Gold Rush: A Global History

'You … are not much inclined to devote yourself to purely intellectual pursuits; but you can grasp a subject with a great deal of spirit '.

- Phrenological analysis of Samuel McCullough, New York, 1854.

'Nothing but the hope of making a speedy fortune in the mines brings a man up under the many hardships … together with the excitement of the mind.'

- The same Samuel McCullough from the Fraser River gold rush, British Columbia, 1858.

McCullough Papers, Huntington Library.

The individualist and democratic gold rushes, of which California was only the most well-known, played a key role in shaping the course of global history between the late 1820s and 1914. The gold rushes connected regions, nations and empires; fostered transnational and trans-regional flows of capital, labor, technology and culture; and initiated profound and complex processes of political, social and economic change.

But the 'hope of making a speedy fortune at the mines' was also an event in American intellectual history. The rush for gold provoked fundamental debate, prophecy and analysis. Across the world's goldfields and in the disparate communities from which the goldseekers hailed, observers scrambled to make sense of the phenomenon unfolding before them. How might the gold seekers' search for gold shape society in the mining regions and at home? What might the great accumulation of gold - more of which was gathered between the 1840s and 1890s than in the previous 3,000 years - mean for the world economy? For the expansion of Euro-American power and dominion? For the development of transnational institutions and professions? For social, cultural and moral traditions? For indigenous peoples? For the natural environment? Over time, the democratic and individualist gold rushes helped naturalize a set of once contentious assumptions about finders and keepers, individual and public good, environmental costs and individual profit. The history subsequently written about them has perpetuated that naturalizing, obscuring the intellectual meaning of these events and the quite fundamental social, cultural and economic debates they once provoked.

Bringing together contributors to the forthcoming collection *Gold Rush: A Global History* this panel examines the intellectual history of the gold rushes. Across the Anglophone settler societies of the Pacific Rim, gold rushes were quickly embedded in historical memory – most often as staging posts on the road to national development – thus losing their once controversial edge. For all the shelves of scholarship devoted to them, we still know remarkably little about their intellectual resonance or the global and transnational development and circulation of ideas that the rush for gold initiated. Approaching the rushes from three distinct vantage points (gold and democratic politics; the struggle for order; and engineering expertise) this panel offers fresh perspectives on the intellectual history of the gold rushes and encourages us to look beyond the national boundaries of historical memory, towards a global intellectual history of gold.

1. Public Versus Private Wealth: Fundamental Choices in Gold Rush History
Professor David Goodman, University of Melbourne

In this paper I trace how individualist wealth seeking in the great nineteenth century cycle of gold rushes in the English-speaking world became associated with democratic politics. There were after all other possibilities – the gold could have been reserved for public use; gold production could have been more highly taxed – and those outcomes could have been (and in some cases were) also understood as democratic. But between the 1830s and 1850s, in the white settler colonial democracies, views about the public rather than private benefits of gold became increasingly the preserve of conservatives, and hence less and less likely to prevail in self-consciously progressive and democratic societies. This left/right politicisation of the private/public argument about gold helped ensure that public good advocates were positioned as spokesmen for the past not the future.

I will demonstrate this public/private debate politicisation in some detail in Georgia, where Governor George Rockingham Gilmer declared in 1830 that the gold diggers were 'appropriating riches to themselves, which of right equally belong to every other citizen of the state, and in violation of the rights of the state and to the injury of the public resources', and (more briefly) in 1850s California and Australia, showing how the emerging association of individual miners with a democratic and egalitarian future led to an association of the individual miner with the public good. This politicisation helped, I argue, clear the way for political and legal decisions that allowed miners – at first individuals and then companies – to mine on public and in many places private land, and to use public resources of timber and water, in what now seems to us an oddly unquestioned manner.

2. The Pacific Gold Rushes and the Struggle for Order
Dr Benjamin Mountford, La Trobe University

In his history of gold rush *California* (1886) the historian and philosopher Josiah Royce set 'the struggle for order' as the most important philosophical theme of the era. Our task, Royce explained, was 'to understand what forces worked for and against order in this community of irresponsible strangers…'. Herein, he contended, lay the key to understanding the making of gold rush California and, in turn, the development of the American character and the American nation.

Concerns about crime and disorder, and how to manage those challenges, predominate in contemporary official and published accounts of all the Pacific gold rushes. On both sides of the great ocean, the struggle for order - first in California and then in Australia, Canada and New Zealand – became a testing ground for investigating competing models of democratic governance, romanticized notions of national character and the future of Anglophone society, both in the Pacific and 'at home'. In the years since, the struggle for order has remained a central component of most regional and national histories of the rushes – appealing to scholars as a prism through which to explore the intellectual preoccupations and policymaking achievements of the golden age. During the last two decades several comparative and global analyses have begun to compare the struggle for order in the Californian and British colonial contexts.

Building on these traditions of scholarship, this paper focuses in on some of the specific historical threads that *connected* the struggle for order in California and Britain's settler

colonies during the 1850s and 1860s. In doing so, it sets out to shed fresh light on the extent to which Californians' and Britons' anxieties about the impact of gold rushes, and their ideas about how they should be tackled, were often closely inter-linked.

3. Engineering Gold Rushes: Expertise, Technology, and the Apparatus of Globalization
Associate Professor Stephen Tuffnell, University of Oxford

Between 1848 and 1899, a series of explosive gold bonanzas struck California, Australasia, Southern Africa and the Yukon. These rushes unleashed waves of global migration, trade, and investment. Beneath and enabling these currents of cross-border exchange was a series of less visible, but no less important, connectors: engineers. Individually and collaboratively engineers redirected connectivity to new locales, spread technical expertise, and created new institutions for supervising global industrial connections. 'By the growth of knowledge through science, invention, and engineering,' wrote one American engineer in 1914, man had been granted 'an almost Aladdin's power.'

Placing the mechanisms of global connectivity at its heart, this paper draws on models of exchange and connection devised by historians of imperial science, technology and transnationalism to bring late nineteenth century gold rushes into a single analytical and comparative frame. For intellectual historians, this approach offers a valuable window onto the processes through which scientific knowledge was generated, organized, and institutionalized. Far from possessing an 'Aladdin's power', engineers benefitted from the creation of new technical schools and the rise of the sciences of mineralogy, geology and chemistry within university curricula. Gold, then, was central to the shift from artisanal to professional mining, and from amateur to academic scientific research.

The paper charts the process through which engineers on the goldfields of the nineteenth century constructed 'mining engineering' as a specialised global profession and contributed to unprecedented transnational exchanges of knowledge and expertise. The mining profession was reshaped by non-governmental institutions and international congresses, which acted as transnational spaces for social networking and forums of cooperation. Knowledge and expertise did not simply 'flow' along transnational currents; it was in these forums, and in the allied technical press, that exchange took place.

CVs

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EDUCATION

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SELECT PUBLICATIONS

'A Transnational history of radio listening groups I: the United Kingdom and United States', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* Vol. 36 (3), 2016, pp. 436-465.

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ed., (with D. Davies and E. Lombard), *Fighting Words: Fifteen Books That Shaped the Postcolonial World* (Oxford: Peter Lang, forthcoming 2017).

'"Send Fook Shing": The Chinese Detective in Colonial Victoria', History Australia, forthcoming 2017.

ed., (with S. Tuffnell), *Gold Rush: A Global History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2017).

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'Anglo-American Inter-Imperialism: US Expansion and the British World, c.1865-1914', *Britain and the World* 7, no.2 (2014), pp. 174-195.

'"Uncle Sam is to be Sacrificed": Anglophobia in Late Nineteenth Century Politics and Culture', *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no.1 (2011), pp. 77-99.