquests, the newspaper linked the Klondike directly to the colonial wars. “While all this has been going on way up in the neighborhood of the North Pole,” the *Nugget* wrote, “British soldiers in Africa and American soldiers in the Philippines have been demonstrating the fact that the tropics will yield as readily to the master hand as has the land in which snow and ice are supposed to be the ruling monarchs.” The Americans and British shall lead the globe, they claimed. “In any event,” the *Nugget* concluded more modestly, “it may be accepted as an indisputable fact that the Anglo-Saxon can live anywhere in the world and be happy.”

The fusion of vision was complete.

These boasts, however, came on the cusp of a changed era. In the first flare-up of the Alaska-Yukon boundary controversy, Buel had copied out a *New York Herald* cartoon, which depicted the fight as a minor issue between the British and American Great Powers, amused by the squabbling of mere Canada and Alaska. As events changed, Dawson’s true place became more obvious. By the middle of 1901, after Victoria’s death and Aguinaldo’s capture, Dawson’s remote, colonial, and increasingly Canadian character grew more prominent. At the boundary on June 24, 1901, an enraged American ran up to a Canadian customs post in Skagway and cut down the pole on which the Canadian flag flew. The event received international attention, and the Earl of Minto noted “the flag incident” in his correspondence to London. Although the *Nugget* denounced “that Skagway flag” and said the man “would not . . . prove a good, patriotic American citizen,” such affronts against Canada gained

When it came to the boundary, the Nugget reprinted a New York Herald cartoon depicting the controversy as a minor issue between the British and American Great Powers, amused by the squabbling of mere Canada and Alaska. The editors did not realize their Anglo-Saxonism received similarly short shrift. Source: Arthur V. Buel, after Homer C. Davenport of the New York Herald, “An American View of the Late War Scare,” Klondike Nugget, Aug. 30, 1899. Source: University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, UW 26672z.
more import. In 1902 the United States and Canada agreed that neither flag would be flown on the other’s territory on official business. Social displays also suffered. After the final Alaska boundary was decided in favor of the United States in 1903, Vancouver and Ottawa audiences “hissed the Stars and Stripes and forced the bringing down of the curtain,” and in Montreal a theater audience “began to yell and hoot’ at the American flag and sang ‘God Save the King’ to the end.”

Fueling the anger was a deep streak of Canadian nationalism, quite distinct from the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxonism.

The Nugget changed as well, losing ground to the increasingly professionalized Dawson Daily News. Buel left for the News, and Eugene Allen turned to a business scheme, leaving his brother George with sole control of the press. While the newspaper then seemed less eager to press Dawson’s place in the world, the Nugget’s devotion to a joint American-British outlook never faltered. Entwined American and British flags continued to fly in Fourth of July and New Year’s cartoons, as the imagined community of the Klondike overshadowed the changes in the region’s reality. The Klondike Nugget ceased publication in July 1903.

“In the popular imagination,” Canadian historian Henry Guest has claimed, “Dawson was a wild west town transplanted to the Arctic. American journalists created that impression.” References to the Klondike Gold Rush remain in American culture,

54. “HAULED DOWN BRITISH FLAG AT SKAGWAY,” New York Times, June 29, 1901, p. 1; see also, under different title, Washington Post, June 29, 1901, p. 1, and the Los Angeles Times, June 29, 1901, p. 3; Minto to Prime Minister Joseph Chamberlain, Dec. 24, 1901, in Minto, Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers, 2: 107; Daily Klondike Nugget, June 27, 1901, p. 2; “NEITHER IS TO FLY FLAG,” Washington Post, Jan. 22, 1902, p. 10, and similar article in the Los Angeles Times, Jan. 22, 1902, p. 1; Ottawa Journal, Nov. 9–11, 1903, quoted in Norman Penlington, Canada and Imperialism, 1896–1899 (Toronto, 1965), 113. For the final machinations of the boundary commission, see Anderson, Race and Rapprochement, 168–170. Clifford Sifton’s biographer has claimed that “in mid-January 1898, the [Northwest Mounted Police] was ordered to establish posts at the summits of the passes [near Dyea and Skagway], although they were not to hoist the British flag to avoid irritating the Americans.” David J. Hall, Clifford Sifton: The Young Napoleon, 1861–1900 (Vancouver, B.C., 1985), 180. Evidence suggests that this policy was not followed in the early years; see, for example, Haskell, Two Years in the Klondike, 94; Palmer, In the Klondyke, 10; Wells, Magnificence and Misery, 151.

from the Klondike® bar to Starbucks Fortymile Blend coffee to the UConn Huskies and beyond. The Sergeant Preston radio and television dramas long held sway in American dreams; Jack London stories and Robert W. Service poems are cherished. Similarly, the names of towns like Yukon, Oklahoma, and Klondike, Iowa, link their founding to this era of American westering.56

Such visions continue to feed a tourist rush in Dawson today. The Palace Grand Theatre, the site of extravagant St. Andrew’s Day balls, still stands. It has been refurbished and made part of Parks Canada’s historic district in Dawson and hosts “Gaslight Follies,” a centerpiece of the “Discovery Days” festival held each year to recount the fables of the early Klondike Gold Rush. For the reenactments, the Palace Grand is again hung with flags: the Union Jack, the Canadian Red Ensign, and the forty-five-starred American flag of the era.57 This historically accurate display commemorates the moment of transition for Americans from the continental to the global frontier.

On the streets of Dawson, at the intersection of the “two Wests,” this transformation took shape in boisterous rhetoric that blended colonial wars and elegant balls, joint holidays and flag displays. The Klondike Nugget sought to make that unity happen. The newspaper’s words and images nurtured the founding myths


of colonization, with raw materials forged in Manifest Destiny and imperial exploration and then extracted from the bitter cold of the Far North. As the newspaper pages reveal, for a brief moment, as racial rhetoric was honed and national bonds merged, the Yukon joined the Philippines, South Africa, and China as a key battlefield in the global fight for an imagined Anglo-Saxonism.