

## **Creating Anglo-American Friendship: The Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Social Construction of the “Special Relationship”**

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During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the political relations between Great Britain and the United States underwent a process of change that was well-nigh dramatic. In the words of historian Charles Campbell, “the wonder is that despite the two wars, threats of a third war, and decades of animosity, America and Britain achieved a lasting rapprochement around 1900.”<sup>1</sup> The hostile tensions between the two states, manifested by two wars conducted against one another toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the attitude of the British in the American Civil War, were continually eased during the 1880s and 1890s with a rapidity and a dynamic that is astonishing for processes of mental change. It is true that the political rivalry between the two states was revived once again during the Venezuela crisis. But as early as 1896 Theodore Roosevelt concluded in a letter to Henry White, in which he called the Americans “the greatest branch of the English-speaking race”<sup>2</sup>, that there was a natural political connection between Britain and the USA. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the “special relationship” was born.

Fundamental alterations in the political relations between states and communities of states, such as the one under scrutiny in this volume, are historically molded and, to a large extent, they result from a great number of different kinds of political, economic, social and cultural interaction among these states and their societies.<sup>3</sup> The historically important question

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1 Charles Soutter Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement. The United States and Great Britain, 1783-1900* (New York 1974), X.

2 Theodore Roosevelt to Henry White, March 30 1896, in: Elting E. Morison (ed.) *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge 1951-54, I), 523.

3 For a theoretical explanation of this assumption see Karl Rohe, „Politische Kultur und der kulturelle Aspekt von politischer Wirklichkeit. Konzeptionelle und typologische Entwicklungen zu Gegenstand und Fragestellung Politischer Kultur-Forschung“, in: Dirk Berg-Schlosser, Jakob Schissler (eds.), *Politische Kultur in Deutschland. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Opladen 1987), 39-48; and Karl Rohe, „Politische Kultur und

is how these changes in the perception and assessment of the relationship came about. What were the ideational or ideological, normative and cultural underpinnings of this particular bond between Great Britain and the United States, which marked the political history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century so strongly? How did this bond evolve during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Through which cultural channels were the new interpretational models spread and consolidated? Which mediators and transmitters were involved?

The relevant scholarship does not satisfactorily answer these questions. Whereas the political relations between Great Britain and the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been studied rather extensively, the cultural dimensions and foundations of the emerging “special relationship” that we are focusing on have been neglected, the *cultural turn* in historical scholarship notwithstanding.<sup>4</sup> One of the major reasons for this is the fact that the analysis of cultural dimensions of the political sphere still poses challenging analytical problems reflecting the difficult hermeneutic processes connected to the historical reconstruction and interpretation of cultural and cognitive change.<sup>5</sup>

The following attempt to reconstruct the cultural and social construction of the “special relationship” during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tries to tackle the epistemological and methodological challenges by blending sociological institution theories with hypotheses and research perspectives developed by the cultural transfer approach. The latter claims that national cultures do not represent closed systems but open ones. It is argued that these national systems are shaped in a process of permanent confrontation with foreign cultures by means of appropriation and rejec-

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ihre Analyse: Probleme und Perspektiven der politischen Kulturforschung“, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 250 (1990), 339-346.

4 For the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century diplomatic relations between Great Britain and the United States see Henry Cranbrook Allen, *Great Britain and the United States. A History of Anglo-American Relations* (New York 1955); Herbert G. Nicholas, *The United States and Great Britain* (Chicago 1975); William Clark, *Less than Kin. A Study of Anglo-American Relations* (London 1957); Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement. Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1885-1904* (Rutherford 1981); David H. Burton, *British-American Diplomacy, 1895-1917. Early Years of the Special Relationship* (Malabar 1999); Charles Soutter Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898-1903* (Baltimore 1965); Charles Soutter Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (New York 1976); Fred M. Leventhal, Roland Quinault (eds), *Anglo-American Attitudes. From Revolution to Partnership* (Aldershot 2000); Howard Jones, Donald A. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny. Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington 1997).

5 See Thomas Mergel, Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28, 4 (2002), 574-606; Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, „Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, 4 (2002), 607-636.

tion.<sup>6</sup> Hence historical change and development of national systems depend upon these processes. The question is, however, how to capture these historical processes. It is at this point that institution theories come in. Institution theories can be used as bridging concepts that offer access to an analysis of the interdependence of social and cultural behavior, modes of communication, and social order.<sup>7</sup>

By referring to institution theories and applying them to a 19<sup>th</sup> century media event (the first world exhibition) the paper tries to reconstruct how specific social frames, communicative constructs and discourses came to harmonize their instrumental functions and symbolic meanings. Communicative events like world exhibitions that were conceived as an occasion to learn from one another, offered opportunities for political and cultural elites to discuss new ideas and present new patterns of interpretation. World exhibitions sustained and strengthened these new concepts by mechanisms of visualization. These mechanisms also helped to spread new modes of interpreting social reality and of establishing them as social and cultural facts.

Heuristically the blending of the two approaches expresses itself in the analytical focus on "core ideas" (*Leitideen*) mirroring key elite discourses.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on elite discourses as instigators and promoters of new ideas<sup>9</sup>

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6 Matthias Middell, "Kulturtransfer und Historische Komparatistik", *Comparativ* 1 (2000), 18; Johannes Paulmann, "Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien: Einführung in ein Forschungskonzept", in: Rudolf Muhs, Johannes Paulmann, Willibald Steinmetz (eds), *Aneignung und Abwehr. Interkultureller Transfer zwischen Deutschland und Großbritannien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bodenheim 1998), 21-43; Johannes Paulmann, "Interkultureller Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts", *Historische Zeitschrift* (1998), 649-685; Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Schriewer (eds), *Vergleich und Transfer. Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt, New York 2003).

7 See Ursula Lehmkuhl, "Diplomatiegeschichte als internationale Kulturgeschichte: Ansätze, Methoden und Forschungsergebnisse zwischen Historischer Kulturwissenschaft und soziologischem Institutionalismus", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2001), 394-423. For an introduction to sociological institution theory see Hermann L. Gukenbiehl, "Institution und Organisation", in: Hermann Korte, Bernhard Schäfers (eds), *Einführung in Hauptbegriffe der Soziologie* (Opladen 1993), 95-110; Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt a. M. 1972); Gert Melville, *Institutionen und Geschichte. Theoretische Aspekte und mittelalterliche Befunde* (Köln 1992); Gerhard Göhler et al. (eds), *Politische Institutionen im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch. Ideengeschichtliche Beiträge zur Theorie politischer Institutionen* (Opladen 1990).

8 Rainer M. Lepsius, *Interessen, Ideen und Institutionen* (Opladen 1990).

9 See Karl Rohe's distinction between "politischer Deutungskultur" and "politischer Soziokultur": Rohe, "Politische Kultur und ihre Analyse", 339-346. Rohe argues that on the level of political culture as political worldview (Deutungskultur) ideas about the political world are either still in the folder of the political designer or are in the process of being passed back and forth between the political and the cultural system. Since elite

the article tries to reflect the institutional effects of world exhibitions as communicative events and mediating agencies triggering discourses which served as a forum for the negotiation of the concept of 'special relations' between Great Britain and the United States. Reports about the participation of the United States and Britain, their contributions, their failures and successes at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London 1851, formulating and designing the concept of 'special relations', were molded by certain intellectual contexts. Core ideas served as a discursive umbrella structuring the communication processes before, during and after the exhibition. The reinterpretation of Anglo-American relations caused by the communicative event 'Crystal Palace Exhibition' was thus attached to longer-range perspectives and concepts. They were 'institutionalized'. The institutional character of world exhibitions comprising certain rules and practices – like public demonstrations of new inventions – together with its function as a media event producing an enormous extent of press coverage all over the world induced the institutionalization of new ideas in the context of existing and longer-lasting discourses. Both aspects were interrelated and reinforced each other. Hence, the analysis of world's fairs as institutions and communicative events helps to explain the historical processes of mental and perceptual change and the sustainability and longevity of new ideas.

**Imagining a Global Community:  
World Exhibitions as a Nineteenth Century Communicative Event**

The London *Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations* of 1851, as the Great Exhibition was officially titled, brought 14.000 representatives from 27 countries to London. They put together a hitherto unparalleled global collection of all kinds of different products. Its international and universal appeal attracted more than six million visitors, from 1 May to 31 October 1851. Most of these visits took place on the Shilling Days, Mondays to Thursdays, from 26 May onwards. Ever since the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London international exhibitions constituted global public spaces where visitors, journalists, and representatives of state governments communicated with one another, negotiated shared questions about human progress and articulated discourses on the future. Therefore World's Fairs were more than just a central forum for the developing

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discourses reflect world views of potential political designers they offer the opportunity to detect at a very early stage those attitudes, mentalities and habits that are in flux and that might change in the near future.

global network of goods and technology exchange. According to a German governmental commission, the fair attempted to represent the “Standpunkt der industriellen und künstlerischen Entwicklung der ganzen Menschheit durch Proben ihrer Erzeugnisse”.<sup>10</sup> Human progress was meant to be exhibited in a systematic and comparative manner resulting in a panorama of civilisation and culture as comprehensive as possible. On the occasion of World’s Fairs politics and the economy, science and technology, education, the fine arts and entertainment all came together and were joined into a multi-layered network of relations. As promoters of peaceful competition and as a communicative event with global significance and outreach, World’s Fairs contributed to the political integration in the respective host country, but also between the participating nations.<sup>11</sup> They played a significant part in the structuring and transformation of global social, cultural and political relations. In this sense the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 together with the media coverage of the event marked the beginning of a communicative process laying the foundations for the social construction of special relation between Great Britain and the United States, a process that lasted about fifty years.

The Crystal Palace Exhibition took place in a historical context that was heavily charged by the dialectic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In the age of emerging nationalism<sup>12</sup> these exhibitions were an instrument of national prestige and power politics which paralleled the claim of bourgeois internationalism to promote understanding between nations. World’s Fairs were “exercises in the imagery of nationalism”.<sup>13</sup> According to Jeffrey Auerbach, the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 was “the greatest defining occasion for nineteenth-century Britons between the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897”.<sup>14</sup> At the

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10 Amtlicher Bericht über die Industrie-Ausstellung aller Völker zu London im Jahre 1851, von der Berichterstattungs-Kommission der Deutschen Zollvereins-Regierungen (Berlin 1852, vol. 1 and 2; 1853, vol. 3); quoted in vol. 1, iii.

11 Wolfram Kaiser, „Die Welt im Dorf. Weltausstellungen von London 1851 bis Hannover 2000“, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 22-23 (26. Mai 2000), 3-10.

12 Dieter Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (München 2000), 35.

13 Manfred Wörner, *Die Welt an einem Ort: Illustrierte Geschichte der Weltausstellungen* (Berlin 2000), 4; Utz Haltern, „Die ‚Welt als Schau‘. Zur Funktion und Bedeutung der internationalen Industrieausstellung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert“, *VfSWG* 60 (1973), 1-40; Burton Benedict, „International exhibitions and national identity“, *Anthropology Today* 7 (1992), 5-90.

14 Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851. A Nation on Display* (New Haven, London 1999), 4; Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display. English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley 2001), xiv; Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling. How the Great Exhibition of 1851 Shaped a Nation* (London 2001), 1.

same time it was – in the words of Prince Albert, the chairman of the *Royal Commission* responsible for organizing the exhibition<sup>15</sup> – conceived to “promote all branches of human diligence and the fortification of peace and friendship among all nations on earth.”<sup>16</sup> The exhibition’s conception and objectives mirrored a variety of different philosophical schools that dominated the bourgeois worldview of the era and laid the foundation for the international spirit of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: cosmopolitanism, pacifism, liberalism and utilitarianism constituted the philosophical soil for the Crystal Palace Exhibition. It would be hard to find another medium in which nationalistic goals were pursued in such a conspicuous way disguised in concepts and discourses of cosmopolitanism and international peace.

The dialectic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism also characterized the discursive setting in which British and American self-perception and the assessment of the other during the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 took place. The social construction of Anglo-American relations as well as the respective British and American perception of the Self and the Other before and during the exhibition was framed by three “core ideas” which can be characterized as signifiers of the dialectics of nationalism and cosmopolitanism: the debate on free trade as a principle for international order and peace; the concepts of utilitarianism and functionalism as new modes of interpreting cultural and civilizational progress; and individualism and ‘democratic government’ as promoters of technological advancement. Following these three core ideas and the discourses they triggered the content and structure of those communication processes, in the course of which Great Britain and the United States began imagining mutual relations as ‘special’, can be reconstructed in an exemplary manner. The following story of the emergence of the Anglo-American “special relationship” is thus told as an interrelated process of socio-economic, socio-cultural and socio-political convergence.

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15 For more information on the history of the Royal Commission see Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition. A History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851* (London 2002).

16 Quoted in Winfried Kretschmer, *Geschichte der Weltausstellungen* (Frankfurt a.M. 1999), 19.

### Free Trade, Utilitarianism and Republicanism: The Cognitive Framing of the “Special Relationship”

#### *Liberalism and Free Trade*

The Great Exhibition marked the beginning of a process that was characterized by the industrial development of the Western world and the emergence of a global economic and transport system. Both formed the basis of the modern world economy developing under the sign of free trade during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> In that sense, already Franz Schnabel characterized the Great Exhibition as a symbol of the “Einheit der abendländisch-nordamerikanischen Wirtschaftskultur” (the unity of the occidental-North American economic culture).<sup>18</sup> With its emphasis on the significance of industry, the Great Exhibition became a role model for all similar events to come.<sup>19</sup> The organizers of the Great Exhibition were convinced that peaceful competition between nations would promote the progress of civilization to the benefit of all human beings. With these and similar arguments the representatives of the *Royal Commission* tried to secure public support and participation.

‘Free trade’ was the economic framework in which – as the proponents of free trade argued – internationalism and liberalism would take shape and on which peaceful competition between nations was based. The vast majority of the members of the *Royal Commission* were supportive of political reform and committed to free trade. They were convinced that low tariffs and the removal of custom barriers would strengthen international trade and thereby increase prosperity at home.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent advocates of free trade in the *Royal Commission* were Robert Cobden, a textile manufacturer, and Robert Peel the former Prime Minister, who in 1846 succeeded in abolishing the *Corn Laws* against the firm resistance of the

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17 A. G. Hopkins, *Globalization in World History* (New York 2002); Knut Borchardt, *Globalisierung in historischer Perspektive* (München 2000); Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge 1999).

18 Franz Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. 2 (Freiburg 1950), 439-440.

19 Louise Purbrick, “Introduction”, in: Louise Purbrick (ed.), *The Great Exhibition of 1851. New interdisciplinary essays* (Manchester 2001), 2-3; Wörner, *Die Welt an einem Ort*, 1.

20 For more details about the free trade debate within the *Royal Commission* see Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition 1851*, 56-64; Wolfram Kaiser, “Inszenierung des Freihandels als weltgesellschaftliche Entwicklungsstrategie: Die ‘Great Exhibition’ 1851 und der politische Kulturtransfer nach Kontinentaleuropa”, in: Franz Bosbach, John R. Davis (eds), *Die Weltausstellung von 1851 und ihre Folgen* (München 2002), 163-180.

landed interests. As a reflection of the Commission's non-partisan character supporters of the *Protectionist Party* were represented as well, for example William Thompson and Thomas Baring, both members of parliament, or Philip Pusey, founder of the Royal Agricultural Society.<sup>21</sup> Due to the neutral character of the *Royal Commission* and the necessity to secure a broad public support for the exhibition free trade was not openly propagated. Instead of speaking of free trade the members of the commission agreed to talk about "commercial freedom".<sup>22</sup> While the Royal Commissioners promoted the exhibition on a variety of grounds, free trade was without doubt one of the most influential argument supporting the endeavor to bring manufacturers from all over the world to London.

Not only in Britain had an advocate of free trade like Robert Peel been able to become head of government. Also in the United States free trade proponents had gained political strength when presidential candidate James K. Polk won the election in 1844. With the support of Treasury Secretary Samuel Walker, Polk initiated a campaign for tariff reform that his political opponents correctly considered an open attack on the "American System".<sup>23</sup> From the introduction of the *Walker Tariff* in 1846 until the Civil War the protection of American infant industries through high tariffs was anathema in politics.<sup>24</sup>

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21 Among the members of the *Royal Commission* were: Prince Albert (President); Earl Granville (Vice President); Duke of Buccleuch; Earl of Ellesmere, President of the Royal Asiatic Society; the Rector of King's College in Aberdeen; Earl of Rosse, President of the Royal Society; Lord John Russell, Prime Minister; Lord Stanley (Earl of Derby), Leader of the Opposition; Robert Peel MP; Thomas Baring MP, Chairman of Lloyds and Baring Brothers; Charles Barry, Architect; Thomas Bazley, Chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce; Richard Cobden MP, Leader of the Anti-Corn Law League; William Cubitt, President of the Institute of Civil Engineers; Charles Lock Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy; Archibald Galloway, Chairman of the East India Company; Thomas Field Gibson, Spitalfield Silk Merchant; William Gladstone MP; John Gott, Leeds Wool Manufacturer; Henry Labouchere MP, President of the Board of Trade; Samuel Jones Loyd (Baron Overstone), Chairman of Jones, Lloyd, and Company; Charles Lyell, President of the Geological Society; Philip Pusey MP, Founder of the Royal Agricultural Society; William Thompson MP, Alderman of the City of London; Richard Westmacott, Sculptor, Marble Arch Reliefs. For a detailed prosopographic description of the composition of the commission see Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition*, 14-17; Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 28-31.

22 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition 1851*, 58.

23 Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steel Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7<sup>th</sup> printing, 1957), 439; Andreas Etges, *Wirtschaftsnationalismus. USA und Deutschland im Vergleich, 1815-1914* (Frankfurt 1999), 160-216.

24 Both, the lasting economic growth and the fact that the Democrats, with only short interruptions, held a majority in Congress, contributed to the predominance of free trade ideology in the United States. With the renewed decrease of import tariffs in 1857, the



Just like Peel and Cobden, Walker had had to defend his policy against considerable political resistance at home. In contrast to their British counterparts, however, the American opponents of free trade were able to arm themselves rhetorically and politically by referring to a foreign enemy, namely Britain. Economic nationalists such as members of the *American School of Political Economy* fought free trade not only as an unhistorical theory and cosmopolitan ideology, but primarily as a British power doctrine. Free trade was identified with the British Crown, and protective tariffs with American independence.<sup>25</sup> Like in Britain, however, free trade and commercial freedom were not used as arguments in the public debate about the necessity of American participation in the London exhibition. Nevertheless, during the exhibition free trade appeared as a reference point when it came to explaining the technological and budgetary successes of the United States that were revealed during the summer of 1851. In June 1851 after the announcement of the extremely positive development of the American federal budget and only a few days after having declared that the American contribution to the World Exhibition was less than mediocre, *The Times* explained:

“The prosperity of the U.S. is so intimately interwoven with this country, that the extraordinary increase of their federal revenue will be regarded as a piece of domestic good fortune. [...] It is no empty compliment, but a literal truth, that this flourishing condition of the United States’ revenue is as great a blessing to us as an equal excess in our own revenue.”

The same article argued strongly for increasing trade relations between Great Britain and the United States and called for the cutback of customs barriers: “In the present instance that state of the American revenue renders it unnecessary to put any additional impediment on the commerce of the two countries”.<sup>26</sup> Five month later, in November 1851, the American Secretary of the Treasury, Walker, addressing free trade opponents in Great Britain and at home, declared in a speech delivered during his visit in Liverpool:

“The American tariff of 1846 remains without alteration. [...] the free trade tariff of 1846 has not ruined the United States, and the dark prognostications of its opponents have been utterly disappointed. [...] The corn laws have been far more injurious to many than profitable to the few. Without, then, attempting to cast up the vast aggregate of mischief,

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United States joined the international trend of a “Free Trade Era”, triggered by the British abrogation of the corn laws. See Etges, *Wirtschaftsnationalismus*.

25 About the program and policy of the *American School of Political Economy* see Etges, *Wirtschaftsnationalismus*, 191-204.

26 *The Times*, June 4, 1851.

we are content to call protection a scheme to tax the public for the benefit of this or that class."<sup>27</sup>

In order to counter the arguments of domestic political opponents, free trade advocates in both countries pointed to the American economy as an example for the positive impact of free trade and as a model to be emulated in Western Europe. And even Royal Commissioner Pusey, who had strongly supported the Corn Laws, urged agriculturalists to adopt scientific improvements in order to enable them to compete with foreign producers. It was he who introduced McCormick's reaper – the catalyst of a process inaugurating a reinterpretation of Anglo-American relations during the Crystal Palace Exhibition<sup>28</sup> – into Britain, on his estates in Berkshire during the exhibition in August 1851.

### *Functionalism and Utilitarianism*

Besides strengthening international trade and promoting the industrial development of the Western World, the Crystal Palace Exhibition was meant to be an educational enterprise. Jeffrey Auerbach argues that "to the extent that there was a dominant aim, it was not so much to celebrate British industrial supremacy as to rectify deficiencies in industrialization".<sup>29</sup> Auerbach explains:

"If there was one theme that united the exhibits and the organizers' objectives it was education in the broadest sense: educating producers about new materials and processes, educating consumers about new products, and educating a substantial portion of British society about the value of industry, commerce, and mechanization, and the importance of art and taste".<sup>30</sup>

When it came to the question of what the world could learn from Britain *The Times'* answer was "... first, a broad, robust, masculine, industrial system, based upon the demand of the masses and directed to the supply of their chief wants all over the world".<sup>31</sup> This claim was reflected in the broad range of British exhibits which were selected in a decentralized process by local committees. Selection was beyond the control of the organizers. This in turn meant that the exhibition was open to a broad spectrum of exhibitors, that it was inclusive rather than exclusive, and that it

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27 *The Times*, November 28, 1851.

28 Ursula Lehmkuhl, "Una mietitrice come catalizzatore: la Great Exhibition del 1851 e la costruzione sociale della relazione speciale anglo-americana", *Memoria e Ricerca* 17 (2004), 141-164.

29 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 31.

30 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 94.

31 *The Times*, June 6, 1851.

encompassed the full range of commercial possibilities. The classification system that was eventually agreed upon to impose order on “the works of industry of all nations” consisted of four categories – raw materials, machinery, manufactures and fine arts – replicating and privileging the manufacturing process.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to France, Russia or Austria but comparable to the United States, Great Britain and the Empire emphasized the presentation of its achievements in the manufacturing industries and heavy machinery. Besides the many artisanal and high-quality goods of small industry, the British exhibited steam engines, railroad cars and machine tools, arms and ship equipment, agricultural machines and devices such as steam plows, butter kegs and the latest reaping and threshing machines. Finished manufactures and machinery best illustrated the interrelatedness of commerce and culture and they attracted especially the “masses”, the so-called *Shilling visitors*. Moreover, they not only demonstrated the country’s industrial progress but also reflected the organizers’ desire to shape an emerging commercial and industrial society in a particular fashion. “Industrialization ... did not mean a choice between art and industry”, industry was art and manufactures were “productions of art”.<sup>33</sup>

The emphasis that the *Royal Commission* put on education and the display of industrial progress coincided with American objectives and the character of the American exhibition. The *New York Herald*, the most influential promoter of an American participation in the London Exhibition, explained in August 1850:

“This is the first opportunity we have had of fairly laying before the world our productions of art and it should not be passed lightly by. It is of more importance to us politically and commercially, than to any other nation. We are as yet unknown in the market of Europe except as the producers of raw material. Now we can show them that we not only produce cotton, iron, coal, copper and gold in greater abundances than any other nation, but that we can work them up into manufactures often equally, sometimes surpassing the oldest nations in a perfection and with a facility unknown to them.”<sup>34</sup>

However, in contrast to European participants and especially to Great Britain, American exhibitors had to cope with a double perceptual disadvantage: Not only did Europeans still consider the United States a young and poorly developed industrial nation, hardly capable of meeting European standards. Also many American manufacturers and entrepreneurs themselves were convinced that the United States had not yet

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32 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 92.

33 For this argument see Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 97, 108.

34 *New York Herald*, August 1, 1850.

reached the status of an industrial nation able to produce high-quality manufactured products meeting the demands of the European market. Hence, despite the reiteration of the argument that American participation was an opportunity to “show the nations of Europe that our mechanical and inventive resources are equal to what we possess in a military point of view”,<sup>35</sup> the American *Executive Committee*, responsible for organizing the American participation in the world exhibition, had trouble finding enough manufacturers and businessmen willing to present their products at the Crystal Palace.

Nevertheless, in the course of the exhibition the desire to “learn from one another” combined with the British and American emphasis on manufactures and heavy machinery developed into a common reference point for establishing an “Anglo-American” standard distinguishing itself from continental European perspectives on culture and civilization. The educational emphasis of the organizers went hand in hand with a shift in the evaluation standards and the concept of industrial aesthetics, emphasizing the utility and functionality of the products. It was this common standard with its focus on functionalism and utilitarianism that turned out to become the second cognitive framework allowing the modification of the stereotypes of European cultural and civilizational superiority and American inferiority.

Functionalism and utilitarianism decided on the success or failure of an exhibit. Public demonstrations and tests of manufactured products that were part of the exhibition demonstrated American mechanical superiority. American products proved to be better than many continental European and also British products especially with regard to functionality and reliability. Of special significance for the public perception of America’s civilizational advancements were the success of McCormick’s reaper, of Hobb’s lock, Colt’s revolver and the yacht *America*.<sup>36</sup> McCormick’s reaper and Colt’s revolver were pointed out as devices revolutionizing agriculture and the military.<sup>37</sup> America’s naval superiority was perceived as a challenge to the shipbuilding of England. To the surprise of the *London Spectator* the English “scientific” approach to shipbuilding had turned out

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35 *Journal of the Great Exhibition of 1851*, vol. I, February 1, 1851, 141.

36 Merle Curti, “America at the World’s Fairs”, *American Historical Review*, 55 (1949/1950), 833-856.

37 *The Times*, September 2, 1851.

to be less successful than the “empiricist” and “commercial” approach of the Americans:<sup>38</sup>

“Off one of our great naval ports, the shipbuilding of England has been challenged by an alien vessel, and defeated totally. It is a remarkable incident, and not satisfactory to the national pride. ... The victory of the America ... practically refutes the newest hypothesis in the search for the philosopher’s stone in the science of shipbuilding.”

The newspaper, however, comforted the reader: “there is no room either for chagrin or dismay. ... We shall not be much behind in the practical progress of ship-building. Nor is it to be assumed, that because empiricism has beaten science, that the latter is to yield in despair. On the contrary, empiricism, has always been the jackal to theoretic science, and every discovery by the working shipwright only brings us nearer to the desideratum – a scientific rule.” American success was not interpreted or perceived in terms of rivalry, neither on the American, nor on the British side. It was instead translated in terms of competitive friendship as the basis of human progress. Hence the reader of the *London Spectator* was informed, that “we have heard an American express the hope that England, by beating America, would give the impulse for a new effort, which should again give his country a new triumph. Such friendly emulation is not rivalry: it is the pride of him, who for the moment gets foremost in the search for the common good. ... our friends hasten over with a natural pride, to make us a party in the new idea.”<sup>39</sup>

#### *Individualism and “democratic form of government”*

Reflecting the *Royal Commission’s* intention, the Great Exhibition “promulgated an image of industrialization that ... was private and firm-based more than it was public and state-supported”.<sup>40</sup> Against the state-centered

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38 This argument refers to the specific make up of the body of the American vessel which went against the contemporary theory that “water displaced by a body which is removed fills the vacuity, not so much by falling in at the sides as rising from below”. Because of this theory the British vessel “was built sharp and deep toward the bows, broad and shallow towards the stern.” The America was constructed the other way round: “the bows are sharp, and the breadth of beam, which is considerable, is greatest about parallel to the mainmast. ... the draught of water at the bows is ... about three feet; and it deepens to three times as much toward the stern.” Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 100.

39 All quotes from the *London Spectator*; article reprinted in Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 100-101. See also the comment of the *London Morning Chronicle*: “It was not brotherly kindness, but friendly competition, which produced the revolver, the reaping-machine, or the unpickable lock. Each of the discoverers attained perfection after a series of beatings – beatings given, we understand, and taken in undisturbed charity”. Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 98.

40 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 94.

tradition prevailing in continental Europe that had nurtured a system of protected and state-sponsored industries<sup>41</sup> and in contrast to the French tradition of exploiting industrial exhibitions as a forum for national representation and power projection, the British organizers emphasized the importance of individual initiative and individual ingenuity as the basis of the industrial success of a nation. This attitude again corresponded to the political process and institutional set-up of the United States founded on the principles of individualism, *laissez-faire* and democratic government. Hence, individualism and democratic government served as the third discursive framework in which a British-American ideological rapprochement took place in the course of the exhibition.

In the American tradition of limited government American participation in the world exhibition was considered to be a private not a political issue. Congress refused to financially or even logistically support the participation of American entrepreneurs and businessmen. The American Government restricted itself to what the *Royal Commission* had requested it to do: designating a national *Executive Committee* responsible for the selection of the American exhibits and nominating two official representatives for supervising the transportation of the American exhibits from New York to London.<sup>42</sup>

The official American representatives, Edward Riddle and Charles F. Stansbury,<sup>43</sup> did not receive any compensation from the US government for their activities, nor did the exhibitors who had to pay for the shipment and transportation of their products themselves. Riddle and Stansbury's work heavily depended on private sponsorship and funds. Even the decoration

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41 In France and Austria the entire exhibition program was supervised by the national government, which assumed full responsibility for the articles exhibited. Robert F. Dalzell, *American Participation in the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Amherst 1960), 25.

42 In that respect, it is very interesting to take a look at the composition of the Committee. It consisted of two scientists (Joseph Henry, Walter R. Johnson), one explorer (Charles Wilkes), one journalist and local politician (Peter Force) and one statistician (Joseph C. G. Kennedy). Joseph Henry had become famous for his experiments with electromagnetism and electricity, which were comparable to the Faraday experiments in England. Henry and Johnson were institutionally linked to the Smithsonian Institute. Henry was appointed as its "First Secretary" and director in 1846; Johnson was chief-chemist, even though his real scientific expertise was in geology. Between 1838 and 1842, Charles Wilkes headed an expedition that cartographically mapped about 1600 miles of the Antarctic coast. Peter Force, a journalist and former mayor of Washington, had edited the monumental "American Archives Series", whereas Joseph C.G. Kennedy had organized the 1850 census. Henceforth, none of the members of the Committee had a background in agriculture or industrial production.

43 Edward Riddle was a carriage dealer and auctioneer from Boston; Charles F. Stansbury held the position of the "Recording Secretary of the National Institute".

of the American department in the Crystal Palace had to be financed with private money.<sup>44</sup> In stark contrast to the European tradition of governmental promotion of business and industry,<sup>45</sup> and in accordance with the principle of American individualism everything was indeed left to private initiative and free competition. The official report about American participation in the Great Exhibition emphasized: "While, then, the American display at the Great Exhibition was organized under official sanction from the Federal and State governments, its chief impetus lay in the decisions made by hundreds of private individuals".<sup>46</sup> Even the American minister in London, Abbott Lawrence, – a leading Boston businessman – did not publicly get involved in the preparation of the American exhibition. He confined himself to calling upon the State Department during the first stage of planning, when he reminded the officials in Washington to take care of an adequate American representation at the World's Fair.<sup>47</sup>

Very much reflecting the arguments and observations prevalent in contemporary British travel literature, British newspaper reports about the American successes at the exhibition emphasized the remarkable ingenuity of the ordinary American fostered by equality of opportunity which again had much to do with the turn that democracy had taken in America during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> Hence, not only functionalism and utilitarianism, but also the American "virtues of democracy and republicanism", the American concept of individualism and the equalitarian doctrine were pointed out by British observers as an explanation for the success of America's inventive spirit and the technical robustness of its machines. Members of the *Royal Commission*, followed by *The Times*, highlighted American liberalism and individualism as a role model for the political future of Europe in general, and of Great Britain in particular. The American success at the exhibition was considered as evidence that industrial and political progress went hand in hand.<sup>49</sup>

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44 George Peabody, an American banker living in England, eventually supported the American exhibition with a donation of \$ 15.000. Dalzell, *American Participation*, 24.

45 See Utz Haltern, *Die Londoner Weltausstellung von 1851* (Münster 1971), 15-20 (incl. further bibliographical information).

46 Dalzell, *American Participation*, 25.

47 John E. Findling, "America at the Great Exhibition", in: Bosbach, Davis (eds) *Die Weltausstellung von 1851 und ihre Folgen*, 197.

48 On travel literature see John D. Hicks, *The Federal Union. A History of the United States to 1877* (Cambridge, MA 1937), 309-314.

49 *The Times*, September 16, 1851.

**From “Western child” to “American brethren”:  
The Integrating Forces of Technological Success**

The self-perception of cultural inferiority and the lack of governmental support in preparing an adequate American participation in the Great Exhibition resulted in reluctance and even a certain resistance on the part of American manufacturers to accept the risks involved in sending their products to London and exhibiting them in the Crystal Palace. Many potential exhibitors were discouraged by the European attitude of cultural superiority, but also the long journey and the costs involved. The *Executive Committee* and the various *State Committees* responsible for recruiting exhibitors and selecting exhibits did little to change that situation. Even the press coverage was meager. The first substantial articles on the planned exhibition appeared as late as the summer of 1850. The *New York Herald* and the *Springfield Republican* took a leading role in supporting American participation. Both newspapers focused on the perceptual problems mentioned above. They invited Americans to participate in the European event by arguing against the prevailing impression and feelings of national inferiority. Despite the enormous economic and technological achievements and the ascendance to a continental power during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, America’s national self-perception was still characterized by ambivalence and insecurity. An article in the *Springfield Republican* from November 1850 pinpoints the perceptive divide between the two Anglo-Saxon nations.

“The Industrial Exhibition of 1851, to come off in London [...] will be a great test, full of glorious meaning in truth, and inevitable in the development of facts instructive in the morals, systems of religion, modes of government, and intellectual progress of every nation which it may represent. [...] If we mistake not, the English will learn some important lessons from their western child, whom they still associate with savage life and whom many among them regard with dignified superciliousness.”<sup>50</sup>

Because of the reluctant response of the American public, in January 1851, only four months before the official opening of the Great Exhibition, the *New York Tribune* warned:

“So far our countrymen have exhibited but little interest in the matter and this appears surprising to anyone who is acquainted with our abilities and resources. There are as yet not two hundreds applicants although the representation from different parts of the Union bids fair to be good”.<sup>51</sup>

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50 *Springfield Republican*, November 27, 1850.

51 *New York Tribune*, January 15, 1851.



The *New York Tribune* pointed out that in comparison about 2.500 French exhibitors and 686 from small Belgium had registered for the exhibition.<sup>52</sup> Reflecting the ambivalence and insecurity among the 519 American participants in the Great Exhibition, two months later the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* warned: “Our enterprise will be poorly represented [...] when our mechanical products come to be inspected, we shall certainly fail – we have nothing on the ground”.<sup>53</sup>

**Table 1: Participating countries, number of exhibitors and size of their departments**

Participating Countries	Exhibitors	Size of the Department	
		Squares	Square meters
United Kingdom and Ireland	7,200	867	46,420
British Colonies	1,296	73	3,906
France and Algiers	1,828	200	10,702
Zollverein and North German States	1,720	142	7,598
Orient	1,326	26	1,391
Austria	748	87	4,655
United States	519	70	3,716
Russia	385	26	1,391
other countries	1,993	133	7,090
<b>Total British Empire</b>	<b>8,496</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>50,324</b>
<b>Total all other countries</b>	<b>8,566</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>29,455</b>

Q: *Official Report 1852: 77,80,107,113* quoted in *Kretschmer (1999): 35*.

When the exhibition opened on May 1, 1851, the American department was still incomplete. Many exhibits, especially those selected in the very last minute, were still on their way from the United States to Europe. In addition American officials had generously miscalculated the size of the American department. The space reserved for American exhibits was much too large and could not be filled. Hence, during the first weeks of the exhibition the American section became notorious for its emptiness.

*The Times* wrote about a “solitude in the Crystal Palace over which the American eagle stretched its mighty wings” and explained that the space claimed by the American department was as “imperfectly occupied” as the American continent.<sup>54</sup> In addition, American exhibits – primarily agricul-

<sup>52</sup> *New York Tribune*, January 15, 1851.

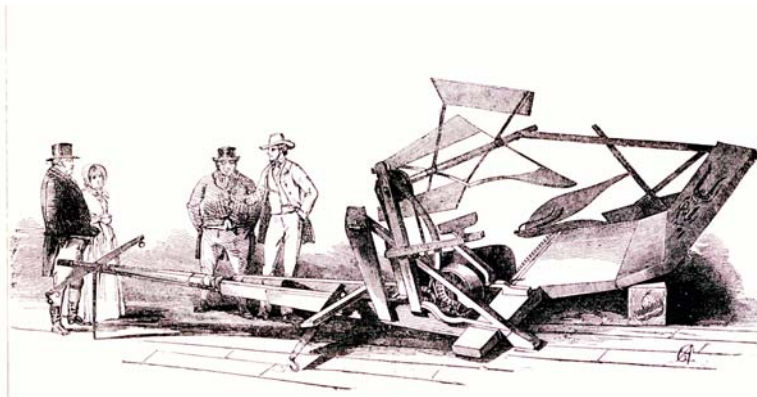
<sup>53</sup> *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 12, 1851.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted from a report of the Hon. Wm. C. Rives, Minister to France, in: *The New York Times*, October 31, 1851.

tural products, raw materials and a few machines, including the most successful American exhibit, McCormick's reaper – at first sight appeared unattractive compared to European ones. McCormick's reaper, praised as a revolutionary invention only a few weeks later, entirely failed to meet the aesthetic demands applied in Europe to a machine's design. Consequently it was the target of numerous jokes. It was called "a cross between an Astley's chariot, a treadmill, and a flying machine"<sup>55</sup>, nothing but a huge and above all ugly Yankee invention.

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Illustration 2: The McCormick Reaper



56. American reaping machine by McCormick. *I.L.N.* July 1851.

W. Friebe, *Vom Kristallpalast zum Sonnenturm*, Leipzig: Edition Leipzig 1973, 15, repr. with the permission of the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik, Weimar.

In early June, *The Times* explained in an article on the American contribution to the exhibition that it could not be expected that the United States "should come out very strong in an exhibition the chief contributors to which are wealthy and long settled states, the heirs by lineal descent of ancient civilization". The author warned: "Whenever they come out of their own province of rugged utility, and enter into competition with European elegance, they certainly do make themselves ridiculous"<sup>56</sup>. Considering these comments, it goes without saying that the "utilitarian standard" propagated by the organizers had obviously not yet been established as a socio-cultural norm.

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55 *The Times*, June 16, 1851.

56 *The Times*, June 5, 1851.

The press coverage during the first weeks of the exhibition very much reflected the interests and response of a specific type of visitor to the Crystal Palace Exhibition. During the first three weeks the exhibition was reserved for the aristocracy and the wealthy upper class. It opened its doors for the so-called *Shilling visitors* only on May 26, 1851.<sup>57</sup> The predominantly aristocratic visitors were neither interested in the varieties of American cotton nor in the rubber products on display. Also the American rocking chair or American farm implements did not raise much enthusiasm. This attitude was uncritically taken over by the press and dominated the spirit and content of the newspaper reports.

However, the machines and manufactures were not only put on display, but also tested in public competitions according to the utilitarian standard emphasized by the organizers of the exhibition. The competitions took place roughly at half time of the exhibition. With the opening of the exhibition for a mass audience and the visualization of functionality in public contests the type of visitor and the visitors' interests changed significantly and with it the character of the newspaper reports. The most prominent competition of the exhibition – the examination of McCormick's reaper, the ugly Yankee invention that according to *The Times* in early June was not even worth the trouble of bringing it to the fields to be tested – took place on July 24 in Essex (Tip-Tree Hall) on a wheat field about 45 miles outside of London, in front of a jury of three and some 200 mainly rural spectators. Benjamin P. Johnson, Secretary of the *New York State Agricultural Society* and a member of the *Executive Commission* described the situation as follows:

"The day proved, as did that for the trial of plows, one of the favourite of England – that is rain incessantly. [... the] wheat was not ripe, but quite green, the crop very heavy upon the ground, and every thing as unfavourable as possible for trying the Reapers. The people present were clamorous for a trial, and the person having Hussey's Reaper in charge placed it on the field, and a trial was made with it; but the grain was so green that it soon clogged the machine, and it passed over without cutting it. [...] It was suggested by the other members of the jury that we had better not try McCormick's; but I informed them that the machine was there for the trial, and it must be tried as I could not consent that the gentlemen present, many of whom had come for the sole purpose of witnessing the trial, should go away with the impression that our Reapers would not do the work promised. McCormick's was accordingly placed to its work, and with a single span of horses, it went through the grain, green as it was, cutting all before it. [...] The jurors then required the machine to cut another swath, so that it might be timed, and its powers ascertained. Accordingly the machine was put in motion again, and cut seventy-four

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57 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 147-158.

yards in length in seventy seconds, doing its work first-rate, and to the satisfaction of every one present."<sup>58</sup>

Johnson reported that the owner of the Tip-Tree Farm, where the demonstration took place, was so enthusiastic about the performance of the reaper that he "jumped upon the platform and said, 'Gentlemen, here is a triumph for the American Reaping Machine. It has, under all ... disadvantages, done its work completely. Now let us as Englishmen show that we appreciate this contribution for cheapening our agriculture, and let us give the Americans three hearty English cheers!'" As a result of the Tip-Tree trials, Johnson could happily inform the American public: "You can hardly imagine how the tone is altered since we have had our implements tried."<sup>59</sup>

When the reaper was brought back to the exhibition hall it became one of the most attractive exhibits in the Crystal Palace. The *Daily News* reported: "A great change has taken place in the comparative attractiveness of the various departments. Formerly the crowds used to cluster most in the French and Austrian section, while the region of the stars and stripes was almost deserted – now the domain of Brother Jonathan is daily filled with crowds of visitors."<sup>60</sup> The McCormick Reaper was praised as an invention that would revolutionize agriculture as much as the spinning jenny and the mechanical loom had revolutionized textile industry. McCormick was awarded both the Grand Medal and the Council Medal, and the "Yankees" were promoted to "American brethren, descendants of this country"<sup>61</sup>

Also in other contests and demonstrations the American inventions and products came out extremely well in comparison with continental European and in particular with British products.<sup>62</sup> Similar stories could be

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58 *Albany Evening Journal*, July 29, 1851, quoted in: Charles T. Rodgers, *American Superiority at the World's Fair* (Philadelphia 1852), 15.

59 Quoted in Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 15.

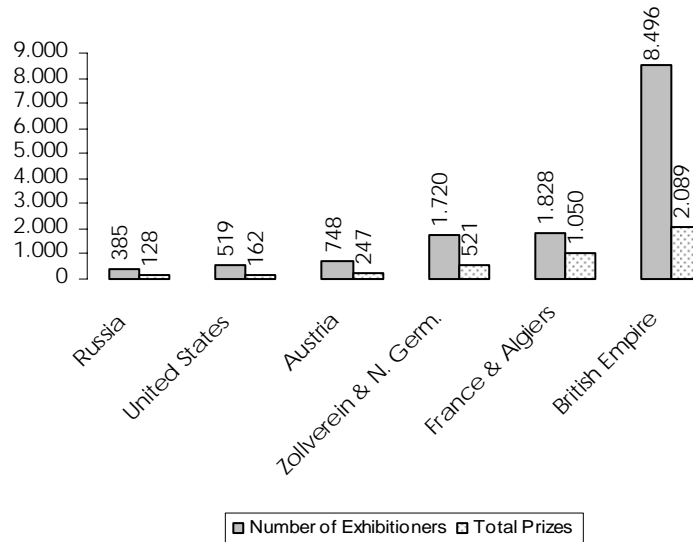
60 *The Daily News*, September 2, 1851.

61 Address by Mr. Mechi, the owner of the wheat field, after the contest. Quoted from Benjamin Pierce Johnson, Secretary of the *New York State Agricultural Society*, and Commissioner to the World's Fair, printed in: Rodgers, *American Superiority at the World's Fair*, 16.

62 In the context of the cultural construction of national identity the Royal Yacht Club regatta should be mentioned. On August 28, the American yacht *America* beat the British *Titania* and won what has become the famous "America's Cup". This regatta climaxed a half century during which Americans had with repeated success challenged British supremacy at sea. For an analysis of this event see Stefanie Schneider, *International Siamese Twins. Die symbolische Repräsentation anglo-amerikanischer Beziehungen in politischen Karikaturen der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Phil. Diss. University of Erfurt, 2004, chapter 4.6); Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 77-86. For the British reaction to the superiority of

told with regard to American ships and locks.<sup>63</sup> Although the number of American exhibits was not really impressive – less than 3% of the 20.000 exhibits came from the United States –, American exhibitors won more prizes than many states on the continent and relatively more than Great Britain.

Figure 1: Number of prizes in relation to number of exhibitors



Based on data presented in the *Official Report from 1853*, 723, quoted in Kretschmer (1999), 48.

Out of a total of 172 Council Awards for unique and ingenious items, the United States won five (for Borden's Meat Biscuit, Dick's Anti-Friction Press, Bond & Son's Astronomical instruments, Goodyear's India Rubber, and for McCormick's Reaper). Of the 2.987 Prize Medals, 102 went to the United States, and 55 other American exhibits obtained an honorable mention.<sup>64</sup> *The Times* commented that "Great Britain has received more useful ideas, and more ingenious inventions from the United States, through the exhibition, than from all other sources".<sup>65</sup>

About six weeks after the opening of the exhibition the British attitude towards the American contributions had reversed itself. Instigated by the

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American locks produced by Day and Newell see B.P. Johnson, *Report on the Industrial Exhibition*, London 1851, in Appendix. *Transactions of the New York State Agricultural Society*, Vol. XI, 140-41.

63 See Rodgers, *American Superiority at the World's Fair*.

64 Kretschmer, *Geschichte der Weltausstellung*, 48.

65 *The Times*, September 6, 1851, quoted in: Dalzell, *American Participation*, 51.

technological success of American manufactured products the English discourse of cultural superiority was superseded by a discourse of kinship. Not the differences between Britain and the United States were focused on but the similarities and common characteristics – cultural, political, economic and racial. The success of the American products was explained by their utilitarian character. They were built as “labor saving devices”, easy to use and to repair even for non-specialists. American machinery and tools were seen as the direct outcome of the American “democratic way of life”. They represented the *Royal Commission’s* ideal of a “broad, robust, masculine, industrial system, based upon the demand of the masses”.<sup>66</sup>

The argumentative linkage of technological success and political system was insinuated by the semantic doubling of ‘civilization’ and ‘civility’, that is civilization understood as a civilized (political) way of life.<sup>67</sup> Taking a recourse to Thomas Paine’s position of 1792, according to which “the more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for government”, the *London Observer* explained by the end of August 1851: “No Government of favoritism raises any manufacture to a pre-eminence. [...] Everything is entrusted to the ingenuity of individuals, who look for their reward to public demand alone”.<sup>68</sup>

The integration of the United States – at least rhetorically and argumentatively – as an equal partner into the community of civilized nations and the discovery of ‘special relations’ between Great Britain and her “American brother” was aptly expressed by *The Times* in September 1851. Written in the typical emphatic style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressive discourse *The Times* argued:

“[...] we hope that an improvement in the physical condition of mankind will tend materially to soften manners generally; and conduce to an universal cultivation of every humanizing art and science. [...] and, if we were called upon at this moment to select that people which, of all others, from their political and social condition is more especially under an obligation to obey the dictates of this international morality, we should without hesitation point to the United States of America. Unlike all other nations, they have not been condemned to pass through an ignorant and barbarous infancy. They began their national existence at the highest point of civilization to which mankind has yet attained. They enter into the great commonwealth of nations just when science and art have almost annihilated time and distance, and when intelligence can be communicated from one end of the earth to the other almost with the rapidity of thought. [...] although many different races of men have contributed to make up this population, one nation,

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66 *The Times*, June 6, 1851.

67 See Jörg Fisch, „Zivilisation, Kultur“, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* vol. 7 (Stuttgart 1992), 679-774, here: 716, 721 f.

68 *London Observer*, August 27, 1851.

viz., the English, have so far outnumbered all others in this contribution as to stamp upon them a national and peculiar character."<sup>69</sup>

At about the same time, *The New York Times* published a long report from the American ambassador to France, Hon. Wm C. Rives, who had visited the exhibition in the summer of 1851. Despite its diplomatic style and language, the report illuminates that the processes of perceptual change described above also happened on the other side of the Atlantic. It especially reveals the revision of the pattern of cultural inferiority that had characterized American self-perception before the exhibition. Rives wrote:

"In entering into a competition of so much gorgeousness as this, it was hardly to be expected that so young and simple and republican a people as that of the United States would make a very brilliant *debut*. I always regretted, therefore, that we entered the lists as general competitors. [...] In spite of these mistakes of our own, and the ill-natured use made of them to our disadvantage by the critics, the solid and intrinsic merit of the American part of the Exhibition finally made itself felt and appreciated by all, and it is now I think universally admitted, even in England, where so many jealousies and prejudices are to be overcome, that in an industrial and useful point of view, no nation contributed more to the Exhibition than the United States."<sup>70</sup>

And in a slightly satirical report about the victory of the American *steamer* in one of the races that were organized in order to test the newest inventions in ship technology the *Boston Evening Transcript* eventually set the tone for reversing the hierarchical structure of the perception patterns that had dominated Anglo-American relations up to this point.

"There is an old French proverb, that those laugh best who laugh last. The truth of it is likely to be demonstrated in the intercourse of the last six months, between "John Bull" and his repudiated offspring, "Brother Jonathan". Because the latter did not fill up the space allotted to him in the Crystal Palace with all sorts of showy contrivances and ornaments – with silks and satins and splendid cloths – with costly articles and furniture, and ministering solely to the luxurious tastes of the opulent – our plain Brother Jonathan, in his suit of homespun, was laughed at, pointed at, and jeered at, till he himself began to distrust his own merits, and to think of getting back to his own folks, there to own up to being eaten, hide his diminished head and lay low.

But while Jonathan was sitting disconsolate in the midst of his "traps", in the Glass Palace, and wishing that he had had nothing to do with his father Bull's invitation to all the nations of the world, to come over and compete with one another in their "fixins" and "notions", Jonathan happened to take a newspaper, and learned that one of his Collins' steamers had made a passage beating the best of Bull's line out and out. Jonathan

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69 *The Times*, September 16, 1851. For an American perspective see the report of B. P. Johnson, representative of the State of New York. He explained: "The influence of our exhibition [...] has more powerfully demonstrated the peculiar advantages of our free institutions in the development of the energies of the people, than would have been done if the government had made a large appropriation." Quoted in: Curti, *America at the World's Fairs*, 840.

70 *The New York Times*, October 31, 1851.

slapped his leg, and stroked it up and down, and his face brightened as he read. He resolved to stay a while longer, just to see what might turn up."<sup>71</sup>

### **Visualization, Performance and Publicity: The Catalytic Effects of 19<sup>th</sup> Century World Exhibitions**

The remarkably rapid change of the perception and the interpretation of Anglo-American relations not only invites drawing conclusions about the content, the mediators and the mediating agencies carrying and disseminating the new interpretative patterns. It also asks for an explanation of why the new patterns evolved so quickly. In only two months, in July and August 1851, the 'old' perceptual patterns of the Self and the Other were completely reversed on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>72</sup> Neither cognitive psychology nor institution theories offer adequate theoretical explanations for the enormous momentum with which in the context of this historical event new cognitive patterns replaced old ones. Both approaches instead stress the persistence of established cognitive structures.<sup>73</sup> The American technological success, which was crucial for the reinterpretation of the character of American civilization, depended without doubt on the access of the masses to the exhibition and the publicity produced by the public competitions accompanying the exhibition. But only the combination of performance and communication accounts for the catalytic impact of the public trials. Hence, in order to explain the dynamics of the reinterpretation of Anglo-American relations the communicative impulses resulting from the institutionalized setting offered by the exhibition, including the public trials as performative acts, have to be considered.

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71 *Boston Evening Transcript*, quoted in: Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 87-88.

72 Secretary of State Daniel Webster in a speech delivered at the Boston Rail Road Jubilee on September 17, 1851, referred to this complete reversal and tried to explain it: "Why ... the bitterest, the ablest, the most anti-American press in all Europe [London Times] within a fortnight, has stated that in every thing valuable, in every thing that is for human improvement, the United States go so far ahead of every body else as to leave nobody else in sight. ... This results partly from the skill of individuals, and partly from the untiring ingenuity of the people, and partly from those great events which have given us the ocean of one world on one side, and the ocean of the other world on the other". Quoted in: Rodgers, *American Superiority*, 109.

73 For a summary of different approaches to cognitive theory see: Jakob Schissler, Christian Tuschhoff, "Kognitive Schemata: Zur Bedeutung neuerer sozialpsychologischer Forschung für die Politikwissenschaft", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 52-53/88 (23. 12. 1988), 3-13; Deborah Welch Larson, "The Role of Belief Systems and Schemas in Foreign Policy Decision Making", *Political Psychology*, 15, 1994, 17-33; Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, "Introduction", in: Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, Ursula Lehmkuhl (eds), *Enemy Images in American History* (Providence, Oxford 1997), 1-40.



Visualization and performance produced a communicative dynamic and generated cultural transfer processes that were pushed and accelerated by the interplay of the three historical factors analyzed in this paper: the function of World's Fairs as a media event triggering political, economic, and cultural communication on a global scale; the emergence of a non-aristocratic international public interested in trade and commerce; and the internationalist spirit of bourgeois cosmopolitanism expressing itself in the three "core ideas" that prepared a fertile soil for the normative and cultural identification of Britain with American technological successes at the exhibition.

The arguments used to modify the perception patterns and the cultural representation of the relations between Great Britain and her former colonies eventually highlight the cognitive mechanisms by which the reinterpretation of British-American relations and especially the dehierarchisation became possible. Public experience and the publicity of America's success coincided with the dire experience of Great Britain's weakness, or even failure. The latter was cognitively compensated by an ethnic and cultural construction and projection of 'special relations' between the United States and Britain. The British identification with America's success was made possible and legitimized by the argument that Americans were Anglo-Saxons after all. The social construction of the "special relationship" hence was based on a racially and ethnically legitimized British identification with the New World in general and the United States as the emerging technological and industrial world power in particular.