

“EVERY THING IN ITS PLACE”
GENDER AND SPACE ON AMERICA’S RAILROADS, 1830-1899

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Abstract

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Gender was a critically important component of the rules and practices of railroading in the nineteenth century. While railroad passengers were initially composed of a homogenous group of middle-class men and women, increased use of trains very quickly led to separations by sex and class. Victorian understandings of respectability and gender roles and view of the world as being ordered and hierarchical strongly shaped how railroads treated their passengers.

Like home and hotel parlors, railroad passenger cars constituted an intersection of the sacred private realm of the home and the less pure mundane arena of public life. Nineteenth-century middle-class Americans used space to define and maintain societal distinctions of gender and, especially, class. The definition and decoration of space in rail passenger service reinforced Victorian values and restricted and controlled behavior.

Diverse gender and status roles distinguished white middle-class men and women from immigrants and members of other races as railroad passengers. Even white middle-class men and women did not have the same experience or expectations of nineteenth-century rail passenger service.

Railroads in the nineteenth century were constructed by a mannered and hierarchical society, but they were also part of a capitalist consumer economy. In a conflict between taking care of business and upholding societal standards such as gender ideals, business generally took precedence.

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The railroad track is miles away,
And the day is loud with voices speaking,
Yet there isn't a train goes by day
But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,
Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming
But I see its cinders red on the sky,
And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,
And better friends I'll not be knowing,
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it's going.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Introduction

It is hard to imagine a more powerful and abiding image of nineteenth and early twentieth century America than the train. Railroads permeated every aspect of American life. Big cities and small towns depended on the train to feed thousands of hungry people, supply the needs of industry, bring a wedding gown or new red wagon, haul coal to heat homes, or deliver oranges to brighten Christmas. The upper mid-west was populated with immigrants, almost all of whom arrived by train. When Horace Greeley said, "Go West, young man, Go West" he was talking about taking the train. At their peak, trains carried 98 percent of all intercity traffic in the United States.¹ Trucks and automobiles, prevalent though they are today, do not have this sort of dominance.

Besides merely being economically ubiquitous, railroads reflected, and at times helped fashion, the culture of America. Train travel encouraged, if it did not create, a new standard of speed, the novel concept of being "on time," and new principles for behavior in shared public space. As noted by historian Leo Marx, trains became "a kind of national obsession" for mid-nineteenth-century Americans. Railroads embodied progress. Referencing the observations of John Stuart Mill, Marx pointed out that "no one needs to spell out the idea of progress" for Americans; "they can see it, hear it, and in a manner of speaking, feel it."² Yet progress and railroad travel were created concepts. Americans constructed the train ride from values and expectations taken from the general society. This thesis examines how some of these values and expectations, particularly gender roles, helped shape some of the policies and practices of this most American of institutions, the railroad in the nineteenth century.

Trains themselves projected an overwhelmingly "masculine" image – brawny, dynamic, utilitarian, and dominating. Nevertheless, train travel became popular with women as they began traveling in ever increasing numbers during the nineteenth century. American society in the middle of the nineteenth century had created an ideal of genteel

¹ John H. White, Jr., *The American Railroad Passenger Car* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), xi.

² Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964; reprint, 1977), 191, 193.

femininity, generally called “True Womanhood,” and defined in books on etiquette and domesticity. Domesticity was an integral part of the concept of true womanhood, a definition of the pinnacle of eastern, white, middle-class female achievement during the middle of the nineteenth-century. Domesticity was reverence for and the practice of order, sharing, and warmth, exemplified and produced by an actively self-sacrificing wife and mother. Even working-class women who had no opportunity to fulfill the ideal of domesticity were defined and derided on the basis of that ideal. Victorian concepts of gentility referenced True Womanhood, with the restrained and structured conduct that ladies and gentlemen counted on from each other. These expectations about femininity and gentility helped determine railroad practices and the design of passenger cars.³

With the possible exception of the Civil War, more has been written on railroading than any area of American history. Of these studies, many have dealt with the equipment, locomotives in particular, but also cars, signaling equipment, braking systems, etc. Many more have examined the history of a particular railroad or area of the country. These narrative histories generally describe what line was laid between which towns and when, and whose drive and innovation facilitated the task. Other works examine the economic impact of a particular railroad or of railroads in general, engineering feats, railroad stock ratings, political and legal issues, or geology and the development of natural resources. Still other books and especially magazines relate the dramatic tales and folklore of railroading. Stories of individual feats of heroism and disaster, such as "Casey Jones" and "The Wreck of the Old 97," have fascinated Americans for decades. Particularly in the nineteenth century, guide books and accounts of travel by rail were very popular.⁴

³ For the accepted definition of “True Womanhood,” see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” in *American Quarterly* (1966). The best description of domesticity is found in Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 63-100.

⁴ Maury Klein, *Unfinished Business: the Railroad in American Life* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 169. Klein points out that the production of work on railroading by amateurs surpasses all other topics of history. A “New Books” or “What’s New” section of a typical book dealer’s advertisement in a railroad enthusiast’s magazine such as Kalmbach Publishing’s *Trains* lists 60 to 100 books, with topics from broad historical surveys to collections of photographs and drawings of the freight and passenger depots of an individual state or a particular style of steam locomotive on a certain railroad. New works are available every month in formats from massive coffee table style hardbound tomes from publishers such as Johns Hopkins University Press to stapled-together soft cover monographs produced at

Almost all of the best work on the history of railroading has focused either on individual achievement or on what railroad historian George Douglas has termed "the financial or managerial dimension." Maury Klein and Alfred Chandler are the foremost scholars in these areas. Chandler's study, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (1977), points out that almost all modern managerial practices, from accounting to business divisions, were invented and perfected by railroad managers as a response to some need they perceived before anyone else. Klein is widely acknowledged to be the foremost historian of railroading in America. His biography of Jay Gould and two volume history of the Union Pacific Railroad have, like the rest of his work, set the standard for those areas of study. As Klein himself points out, however, only a very small percentage of railroad literature does more than touch upon the social aspects of railroading.⁵

Some writers have taken on the task of attempting to demonstrate the impact of the technology of railroading on American culture as a whole, with some degree of success. Foremost among these have been Leo Marx with *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), and John Stilgoe with *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (1983). Stewart Holbrook was an early pioneer in including some social perspective with *The Story of American Railroads* (1947). More recent works with that focus are George Douglas' *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life* (1992), and Sarah Gordon's *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929* (1996). *Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887* by James A. Ward indicates the importance railroads had in "determining what Americans of a certain era thought their nation was and, equally

the local photo-copier business. While some writers present overviews mostly in text, by far the most popular approach is a photo archive on a narrow subject. Favorite topics include the current condition of an abandoned rail line and collections of railroad publicity photographs. Video tapes on railroading and books and tapes on model railroading come close to equaling the output of the rail hobby press. Much like many Civil War re-enactors, rail "buffs" tend to be more interested in experiencing the concrete (mostly through pictures) than in intellectually understanding their topic in a broad sense. "Rivet counters" literally can tell you the number and size of bolts used on a given model of steam locomotive, but would have a more difficult time discussing what it meant to a small isolated town to become connected to the rest of the world through a rail connection.

⁵ George H. Douglas, *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1992), ix; Klein, *Unfinished Business*, 168.

important, where they thought it was going.”⁶ Other authors have, by focusing on a specific area over a period of time, illuminated the social as well as the economic effects of the introduction of a railroad to that area, as, for example, Kenneth Noe and *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crises* (1994). One writer, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, has presented a marvelous study of the psychological impact of railroad travel in *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century* (1980). As yet, however, scholars’ work on railroads and society has, for the most part, been general. Feminist scholars have argued for some time that most general history tends to be limited to the activities of men, particularly middle- and upper-class white men. Other components of society, such as laborers, immigrants, or women, are usually only dealt with in specialized studies. One exception to this generalization is the work done recently focused on the legal aspects of the difficulties of African-American women with railroad travel in the late nineteenth century.⁷

This thesis attempts to enlarge railroad history by emphasizing gender. Gendered constructions were ubiquitous on railroads; gender was as much a part of the atmosphere of railroading as steam and smoke from coal. By ignoring the role of women on trains, previous work has suggested that men both created and consumed railroad services while women merely were consumers. Is it conceivable that women had no effect on the development and practices of railroads? Of course not. Not even all men perceived train travel in the same way. Status and individual differences created varying experiences for them, as well as for women.

Illustrations and lithographs of the very earliest train excursions in America frequently showed women passengers. Foreign visitors in the middle of the nineteenth century, Tocqueville and Dickens among others, commented on the freedom of American women to travel. Obviously American women did travel, in numbers that non-Americans found worthy of note. At the same time, popular magazines and books preached a cult of

⁶ James A. Ward, *Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 4.

⁷ Patricia Hagler Minter wrote “The Failure of Freedom: Class, Gender, and the Evolution of Segregated Transit Law in the Nineteenth-Century South” (1995). Barbara Y. Welke has presented an in-depth study of the transformation of personal responsibility with her dissertation examining the history of injury on public transportation: “Gendered Journeys: A History of Injury, Public Transport, and American Law” (1995). Welke appears to be the only scholar to have specifically combined gender and transportation.

"True Womanhood" which demanded that a woman stay within the home and "define her rights . . . by the practice of the requisite virtues."⁸ Most important to the subject at hand is the symbolism of domesticity, and its influence on nineteenth-century American culture. How could a woman both travel in public and still adhere to the requirements of domesticity? Were there spaces which allowed women to be in the "public" sphere and yet not of it? If so, how was that space constructed? Examining the use of space on trains can help to answer these questions.

In her study on women travelers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Patricia Cline Cohen has examined letters, diaries, and published memoirs of women travelers from the time period. She concludes that "women were not 'out of place' in public, but they were not traveling on the same terms as were men." Etiquette books from the time insisted that respectable women take on a certain behavior of reserved constraint; "freedom of manners, sociability, and splendid dress" would mark a woman as disreputable with concomitant consequences.⁹ Women were even considered to be responsible for men's behavior, especially during travel: "If husbands or sons transgressed, then the wife's or mother's influence had not been strong enough."¹⁰

While Cohen is certainly correct concerning the need for women to adjust their behavior while traveling, that is not the whole story. Suppliers of transportation often made a special effort to accommodate "ladies." Railroads created separate physical and psychological space for at least some women, those who traveled first class. Reflecting the nineteenth century's culture of separate spheres and the practices of canal and steamboats, many railroads initially designated special spaces for women and young children. By mid-century almost all railroads had separate "ladies' cars" into which a man was allowed only if accompanying a woman. There were as well separate areas in many railroad passenger stations for women, also with limited access. In the rules established for Pullman Sleeping Car conductors and porters, "ladies" were categorized

⁸ Welter, "'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,'" 155.

⁹ Patricia Cline Cohen, "Safety and Danger: Women on American Public Transport, 1750-1850," in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 117, 121. Cline points out that "a good third" of etiquette books devoted at least some attention specifically to travel conduct (119n).

¹⁰ Laura Ann Day, "'The History of Every One of Us: A Gender Study of America's Antebellum Writers'" (Indianapolis, 1988), 130.

as requiring more attention than male travelers. While handling baggage and assisting persons on and off the train, employees were ordered to give "preference to ladies, old people and invalids."¹¹ Railroad regulations reflected the assumption that most men would not be upset or discommoded by profanity, tobacco smoke, or expectorant, but that women would be.

Separate spheres for men and women indeed existed, based not solely on physical separation or even only on different roles, but rather on the distinction of the type of space which "ladies" should occupy, as compared with men. Domesticity, besides creating an archetype of behavior in True Womanhood, acted as a set of sacred symbols, defining not only behavior, but space itself. The perception of the home as "sacred hearth" and woman as "chief minister" contrasted almost violently with the sordidness of the outside world as a place where "men toil . . . mainly for earthly, selfish advantages." A distinct separation was made between the inside of the home and the outside world. As sociologist and religious scholar Mircea Eliade demonstrated, most cultures perceive a dwelling place as "abolishing profane space and time and establishing sacred space and time." By delineating so strongly between the public and the private, Domesticity fulfilled what pioneering sociologist Emile Durkheim termed one "distinctive trait of religious thought;" it practiced the "division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane."¹²

Demonstrating this division by examining the use and decoration of parlors, historian Katherine C. Grier presents the intersection between the sacred home and the profane public as represented in nineteenth-century America. Parlors accommodated the public while adhering to the symbols of domesticity. A great many of these symbols of domesticity were recreated as icons in passenger cars just as homemakers presented them in formal parlors.

The seats are wide and comfortable (with arm-rests which justify the name), the outer sides resembling easy chairs of antique pattern. The seats and backs are upholstered with crimson plush. . . . The floor . . . is covered with a thick velvet

¹¹ Pullman Palace Car Company, *Car Service Rules* (Chicago, 1873), 13.

¹² Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 20; Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958; Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 379; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 34.

carpet of neat figure, in dark colors. . . . The interior wood-work, as well as the movable card tables, seats and section partitions, is of black walnut, smoothly finished in oil.¹³

This description for the interior of a train car could as easily be for a formal hotel parlor, or even a home. All of these areas had the same requirement, that of being a space for social ceremony. Such spaces were the intersections of the sacred private and the mundane public, with symbols chosen to express Victorian cultural values.¹⁴ Grier points out that “comfort,” for Victorian Americans, had little to do with “a pleasurable physical state,” but instead denoted “the presence of the more family-centered values associated with ‘home’.”¹⁵ Designers of railroad passenger cars, seeking to make their customers feel at ease, unselfconsciously adhered to this genteel middle-class conflation of physical and spiritual comfort.

This thesis explores how nineteenth-century American concepts such as comfort, separate spheres, gentility, and an ordered and hierarchical universe affected the creation of practices and space in railroad passenger service.

Chapter One, “The Evolution and Separation of Space on Railroads” deals with the overall layout of a passenger train and how it developed from the first casual excursions to the highly formalized structure of late nineteenth century passenger service. The design and placement of different types of cars in a passenger train spoke to Victorian concepts of comfort and relative worth. Passengers were grouped into categories of race, class and gender, with each category assigned to a particular space on

¹³ *The National Car-Builder* 10 (December, 1880), 189.

¹⁴ Throughout this work, “Victorian” refers to individuals living in the United States (and in Great Britain) during the period of 1830 to 1899 who held a certain economic status and adhered to particular values, and to the attitudes held by those same people. Victorian culture sought actively and self-consciously to reconcile the ideals of Christianity with the realities of the industrial age. Some attributes shared by Victorians include: religiosity, idealization of women (particularly mothers), orderliness, personal morality, respect for standards, repression of sensuality (not merely sexually, but in the connotation of all senses), the work ethic (the desire to work hard, to improve oneself, to be conscientious and sober, almost to be compulsive), and a belief in the inevitability of progress. Ultimately, Victorianism enhanced and defended the position and beliefs of the white Protestant middle-class. Some valuable works on Victorian culture include: Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in a Age of Change* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), and G. M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹⁵ Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 2, 116.

the train. Initially, gender played the most important part in this classification, but by mid-century, class or race-based status had taken over as primary determinants.

“‘To Protect Women from the Rude Conduct of the Disorderly:’ Railroad Rules and Practices as they Applied to Women,” the second chapter, examines how Victorian perceptions of womanhood and gentility determined the ways in which railroads categorized and treated their female passengers. “Respectable” women formed the largest group of female passengers: most railroad practices and regulations focused on them. The ultra-respectable or genteel ladies were given special accommodations. They were also sequestered to protect them from those passengers the railroads considered less-than-respectable. African Americans made up a large portion of this last group. The treatment accorded members of that race, particularly women, illustrates some aspects of Victorian ideas of gentility.

Chapter Three, “Space and Comfort in Travel,” deals with the physical space of railroad passenger cars, particularly first-class cars, as an intersection of public and private. The design of first-class cars reflected contemporary concepts of comfort and ideal space.¹⁶ Katherine Grier notes that in the nineteenth century, “comfort was much more than ease; it was a distinctively middle-class state of mind.”¹⁷ The railroads tried to create a world of comfort, aimed at Victorian American middle-class travelers. Space within first-class cars simultaneously reinforced Victorian values and restricted and controlled behavior.

The final chapter of the thesis, “Gentility and the Smoking Car: Gender Roles on the Railroad,” looks at how women perceived train travel as compared with men, and how a sense of gentility shaped those perceptions. For white women, gentility meant protection accompanied by restrictions. White men could choose to reject the gentility usually associated with “ladies” and so had a great deal more freedom. Some passengers,

¹⁶ Sleeping cars and the purpose built "chair" cars and "parlor" cars were always "first class," with an extra fare charged for passage. These cars were invariably placed on the end of the train furthest from the locomotive to reduce the exposure of the passengers to smoke and coal cinders. Dining cars were a transitional area, usually located between the "first-class" cars and the standard accommodation coaches. Limited "smoking" facilities could be found in either "first-class" or standard cars, but were isolated in some way from the rest of the car. Specialized smoking cars or cars which combined passenger facilities with a baggage area (known as "combines"), were often added to the consist of a train to oblige "gentlemen."

such as African Americans, could achieve neither the protection nor the freedom to choose.

Railroad passenger service was essentially a product of gender roles (as shaped by class and status perceptions) in nineteenth century America. Distinct cultures separated the genteel from the less-than-respectable. These distinctions grew from the need of the middle class to define and establish itself. Railroad passenger cars utilized standards of etiquette and the symbols of domesticity to create a sense of comfort for the middle class, especially women. Because railroad passenger service was one of the earliest and overall most prevalent areas for the standards of domesticity to be applied to the public at large, it formed patterns of behavior and “respectability” later applied in other public spaces, such as restaurants and department stores. As an early example of the intersection between middle-class aspirations and industrial technology as they evolved in the public domain, train travel deserves some attention.

¹⁷ Grier, *Culture and Comfort*, viii.

Chapter One

The Evolution and Separation of Space on Railroads

In 1842, the high-priestess of nineteenth-century American domesticity, Catharine Beecher, articulated a concept critical for understanding Victorian society in general and railroad passenger service in particular: “A place for every thing, and every thing in its place.” Beecher was writing about kitchen work, but the belief in a logically ordered creation, wherein every person and every thing had a particular and proper spot to occupy, formed an essential part of the Victorian world view. Nineteenth-century railroad passenger service exemplified this belief.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century railroads distinguished among passenger accommodations in a number of ways. Due to considerations of comfort and safety, railroads placed those passengers they most saw in need of attention furthest from the locomotive. The closer to the locomotive, the less valued the passenger. Passenger accommodations within cars reflected Victorian concepts of gentility along with practical business considerations. Railroads were quite willing to supply superior facilities to those willing to pay for having them. Conversely, railroad companies saw no point in furnishing luxuries if passengers did not appreciate them, or even more importantly, could not afford them. This chapter discusses how these different accommodations developed on early nineteenth-century railroads.

The design and placement of different types of cars in a passenger train speaks to nineteenth-century notions of comfort and relative worth. The United States in the early nineteenth century was at least ostensibly (and according to many European visitors, often aggressively) an egalitarian society. Accordingly, American railroad companies did not often use the term “first-class” to designate the cars for which they charged passengers an additional amount beyond the basic coach fare. Instead, they designated

those cars as ladies' cars, parlor or chair cars, or, most prevalently after 1870, sleeping cars. Nor did American railroads generally indicate any accommodations as being substandard or third- or fourth-class.¹⁹ Three things determined the physical situation of passengers on mid-nineteenth-century trains: gender, race, and class (i.e. wealth). Effectively, these elements of distinction combined to determine four classes or categories on railroads. Lowest in status were non-Whites, followed by white non-Britons. British ancestry and working-class position defined the standard class.²⁰ "First-class" status was reserved for the wealthy and for "ladies." This study focuses on how and why "ladies" received special treatment. Rigid gender and class distinctions developed as railroads progressed from a novelty into the most common form of transportation. Railroad practices reflect Victorian conventions of categorizing and differentiating types of people.

In the beginning, there were no classes, and men and women shared the same accommodations. The earliest railroad companies had no intention of even carrying passengers. English roads began by transporting coal and other minerals. In the United States, the first railway was built for the purpose of transporting granite for the Bunker Hill memorial monument. The idea that people would want to travel at the breath-taking speed of 15 miles per hour was far from universally accepted. However, it quickly turned out that humans, being rash and adventurous creatures, did indeed wish to undergo such an experience. The Stockton and Darlington railroad of England ran the first rail car built

¹⁸ Catharine E. Beecher, *Letters to Persons Who are Engaged in Domestic Service* (New York: Leavitt & Trow, 1842), 211.

¹⁹ Unlike the railroads of Great Britain and Europe, American lines very seldom employed the term "first-class," preferring instead to designate these facilities as ladies' cars, parlor cars, chair cars, etc. "Third-class" is used herein to describe facilities that either required a lower fare than did a standard coach, and/or which were substandard and restricted to passengers the railroads found less than desirable, such as African Americans or Chinese. These expressions are too simply descriptive to not use even though not often applied by the American railroads themselves.

²⁰ As with all such categorizations, these four classifications are over-simplified; however, enough reality is contained in the divisions for them to be useful tools to describe railroad practices. "Briton" or "British" refers to either a person of English (including Welsh), Scottish, or Scots-Irish ancestry who adhered to Protestant middle-class values, or a White non-Briton who had assimilated those same values, i.e. a Victorian.

specifically to carry passengers on October 10, 1825. This car, appropriately named the “Experiment,” was patterned after a stagecoach.²¹

The design of the earliest railroad passenger cars followed one of two patterns. One type, like the “Experiment,” closely resembled the stagecoaches of the early 1830s, not surprisingly because carriage makers built these cars (see Fig. 1). Like a stagecoach, comfort and convenience were divided between “inside” and “outside.” Riding outside cost less, but travelers were exposed to the weather, and often even more uncomfortably, the smoke and sparks generated by the locomotive. Inside passengers had more protection but missed out on the experience of speed. The other design was a small simple, four-wheeled, flat car with sides, a roof, and a center bench for travelers to sit upon. This style possessed no distinction; the accommodations were the same for all passengers.

For the most part, the earliest train travel was undertaken more for the experience than for transportation. All of the passengers had wealth and leisure enough to participate in a new and exciting adventure. Joy riders went on an excursion to the end of the tracks and returned, often having had a picnic at the end of the line. As railroads became a viable form of transportation, more and more people from all segments of society used them daily. Only then did practices arise that distinguished among different kinds of travelers. In America, these practices took longer to develop than in England, and they did not evolve in quite the same fashion, but ultimately each race, class, sex, and permutation of the three had an assigned space. These spaces took different forms. Some spaces were within a car, separated in some way from others in that car. Whole cars, allocated to specific types of passengers and placed in a specific location in the makeup of a train, often defined the separation of sex, race, and class. The design of accommodations in cars reflected and sought to direct certain expectations of behavior.

The first distinction developed from separate facilities within a car. With the increased demand for rail transportation, cars very quickly became larger. Both the compartmental and open patterns of passenger car design continued until well into the

²¹ Horace Porter, “Railway Passenger Travel,” in *The American Railway: Its Construction, Development, Management, and Appliances*, Thomas Curtis Clarke, et al, new and revised edition (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1897), 228-9.

nineteenth century. Builders continued the concept of the stagecoach by placing three coach-like compartments on a single frame. The British maintained this practice of small cabins or compartments, each having its own door opening to the outside of the car. For some time, so did railroads in America, particularly those in the New England area. More popular in the United States, however, was the open-bodied style. As the cars grew larger, the central bench gave way to small benches for two people located on each side of a central aisle (see Fig. 2).

This design accommodated more passengers than did the central bench. At the same time, these small benches began a definition of space, one with some semblance of privacy. Variations on, and combinations of, these two approaches dominated passenger car design through most of the 1830s. By 1839, a standardized design for the American general-use day coach had emerged. A door at each end of the car provided access to the center aisle. The seats were essentially benches with low backs that could be switched from one side of the seat to the other, so that passengers could face in the direction of travel, or could create a small four person area of sociability (see Fig. 3).²²

As utilized on railroads, passenger space had aspects that reflected the earlier forms of mass transportation in the United States: canal boats and steamboats. Railroads and packet boats on the canals had more in common than railroads did with steamboats. Both canal boats and railroad passenger cars offered a relatively restricted area for the accommodation of passengers. Due to the amount of time involved in canal travel, packet boats almost from their inception offered sleeping facilities. Travelers from the time seldom if ever had anything kind to say about the limited and spare accommodations. In relating his experiences on a journey in 1842, Charles Dickens

²² This and the following descriptions of the physical arrangements of passenger cars rely heavily on two sources: August Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car: An Illustrated History of the First Hundred Years with Accounts by Contemporary Passengers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), and John H. White, Jr., *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). White's work is invaluable as a source for information about the construction and general layout of passenger equipment. Other works with useful illustrations and descriptions are Clarence P. Hornung, *Wheels Across America* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1959), and Oliver Jensen, *American Heritage History of Railroads in America* (New York: Forbes, Inc, 1975; reprint, Avenel, NJ: Wings Books, 1993). Travelers' tales sometimes also include descriptions of passenger car interiors, such as Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 68; with Dickens' penchant for detail, this narrative of a 1842 trip around the northeastern United States, Maryland, and Virginia gives a wonderful sense of the flavor of travel on railroads, steam packets, and canal boats.

expressed the dismay of many of his fellow sufferers when he described “tiers of hanging book shelves, designed apparently for volumes of the small octavo size,” supplied with “a sort of microscopic sheet and blanket.” Universally, sleeping accommodations on canal boats were separated by sex. Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and other travelers describe the division between the ladies’ cabin and the men’s space, kept distinct by a curtain, often red.²³

In contrast to canal boats, illustrations of the earliest railroad excursions from the early 1830s show that women and men shared the same space. These illustrations show as well that no differences existed between types of cars. Very soon after that, however, the spirit of the compartmentalized car as well as vestiges of canal boat practices introduced variations in design and separations in classes of cars. Beginning at some time around 1838, separate compartments or apartments for ladies began to appear.²⁴ These facilities did not, as in the case of canal boats, reproduce the general or “common” compartment, separated merely by the red curtain noted by Dickens in his travels. The ladies’ compartments on the railroad cars were more luxuriously appointed than the main area, and had such conveniences as a washstand and dressing table (see Fig. 3). Sofas replaced the rather Spartan seats of the common area. A manufacturer’s description of the new cars listed “other conveniences,” which from contemporary drawings appear to have been toilet facilities.²⁵

On early railroads, such niceties as toilets and sleeping accommodations were less essential, since most rail lines were quite short, at least by today’s standards. The mighty Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, part of the present day CSX Corporation, began with a 13-

²³ Dickens, *American Notes*, 161; Stowe, “The Canal Boat,” 167. A Pedestrian (Nathaniel Hawthorne), “Sketches from Memory,” *New England Magazine* 9 (1835) refers to “the crimson curtain being let down between the ladies and gentlemen” (402). Some comments of canal boat travel were, like Dickens’, rueful but light-hearted. Other travelers, including Frances Trollope and Stowe, pledged to stay off of canal boats if at all possible. Even those who otherwise enjoyed the atmosphere and pace of canal boat travel, like Hawthorne and actress Fanny Kemble, often deplored the sleeping accommodations.

²⁴ An 1839 prospectus from the car builders Betts, Pusey, and Harlan, cited in White, *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, 15-6, lists a “private apartment for ladies” as one of the amenities of some of their classes of cars already delivered to railroads.

²⁵ Dickens, *American Notes*, 137, *American Railroad Journal*, June 15, 1842, 380-382. A general discussion of women traveling in the early part of the 19th century can be found in Patricia Cline Cohen, “Safety and Danger: Women on American Public Transport, 1750-1850,” in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 109-122.

mile connection between Baltimore and Ellicott's Mills, Maryland. For a number of years, the longest railroad in the world was operated by the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company: 136 miles. As late as 1852, the average length of all railroads in the United States was only 34.4 miles. When distances were short, and stops occurred often, passengers did not demand amenities. As distances grew and time became more important, the railroads sought ways to decrease travel time. Trains still stopped often between stations for the locomotives to take on wood for fuel and water for steam. But rather than have passengers scatter into the woods at each stop, railroads began placing sanitary facilities in their passenger cars. Initially, they only provided accommodations for women. Men must have been expected to wait until the train stopped or else use the open platforms at each end of the cars.²⁶

Separate compartments for women did not only meet sanitary needs, though. As noted in a review in the *American Railroad Journal (ARJ)*, these accommodations were intended to “remedy some serious objections that have hitherto existed against railroad travelling on the part of families, especially where any of the members are in delicate health,” a euphemism for pregnancy. It seems clear that the reviewer in the *ARJ* found it quite reasonable in 1842 that women and young children required an area to themselves.²⁷

In canal and steam boats, the ladies' cabin was provided for all women and children, and only women and children, regardless of class. According to author and reformer Harriet Beecher Stowe, sister to and sometime collaborator with Catharine Beecher, the ladies' cabin was occupied by “all shapes, sizes, [of] women, children, babies, and nurses.” Unlike canal and steamboats, however, railroad passenger service began quite early to be divided up in a fashion other than simply female/male. Stowe's experience of canal boat travel took place in 1841. By that time, a number of railroads had already put into service cars that allowed men to be present if they were acting as

²⁶ Ray Spangenburg and Diane K. Moser, *The Story of America's Railroads* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1991), 11, 16; Frederick S. Williams, *Our Iron Roads: Their History, Construction, and Social Influences* (London: Ingram, Cooke, and Co., 1852), 307.

²⁷ *American Railroad Journal*, 15 June 1842, 380-382.

escorts to ladies. Charles Dickens found this phenomenon worthy of comment in 1842: “In the ladies' car, there are a great many gentlemen who have ladies with them.”²⁸

The significance of this change may not be apparent, but “ladies’ cars” to which men were admitted represented a shift in attitude within American society. When railroads first added ladies’ cars to trains, the cars represented a sanctuary for women similar to the inner cabin of a canal packet boat into which all women were accepted. Allowing men to join the ladies may have been a purely practical move on the part of the railroads to ensure that women would have assistance with their packages and in boarding, but it nonetheless represented a breach in the previously impenetrable wall between men and women in mass transit. The next major change occurred when women were themselves divided into classes: “ladies” who were welcome into the ladies’ car, and other women who were not. Chapter Two will examine this point in more detail.

Not only did the design of cars evolve to meet the culture’s increasing demand for separation by gender, class and race. The placement of cars relative to the locomotive and to each other also reflected hierarchical distinctions over the first decades of passenger service. Almost from the very beginning, railroads decided to distance paying passengers from the smoke and soot produced by the locomotive, not to mention the very real dangers of a boiler explosion. Within six months of powering the first scheduled steam train in the United States in December of 1831, the boiler of locomotive *Best Friend* of Charleston, South Carolina exploded. According to contemporary newspaper accounts, while the train was stopped the engineer stepped down to connect up some cars. The fireman, who had evidently never learned the purpose of the steam safety valve, tied it down so that it would stop hissing. Steam pressure in the boiler built up beyond its capacity, and it burst, killing the fireman and seriously injuring the engineer and another man. When passenger service resumed with a new locomotive, the railroad placed a car piled high with bales of cotton between the engine and the passenger cars as a protective buffer. An engraving from 1832 included in a review of the history of passenger cars written for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1888, shows a car full of wool performing the same function of helping to protect the passengers (see Fig. 4). The article, written by “J. E.

²⁸ Stowe, “The Canal Boat,” 167; White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, chap. 1, passim; Dickens, *American Notes*, 61.

Watkins, Department of Transportation United States National Museum, Washington, D. C.,” did not discuss the wool car as a safety device against a burst boiler. Instead, he stated that “The car immediately behind the locomotive was laden with wool so that the sparks from the wood fire would do no damage.” Accounts of the early excursions suggest that sparks swept back from the engine along with the smoke were of much greater concern to most passengers than were explosions. Describing the first trip on the new rail connection between Albany and Schenectady, New York, railroad historian George Douglas notes that the passengers “spent the whole trip putting out one another’s flames.”²⁹

The engraving from the *Harper’s Weekly* article suggests that both the railroad and its passengers took what precautions they could against damage from sparks. The roofed coach is closer to the locomotive than the open chaise carried on the flat car. Also, the ladies in the chaise held umbrellas. An umbrella is not a practical device for use while traveling in the open air at fifteen to twenty miles per hour. Nonetheless passengers used them in an effort to gain at least some protection from sparks and cinders. Charles Dickens noted the phenomenon of the discharge from the smokestack in a picturesque manner. About a nighttime train journey, he wrote “we were travelling in a whirlwind of bright sparks, which showered about us like a storm of fiery snow.” Of course, in 1842 Dickens experienced this spectacle through a glass window, from inside a completely enclosed car. Since he was not exposed to the reality of the sparks as were earlier travelers, he was free to find the sight charming.³⁰

The engraving from *Harper’s Weekly* illustrates a pattern in the placement of cars within the consist³¹ of passenger trains, one that was based on issues of safety and convenience, but also reflected class and gender distinctions. Railroads arranged cars to distance passengers from the locomotive with the more exclusive accommodations being the farthest from the engine. When railroads added baggage cars to passenger trains to transport luggage, mail, and other freight, these cars became the barrier cars between the locomotive and any passenger coaches, replacing loads of cotton or wool. Post Office

²⁹ J. E. Watkins, “The Evolution of the Railway Passenger Car,” *Harper’s Weekly*, XXXII (1888): 642-3; George Douglas, *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life*, (New York, Marlowe & Co., 1995), 30.

³⁰ Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, 76.

³¹ In railroad parlance, *consist* is used to describe the arrangement and/or number of cars making up a train.

cars became part of the consist in the 1860s and 1870s and were placed immediately behind the engine and tender, in front of the baggage cars, creating more of a barrier. Just as in the 1832 engraving, standard coaches were located after these barrier cars, and were followed by any “first-class” cars. When dining cars were introduced, railroads generally positioned them between the coaches and first-class cars. Only elegant private cars or cars of railroad executives were attached behind first-class cars.

Separation from boiler explosions and flying sparks were not the only issues affecting the placement of cars in a passenger train. Most trains in early nineteenth-century America rode on rails that were not iron or steel, but rather, as railroad historian George Selph Henry describes them, “wooden stringers, faced by iron straps.” Because of weather and the pressure of iron wheels rolling over them, the thin iron strips would regularly work their way loose from the wooden rails. When a strap did come loose and fall to the side, sometimes the only harm done was severe wear to the wooden rail. More often and more seriously, one or more cars or locomotives could derail. Sometimes, however, the action of wheels, most often the drive wheels of a locomotive, would cause the metal strip to curl upwards and penetrate the bottom of a car. If the car happened to be carrying passengers, the result was surprise, and not infrequently, injury. Called “snake heads,” presumably because of their sudden and vicious appearance from below, the possibility of danger from these iron straps supplied another reason to provide some separation between the engine and passengers.³²

The carriage on the flat car in the 1832 engraving from *Harper's Weekly* indicates an early beginning to the distinction and separation of accommodations for the wealthy. Watkins notes in the accompanying article that “the family carriage . . . was much more comfortable than the passenger car, with its straight-back seats.” Possibly noteworthy is the fact that only ladies appear to be occupying this early first-class conveyance.³³

³² Robert Selph Henry, *This Fascinating Railroad Business*, 3rd ed., revised (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 32.

³³ Watkins, “Evolution of the Railway Passenger Car,” 643. For the convenience of their more affluent customers, early American railroads offered the service of transporting not only carriages, but horses as well. In that way, transportation was available for getting around whatever fashionable resort was the destination. Similarly, British trains had specifically designated “horse-boxes” to carry one carriage, two horses, and a groom. The cost for this first-class convenience was the equivalent of twenty to thirty standard passenger fares. A latter-day descendent of these carriage cars and horse-boxes operates today. The “auto-train,” which operates between New York City and Florida, allows travelers to take their automobiles along so that they are available for touring the Sunshine State.

The relative arrangement of baggage cars, coaches, and first-class cars took on its own life and continued long after the original conditions had ceased to apply. The placement of cars in the train reflected cultural hierarchy rather than protection. Enclosed cars, better constructed boilers, improved smokestack design, the replacement of wood by coal for firing engines, and solid iron or steel rails obviated most of the original objectives in placing first-class cars furthest from the locomotive. Indeed, by the 1870s, passengers were advising each other that the safest place to travel was in a car near the middle of the train. Greater danger of collision between trains due to increased traffic, and the heightened possibility of serious injury due to the higher speed and greater weight of cars, meant that the very front and very rear of the train were more deadly for passengers than was the center. The pattern had been set, however. Regardless of the reality of danger, the American Victorian need for order had defined the rear of the train as being the proper place for transporting ladies and gentlemen, and so the practice remained.³⁴

British practices contrasted with the distinctions of operations in American passenger service. As mentioned above, early nineteenth-century British railroad systems standardized the design of passenger cars into individual compartments within the same car. Each compartment was completely separate from the others, and each had its own door to allow entrance and exit. A passenger could not move from compartment to compartment or from car to car. Once a passenger had entered a compartment, he or she stayed there until the train reached its next stop. A car usually had three compartments. On some railroads the sections in each car were of the same type; on others, each car had one first-, one second-, and one third-class compartment.

Whichever arrangement, large price differentials between the fares for the different accommodations insured the unlikelihood that a working class individual would ever purchase a ticket for a first-class compartment. Not only the fares distinguished among the types of compartments; the accommodations themselves varied greatly. First-class compartments equaled or exceeded in their plush luxury any car on American

³⁴ One can observe this pattern on Amtrak trains even today (1999). First come the mail and baggage cars, then the coaches, then the dining or snack car, then the sleeping cars. Only in the last year or so, as a result of pressure to make additional revenues, has Amtrak changed this pattern. Sometimes additional mail or

railroads, with tufted upholstery, elaborate carpeting, gilt and brocade embellishments, and sometimes even “wing-back” style seating to help protect from drafts. Second-class passengers had to make do with plain lightly cushioned benches and no extraneous decoration. “Spartan” accurately describes third-class compartments, which occasionally doubled as storage for the baggage of first- and second-class passengers. The wooden floor and bare benches served equally well for seating passengers or for stacking luggage or parcels. No superfluous luxuries were wasted on third-class patrons. Even oil lamps were considered unnecessary, a situation which horrified an English observer on at least one occasion. An editorial in the *Preston Guardian* in 1858 deplored the fact that men and women both occupied “these carriages, all in darkness to remain in this shameful, comfortless state till one o’clock in the morning.”³⁵

Due to the difference in British practices, British travelers’ reactions while traveling on railroads in the United States give perspective to the standards of American passenger service. Charles Dickens provided insightful observations of American practices in *American Notes*. After commenting that there are no first and second class carriages “as with us,” he observed a custom which was almost universal and which is important to note about nineteenth-century railroad practices. He wrote that since “a black man never travels with a white one, there is also a negro car; which is a great, blundering, clumsy chest, such as Gulliver put to sea in, from the kingdom of Brobdingnag.” We may derive more from this remark than might first appear. Obviously, something about the car for African Americans struck Dickens as being quite unlike a standard passenger car. From the description, it might seem that the car was physically larger, which is very unlikely. In order to maximize revenue, American railroads built passenger cars as large as the tracks and right-of-way would accommodate. The newer the car, the more likely it was to have been larger than older equipment. Railroads did not discard the older equipment; instead they often used it to carry African Americans, immigrants, or other passengers less important to the railroad. Even though

express package cars are added behind the passenger cars so that they can more easily be uncoupled and maneuvered into a separate area of the depot or station for handling or forwarding.

³⁵ “How Third-Class Passengers are Treated in England,” *American Railroad Journal*, vol. XXXI (1858), 788, quote attributed to the *Preston Guardian* [n.d.]. The *ARJ* used this story as an example of the superiority of American railroads; noting that no railroad in the United States was so unobserving of propriety.

they were not often labeled as such, these were essentially third or fourth-class accommodations.³⁶

Not only were the cars for less important passengers likely to be older, sometimes they were not even passenger cars. Just as in England, baggage space and inferior passenger accommodations often overlapped. Closest to the locomotive, and so least desirable for passengers, baggage cars often carried not only packages, trunks, and hatboxes, but Blacks, Chinese, or Native Americans, depending on the region of the country. Although Dickens did not specifically label it as such, the “negro car” which he described was likely to have been a converted, or perhaps only re-designated, boxcar. Like Gulliver’s chest, and unlike a passenger car, a boxcar would not have had windows. A boxcar or baggage car would have been shorter and somewhat taller, presenting a more “blundering” and “clumsy” appearance than the longer, lower, passenger cars of the period. Even when not relegated to a baggage car, Blacks and Chinese traveled apart from all white passengers, generally in the oldest and most dilapidated passenger equipment available.³⁷

³⁶ Generally, railroad cars that carry passengers are larger than those that carry freight. The limiting factor for the weight of railroad cars has (since at least the 1840s) been how much the trucks (the wheel assemblies) can carry. Since most freight is denser and can be packed much more tightly than can human bodies, less room is required for a given amount of weight. Eighty to eighty-five foot passenger cars were the norm when the average freight car was forty feet or less in length. Even today, only certain specialized types of freight cars, such as those that transport automobiles and small trucks, and containerized cargo boxes, are as large as passenger cars. It must be noted that sometimes railroads did indeed build and use cars which were designed from the outset to be employed as third-, or even fourth-class accommodations, somewhat following British customs. However, this practice was almost entirely limited to railroads in the Northeast, and even there only taken up by companies who had no problems with cash flow. Most railroads, especially less well capitalized roads in the South and West, found it much more practical to recycle otherwise obsolete equipment for transporting immigrants and other lower status passengers. Older equipment was also used to transport and accommodate railroad work crews who were laboring beyond reach of hotels or who the railroad did not wish to pay to put up in hotels.

³⁷ A number of travelers besides Dickens commented on African Americans traveling in older or rougher accommodations on railroads as well as on boats. Some of these included the Misses Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life* (New York: published for the authors, 1854), and Captain Frederick Marryat, *Dairy in America with Remarks on its Institutions* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1839). Robert Lewis Stevenson, *From Scotland to Silverado*, edited by James D. Hart (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966) observed the separation of Chinese, as did Beatrice Webb, *Beatrice Webb’s American Diary: 1898*, edited by David A. Shannon (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), and James Rusling, Brevet Brigadier-General, retired, U. S. Army, *Across America: or, The Great West and The Pacific Coast* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1874). Lady (Mary McDowell) Duffus Hardy, *Through Cities and Prairie Lands* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1881) noted “All Indians are allowed to ride free, getting on and off as they please: they never ride in cars with the other passengers, but on the steps or in the baggage van” (246). John White gives a good short survey of the use of baggage and freight cars for the transportation of less than first-class passengers in *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, I, 203.

Although treated somewhat more kindly than Blacks or Chinese, most white immigrants also traveled in a fashion quite different from the middle-class passengers who paid full fare and occupied the cars toward the back of the train. The transportation of immigrants represented an anomalous situation for the railroads, and they handled it in an ambiguous manner. While not considered less than fully human as were Blacks, Chinese, and Native Americans, immigrants did not command the same consideration as standard passengers. For one thing, they usually paid less for their conveyance.

Sometimes steamship companies sold to emigrants, either as individuals or as groups, passage to the United States that included transportation to western lands. Agents in European countries, representing individual states, independent entrepreneurs, or railroads, worked hard to convince potential emigrants to use their services or to purchase land. In the 1850s and after, the Illinois Central Railroad, the first land-grant rail company, sent representatives to the Scandinavian countries and to Germany to recruit settlers for its land in Illinois. If not operating on their own behalf, railroads sold blocks of space to land brokers, steamship companies, sometimes directly to immigrant groups.³⁸

The railroad companies sought to transport these large numbers of people as inexpensively as possible while not raising vehement objections to the rudeness of the accommodations, either from the public or the immigrants themselves. For the most part, as historian Oscar Handlin observes in *The Uprooted*, the railroads “were less concerned with collecting fares than with settling their holdings with industrious farmers who would turn out a constant supply of products to keep the freight cars full.” Since they could not charge immigrants very much, either because of their own needs or due to contractual

³⁸ In sparsely settled areas, wherein a railroad would have found it difficult, if not impossible to build or operate without losing money, the Federal government would “grant” to a road alternate sections of land along the railroad’s route. The rail company could then sell or develop the land to offset its expenses. These grants were not a gift, as is often believed. In return for the land, the railroads agreed to charge the government reduced rates for mail and military troop and supply movements. The Federal government received these reduced rates through the end of World War II. Congress ended them in 1946, having determined that the railroads had more than sufficiently compensated the government for the original grants. An excellent short description of the land grant program can be found in Henry, *This Fascinating Railroad Business*, 376-80. Paul W. Gates, *The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), chaps. II, III, and VI, gives a good detailed account of how the first railroad land grant came about and its effect. The Illinois Central Railroad, because of being the first land grant railroad, was the first rail

agreements with brokers, the railroads supplied the minimum accommodations possible.³⁹

Railroads used two different types of equipment for immigrant service. In the first part of the nineteenth century, roads allocated older standard passenger coaches, either “as is,” or simply replacing upholstered seats with wooden slats. As the number of immigrants increased, roads began modifying older cars more heavily for the purpose, or having specially designed cars built. These cars did not possess the upholstered, carpeted, wood inlaid interiors of standard and first-class cars.

Robert Louis Stevenson crossed America in the summer of 1879. Since he was flying to the side of a married American woman, without the support or even knowledge of his family, he was effectively a pauper. For that reason, he traveled as cheaply as a white man could, that is, as an immigrant. The report of his journey recounts the conditions of immigrants and the practices of certain railroads. He described the cars on the Union Pacific as: “only remarkable for their extreme plainness, nothing but wood entering in any part into their constitution” (see Fig. 5). The seats came in for particular criticism: “The benches are too short for anything but a young child. Where there is scarce elbow-room for two to sit, there will not be space enough for one to lie.” Stevenson further related the manner in which he and his fellow riders overcame the difficulties of finding a place to lie down. An opportunistic conductor (whom Stevenson characterized as a “white-haired leech”) offered to rent, at an exorbitant price, boards and straw cushions to lay across the benches to make beds.⁴⁰

The accommodations supplied to immigrants on railroads reflected attitudes and practices in the rest of the culture of the United States. The conditions on sailing ships bringing immigrants to America in the first part of the nineteenth century were often appalling. Handlin and Stevenson both present a disturbing portrait of life in steerage, the area not only below decks in a ship, but usually below the waterline. The air was close and exceedingly damp, bitterly cold in the winter and suffocatingly hot the rest of the time. Men, women and children traveled in “boxlike spaces, ten feet wide, five long,

company to decide to market directly to would-be emigrants in their own countries. Gates relates this history as well, particularly in chapters X and XI.

³⁹ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 2nd ed., revised (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 54.

less than three high,” each cramped area home for months to “six to ten beings.” Seasickness, disease, and starvation were endemic, with the mortality rate at 10 percent or more during crossings. Compared with such circumstances, a clean though Spartan railroad coach or even the bare slats of a sleeping car built specifically for transporting immigrants, may have seemed the height of luxury. Stevenson came across the ocean as a “second-cabin” passenger, not exactly comfortable, yet considerably more so than in the steerage he describes.⁴¹

Once immigrants reached the American shore, their troubles were far from over but their transportation accommodations generally improved at least somewhat. Railroads did not include luxuries on the cars designated for immigrants because such niceties were seen as being wasted. Shipping companies and railroads shared a perception of the mostly agricultural workers coming from Europe to the United States. An immigrant would not be used to any luxury at all. According to those in charge of transporting them, exposing an immigrant to a soft existence would not only ruin him for his future life; it might actually make him sick. On the other hand, as Oscar Handlin summed up the attitude; “let him lie on a good firm deck, eat salt herring, and he’ll be hale and hearty.” Railroads therefore had two justifications for not supplying immigrants with more than the bare necessities: they could not pay for anything better and luxury would weaken them for life on the farm.⁴²

Accommodations on nineteenth century railroads reflected both realities and perceptions. Some railroads may have started out as objects of community pride, but all rapidly became would-be sources of corporate profit. Economic reality determined that companies not allocate scarce resources to furnish luxuries to those who could not pay for them. Economic reality also ordained that railroads please their passengers, the mostly middle-class consumers who rode trains. Railroad managers’ perceptions of the needs and desires of those middle-class consumers formed the manner in which they sought to accommodate their passengers. Distance from the locomotive and quality of accommodations were the ways in which managers of railroads demonstrated their

⁴⁰ R. L. Stevenson, *From Scotland to Silverado*, edited by James D. Hart (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), 115-6.

⁴¹ Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 45; Stevenson, *From Scotland to Silverado*, 3-99.

⁴² Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 47.

understanding of passenger requirements. Railroads saw no need to furnish luxuries to those passengers who were perceived not to want them or not to appreciate them. Accordingly, passengers were grouped into categories of race, class and gender, with each category assigned to a particular space on the train: “A place for every thing and every thing in its place.” Though not the case for long, initially the single most important characteristic used by railroads to distinguish between passengers was gender. Societal perceptions of women not only established the physical location of women on trains, they also, as will be seen in the next chapter, determined practices and regulations by the railroads.

Chapter Two

“To Protect Women from the Rude Conduct of the Disorderly”⁴³ Railroad Rules and Practices as they Applied to Women

Nineteenth-century American railroads had different rules and practices for most of their female passengers than they did for men. Societal perceptions of women shaped how the railroads categorized and treated them. In practice, railroads in the east classified women into three categories: genteel, respectable, and less-than-respectable. Gentility was actually a subclass of respectability with extra requirements, one of which was wealth. Railroads in the west tended to only have two classifications: respectable and less-than-respectable.⁴⁴ Different rules applied to each of these groups. A railroad car manufacturer’s prospectus of 1839 describes four classes of passenger car as supplied to “seven major Middle Atlantic and Southern railroads.” The first and second-class cars included a “Private apartment for ladies.” The distinction between the two ladies’ compartments was phrased as “completely trimmed and carpeted,” for the first-class cars, and “neatly fitted up,” for the second-class. The third and fourth-class cars had no separate facilities for women at all. This distinction in treatment between wealthier “ladies” and less well to-do women was a common theme throughout nineteenth-century rail passenger service.⁴⁵

Respectable women comprised the majority of the female passengers on trains and most regulations and practices were established for them. One essential element for understanding the culture of railroad passenger service in the nineteenth century is the concept of separate spheres. Victorian women and men saw respectable women as distinct from men, with different skills and interests. Even the physical and spiritual essence of these women differed from that of men. Lydia Huntley Sigourney, author,

⁴³ *Brown v. Memphis & C. R. Co.*, Circuit Court, W. D. Tennessee, 7 F. 51; 1881, U.S. App. LEXIS 2189.

⁴⁴ As with all such categorizations, these three groups overlapped to some extent and changed over time. As the society as a whole shifted from the ideals of Jacksonian democracy to the precepts of social Darwinism, so did definitions of respectability. Acknowledging that any such classification potentially oversimplifies reality, grouping women in this way allows insights into railroads’ (and society’s) attitudes towards them.

champion of middle-class values, and arbiter of women's behavior in the mid-nineteenth century, described this division of the world into masculine and feminine domains in one of the first issues of *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1830:

Man might be initiated into the varieties and mysteries of needlework; taught to have patience with the feebleness and waywardness of infancy, and to steal with noiseless step about the chamber of the sick; and woman might be instructed to contend for the palm of science; to pour forth eloquence in senates, or to 'wade through fields of slaughter to a throne.' Yet revoltings of the soul would attend this violence to nature; this abuse of physical and intellectual energy; while the beauty of social order would be defaced, and the fountains of earth's felicity broken up.

We arrive, therefore, at the conclusion. The sexes are intended for different spheres, and constructed in conformity to their respective destinations by Him who bids the oak brave the fury of the tempest, and the Alpine flower lean its cheek on the bosom of eternal snows.

In Victorian America, God created an order for the universe, with places for each element of creation. Those in a particular position should fulfill their assignments to the best of their ability, but should not seek to move out of their ordained place. To do otherwise would be as unnatural as for an Alpine flower to be capable of surviving "the fury of the tempest," as Sigourney characterizes the distinction. Men were created to have certain characteristics so as to occupy a particular place in creation. Respectable women had a different role.⁴⁶

For mid-nineteenth-century Americans, the essential role of woman was as wife and mother. Based on Protestant Christian religious convictions, and spread by books and magazines, domesticity permeated American culture. Historian Barbara Welter described this belief system and its ubiquity in her groundbreaking essay "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Welter characterized the combination of religious beliefs and capitalist practices as the "cult of domesticity." Values reflecting those of the home comprised a key element of domesticity. Lydia Sigourney's commentary referenced needlework and caring for infants and the ill. This belief system defined society's expectations about "true" or "proper" women in America from the ante-bellum

⁴⁵ White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 16; advertising brochure for Betts, Pusey & Harlan: Steam Engine and Rail Road Car Manufactory, Wilmington, DE, 1839, as quoted in White, *American Railroad Passenger Car*, 16.

⁴⁶ Lydia Huntley Sigourney, "The Two Sexes," *Godey's Lady's Book* I (1830): 276.

years to late in the century. Domesticity was not limited to women, however. Just as proper women had a set of interests and behaviors, some men accepted, glorified, and supported that role for women. Men who rejected the pattern of behavior allied with true womanhood were not considered gentlemen. Welter made a tongue-in-cheek observation that nevertheless contained a great deal of truth: “If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic.” Domesticity formed the single most important element of true womanhood.⁴⁷

The same period in which the cult of true womanhood developed and reached its height, 1820 to 1860, parallels the creation and initial expansion of mass transportation in the United States. Travel practices illustrate a number of elements of respectability as understood by nineteenth-century American society, particularly women’s helplessness and need for protection.⁴⁸ The concept of respectability as a component of true womanhood required that women be relatively helpless when out of their own domestic sphere, even if quite capable within it. An endearing dependence and submission to male superiority was expected of proper women. Charlotte Hosmer, a quite independent-minded young woman, repeatedly encountered this presumption and found it quite amusing. Upon one occasion while traveling as a book agent in the early 1850s, Hosmer found it necessary to transfer from a steamboat to a train. The captain of the boat took it upon himself to gather and shepherd all of the women from the boat to the train. Hosmer described the scene: “to give you a perfect picture of us, hurrying along from the boat to

⁴⁷ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1966), 152. Historiographer Linda Kerber, in “Separate Spheres: Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* LXXV (1988-9), 9-39, points out “the idea of separate spheres as primarily a trope, employed by people in the past to characterize power relations for which they had no other words” (39). In terms of historiographical reality, she is correct. Perception, however, for the people living in a set of circumstances has the force of reality. Many Victorian Americans believed in the reality of separate spheres just as strongly as they believed in God.

⁴⁸ An excellent general discussion of women traveling in the early part of the 19th century can be found in Patricia Cline Cohen, “Safety and Danger: Women on American Public Transport, 1750-1850,” in *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History*, ed. Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M Reverby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 109-122.

the cars, you must fancy a hen with an immense brood of chickens, when there is danger near.”⁴⁹

The nature of women’s respectability was reflected in Americans’ conception and use of space in the sexually shared realm of railroad passenger cars. Early railroad passenger cars allocated space in a different fashion than the earlier canal boats. From a relatively early point in the history of railroads, physically separated areas were created for the use of “ladies,” their children, and their escorts. This practice distinguished railroads from their immediate predecessors in mass transportation. On canal boats, use of the “ladies cabin” generally prohibited the presence of men. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote a painfully amusing account of a trip on a canal boat, describing the trials and tribulations of “a respectable colony of old ladies, babies [and] mothers” traveling in Pennsylvania. Crowding and confusion ruled. Stowe advised “all our friends who intend to try this way of travelling for pleasure, to take a good stock both of patience and clean towels with them, for we think that they will find abundant need for both.”⁵⁰

Unlike canal boats, most women on railroads rode in spaces that were shared with men. Mixed gender day coaches always formed the principal means of travel by train. Regulations and practices for these shared spaces were modeled on the American Victorian concept of separate spheres. As noted in the Introduction, railroads classified women with those considered as less than capable, putting “ladies, old people and invalids” all in the same category of those needing assistance. As historian Barbara Welke has pointed out, American society had created this situation of incapacity by structuring “daily life to preserve female passivity and helplessness.” Railroads saw women not only as less capable, but as being more demanding as well. The Pullman Palace Car Company felt it necessary to caution their conductors to take special care “to accommodate a lady, an invalid, or an exacting passenger.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jane Mendell and Charlotte Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life* (New York: published for the authors, 1854), 285-6.

⁵⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, “The Canal Boat,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* XXIII (1841): 167, 169.

⁵¹ Barbara Y. Welke, “Gendered Journeys: A History of Injury, Public Transport, and American Law, 1865-1920,” Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1996, 333; Pullman Palace Car Company, *Car Service Rules of the Operating Department of Pullman’s Palace Car Company: revised October 1st, 1888* (Chicago: C. H. Blakely & Co., 1888), 13. Other examples with essentially the same language can be found in Pennsylvania Railroad Company, *Rules of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company for the*

A principal duty of the railroads was the protection of women. Railroad company regulations and a preponderance of court cases indicated that women required and were due protection even beyond the safety precautions described in the previous chapter. Railroads exemplified societal perceptions by treating women as less capable than men. As late as 1899, the Supreme Court of Louisiana still found for a plaintiff on the basis that she had every “right to expect” that a conductor or porter would “render her assistance in alighting” from a train car. Mrs. Ella Kennon sought to alight from the ladies’ car in which she had been traveling, but the car had not reached the platform. She waited in the vestibule of the car, thinking that the train would pull forward to where she could more conveniently get off. Instead the train pulled out of the station altogether. When Kennon attempted to reenter the car, the train jerked, causing her to lose her balance and fall to the ground, becoming seriously injured. The conductor admitted that he had overlooked or forgotten that a “lady passenger” was scheduled to alight at that station and so was not present to render assistance. Therefore, when she was injured while attempting to disembark on her own, the railroad was liable.⁵²

Protection was not limited to safety from gross physical harm.⁵³ In a case in Illinois in 1898, *The People ex rel. W. S. Cantrell et al. V. The St. Louis, Alton and Terre Haute Railroad Co.*, the question was rather or not the railroad should be required to furnish a passenger train as well as a freight train. The railroad had been running a “mixed” train, one with passenger as well as freight cars in the consist. In the mixed train, the railroad placed stock cars carrying live cattle ahead of the passenger cars, following the standard practice of “protecting” the passengers by keeping them as far as possible from the engine. Unfortunately, this arrangement caused the odor from the cattle and their manure to inundate the passenger cars. An important argument for

Government of the Transportation Department (Philadelphia: printed for the author, 1889); and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company, General Passenger and Ticket Dept., *Rules for conductors, no. 4.* (Topeka, KS: Printed for the author, 1891).

⁵² *Mrs. Ella Kennon v. Vicksburg, Shreveport & Pacific Railroad Company*, No. 13,196 (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 26 So. 466; 1899), La. LEXIS 597, 51 La. Ann. 1599.

⁵³ Welke, “Gendered Journeys,” presents an analysis of American courts’ gendered approach to injuries from railroad accidents. Men were more likely to recover damages for physical injuries, women from “infliction of nervous shock” (335).

forcing the railroad to put on an additional train for passengers only, was that the odor was “bad for ladies and children.”⁵⁴

Protection from being annoyed by men comprised an essential part of a railroad’s duty towards women. The *New York Times* treated one episode from 1873 in a humorous fashion that nonetheless demonstrated a certain presupposition of protection by railroads and their employees. A “good-looking and interesting young lady, twenty-one years of age,” took a train to Baraboo on the Chicago and North-western Railroad. After some time, the car in which she was riding emptied out except for herself. The conductor entered, and finding her alone, did “caress and kiss’ his interesting passenger with malice prepense and aforethought.” A Wisconsin court fined the conductor \$25 and the railroad fired him. However, the court also fined the railroad -- \$1000 in damages. The *Times* writer facetiously noted that at least the conductor got a kiss, the company got nothing:

We trust the lesson will not be lost on other roads with insolent conductors. For the Chicago and North-western we may safely assert that no man will hereafter be employed on it as conductor who is not at least 100 years old, and who does not rank interesting young ladies as disasters only second to a first-class collision.⁵⁵

This court made a strong statement about the responsibility of a railroad company to control its employees, at least in regard to women.

The ultimate aspect of the gendered arrangements established by the railroads in the effort to protect women was the establishment of dedicated ladies’ cars. By 1850, almost without exception, railroads east of the Mississippi had instituted the practice of designating the rearmost coach on the train as being restricted to ladies and their escorts. Even on a short train, consisting of only a baggage car and two passenger cars, one of the cars would often be specified as the ladies’ car. Dickens observed this phenomenon: “there is a gentleman's car and a ladies' car: the main distinction between which is that in the first, everybody smokes; and in the second, nobody does.” Dickens is not alone in finding tobacco to be the primary difference between the cars. The author of a recent

⁵⁴ *The People ex rel. W. S. Cantrell et al. V. The St. Louis, Alton and Terre Haute Railroad Co.*, Supreme Court of Illinois, 176 Ill. 512; 45 N.E. 824; 1898 Ill. Lexis 3292.

⁵⁵ “The Tragedy of Baraboo,” *New York Times* (April 10, 1874), 4.

popular history of American railroading went so far as to state that the introduction of cars for women “came about not for reasons of prudery, or because women needed to be spared the presence of members of the opposite sex, but because in those years a great many men smoked and an equally large number were devoted to the then very widespread practice of chewing tobacco.” He overstates the importance of tobacco alone to the separation of women from men, especially considering that on some railroads ladies’ escorts were free to smoke and chew in the ladies’ car, at least up to about 1860.⁵⁶ What this early definer of difference does is reflect the developing concept of gentility.

As practiced on the railroads, gentility was respectability distilled to its purest form. Genteel women required not only the basics of assistance and physical protection; they and their equally respectable male escorts also had to be protected from the presence of the less-than-respectable. Ladies’ cars offered a sanctuary from certain behaviors and groups. The practice of restricting entry to ladies’ cars reflects societal attitudes concerning those behaviors and groups.

One less-than-respectable behavior from which women were to be protected was bad language. Swearing was considered to be undesirable on most railroads. Some companies went so far as to attempt to ban it altogether: “No person will be employed by the Company who is known to be in the habit of using profane or obscene language, and any one using such language, in the presence of passengers, will be promptly discharged.” This attitude demonstrates the increasing sense on the part of Americans that public behavior needed to be even more restrained and proper than private. One guide-book author put it this way: “Profanity, boisterous laughter, uncouth manners, and rudeness are even more unseemly and improper amid the stranger-group of passengers than elsewhere; for, being strangers, a reciprocal respect should prevail.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Dickens, *American Notes*, 61-62; George H. Douglas, *All Aboard! The Railroad in American Life* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1992; paperback edition, 1995), 47.

⁵⁷ *Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Transportation Department of the Pennsylvania Railroad: including the Substance of all General Orders, General Rule No. 6* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1854), 4; George B. Ayers, *New descriptive hand-book of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and Traveler's Guide to the Great West! exhibiting the Geography, History and Statistics of the Entire Country Traversed by the Road: Gathered on the spot and Compiled from the Best Authorities : also, Valuable Hints to Travelers*, (Pittsburgh, W. S. Haven, 1859), 113.

Sociologist Lyn Lofland characterizes this sort of restraint as the symbolic transformation of public space into private necessary for humans to cope with a “world of strangers.” Restraint characterized gentility for Victorian Americans through a socially constructed set of attitudes and behaviors toward others. As part of a middle-class sense of identity, gentility gave a framework for conduct in an uncertain world. Courtesy was due “respectable” people. Acting with courtesy confirmed an individual’s right to be considered genteel. As with all socially created behaviors, however, gentility sometimes became something other than a way of facilitating social intercourse. A German aristocrat, Francis Grund, while scathingly describing American gentility in general, accurately illustrated the situation as it often applied to railroad travel: “In order to be ‘genteel,’ it is necessary, in the first place, to know nobody who is *not* so.” Railroads promoted this concept of gentility with the creation of ladies’ cars.⁵⁸

The concept of the ladies’ car as a form of protection was so ingrained in the culture that commentary on just exactly why it existed is difficult to find. However, transcripts of court cases produce a most productive source for understanding the rationale of the ladies’ car. One such case from 1877, *John M. Peck v. The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad Company*, demonstrates how designating a ladies’ car had become part of generally accepted practice. Peck, while traveling alone, entered the ladies’ car in spite of a placard noting that the car was reserved for ladies and ladies with gentlemen, and in spite of being informed by the attendant brakeman that it was so reserved. The brakeman then forcibly ejected Peck. Peck, ostensibly injured in the process, sued the railroad. The suit did not hinge on whether not the railroad had a right to prevent Peck from traveling in the ladies’ car, but instead on the use of force in ejecting him. Appellant Court Judge J. Folger’s opinion noted that a regulation establishing a ladies’ car was “a reasonable regulation for the defendant to make, that one

⁵⁸ Lyn Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), passim, especially chapter 7; Francis J. Grund, *Aristocracy in America: From the Sketchbook of a German Nobleman* (London: R. Bentley, 1839; reprinted, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 146, as quoted in Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: a Study of Middle-Class Culture, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 63. Halttunen gives an excellent overview of the nineteenth-century American middle class and its struggle to establish its place in the world. With a different perspective, John Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), also discusses the forms and impulses that went into the rigid etiquette of Victorian America.

car should be set apart, in the first instance, for females traveling alone, or with male relatives or friends. It tended to their comfort and security, and to the preservation of good order.”⁵⁹

A number of legal cases concerned the fervor and energy with which railroad employees defended the sanctity of the ladies’ car. The brakeman for that car had a key to it, and was charged with the responsibility of insuring that only ladies and gentlemen escorting ladies were admitted. These brakemen and their supervisors, passenger conductors, were normally quite diligent in carrying out these duties. Several suits were brought against railroads by men who felt that they had been improperly or violently dismissed from a ladies’ car. References to “unnecessary violence” in ejecting an interloper could indicate that brakemen and conductors took the duties of protecting ladies very seriously, and became “wroth” when they felt their charges were in danger of contamination by a single man.⁶⁰

Regulations about admittance to the ladies’ car assumed that “females” would be uncomfortable occupying the same space as men who were not accompanying women. This assumption was predicated on the notion that men, when not “improved” by the presence of a wife, mother, sister, or daughter, tended to be less than perfectly civilized, if not downright predatory. The purity of women and the sensual weakness of men were important components of the philosophy of True Womanhood.⁶¹ Even the independent Charlotte Hosmer was aware of the dangers inherent in traveling. During her travels, she once failed to connect with her traveling companion and so was on a train car alone. She related being approached by a man: “Dear Jane, I have seen a wolf! yes, a wolf – I’m

⁵⁹ John M. Peck, Respondent, v. The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad Company, Appellant (Court of Appeals of New York, 70 N.Y. 587; 1877), N.Y. LEXIS 659. Even in railroad journals, mention is made of these regulations as being appropriate “to secure the comfort and security of female passengers,” only in the context of commenting on a legal case, “The Ladies Car,” *The Railroad Gazette* XI (1879), 69.

⁶⁰ Prior to the introduction of automatic braking systems in the 1870s and 1880s, the train crew on a passenger train consisted (besides the engineer and fireman) of a brakeman for each passenger car, and a conductor in overall charge of the train; trains were slowed and stopped by each brakeman turning a wheel which applied mechanical braking to the wheels of each car; brakemen also had the responsibility of assisting passengers to board and disembark, and in the case of the ladies’ car, the particular duty of restricting access; “The Ladies’ Car,” *The Railroad Gazette* vol. XI (1879), 69; see also Peck v. NYC & Hudson River RR, cited in note 17.

⁶¹ See Cohen, 121-2 and Welter, 154-5.

sure he was . . . he had on sheep's clothing, and he sat very near me . . . I looked away and hardly dared breathe."⁶²

The sorts of behavior against which women were to be protected ranged from actual molestation to bad language and the much more difficult to define "rude conduct of the disorderly." Certainly incidents occurred to the contrary, but comments by numerous foreign visitors seem to indicate that railroad rules and practices were essentially effective. Charles Dickens, as well as other travelers, felt it appropriate to make the observation that "any lady may travel alone, from one end of the United States to the other, and be certain of the most courteous and considerate treatment everywhere." One Scottish traveler sounded almost tired of having heard it all before: "You will not meet five Americans without hearing ten times that a lone woman can traverse the length and breadth of the United States without fear of insult." Women travel writers generally either agreed with the sentiment, or did not mention any views to the contrary.⁶³

⁶² Mendell and Hosmer, *Notes of Travel and Life*, 113. Some writers already referenced (e.g. Cott and Welter) point out that women had the responsibility of raising proper gentlemen; Cohen, "Safety and Danger," notes as well that "female behavior became the determinant of male behavior," 122. Anthony Rotundo goes so far as to state that the point of separate spheres was to give "men the freedom to be aggressive, greedy, ambitious, competitive, and self-interested," while leaving "women with the duty of curbing this behavior," E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 25.

⁶³ *Brown v. Memphis & C. R. Co.*, Circuit Court, W. D. Tennessee, 7 F. 51; 1881, U.S. App. LEXIS 2189; Dickens, *American Notes*, 68; James Fullarton Muirhead, *The Land of Contrasts* (London: Lamson, Wolfe & Company, 1898), chap. 2, as quoted in Allan Nevins, ed., *American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1923; reprint, New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), 526.

Toqueville made the same observation: "In America, a young unmarried woman may alone and without fear undertake a long journey:" *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945; revised, 1963), 2:213. Cohen, "Safety and Danger," presents the opposite viewpoint – she notes the rise of the American Female Moral Reform Society concurrent with the first decade of railroad travel, and suggests that the "rising preoccupation with sexual danger for women in public" could be seen in the establishment of separate ladies' waiting rooms in rail passenger stations – I submit that the reality, if not the public perception, of the danger was actually less than Cohen presents it to have been. Much of the increased awareness of assaults had to do with the tremendous explosion of the number of women traveling, the public's fascination with rail travel, the boom in newspaper and magazine publishing which was happening during the same period, and most of all, because assaults grabbed attention simply due to being so antithetical to the society's mores – cautionary tales abounded in the ante-bellum period, aimed at factory workers, urban females, etc. Women travelers were simply another category of those seen at risk in an increasingly mobile and unstructured society. Separation of women's accommodations from those of men on canal and steamboats predated the growth of the American Female Moral Reform Society in the 1830s and 1840s. On the other hand, this question could be another example of a gendered dichotomy, with the male dominated social structure having one viewpoint – that of safety – and women having the opposite perception – that of danger.

A generally accepted sense of respectability helped protect women on trains, even when they were not physically isolated. An anecdote from Charlotte Perkins Gilman, feminist and economic writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, illustrates this point. While on a lecture tour in Kansas in 1896, Gilman found it necessary to ride what was then known as an accommodation train, one for which the main purpose was to transport freight, and so had very limited provision for passengers. “The only place for a human passenger,” Gilman wrote:

was the caboose at the end, occupied by cattle punchers, trainhands and salesmen. Some were sleeping on the long seat at the side, the others clustered together telling “snappy stories.” I slipped quietly in and sat down next the door (*sic*), looking nowhere at all.

Then was shown the chivalry and courtesy of western men. When one of the sleepers awoke and began to swear as was his wont, he was softly and promptly hushed – “Shut up! There’s a lady aboard.”

Gilman’s demeanor demonstrated proper behavior for a “lady” of Victorian America. By slipping quietly in and “looking nowhere at all,” Gilman established herself in the minds of the men present as indeed being a lady. Had she breezed in and begun chatting up the men present, she would have been deemed another type of female altogether.⁶⁴

This protective aspect of respectability was put to the test as railroads began introducing sleeping cars. The development of railroad sleeping cars at least helped to cause a rather extreme change in women’s accommodations in mass transportation. In a few decades, women went from being segregated from men in sleeping cars to being in the midst of them.

The sleeping car generally accepted as being the very earliest, the *Chambersburg*, of the Cumberland Valley Railroad c. 1838, followed the canal boat practice of having separate men’s and women’s compartments.⁶⁵ This practice was consistent before 1850, and tended to continue in the east. In the east as well, many sleeping and other first-class cars were built following the British practice of individual compartments. On the shorter

⁶⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: an autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: D. Appleton – Century Company, 1935; Introduction Ann J. Lane, Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 194.

⁶⁵ White, *The American Railroad Passenger Car*, 204-6.

railroads prevalent before mid-century and particularly before the Civil War, sleeping accommodations for women on railroads were either separated following the canal boat precedent, or separated by supplying married couples with individual compartments.

However, as travel distances grew and demand for passenger service increased, railroads had to find ways to increase the number of passengers carried in cars. Compartment cars, while convertible from sitting to sleeping use, simply could not accommodate as many passengers as an open coach style car. Separate sleeping facilities required two cars, one for day use and one for the night. For the railroads, the goal was to find a way to convert a day coach into a sleeping coach. While still unable to handle as many passengers asleep as awake, such a dual-purpose car would nonetheless produce greater profit for the operator. Convertible cars ended the accommodation of women in separated areas.

George Pullman was not the first person to design a convertible sleeping car, nor did he build the best and most comfortable. What Pullman did was to market a concept well and to be in the right place at the right time. By the end of the Civil War, the portion of the United States east of Chicago had seen its period of greatest railroad construction. To the west of Chicago, the railroad boom was just beginning. Being located in Chicago, Pullman had an advantage over the large passenger car manufacturers located in the East. Almost all of the railroads in the West began at Chicago or some point on or near the Mississippi River. It made sense to the roads to deal with a local supplier rather than have cars transported all the way from New England, New York, Philadelphia, or other East Coast manufacturer locations. Pullman also benefited from the sheer size of western railroads. By 1870, almost anywhere in the East was only one or two days from anywhere else; sleeping cars remained a convenience for the relatively wealthy. From Chicago to California took a week if no problems arose. All but the poorest travelers considered a sleeping car to be a necessity over such a distance. The demand by passengers and the need by the railroads to haul as few cars as possible dictated the use of convertible sleeping cars. Pullman was willing and able to fill this need.

Pullman cars almost all were built so that men and women shared the common area, just as in a standard day coach. Even at night, a woman in her sleeping berth might

be surrounded by men. This represented a drastic change from the physical separation practiced in steamboats and canal packets that carried over to the design of the earlier sleeping cars as well as a drastic change from the separate domestic space of the ladies' car. The *National Car-Builder* included the following in a section of the journal dedicated to jokes and funny stories:

An indignant matron winds up a philippic against sleeping-cars with the clinching accusation that the system forces young girls to become "familiarized with that unattractive object, a sleepy and unwashed man."⁶⁶

Causing women to behold such an unattractive object was a violation of the public/private dichotomy that was part of the concept of separate spheres. Genteel men were no happier about this aspect of traveling in sleeping cars. A writer for the *Boston Advertiser* made this complaint about sleeping car travel:

There are but two washstands for all these people, and ladies and gentlemen are served alike. You see a lady with sponge and tooth-brush and towel, edging her way along the narrow passage between curtains to take her turn at the washstand, where she waits perhaps some minutes for the gentleman to finish who is already in possession. When she gets her turn, she is waited for by another gentleman who is compelled to be an unwilling witness of her ablutions under penalty of losing his chance.⁶⁷

Even up to the 1870s and 1880s, eastern sleeping car manufacturers such as Woodruff, Mann, and Harlan and Hollingsworth continued to design stateroom cars or separate areas for men and women. Pullman built stateroom cars as well, but most of the sleeping cars designed by Pullman Palace Car Company were the standard convertible cars where men and women slept in near proximity to each other and could not avoid seeing each other while less than fully prepared for public view. These cars, following the pattern set for western railroads, became the standard for the entire country. The American Victorian concept of respectability had to adjust to ladies and gentlemen seeing each other in what otherwise were considered to be very private circumstances.

The shift in the way spaces in railroad cars were assigned demonstrates the changing values and sense of space in the United States. In boats and in early railroad passenger cars, women were assigned a separate space with their young children. A rapidly expanding and changing America could not continue to isolate women; there

⁶⁶ *National Car-Builder* 5 (April, 1874), 59.

were simply too many of them traveling and the economics of railroading precluded keeping women separated. As historian Katherine Grier noted, in the early nineteenth century American society was “still looking for a place, in both the psychological and the spatial sense, for women in the public sphere.”⁶⁸ Transportation was just one of the many public areas in which society found it necessary to accommodate women without outrageously violating cultural standards.

While beginning to accommodate women, cultural standards still required the segregation of some groups of people. As noted in Chapter One, railroads began quite early to separate the less-than-respectable from the respectable. Immigrants and African Americans are two examples of groups that society and therefore railroad practices categorized as less-than-respectable. Immigrant cars created a self-fulfilling prophecy of less-than-respectable. Even those immigrants who came from a culture of personal control and physical restraint had no opportunity to practice such behaviors in the extremely crowded confines of an immigrant car. From the time of Erasmus around the beginning of the sixteenth century civilized behavior was marked by bodily propriety.⁶⁹ In most immigrant cars, all bodily functions, from sleeping to eating, were on public view. Only voiding was allowed any privacy, and even there women had to share the one facility with men. Unlike Victorian notions of proper differentiation of public and private connected to the idea of separate spheres, all actions took place in one space. Passengers in these crowded conditions could not possibly fulfill what sociologist Norbert Elias has termed “more or less total and automatic self-restraint” – for Elias, the cornerstone of civilization.⁷⁰

In the case of the immigrant cars, railroad companies had some economic justification for treating immigrants differently: they did not pay the same fare as did other passengers. African-American passengers often paid for first-class accommodations and were denied them by the railroads. An example of an African-

⁶⁷ “A Winter Journey Across the Continent,” *Boston Advertiser*, Feb. 8, 1870.

⁶⁸ Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 62.

⁶⁹ For an overview of the evolution of restraint as the essential component of civilization, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 43-8. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, also describes restraint as part of respectability, as does Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

American woman paying for and being denied a seat in the ladies' car occurred in Tennessee in 1880. In *Brown v. Memphis & Chattanooga Railroad Company*, the plaintiff had in the past been accustomed to traveling in the ladies' car, but was forced by a particular conductor to move to the smoking car, which "was at the time crowded with passengers, most emigrants." Brown refused to remain in the car, and left the train. The railroad had two defenses for the conductor's actions. The conductor testified that the plaintiff was a prostitute, and that he was justified in keeping improper characters out of the ladies' car. Challenged by Brown's attorney to supply proof or even to give examples of any other women who were ever excluded from the ladies' car on this basis, the conductor could not do so. The other defense produced by the railroad was that the accommodations in the smoking car were as good as the ladies' car, and so Brown had no right to refuse to sit there. The court disagreed, noting that "carriers . . . seek to protect women from the rude conduct of the disorderly by providing for them a special 'ladies' car,' in which, while traveling alone, they may be somewhat secluded."⁷¹

Perhaps the best known example is the case of Ida B. Wells, a school teacher who became a newspaper publisher and a race activist. One day in May, 1884, Wells was returning to her job from visiting her daughters in Memphis. In her autobiography, Wells wrote "I took a seat in the ladies' coach of the train as usual." The conductor came by to collect tickets, but refused Wells', saying he could not take her ticket there. She shrugged it off, thinking "that if he didn't want the ticket I wouldn't have to bother about it so went on reading." However, when the conductor finished taking up all the other tickets, he returned to Wells and told her she would have to go into the smoking car. She refused. He then tried to drag her out of her seat, but as she told it, "the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand." The conductor went to get two other men and returned to force Wells into the smoker. Since the train had by then reached the first station, rather than submit to being put in the smoking car, Wells left the train, "pretty roughly handled," but not physically harmed.⁷²

⁷⁰ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 114.

⁷¹ *Brown v. Memphis & C. R. Co.*, Circuit Court, W. D. Tennessee, 7 F. 51; 1881, U.S. App. LEXIS 2189.

⁷² Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, edited by Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 18-9. According to C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, third revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), legalized

These cases illustrate conflicting attitudes on the part of railroads and female African-American passengers. Both sides did agree that the ladies' car represented total respectability and that the smoking car represented a state of something less. They totally disagreed on where African-American women belonged. On the one hand, the women insisted on their own respectability, to the extent of refusing to even stay on the train if forced to ride in the smoking car. The railroads took the contrary stand, viewing African Americans as inherently less-than-respectable and therefore unsuitable for accommodation in the ladies' car.⁷³

An irony arose from George Pullman's nearly exclusive use of African Americans as porters in his sleeping cars. Pullman may have decided to do this in an attempt to enhance the perception of luxury experienced by his almost exclusively white passengers. In the sexually mixed environment of a Pullman sleeping car, however, the presence of an African-American porter acted as a protection for white women, much as in the southern slave society of earlier in the century, where a house servant was expected to protect his white mistress.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, domesticity had created a sense of "ladies" as distinct, at least semi-sacred, beings. Patterns of behavior and expectation built on this sense permeated the culture. Railroad passenger service demonstrated several of those patterns. By separating "ladies" from possible rude conduct by assigning them a confined space, railroads were protecting some women, but were limiting their behavior as well. Railroad passenger service reflected the expectations and values of society in its attitudes toward women. Seeking women's patronage, railroad practices sought to accommodate the special status and requirements of "ladies" by protecting and restricting them. Women who did not qualify for the status of "lady" due to their failure to meet the standards of true womanhood, such as African Americans and immigrants,

segregation in the form of Jim Crow laws did not come about until the late 1880s. As can be seen by these stories, however, *de facto* segregation began on railroads several years before that time.

⁷³ Two excellent treatments of the struggles of African Americans of the late nineteenth century to obtain the same treatment and consideration as Whites can be found in Welke, "Gendered Journeys," chapter 7, and in Patricia Hagler, "The Failure of Freedom: Class, Gender, and the Evolution of Segregated Transit Law in the Nineteenth Century South," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 70 (1995), 993-1009. No single description can correctly cover the treatment of blacks on nineteenth-century American railroads. Different railroads had different policies. For a time, both before and after the Civil War, some southern railroads

were sometimes treated differently from “ladies.” Ultimately, the distinction in treatment between “ladies” and women came down to a class issue. The middle class established a definition of ladyhood. In the East, that definition tended to be rigid and exclusive. Westerners operated under a more inclusive view of lady; a woman was a lady unless she proved herself not to be one. George Pullman’s rise to prominence in the manufacture of passenger cars had a profound effect on the practices of all American railroads simply because he accepted the views of Westerners.

allowed African Americans to ride in standard coaches or ladies’ cars if they paid the proper fare. No sign of any northern railroad adhering to this practice can be found.

Chapter Three

Space and Comfort in Travel

Railroad travel caused interaction among different worlds in the early nineteenth century: the disparate spheres of male “public” life and female “private” life as well as of isolated rural life and more congested urban life. At least some people in the United States first experienced the evolving nineteenth-century urban industrialized consumer society through exposure to public transportation. As a part of the consumer culture, railroads competed against each other as well as against different forms of transportation such as steamboats and stagecoaches. They also sought to overcome any resistance people had concerning this big new technology.⁷⁴ Railroad managers attempted to create an environment that would appeal to passengers. They focused on the standard day coaches and especially on the first-class cars. Sleeping cars and parlor cars did not necessarily produce more profit for the railroads than did the standard fare cars, but railroads often concentrated their efforts on the luxury trade. Railroad managers felt that promoting first-class accommodations would attach a certain patina of quality to their coach travel.⁷⁵ Passengers who did not consider that their surroundings were appropriate would be reluctant to travel on that railroad. *The National Car Builder* in 1880 advocated that cars be built on stronger and more practical patterns, but recognized that: “The market determines the style of the wares that are taken to it. Railway companies keep traveling facilities to sell, and if a miniature palace is called for, it must be forthcoming at any cost.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, wrote an important discussion of the integration of technology with the pastoral ideal in nineteenth-century America. While technology came to exemplify progress in America, Marx noted resistance to the idea. Railroad journals seemed to delight in printing stories of individuals, usually farmers or older women, who became fearful or confused while trying to deal with this new mode of transportation.

⁷⁵ Many free trips were supplied to newspaper writers and editors in exchange for articles. These were after all the days before the concept of journalistic ethics. Free passes on each road were customarily given out to newspaper editors in cities along the route right up to the end of passenger service in the early 1970s. For an example, see the pass roster for the Norfolk & Western Railway in the Norfolk & Western collection at Virginia Tech.

⁷⁶ “Passenger Car Ornamentation,” *The National Car-BUILDER* 10 (August, 1880), 140.

How railroads designed space on these first-class cars reflected contemporary concepts of comfort and ideal space. Following architectural ideals of the time, railroads also sought to “improve” and control passengers through their design of space. An 1866 description in the *New York Times* of a new sleeping car on the Central Railroad Company of New Jersey typifies the décor of a first-class railroad car:

The car is fitted up in the most splendid manner, silk, velvet, glass and silver being lavishly used in its decoration. On entering it one would imagine it to be the saloon of some palatial residence rather than a railroad car, the soft rustling of the silken curtains, the subdued light from the ground glass windows, the couches covered with a superb velvet, and the carpeted aisles. . . . The wood work is of black walnut, and the decorations of silver plate.⁷⁷

For Victorian Americans, public comfort such as this confirmed their place in the world. These parlor or “saloon” surroundings, whether in a hotel, a home, or a railroad car, helped comprise a familiar environment of restraint and a sense of connection with something greater than the individual. Elegance demonstrated taste and refinement, even when the definition of refinement was stretched to the limit. For those not familiar and comfortable with elegance, the unfamiliarity of the circumstances helped produce the physical restraint and reserved state of mind desired and practiced by the middle class. In this fashion, the space created by the railroads to surround their genteel passengers created a level of comfort that was a combination of the physical and the psychological.

This chapter relates how railroads designed passenger cars to concepts of Victorian design and perceptions of personal space. High Victorians wanted their decorative surroundings to create “an emotional mood, an intellectual attitude, a visual impression”. The Victorian world-view that was to be displayed included certain basic precepts. Among these were a sense that history was progressive and an understanding that nature was an edifying force. Victorian architecture and furniture design reflected the idea that the (then) present was the supreme culmination of a direct line of history. Furniture and architecture also reflected a fascination with nature; outlines were rendered lavish with fringe, lace, knobs, and wooden or iron “gingerbread.” High Victorian design visually declared that nature was all around and that history was linear. Borrowing freely

⁷⁷ “A Superb Sleeping Car,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1866, 5.

from previous visual forms such as Classical and Gothic, the broken outlines of furniture and interior decoration trailed “off into infinite space in the same way their eclectic forms trailed back into indefinite time.”⁷⁸ Decoration, whether in a sleeping car or a home parlor, reinforced the Victorian world-view.

First-class rail car design reflected new concepts of personal relationships and values, as well as tremendous changes in the material condition of many, if not most, Americans. As historian John Kasson points out, the change from a colonial rank-structured society to an industrial market-oriented society created “manifestations of a new sense of self, individual privacy, and personal space.”⁷⁹ On American railroads, these manifestations of personal space instituted changes in how passengers were accommodated. Even beyond the gender and class distinctions discussed previously, the Victorian understanding of personal space helped determine the design and decoration of cars.

At the most basic level, relationship is what determines space. In a physical sense, when objects are few and the distance between them is great, space is vast, and when objects are many and the distance between them slight, space is confined. On the other hand, “alone in a crowd,” while a cliché, characterizes a valid sense of psychological space. Connection with or ostracism from others establishes our comfort level, regardless of how many people actually surround us. In the same way, comfort can be derived from the objects around us, as long as they support our sense of self. As pointed out by architects Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, physical space “provides the material preconditions for the patterns of movement, encounter and avoidance which are the material realisation – as well as sometimes the generator – of social relations.”⁸⁰

The space that realizes social relations varies from culture to culture and within cultures. Sociologist Lyn Lofland has explored the revised sense of “knowing” that arose with the transformation of rural to urban life. In a restricted environment, which is most

⁷⁸ Alan Gowans, *Images of American Living: Four Centuries of Architecture and Furniture as Cultural Expression* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964, reprint, New York: Harper & Rowe, 1976), 351, 289, 331. See as well general analyses of the Victorian age as referenced in the Introduction, note 11.

⁷⁹ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 18.

⁸⁰ Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), ix.

Americans had prior to the nineteenth century, “personal knowing” covered the vast majority of contacts among people. As people concentrated in urban areas, an individual’s daily interactions involved fewer acquaintances and more persons who were known only from their role or status, or who were complete strangers. As Lofland points out, human “social psychological conditions for urban life” require individuals to find a way to relate to one another outside of personal acquaintanceship. She notes that “living as a stranger in the midst of strangers has within it the logical potential for a chaotic unpredictability that no human would find tolerable.”⁸¹ The fear of such chaotic unpredictability contributed to the extreme rigidity of urban middle-class etiquette and public behaviors.⁸²

Lofland points out that another major component of early nineteenth-century urbanization was the specialization of areas into commercial, residential, respectable, dangerous, and so forth.⁸³ She maintains that this specialization was an important part of the “not-so-rich middle class” differentiating itself from those below it on the social and economic spectrum. Lofland indicates that those within the middle class were almost desperate to insulate themselves from the “common people.” When not able to completely physically separate themselves from the lower classes, the middle class sought other ways of identifying, and distinguishing themselves from, the “others.”⁸⁴ Historian John Kasson makes the same point about the strict rules of etiquette which

⁸¹ Lyn H. Lofland, *A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1973), 176.

⁸² For analysis on this point, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: a Study of Middle-Class Culture, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), and Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*.

⁸³ To at least some extent, Lofland’s approach here appears to be based on a seminal article by Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *The American Journal of Sociology* XLIV (July 1938) 1-24, reprinted in *American Urban History: An Interpretive Reader with Commentaries*, edited by Alexander B. Callow, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 488-503. Wirth notes that the density of urbanization “thus reinforces the effect of numbers in diversifying men and their activities and in increasing the complexity of the social structure” (496).

⁸⁴ Lofland, *A World of Strangers*, 65, 63; chapter three overall gives an excellent description of the transition to the urban city and the increasing importance of spatial ordering. In a subsequent work, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City’s Quintessential Social Territory* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1998), Lofland reemphasizes the desperation of the middle class to differentiate itself from all others. She indicates that because of this, the middle class sees the entire public realm as “morally suspect” (118). Down to the present, any mixing at all of different elements of society tends to weaken the image that the middle class has of itself. One of the most fascinating aspects of this hypothesis is Lofland’s contention that this repugnance for mixing explains the overwhelming preference of the middle-class for the individually occupied automobile, which tendency predicates the ultimate failure of any form of mass transit.

appeared during this period. Advice books on every topic informed readers of the “right” way to act, dress, and decorate. Books and articles warned middle-class readers of the dangers of not adhering to behaviors that separated them from the “dangerous classes.”⁸⁵ Separation and hierarchy were the tools used by the middle class to define itself. Genteel railroad passengers found it quite disconcerting to not be able to separate themselves from the “others.” One English traveler wondered how anybody of quality could possibly tolerate traveling to California by rail if unable to afford the extra fare for first class: “people of cultivated minds and habits have to herd with the vulgar and low-mannered and the journey altogether must be as near an approach to a seven day’s purgatory as is possible.”⁸⁶

As Lofland makes clear, in the expanding cities of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the emerging middle class increasingly felt the need to distance themselves. By moving their homes to areas away from the central city and establishing zoning regulations, they sought to be safe from disturbing influences. Reformer Catharine Beecher even strongly suggested that the ideal Christian home should be built away from the moral ambiguity of the city, in “the freer and purer quietude of the country.”⁸⁷

A policy of avoidance was difficult within urban society, however. Mass transportation reflected this same difficulty. Initially, no means of separation were necessary. Travel between cities or between country and city was so expensive in the very early nineteenth century that for the most part only those in the middle class could avail themselves of it. However, as the transportation infrastructure developed and the cost of traveling fell, increasing numbers of working-class people took advantage of what was becoming an important part of everyday life. With the influx of the working class, the middle class sought to find a way to reestablish spatial ordering.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, particularly chapter 2.

⁸⁶ J. W. Boddam-Wetham, *Western Wanderings* (London, 1874), 101, as quoted in Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car*, 160.

⁸⁷ Lofland, *World of Strangers*, chapter 3; Beecher, *American Woman’s Home*, 24. Beecher went so far on this idea of distancing as to suggest that “cultivated and Christian people, having abundant wealth,” should remove themselves to the “desolated sections” of the Southern mountains and establish a colony (41-2).

⁸⁸ Lofland, *World of Strangers*, chapter 4. Lofland suggests that zoning, housing developments, all manner of reforms, and especially the police, have acted on behalf of the middle class to segregate “persons and activities in urban public space” (90).

Such spatial ordering was often disguised as concern for the less fortunate. It was so with the humanitarian organizations that developed in nineteenth-century cities, and it was so in the arrangement of space on railroads. An 1859 editorial in the *New York Times* recalls the sort of reasoning referenced in Chapter One which argued that immigrants would be spoiled by anything other than the roughest of accommodations. The *Times* writer, who turned out to be something of a prophet, sought to persuade railroad company managements that the success of sleeping cars at an increased fare should lead the way to offering different accommodations for passengers. He commented that “all persons who travel are not of the same tastes, the same habits of life, or of the same means of commanding comforts and luxuries.” He summed up his argument as: “it is quite as distasteful for a poor man to be compelled to pay for luxuries which he does not desire, as it is for a rich man to be deprived of comforts for which he would willingly pay.” This writer appears to be suggesting that what a poor man would have found an unnecessary “luxury,” a rich man would have desired as a “comfort.”⁸⁹

In his essay “The Sensibility of Comfort,” the historian John Crowley presents this perception of comfort as something necessary to the cultured individual. Crowley analyzed the transition of the older understanding of comfort to the more material culture that originated in the eighteenth century. He points out that prior to 1700, “‘comfort’ had primarily meant moral, emotional, spiritual, and political support.” During the eighteenth century, items and practices which had been termed “conveniences,” such as those found in a guide to living in London of “hiring carriages, buying wine, borrowing books, finding card players, discussing improving topics, hearing parliamentary and other debates, attending musical concerts, and taking hot, cold, and freshwater baths,” transfigured into “comforts.”⁹⁰ This transfiguration occurred on railroad cars as well as railroads sought to create environments that their middle-class passengers would find appropriate. *The National Car-Builder* described new cars of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway in 1874 as: “replete with every requirement of luxury,

⁸⁹ “Comfort in Railroad Traveling,” *New York Times*, 25 March 1859, 4.

⁹⁰ John E. Crowley, “The Sensibility of Comfort,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June, 1999): 751, 762. Crowley’s intent is to demonstrate how comfort became redefined as an element of the consumption culture that developed beginning in the eighteenth century. He quite successfully does so. However, by focusing on the physical aspects of comfort as they related to burgeoning consumerism, he

elegance, and comfort. Nothing that the skill of designer, artist, and artisan could contribute, has been omitted.”⁹¹

The physical environment formed an important part of a Victorian’s concept of “comfort.” However, much of that feeling of comfort derived not from the environment’s effect on the physical person, but rather from the appropriateness of the surroundings. This important distinction helps to explain how the nineteenth-century traveler related to his or her physical circumstances. Lucius Beebe, a generally insightful commentator on the American railroad scene, wrote, concerning the design of nineteenth-century passenger cars: “Travelers, especially the more impressionable among them, seemed to concur with the management in the theory that lavish ornamentation was an adequate substitute for practical comfort.” Writing in the 1960s, Beebe applied an understanding of comfort that would have been puzzling to most of the travelers to whom he referred. The middle class in Victorian America conceived of comfort at least as much in psychological terms as in physical. Historian Katherine Grier presents a fascinating study of this aspect of comfort in *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*. Grier characterizes this understanding as “values emphasizing domesticity, perfect sincerity, and moderation in all things.” The elaborate furnishings surrounding a middle-class Victorian represented restraint and refinement rather than physical ease. The concept that furniture should be comfortable rather than formal had only developed in Europe in the eighteenth century, and was far from universal.⁹²

Grier describes the importance middle-class families placed on demonstrating their understanding of “proper” cultural values. A parlor containing the correct elements said to the world that this family recognized the importance of gentility and subscribed to

may be understating the moral and spiritual factors that were an essential part of comfort until almost the twentieth century.

⁹¹ “Two Superb Drawing-Room Coaches,” *The National Car-Builder* 5 (May, 1874), 70.

⁹² Lucius Beebe, *Mr. Pullman’s Elegant Palace Car* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), 72; Katherine C. Grier, *Culture & Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 2. Grier points out the connection between women’s corseted bodies and the “restraining morals and manners of a civilized society” (127) and how the physical realities of women’s dress determined furniture design (Chap. 4). Rybczynski, in *Home*, Chapter 4, presents an insightful analysis of the cultural differences between sitting and squatting and how the perception of comfort as part of sitting developed. Crowley, “The Sensibility of Comfort,” 756-7, also discusses sitting as part of his general analysis of the eighteenth-century material culture of comfort.

its precepts. An understanding of what those elements were and how they appeared spread through American society by means of magazines and catalogues and by what Grier terms “commercial parlors,” carefully designed spaces in hotels, steamboats, railroads, and photographers’ studios. Individuals in the West had limited opportunities for observation of fully decorated parlors. Few elegant hotels existed on the Great Plains, and there were even fewer photographers’ studios. Steamboats and especially railroads supplied the only examples many people could actually experience.⁹³

Because railroads were the intersection of separate spheres and different classes, cultural values had to be particularly well demonstrated on passenger cars.

The more elaborate and costly ornamentation and upholstery which has been steadily developed . . . was criticised . . . as useless extravagance – a waste of money on things which passengers would only destroy. It has not proved to be the case. I have always held that people are very greatly influenced by their physical surroundings. Take the roughest man, a man whose lines have always brought him into coarsest and poorest surroundings, and the effect upon his bearing is immediate. The more artistic and refined the mere external surroundings, in other words, the better and more refined the man.⁹⁴

This statement, attributed to George Pullman, illustrates an attitude quite prevalent in Victorian society. For many thinkers in the nineteenth century, moral feelings and the proper state of mind arose from the physical as well as spiritual surroundings of the individual. A mid-nineteenth-century architect put it this way: “There is so intimate a connection between taste and morals, aesthetics and Christianity, that they . . . mutually modify each other.”⁹⁵ The proper atmosphere for a civilized state of mind could only be found in an advanced form of physical environment. For genteel Victorians, the most advanced society lived in the most elaborate housing and utilized the most technology, so

⁹³ Grier discusses the rhetoric and symbolism of parlors in Chapter 3, “‘Orthodox as the Hymn Book;’” Chapter 1, “Imagining the Parlor,” describes the examples of commercial parlors and their effect on American culture.

⁹⁴ Attributed to George M. Pullman by Mrs. Duane Doty, in *The Town of Pullman Illustrated: Its Growth with Brief Accounts of Its Industries* (Pullman, IL: Pullman Civic Organization, 1893; reprint, 1974), 23, as quoted in Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 61.

⁹⁵ William H. Ranlett, *The Architect: a Series of Original Designs, for Domestic and Ornamental Cottages and Villas, connected with Landscape Gardening, Adapted to the United States, Illustrated by Drawings of Ground Plots, Plans, Perspective Views, Elevations, Sections and Details* Vol. I (New York: Dewitt & Daveport, 1849), reprinted (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 3.

consequently proper architecture had a positive effect on the level of refinement of the people who inhabited it.⁹⁶

Victorians decided that the more elaborate, complex, and technologically demanding the surroundings, the more refined the effect. In an article about the latest examples of available furniture maker Henkels in New York, *Godey's Lady's Book* (*GLB*) praised the efforts of the manufacturer. Applauding the decorator's efforts to rise "higher, to a style more florid and ornate," *GLB* noted his willingness to "decorate and embellish."⁹⁷ In mid-century Victorian décor, fabric, textured and figured in complex patterns, was draped and tucked everywhere that wood was not turned, carved, inlaid, or gilded. The result became known as "steamboat gothic" or (more pertinently to this study) "the Early Pullman period of home decoration." This phrase of disdain from a 1925 book on home decorating dismisses Victorian aesthetics as unsuitable to the (then) modern age.⁹⁸ However, in their own time, railroad passenger cars, as exemplified by Pullman (see Fig. 6), became the hallmark of a particular nineteenth-century notion of comfort and elegance.⁹⁹

In an article partially subtitled "Comfort and Economy Combined," a writer for the *New York Times* in 1869 gave the following description of drawing-room cars recently introduced on the Erie Railroad:

The interior . . . is solid black walnut inlaid with French walnut. The carving is exquisite and elaborate, without the least hint at extravagance of fancy. The arched partitions which divide the compartments rise to within a reasonable distance of the roof, and in their designs, carving, paneling, gilt moulding and scroll work are highly chaste and ornamental. The upholstery is of the finest crimson plush; the curtains are a rich mellow rep, trimmed

⁹⁶ Observed by Colleen McDannell, *Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), chapter 2, "Domestic Architecture and the Protestant Spirit," and in "Parlor Piety: The Home as Sacred Space in Protestant America," in Jessica A. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds. *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 162-89 and Grier (esp. chapter 5, "The Quest for Refinement"). The concept of physical surroundings affecting an individual's moral and spiritual life was advanced by a number of thinkers in the early to mid-nineteenth century, possibly all inspired by John Ruskin. Although not often explicit, Catharine Beecher clearly subscribed to this philosophy - see particularly Chap. 2, "A Christian Home," in *American Woman's Home*.

⁹⁷ "A Visit to Henkels' Warerooms," *Godey's Lady's Book* XLI (August, 1850), 123.

⁹⁸ *The Modern Priscilla Home Furnishing Book: A Practical Guide for the Woman Who Loves Her Home* (Boston: Priscilla Publishing Company, 1925), 2, quoted in Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 50.

⁹⁹ Beebe goes so far as to say that it was railroad cars, particularly Pullman's, which were "the greatest single agency of urbanity and sophistication available to the American consciousness" (*Mr. Pullman's Palace Car*, 18).

with velvet of a darker shade, and lined with an orange-colored fabric of some description unknown to us. The hangings of the doors, the trimmings of the windows, the lamps, and even the spittoons are silver-plated. The large rooms have six French plate mirrors each, two large ones facing each other, and four small ones. These are set in a massive framework of black walnut and gold, beautifully ornamented . . .¹⁰⁰

Interior decoration such as this illustrates the level of intricacy and technological complexity Victorians required to feel properly uplifted.

As noted above, Victorians saw “aesthetics and Christianity” as being inextricably linked. Also inextricably linked were Christianity and the home. As expressed by Catharine Beecher in *The American Woman’s Home*, the home and the family within it was “the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is the chief minister.” Historian Coleen McDannell states that this attitude was shared by “the creators of Victorian American culture – ministers, reformers, novelists, and architects,” who felt that, as with the church, “the home as a physical space . . . was sacred.”¹⁰¹

Some commentators have indicated that the nineteenth century was at least somewhat, if not totally, shaped by the rise of industrialism and the consumer culture. However, as Grier points out, the objects and symbols that helped define home as a sacred space predated the nineteenth century. The profusion of products that filled the parlors of homes, hotels, and railroad cars was made possible by industrialization, but the demand for them anticipated the supply. And the demand would not have existed if the commodities did not have some significance beyond their usefulness.¹⁰² Even hard-headed Karl Marx, the ultimate materialist, found it necessary to “have recourse to the

¹⁰⁰ “Luxuries of Travel: Drawing-Room and Silver Palace Cars – Comfort and Economy Combined,” *New York Times*, June 18, 1869, 2.

¹⁰¹ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home*, 19; McDannell, “Parlor Piety,” 162. McDannell has focused on an element of nineteenth-century American culture essential to understanding some aspects of the period. Often overlooked in historical commentary is the overwhelming importance religion and its symbolism had (and has) for many people. In the introduction to her new (1995) translation of Emile Durkheim’s classic sociological work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), Karen E. Fields reminds us that religion, besides being a force of socialization and control, “is the steady, day-in-day-out reality of millions, their routine framework of everyday activity, their calm certainty of life” (xxv).

¹⁰² Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 8-9. For discussion of the transformation of American society by industrialization, especially the transition of woman from producer to consumer, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) chap. 2, particularly 51-56, and Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chap. 1, as well as William Leach, *Land of Desire:*

mist-enveloped regions of the religious world,” in order to discuss the concept that objects had some value to humans outside of their utility. He dubbed this treatment of objects “as independent beings endowed with life” as the “Fetishism of commodities.”¹⁰³ Marx was reacting to the “characteristic habit of mind” of Victorians, which saw “visual forms in terms of intellectual images,” and which used them “as a kind of symbolic language.”¹⁰⁴

In the home, the symbolic language of commodities was strongest in the parlor. While part of the home’s sacred space, parlors acted as an intersection with the outside world. Accordingly, décor and manners in the parlor took on a more formal and ritualistic tone. Parlor manners differed from those used in the rest of the house. For the Victorians, public spaces within the home mediated between familial sacred space and the perils outside. Since the parlor existed partially in the public space, deep feelings and bodily movement had to be quite restrained. Gentility directed behavior in parlors. Proper conduct in first-class train cars mirrored that of the home parlor, transferring a sense of the sacred private to the realm of public transportation. Decoration took on increased importance in parlors as well. Victorians filled their homes with what McDannell describes as “symbols of status and piety which marked the household as distinct from the less-than-desirable Americans who populated tenements, farm shacks, and back alleys.”¹⁰⁵ Carefully designed parlor spaces on railroad cars applied many of the same symbols.

The decorative elements of railroad passenger cars that duplicated those of formal parlors in homes, hotels, and other places of public intersection had significance beyond utility. Just as with static parlors, each component of the decoration of the cars contained a message. Upholstered furniture both required a particular deportment and softened the space, distinguishing it from the hardness of everyday life. Plush carpets helped to soften and muffle the environment as well as to present elaborate patterns reminiscent of nature. Semi-opaque and translucent draperies, by coloring and softening light and creating

Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Random House, 1993), esp. chap. 4 & 10.

¹⁰³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. from 3rd German edition, Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), 83.

¹⁰⁴ Gowans, *Images of American Living*, 289.

¹⁰⁵ McDannell, “Parlor Piety,” 173.

shadows, also patterned nature in the abstract manner suitable for refined tastes. Refinement was further to be encountered in the carefully carved, stained, and polished wood and in a profusion of mirrors.¹⁰⁶

As noted previously, public transportation during the nineteenth century shifted from segregating women to creating a space shared by some women and some men. The new spaces had a definite masculine flavor. Although decorative refinement was closely associated with domesticity, it was far from being associated exclusively with women. Men designed the fabrics and furniture. Many, if not most, of the books written to advise women on how to tastefully furnish the home were by men. Since parlors and dining rooms were accessible to the public, they had to reflect the public face of the family. Accordingly, they were designed to present the family's "dressed-up social identity." That social identity, that public face, had a masculine cast.¹⁰⁷

Likewise, the manufacturers of railroad passenger cars reached for the epitome of refinement by designing interiors that spoke the language of men. If men did not understand and adhere to the decorating rhetoric of the time, spaces limited to men, such as smoking areas and cars, would have been decorated in a fashion different from that of parlor and sleeping cars. Instead, except for the not universal exception of using leather or rattan for seating in place of fabric upholstery, first-class men's areas were often at least as ornate as the other first-class accommodations. An excellent example of this is the Pullman combination smoker/baggage car *Marchena*. Lucius Beebe discusses and illustrates this car in *Mr. Pullman's Elegant Palace Car*, a survey of the history of first-class railroad cars, focusing on those of George Pullman. The carving and inlay work exceed in intricacy and ornateness almost any other car built. Covering the floor was "an

¹⁰⁶ McDannell, *Christian Home*, 28-48, and Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, (particularly chapter 3, "Orthodox as a Hymn Book") both present analyses of the symbolism of décor and its relation to the dominant Protestant culture of the nineteenth century.

¹⁰⁷ Ellen Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, lists several influential advice givers, including Alexander V. Hamilton, Charles Eastlake, Clarence Cook, and the team of Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., as well as Andrew Jackson Downing, better known as an architect and garden designer. Grier notes most of these as well, along with many other designers and advisors, almost all of them men. Modern observers have noted that the decoration of the parlor, like that of the dining room, was often "decidedly masculine in appearance and form" (Plante, 65). Sitting rooms, those more informal spaces generally occupied only by family members, echoed the rhetoric of the parlor, but in a more comfortable, less formal, fashion. These rooms were truly private, and so could reflect more feminine tendencies. See also Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, for a discussion of the more casual sitting room compared with the parlor "as a site for social ritual" (70). Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 71.

Axminster of special design as thick as a stockyards *filet mignon*.” A barbershop formed the centerpiece for this extravaganza. With “a mosque-like pagoda with arabesques in beaten copper,” which structure was supported by columns of “Honduran mahogany capped with pediments of black onyx,” and including “gold marquetry work” that “might have served in a queen’s boudoir,” this conveyance demonstrates that excessive ornateness was not a purely feminine trait.¹⁰⁸

A survey of the Pullman Palace Car Company records held at the Newberry Library in Chicago and the Museum of America History, Smithsonian Institution, demonstrates that smoking areas and cars were indeed decorated in the same fashion as other first-class cars. Often, though not always, leather upholstery or rattan furniture were used in place of plush or brocade upholstery, presumably because the deep fabrics would hold the smell of smoke to a greater degree. The same logic does not appear to have been applied to window hangings, however. Draperies in smoking areas and cars seem to have been constructed in the same manner and of the same materials as sleeping and parlor cars, at least up to the end of the nineteenth century. As noted by Beebe, thick carpets often found their way into smoking cars as well.

Another not exclusively feminine characteristic was the desire for privacy. In *The Railroad Passenger Car*, historian August Mencken notes that fully reclining seats were patented and available on cars before any but the most primitive and uncomfortable sleeping cars were developed. In terms of comfort, convenience, and cost, these convertible seats were in many ways superior to the bare bunks available in early sleeping cars. Nonetheless, sleeping cars became much more widely popular, even before the opening of the West rendered them well nigh indispensable. The middle-class travelers who made up the largest portion of railroad clientele found separation and some sense of private space to be essential. Genteel nineteenth-century Americans feared losing consciousness in public. Historian John Kasson noted that a woman who fainted “lost all the bodily control, self-possession, and inconspicuousness on which women

¹⁰⁸ Beebe, *Mr. Pullman’s Elegant Palace Car*, 286-7 & 302-5. Carpeting and other materials used by the passenger car manufacturers tended to be of the highest quality available; at the time, carpet styles popularly known as Brussels, Turkish, and Axminster were generally used (see Beebe, 283).

especially were taught to depend in public.” Even the flimsy barrier of a curtained berth in a sleeping car was preferable to being in the public view while asleep.¹⁰⁹

The statement attributed to George Pullman about the effect of surroundings on all people came from a very late point in Pullman’s life. If he indeed felt that way, surely he had a reason. Pullman must have observed the impact of an elegant environment on people who were not accustomed to it, and approved of the effect. This raises a question: why and how did such an environment have the effect of improving the behavior of men from “the coarsest and poorest surroundings,” at least in the view of Pullman?

Environmental psychologists define an individual’s reaction to their surroundings in a number of ways. One of the main generalizations used is the *approach/avoidance* dichotomy. If a person is not able to totally avoid a particular environment he or she finds unpleasant in some ways, he or she will react by closing down all possible interaction with the environment and those in it. Such avoidance can take the form of reading, going to sleep (or pretending to do so), or just gazing into space. The physical movements of such a person tend to be limited both in number and scope. Interaction with other people is held to a minimum; in other words, behavior reflecting the perfect public demeanor of a middle-class Victorian.¹¹⁰

Sociologist Lofland defined a “symbolic shield of privacy” necessary for the urban life that emerged with the growth of cities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Maintaining this shield required six practices: minimize expressivity; minimize body contact; look before you sit; minimize eye contact; when in doubt, flee; when in doubt, disattend.¹¹¹ A tongue-in-cheek article from the *New York Times* in 1874 which lampooned railroad manners echoed some of these behaviors. The

¹⁰⁹ Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car*, 18-25; Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 136. One British traveler, upon observing a few married women sleeping in an American coach car, “each laying her head on her husband’s shoulder for a pillow,” commented “English ladies would probably under circumstances of so much publicity have endeavored to keep awake;” F. Barham Zincke, *Last Winter in the United States* (London: 1868), quoted in Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car*, 143.

¹¹⁰ Albert Mehrabian, *Public Places and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976), 5-16. Lofland applies the concept of avoidance in her analyses. The same concepts, though not the exact terms, are also used by Claude Levy-Leboyer, *Psychology and Environment*, trans. by David Cantor and Ian Griffiths (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982), 25-34. Kasson points out that public restraint and self-discipline occupied such an overwhelmingly crucial role that even clothing changed from the color and style of the eighteenth century to the basic dark suit still worn by men today (*Rudeness & Civility*, 118-23).

¹¹¹ Lofland, *A World of Strangers*, 151-7.

writer sought to advise “unsophisticated persons who seem to imagine that the essential principals of good manners in traveling are the same that they are in any other phase of life.” One portion of the advice offered illustrates the way some passengers behaved on trains:

If, as unhappily is often inevitable, two strangers are forced to sit beside each other in the cars, all conversation should be studiously avoided. The slightest attempt at anything of the kind should be instantly repelled by the person addressed. . . . If any answer at all is given, it should be short and unsatisfactory as possible. The manner of reply may be either crusty and snappish, or coldly dignified. But the best way is not to notice the questioner in any way whatever except by a stare, particularly if his dress and appearance are those of an individual in rather humble circumstances.¹¹²

The writer sought to make a point by referencing actual conduct. Such behavior in the public arena of nineteenth-century America duplicated the sort of behavior created by placing an individual into a strange and uncomfortable environment.

In the late 1820s, writer Nathaniel Hawthorne traveled on the Erie Canal, a trip that he later described in an article for the *New England Magazine*. He related an incident involving a young woman who was traveling alone. Venturing out from the ladies’-only area of the cabin, this woman noticed that a man was looking at her. As Hawthorne related it, she then “reddened, and retired deeper into the female part of the cabin.” Hawthorne indicated that he did not think that she felt directly threatened. He suggested instead that she was simply “the pure, modest, sensitive, and shrinking woman of America,” who was “strangely modest, without confidence in the modesty of other people, and admirably pure, with such a quick apprehension of all impurity.” Historian Patricia Cline Cohen references this anecdote as a possible example of a woman indeed feeling vulnerable. Both the contemporary observer and the historical interpreter are most likely correct. Because the young woman was “without confidence in the modesty of other people,” she did feel threatened. She acted in accordance with urban behavior described by Lofland: when in doubt, flee.¹¹³

A concern for comfort formed the key element in a railroad’s attempts to establish a space for women and act as protector and attendant. As cited in the case of *John M.*

¹¹² “Railroad Manners,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1874, 4.

¹¹³ A Pedestrian (Nathaniel Hawthorne), “Sketches from Memory,” *New England Magazine* 9 (1835): 401-2; Cohen, “Safety and Danger,” 109-11.

Peck v. The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad Company, Judge Folger noted that the establishment of a separate car for ladies “tended to their comfort and security.” Judge Folger certainly did not refer simply to physical comfort. For a space to be comfortable to a nineteenth century American, it had to be appropriate in design and purpose. This concept of psychological comfort for both “ladies” and “gentlemen” is crucial for understanding the decoration of cars as well as the regulations practiced by Victorian railroads.¹¹⁴ Following the changing notions of society, modes of behavior in adherence to a particular standard, rather than sex, became the determinant for who occupied a given space in railroad cars. In an effort to make middle-class passengers comfortable, railroads created spaces and restricted behavior, reproducing the separation of categories of human conduct that was going on in the larger society.

Even today, comfortable means much more than mere physical ease. A good example of this can be found in the practices of present-day air travelers. All of the seats in the coach or standard seating area of a modern aircraft are identical to one another. However, passengers will adamantly insist on an aisle seat, or a window seat, or being as far front as possible, or as far back in the tail as possible. An aisle seat may represent not feeling as confined, or being able to move about the plane without disturbing others.

¹¹⁴ John M. Peck, Respondent, v. The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad Company, Appellant (Court of Appeals of New York, 70 N.Y. 587; 1877), N.Y. LEXIS 659. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed. (1989), s.v. “Comfort” and “Comfortable”) notes several definitions for comfort, but few of them specifically refer to physical conditions. The fifth citation interprets comfort as “Relief or support in mental distress,” and “The feeling of consolation or mental relief; the state of being consoled.” Not until the sixth is there a reference to “A state of physical and material well being, with freedom from pain and trouble, and satisfaction of bodily needs.” This definition brings to mind the use of comfort in an economic sense, as in someone saying “I’m not rich, I’m not poor, I’m comfortable,” which is interesting considering the definitions of “comfortable” in the *OED*. The first non-obsolete, non-archaic reference to the physical state does not come until the tenth definition: “In a state of tranquil enjoyment and content; free from pain and trouble; at ease (usually, but not always, in reference to physical conditions or circumstances).” The primary definition of comfortable begins: “Strengthening or supporting (morally or spiritually).” Understanding the moral and spiritual aspects of comfort is essential to perceive it as did the Victorians. Otherwise, we (as did Lucius Beebe) will be applying an incomplete, if not misleading, interpretation to what nineteenth-century middle-class Americans were seeking in public spaces such as railroad passenger cars. Even historians of interior design do not escape the error of applying twentieth-century conceptions to nineteenth-century standards: Denys Hinton, “High Victorian, 1840-1880,” in *Great Interiors*, ed. Ian Grant (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1967), 177, states “the Victorians developed an obsession with luxurious comfort,” and then rather snidely remarks “or rather the *appearance* of comfort, since very few of the furniture designs, for instance, were scientifically adapted to the needs of the human body at rest.” Hinton’s attitude approaches the same presentism and technological snobbishness practiced by the Victorians; he characterized the interior of Queen Victoria’s private railroad car as not “escaping altogether the character of a padded cell.” The Victorians did not define comfort or luxury in the same way as Hinton, so he seems to assume that they missed their target.

Some passengers insist that a window seat helps them escape the sensation of inhabiting an over-crowded metal tube. A traveler may want to be in the tail because he feels safer, or close to the front so she can disembark more quickly.

All of these desires go beyond simple physical comfort. Some requests by passengers are at least ostensibly for corporal reasons. A tall person might want a seat immediately behind the partition between the first-class cabin and the coach seating because no seat directly in front means more legroom. A traveler accustomed to flying first class might feel distinctly uncomfortable having to take a seat in coach, even if not closely pressed in upon either physically or psychologically by other passengers. Familiarity makes for a more comfortable situation. Environmental psychologist Albert Mehrabian describes the familiar as relatively *low-load*. Even an otherwise stressful environment, such as being surrounded by strangers or traveling, loses much of its stress as long as it is expected. As Mehrabian phrases it: “environmental load is equivalent to the level of *uncertainty* about what a place is all about or what is happening there” (emphasis in original).¹¹⁵ Space within first-class cars simultaneously reinforced Victorian values and restricted and controlled behavior. Railroads designed passenger cars in the nineteenth century to reduce uncertainty for their most valued passengers by restricting behaviors to the expected and by referencing the symbolism of domesticity.

¹¹⁵ Mehrabian, *Public Places and Private Spaces*, 12-3.

Chapter Four

Gentility and the Smoking Car: Gender Roles on the Railroad

American railroads in the nineteenth century established separate areas for different types of passengers. The railroads associated certain types of behavior with a specific race, class, or gender, and assigned space on cars accordingly. Railroad managers designated the accommodations they felt safest and most refined for well-to-do white women and their escorts. African Americans, Chinese, and immigrants were allocated space based on the white society's perception of their relative worth. Middle-class white men had more options, and were most likely to be assigned to a space totally on the basis of behavior. The railroads used respectability as the standard. Those who the railroads presumed to be respectable, white women, were ushered to the ladies' car. Those who the railroads presumed to not possess respectability were segregated. For white men, respectability, especially in its purest form of gentility, was a role. They could assume the role and be accommodated in the first-class cars, or could reject it to ride elsewhere.

Three distinct areas comprised most nineteenth-century passenger trains. As noted, the middle of the train was made up of day coaches, where travelers rode who either were not going very far or who could not afford the comfort of a sleeper or parlor car. In day coaches behavior generally reflected the blend of class and sex that usually comprised the mix of riders. Conduct was constrained, but not to the extent it was in the first-class cars. Significantly enough, the last and first passenger-carrying cars bracketing the day coaches defined opposite notions of comfort and behavior. Ladies' cars demonstrated genteel domesticity with all of its overtones of Protestant Christianity. On the other hand, in smoking cars behaviors reflected freedom from care and constraint.

It was no accident that very few women traveled in smoking cars, and that only those gentlemen accompanying ladies had access to ladies' cars. Ladies' cars and smoking cars did not mirror the concept of separate spheres so much as they

demonstrated gendered archetypes of Victorian gentility. A genteel woman's role was to "be," an active man's role to "do."¹¹⁶ Even the terms used to describe the passenger cars allocated to gentility or the lack thereof reflected this dichotomy. "First-class," "palace," "parlor," "chair," and "ladies" cars all refer to a state of existence, of being. Only "sleeping car" in any way suggests an activity, and even then the word reflects more of a state of being than of doing. On the other hand, a "smoking" or "smokers" car suggests greater dynamism. During the 1860s and 1870s, first-class cars such as parlor and palace cars were the center of activity, with card tables and occasionally small libraries. By the 1880s however, such pastimes had tended to move to the smoking cars. Smokers often contained reading rooms, tables for writing or card-playing, and sometimes even a barber shop, where a man could get a shave, "have his hair cut, curled and shampooed," or even take a bath. Descriptions of parlor or palace cars tend to the static, such as "fitted up with the utmost elegance," and having "easy chairs, couches, tables, and every drawing-room requisite."¹¹⁷

The very expressions used by some male and female travelers demonstrate a gender distinction. Mark Twain, like Charles Dickens, was a writer of strong opinions, intelligently expressed. Twain seemed to have particularly powerful feelings about steamboats, stagecoaches, and trains. Labeled "a man's man" by writer Kurt Vonnegut, Twain could be taken as the personification of a certain bluff, rational, adventurous male.¹¹⁸ His perception of traveling by stagecoach differed greatly with that of Mrs. Ellet, author of several works of history, poetry and travel.¹¹⁹ Mrs. Ellet characterized stagecoaches as "heavy, lumbering, leathery horrors" which "a joyful era in civilization"

¹¹⁶ Ann Douglas, in *The Feminization of American Culture*, presents an excellent analysis of this phenomenon in Chapter 2, "Feminine Disestablishment," 44-79. For example, Douglas quotes Horace Bushnell, nineteenth-century writer and theologian, describing the "womanly ideal" to his daughter as "a woman should be a Christian" (44).

¹¹⁷ William Smith, *A Yorkshireman's Trip to the United States and Canada* (London, 1892), 161, as quoted in Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car*, 189; Margaret E. Parker, *Six Happy Weeks Among the Americans*, 49.

¹¹⁸ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., "Opening Remarks" to *The Unabridged Mark Twain*, edited by Lawrence Teacher (Philadelphia: Running Press, 1976), xiv.

¹¹⁹ A female equivalent to Mark Twain probably does not exist. Mrs. Ellet has the unenviable task of being contrasted with Twain simply because she was a woman writer who expressed opinions about both trains and stagecoaches. Mrs. Ellet's most important work was *Women of the American Revolution*, a two volume study from primary sources of women who observed, commented upon, or participated in the Revolution. She may have been the first person to focus on the role of women in history. Other works included *Pioneer Women of the West* and *Women Artists of All Ages and Countries*.

would soon banish.¹²⁰ With the exception of “lumbering,” Ellet’s choice of words was descriptive of characteristics, not activities. Twain’s memoir of a trip by stagecoach between Missouri and Nevada indicates a contrary opinion, expressed in quite different terms:

The stage whirled along at a spanking gait, the breeze flapping curtains and suspended coats in a most exhilarating way; the cradle swayed and swung luxuriously, the pattering of the horses' hoofs, the cracking of the driver's whip, and his "Hi-yi! g'lang!" were music; the spinning ground and the waltzing trees appeared to give us a mute hurrah as we went by, and then slack up and look after us with interest, or envy, or something; and as we lay and smoked the pipe of peace and compared all this luxury with the years of tiresome city life that had gone before it, we felt that there was only one complete and satisfying happiness in the world, and we had found it.¹²¹

In this short passage, Mark Twain twice referred to luxury. That such a consummate wordsmith as Twain should reiterate such a notion in a seemingly contradictory setting surely indicates that he felt strongly about the sentiment expressed. Twain showed himself a man whose notion of “luxury” was to be free and easy in the company of other men.

Mark Twain’s opinion of trains was the opposite of Ellet’s as well. Twain did not care for them. Some of his prejudice may have been due to railroads’ having supplanted steamboats as the primary mode of transportation in the West,¹²² but some at least had to do with his concept of comfort. Ellet approved of “large and commodious cars, clean and luxuriously furnished.” Twain was looking for something more from a travel experience.

Roughing It was how Twain entitled the story of his 1861 trip overland to California (and subsequent journey to Hawaii). In the book, he contrasted his memory of the journey with a contemporary (1872) description of travelling “almost the very ground” over the recently completed Union Pacific rail line. To make his point, he quoted from an article in the *New York Times* that rhapsodized about “tables covered with snowy linen and garnished with services of solid silver,” and “Ethiop waiters, flitting

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Fries Lummis Ellet, *Summer Rambles in the West* (New York: Riker, 1853), 39.

¹²¹ Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, vol. 2, *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1972), 52.

¹²² See *Life on the Mississippi*, particularly the end of chapters 15 and 23.

about in spotless white.” Twain considered that travel on the train had none of the adventure and none of the freedom represented by the stagecoach. In the first chapter of *Roughing It*, he pointed out that “There was no Pacific railroad in those fine times of ten or twelve years ago – not a single rail of it.” For Twain, civilization in the form of the train had destroyed the “fine times.”¹²³

One of the objections Twain had concerning trains was the restraint required by the demands of polite society, a society that included women. He personified the train as being respectable and therefore tiresome. Concerning traveling on a train in France in the 1860s, Twain complained that railroading “is too tedious. Stagecoaching is infinitely more delightful.”¹²⁴ Twain voiced the longings of many a man when he had Huckleberry Finn say at the end of his adventures, “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize (sic) me, and I can't stand it.”¹²⁵ Respectability was a heavy burden.

Twain was not the only man to gravitate towards the free and easy bachelor society. On several railroads this casual concept of comfort was to be found in the smoking car. *The Railroad Gazette* reprinted from the *Yonkers (N. Y.) Gazette* a marvelous commendation:

Many men, though they may not wish to smoke, on taking a train for a short trip usually prefer a seat in the smoking car. They say that in case of a crowd when once they get a seat in the smoking car it is theirs until they choose to give it up. Besides, they like the company. It is free and easy, good natured and jolly. One seldom sees a sour face in a smoking car. If there is one it soon vanishes to the rear after it has finished puffing its own cigar. Most of the pleasant stories of the train are told in the smoking car and many good songs are there sung and no one objects to music or hearty laughter. . . . The smoking car is one of the institutions of American travel. Long may it roll.¹²⁶

This short passage is packed with significance. It reflects attitudes mirroring those of Mark Twain and other men whose idea of comfort excluded the presence of ladies.

¹²³ Twain, *Roughing It*, 64, 44.

¹²⁴ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, or, The New Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, c1911), 106.

¹²⁵ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1953), 312.

¹²⁶ “The Smoking Car,” *The Railroad Gazette* 16 (25 January 1884), 73.

The writer of this little piece displayed a number of assumptions. “Free and easy” was not possible with ladies present; a man who did not want to be “good natured and jolly” would quickly return to the ladies’ car (“vanishes to the rear”) after he finished his cigar. The image here is of action: telling stories, singing songs, and laughing – not to mention smoking. “Once they get a seat in the smoking car it is theirs until they choose to give it up” indicates strongly that there were men who did not eagerly stand so ladies could sit down.¹²⁷

As discussed earlier, railroad accommodations developed over time from general seating to distinct and separate spaces based on sex, class, and race. Behavior formed another category of distinction. From the beginning of railroading, white males who were not lacking for money had the widest choice of how to travel. Even they had constraints on their choices. Gentlemen not accompanying ladies generally could not ride in the ladies’ car. The period of about 1840 to 1870 saw another restriction applied – against smoking.

Charles Dickens commented in 1842 on the general way of things at the time: “there is a gentleman’s car and a ladies’ car: the main distinction between which is that in the first, everybody smokes; and in the second, nobody does.” This state of affairs continued for the most part until well after the Civil War. At some point after the war, probably in the early 1870s, a “colonel” was quoted as complaining that “Under the lock-car rule, all other cars are virtually smoking cars.” The lock-car rule refers to the restriction of only allowing ladies and their escorts into the ladies’ car. By 1885, however, a Maryland steamboat company attempted to bolster its argument for the maintenance of separate facilities for “colored people” by a reference to smoking cars on trains. Arguing before the Federal District Court of Maryland, the company declared that they merely responded to the public’s wishes by distinguishing between whites and blacks. The company compared its establishment of separate accommodations to railroad smoking cars, noting that: “There was a time when every man on a railroad train who wanted to smoke assumed the right to do so in every car except what was known as the

¹²⁷ It would be a mistake to take the attitudes expressed by this writer as universal. On the other hand, that a national railroad journal found the article to be of sufficient interest to reprint it argues for a certain degree of prevalence even if not universality of such a point of view.

‘ladies’ car,’ but the demand of the majority of male passengers gradually compelled the enforcement of a regulation that there should be no smoking unless there was a car set apart for it.” By 1885, behavior reflecting gentility was viewed as a legitimate distinguishing characteristic, not only between races and classes, but within them. Men could choose to demonstrate gentility or not.¹²⁸

Railroads had always sought to moderate and restrict behavior, both in an effort to protect property from damage and to avoid discouraging women from traveling. In 1853, the *American Railroad Journal* published the content of some notices that the Michigan Central Railroad had posted in its cars. These notices concerned such things as procedures for handling baggage, information about lunch stops, and prohibited behaviors. That the railroad was serious about its expectations of passengers is evidenced by the fact that, as the *American Railroad Journal* pointed out, these notices were “posted between the windows, throughout the cars.” The *ARRJ* also found these regulations to be serious and valuable enough to be “worthy the attention of other companies.” Second on the list on these notices, just after advice on checking and claiming baggage, was the following: “Gentlemen are requested not to place their feet upon the cushions, or otherwise deface the cars.”¹²⁹ That the Michigan Central found it necessary to single out “gentlemen” rather indicates that ladies were perceived as being less likely to indulge in such un-genteel behavior.

Such regulations, along with the increasing grandeur of the cars, do seem to have moderated the conduct of men in day coaches and first-class cars. The impulse to such unrestrained behavior did not disappear however. It simply moved to the smoking cars. Smoking was merely an indicator. As noted by Kasson, etiquette advisors censured smoking in public, especially in the presence of ladies. Smoking also represented an

¹²⁸ Dickens, *American Notes*, 61-2; “The Snow Blockade,” *Romance and humor of the rail: a book for railway men and travellers, representing everyday life on the railroad in every department of the railway service, with sketches and rhymes of romance, and numerous anecdotes and incidents* (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1873), 240; *The Sue*, District Court, D. Maryland; 22 F. 843; 1885 U.S. Dist. Lexis 7.

¹²⁹ “Passenger Regulations on the Michigan Central Railroad,” *American Railroad Journal* 26 (October 1, 1853), 638. This might appear to be an example of behavior refuting George Pullman’s contention that “the more artistic and refined the mere external surroundings . . . the better and more refined the man.” However, in 1853 on the Michigan Central Railroad, the surroundings were not particularly artistic or refined. These cars most likely resembled the day coaches in general use in the northeastern states at the time, which were only beginning to be decorated.

unrestrained behavior that violated the disciplined body management expected in polite society.¹³⁰ Beginning by at least 1840 with the tendency accelerating after the Civil War, railroads sought to ban it from the spaces reserved for those most likely to be offended – genteel women. The smoking car had become a repository for any and all less-than-genteel persons and behaviors.

“The smoking car” was for the most part a misnomer, at least by the late 1870s. Generally, no whole car was set aside for smoking once smoking became a restricted activity. In parlor and chair cars, separate compartments were built to accommodate first-class smoking passenger. In sleeping cars, smoking facilities were seldom specifically allocated. Smokers traveling in sleeping cars had to stand in the vestibule outside the car or walk to another car in order to smoke. The standard smoking facility supplied by most railroads was a combination smoking and baggage car, or smoking and mail car. By the late nineteenth century, an interesting dichotomy had developed: that of smoking cars as either second-class or privileged accommodations.

One direction the smoking car took was that of extreme ornateness and complexity. The *Marchena*, described in chapter 3, epitomizes this development with its elaborate décor and multiple spaces, such as the barbershop. The late nineteenth- and twentieth-century lounge or club car ultimately replaced this line of evolution. “Free and easy” fairly describes the behavior in these cars. For the most part, these smoking cars were well maintained and decorated, but behavior did tend to be less than genteel, as one English traveler observed on a train in Pennsylvania in 1880, noting that occupants of the smoking car sat “with their feet tilted outside the window to woo the grateful breeze about their trouser legs.”¹³¹ An illustration from about that same time shows that even top-hatted businessmen were not above putting their feet on the furniture. Such conduct was not considered untoward in the smoking car.

Accommodations on the smoker varied greatly between railroads and areas of the country. As demonstrated by the description of the *Marchena*, a smoking car could be quite lavish. On the other hand, because the smoking car was so often a repository for

¹³⁰ Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility*, 124-5.

¹³¹ For a description of the evolution of the lounge car, see White, 299-311; C. B. Berry, *The Other Side* (New York 1880), 49, as quoted in Mencken, 173.

the less-than-respectable, railroads sometimes assigned older equipment for the purpose. Often, particularly in the South, the “smoking car” comprised a section of the baggage car, sometimes the whole of it. Shelves for baggage might double as seats in a bare and unlighted space, cavernous except for whatever trunks and bags were about. Even if the physical accommodations matched or exceeded those of a standard day coach, conductors directed persons considered less than respectable enough for first-class or even standard cars to the smoker.

One somewhat extreme example of this can be seen through the testimony of a conductor in an appeal to a murder case. Conductor John Gillies worked for the St. Louis – San Francisco Railway. On December 26, 1890, Bud Blount, the accused, sought to board the train in Granby, Missouri. Jack Majors, a brakeman assisting Gillies, asked Blount to wait to board until passengers could disembark. According to Gillies’ testimony, Blount became upset, and after boarding the train, began moving about the cars and the platforms between them, saying “I would like to find the son of a bitch that would object to me getting on this train when and as I pleased.” Gillies attempted to calm him down, even to the extent of allowing Blount access to the ladies’ car despite not being with a lady. Gillies testified that Blount did not appear to be drunk, but that while he was in the ladies’ car, Blount took out a bottle and began to drink from it. When Gillies told Blount that he could not drink in the ladies’ car, Blount struck at him with a knife. Gillies tried to get Blount to move to the smoking car. As Blount was moving towards the front of the train, he encountered Majors between cars, shoved him down to the platform, pulled out a pistol and shot him. The appeal hinged not on the actions of the accused, but was an attempt on his part to change his conviction to manslaughter rather than murder.¹³²

The testimony of Gillies about what he said to Blount while attempting to get him to move to the smoking car demonstrates the attitude of many railroaders towards the smoking car. After seeing Blount try to take a drink in the ladies’ car, and after Blount twice struck at him with a knife, Gillies said to Blount: “Now, don’t drink in this car; if you want to drink and have a good time, go to the mail-car, the smoker; nobody will

¹³² The State v. Blount, Appellant, Supreme Court of Missouri, Division Two, 110 Mo. 322; 19 S.W. 650; 1892 Mo. Lexis 79.

bother you at all there.’”¹³³ The conductor of a train saw nothing wrong with sending a belligerent and violent man, who even if not drunk was drinking, to the smoking car.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, most railroads considered Blacks of both sexes to be properly accommodated in the smoking car. African Americans objected, sometimes violently, to being categorized in the same way as drunks and those who otherwise behaved in an unrestrained fashion (see Chapter Two). As historian Glenda Gilmore has pointed out, many African Americans in the South and elsewhere seized upon the ideology of the Best Man and the Best Woman in the late nineteenth century.¹³⁴ This method of determining merit depended upon acceptance and practice of gentility as preached by middle-class whites. Middle-class African American railroad passengers therefore ascribed to the same precepts of behavior as did middle-class whites, and desired to be treated accordingly. However, to be black in the nineteenth century meant being seen as innately immoral or otherwise somehow not respectable. Some African Americans sought to adhere to middle-class standards of restraint and composure but were, like Ida B. Wells, relegated to the same environment as smokers, drinkers, and rowdies. Therefore, even when a railroad correctly maintained that the physical accommodations were in no way inferior to those found in other cars, black passengers could and did object to being seated in the less-than-respectable environment of a smoking car.¹³⁵

One important aspect of a “smoker” was the escape it provided from the responsibility inherent in traveling with ladies. There were many who agreed with the Yonkers newspaper writer quoted above: being obligated to accommodate and protect women tended to make a man “a sour face.” This resistance to the role of protector was

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender & Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 62-3, 75-6. Gilmore notes that some African Americans in the late nineteenth century attempted to make the white middle class apply the same standards of gentility to everyone. These middle-class Blacks “demanded that class serve as a marker of manhood and womanhood” (75). Unfortunately, class, like gender, was trumped by race.

¹³⁵ Eventually, court decisions forced the railroads into actually supplying equal accommodations for whites and blacks, including separate ladies’ cars and smoking cars. On this basis, courts upheld the practice of “separate but equal,” prohibiting the mixing of races in the same car. See, for example, *Chilton, Appellant, v. The St. Louis & Iron Mountain Railway Company*, Supreme Court of Missouri, Division One, 114 Mo. 88; 21 S.W. 457; 1893 Mo. Lexis 201, citing “equally safe, commodious and comfortable cars for the negroes.”

mirrored by some women who likewise acknowledged the standard, but saw a need for change in woman's role as dependant.¹³⁶

Nineteenth-century feminist and social reformer Margaret Fuller argued passionately for women having equal rights and opportunities for intellectual and social fulfillment. She pointed out that a large percentage of women could never realize the domestic ideal of husband and family, and that even if marriage did furnish "a sure home and protector," death or circumstances could quickly force a woman to be on her own. The death of her father forced Fuller herself to go to work. She determined therefore that all women should receive sufficient education to be able to make it on their own. Feminist though she was however, Fuller accepted that the ideal was for a woman to have a protector in the form of a husband.¹³⁷

For Fuller, as for most of genteel Victorian society, men protected and women were dependent. This theme repeats again and again in the history of train travel in the nineteenth century. Male and female travelers commented on how eager men were to assist women, particularly those unaccompanied by men. Mary Lundie Duncan, a well known English memoir writer of the mid-nineteenth century, wrote that "I have found a gentleman alight, and hand you out, and inquire about your baggage, with whom your only previous intercourse has been an inquiry if the next station was that you wished to alight at." Scottish travel handbook writer James Fullarton Muirhead commented that "every traveller reports that the United States is the Paradise of women." Muirhead noted that while traveling, as in the larger society, "Man meekly submits to be the hewer of wood, the drawer of water, and the beast of burden for the superior sex."¹³⁸

Being a beast of burden was codified for railroad employees. Conductors and brakemen were directed by regulation to take special care "to accommodate a lady, an

¹³⁶ "The Smoking Car," 73.

¹³⁷ Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 218. Fuller did not of course limit her justification for a woman's education to the practical aspects of having to earn support for herself or her family. Such aspects as better supporting her husband's endeavors and educating children, not to mention personal fulfillment, formed the core of Fuller's reasoning. However, her ultimate argument was that often a woman did have to go out and obtain "the employment she alone can secure" (219).

¹³⁸ Mary G. Lundie Duncan, *America As I Found It* (London: James Nesbet and Co., 1852), 328; James Fullarton Muirhead, *Land of Contrasts* (London: Lamson, Wolfe & Company, 1898), chap. 2, as quoted in Allan Nevins, ed. *American Social History as Recorded by British Travellers*. (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1923. Reprint, New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969), 526.

invalid, or an exacting passenger.” Beyond regulations, societal convention expected that a passenger conductor act like a gentleman. He had to do so, because he in fact and usage was the official protector of the women on his train. Advising her readers on how to approach traveling, American writer Lillian Foster observed that “if you are put under the care of a handsome and gentlemanly conductor, you will receive every polite attention.” An aristocratic Briton agreed, stating that a lady could travel in America “in perfect comfort and safety,” because “The conductors and all the train officials devote themselves most loyally to her service.”¹³⁹

So ubiquitous was this attitude of women’s right to protection that it took on the weight of law. In a number of cases in the middle and late nineteenth century, courts based decisions at least partially on consideration of women having a right to particular attentions and protections on the part of railroads and their employees. In 1863 in Pennsylvania, Thomas Keenan was convicted of the murder of John Obey, a passenger car conductor. Keenan, in the company of several other men had “entered the car, all more or less intoxicated.” The men “were noisy and boisterous in the car, sitting on each other’s knees, talking loudly, and using improper language.” Obey “admonished them to be quiet, ‘as there were ladies in the car;’ but they continued as before.” The conductor twice more advised the defendant to be quiet, “without effect, save to elicit threatening replies.” Finally, Obey took hold of Keenan to put him off of the car. A scuffle ensued, during which Keenan drew a knife and stabbed Obey repeatedly. Keenan was found guilty in a lower court, but wished to appeal to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. Judge C. J. Lowrie, in an opinion denying a new trial, stated that no argument of self-defence could apply. The behavior of the accused violated certain standards. Judge Lowrie noted that “what is usual and ordinary in any given society, is the law of that society.” Keenan misbehaved, and “the conductor had a right to put out a passenger so

¹³⁹ Pullman Palace Car Company, *Car Service Rules of the Operating Department of Pullman's Palace Car Company: revised October 1st, 1888* (Chicago: C. H. Blakely & Co., 1888), 13; Lillian Foster, *Wayside Glimpses, North and South* (New York: Rudd & Carlton, 1860), 104; Lady (Mary McDowell) Duffus Hardy, *Through Cities and Prairie Lands, Sketches of an American Tour* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1881), 87.

misbehaving.” Since Keenan attacked the conductor who was upholding the “law” of the society, he was guilty of murder.¹⁴⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century however, women’s claims to protection were beginning to break down – at least in some courts of law. In the case of *The Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railway Company v. Wolfe* in 1891, a male passenger sued the railroad for being ejected after having used “profane and improper language in the presence of lady passengers.” Judge C. J. Olds determined that since the passenger had been accused by the conductor of not having handed in a ticket, the language used “in a heat of passion caused by a sudden and wanton insult and unexpected charge against his truthfulness and honesty,” decreased the offense. While acknowledging that “the language was unjustifiable, and was an insult to those in whose presence it was uttered,” the judge saw “no reason why” the passenger should not recover damages for being improperly ejected.¹⁴¹

Another case from the end of the century demonstrates a shift towards women being at least partially responsible for their own actions. In 1891, a woman was injured while attempting to alight from a passenger car at a station. The woman had boarded with a number of packages and had informed the conductor of her planned stop. When the train did arrive at her station, no conductor or brakeman helped her with her bundles. Because of this, by the time she had gathered her packages and moved to the steps to descend from the car, the train began to pull out. Fearful at being carried away from her home, she attempted to alight anyway, fell and was injured. Justice C. J. Howard agreed that the railroad was negligent for not having assistance available and for failing to give the passenger sufficient time to safely alight from the train. However, he found that the railroad was not solely negligent, and was not responsible for the passenger’s injuries. Because the car was in motion, the woman “should have returned to her seat, and asked compensation of the company, if she were entitled to any, for carrying her past her station

¹⁴⁰ Keenan v. The Commonwealth. Supreme Court of Pennsylvania 44 Pa. 55; 1863 Pa. Lexis 21.

¹⁴¹ The Louisville, New Albany and Chicago Railway Company v. Wolfe. Supreme Court of Indiana 128 Ind. 347; 27 N.E. 606; 1891 Ind. Lexis 329.

and away from her home.” By taking action on her own, the woman stepped outside of the railroad’s responsibility to protect her.¹⁴²

While making the woman responsible for her own actions, this case nevertheless demonstrated a lingering attitude towards women as being deserving of extra attention. In his opinion, Judge Howard noted that the woman was “believing and expecting, as well she might, that the conductor, or other servant of defendant would meet and assist her down the steps and to alight in safety.”¹⁴³ Had the plaintiff been a man, the question of assistance would never have come up unless he had been obviously infirm in some way.

Women were not above exploiting their position. When a man became predator rather than protector, a respectable woman might use her helpless dependent role against him. One story of such an encounter could hardly be told more to the point than as it was related in *The Railroad Gazette*:

She was a handsome young woman. . . . This was remarked by a conceited young snip of a fellow who looked “masher” from the crown of his hat to the heels of his gaiters. She had no sooner purchased her ticket and taken her seat than he began to circle around. She saw him and read his character, and beckoning him to approach, she asked:

“Are you going to Buffalo?”

“Yes – ah – certainly.”

“I am glad to hear it. Will you do me a favor?”

“With all my heart. Command me.”

“I am afraid my trunk was left at the hotel. Could I ask you to run up and see about it?”

“Of course – certainly – only too happy.”

It was twenty minutes to train time. He was back in 16, his face flushed, his ears red and his breathing spasmodic. He had done some tall running. The trunk was not there.

“Oh dear, but would you be so kind as to look into the baggage-room?”

He would. He did. He ended a score of trunks around, made a dozen inquiries for a Saratoga trunk with an “E” on the ends, and finally returned to the waiting room to say:

But she wasn’t there! The train was also gone! A man . . . informed him that he had no sooner started for the baggage room than she had picked up

¹⁴² *The Toledo, St. Louis and Kansas City Railroad Co. v. Wingate*. Supreme Court of Indiana 143 Ind. 125; 37 N.E. 274; 1894 Ind. Lexis 358. For some reason, this report does not give the name of the woman passenger who was the plaintiff in this case. “Wingate” was identified as the station at which the woman was injured.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

her reticule and boarded the train, her face wearing a happy smile and her rosebud mouth gently puckered up as she hummed: “The chap I left behind me!”¹⁴⁴

The observer then added insult to injury by commenting to the young man that it looked “as if it was a put up job to choke off your society.” This had, of course, been the intention. Respectable white women could sometimes take advantage of their roles in society to protect themselves even when some individuals were ready to ignore society’s standards

Sex and race distinguished perception and treatment in railroad passenger service in the nineteenth century, just as with the society as a whole. Genteel white women occupied one physical and psychological space, sometimes accompanied by white men. White men had a choice of environments, from the atmosphere of domesticity in the ladies’ car at the end of the train to the bachelor milieu of the smoker at the front, from mannered and restrained to free and easy, with a mixture in between. For the most part being considered less than respectable, African American passengers had no choice. Railroad passenger service conformed to Victorian gender roles and concepts of respectability constraining both the genteel and less-than-respectable. Only white males could choose.

¹⁴⁴ “She was too Sharp for Him,” *The Railroad Gazette* 16 (25 January 1884), 73.

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century American railroads were a major cultural force, affecting and structuring the lives of many, if not most, of the people in the United States. An impetus towards industrialization, the pattern for modern corporate practices, and an economic behemoth, railroads built bridges, dug tunnels and laid track not only through landscapes but lives as well. Trains embodied progress, a modern technological wonder that helped create industrial America.

At the same time, the standards of the Victorian society in which it developed shaped the culture of trains. The emerging consumer culture impacted railroads as they sought to supply a service in a sometimes wildly competitive environment. Railroads were as well the product of an ordered historically progressive mind-set, with the white Anglo-Saxon race the pinnacle of civilization. In some ways, first-class passenger service on trains embodied the ideal of separate spheres, exemplifying Victorian categorization and compartmentalization. Concepts of differentiation and specialization governed new perceptions of class and gender roles.

The day-to-day reality of railroads lay somewhere between being a product of cultural mores and being an overwhelming but impersonal technological force. Trains were a fact of life. While railroads were part of a mannered culture, the nature of railroading as a commodity and as an industrial technology also affected practices. Mirroring attitudes from the larger culture, railroads sought to protect women passengers, and many regulations and practices reflected that intention. On the other hand, the business of railroads was not protecting women, but was, rather, running trains. A story from early in the history of trains in America illustrates this point graphically. In 1840, Englishman Thomas Colley Grattan was traveling by rail from a steamboat connection on the Delaware Bay to one on the Chesapeake Bay. At a road crossing, he and the other passengers felt “a violent jolt accompanied by a loud crash.” The train did not slow down, so everyone felt relieved that there had been no accident to the train itself. Upon

arriving at the waterside destination, Grattan inquired of the conductor and engineer the cause of the noise:

“Well, it was in going over a chaise and horse,” replied one of them coolly.

“There was no one in the chaise?” asked I, anxiously.

“Oh, yes, there were two ladies.”

“Were they thrown out?”

“I guess they were and pretty well smashed up, too.”

“Good God! And why didn’t you stop the train? Can’t you send back to know what state they’re in?”

“Well, mister, I recon’ they’re in the state of Delaware; but you’d better jump into the steamer there or you are like to lose your passage.”¹⁴⁵

Since Grattan’s published recounting of this story took place almost twenty years after the event the details may have become somewhat hazy. However, unless he fabricated the whole thing, it seems clear that even early on, railroads were firmly committed to getting passengers to their destinations on time, even to the extent of violating cultural standards.

One could see this story as contradicting contemporary cultural mores about protecting women. The dismay expressed by Grattan does, on the one hand, demonstrate a nineteenth-century gentleman’s horror at the thought of women being harmed. On the other hand, the story exemplifies another Victorian precept, that of compartmentalization. For the trainmen, the women in the chaise constituted “other,” not a part of the railroad employees’ concern. Such distinction typifies Victorian practices. Railroads’ treatment of female African American passengers in the latter part of the century was simply another example of this separation and distinction of “other.”

Lyn Lofland has suggested that the nineteenth and early twentieth-century “instruments for the creation and maintenance of the segregation of persons and activities in urban public space” were largely contrived and controlled by the middle class.¹⁴⁶ Victorians utilized space to define and maintain societal distinctions. It seems clear that through the design of passenger cars and their relative location in a train, railroads applied Victorian distinctions to passenger service.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Colley Grattan, *Civilized America* (London, 1859), 161-2, as quoted in August Mencken, *The Railroad Passenger Car* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 103.

¹⁴⁶ Lofland, *A World of Strangers*, 90.

As in the larger society, the first level of distinction railroads made was between respectable and less-than-respectable. Even gender difference carried less weight. As seen in the treatment of African-American women, those considered less-than-respectable received little recognition of their femininity. After respectability, however, gender had the greatest significance. One of the most interesting concepts coming out of the work on this thesis is that nineteenth century societal understandings of sex, class and race led to the effect of there being multiple genders.¹⁴⁷ Women, and men, were “gendered” according to the culture’s expectations of them. Victorians did not assign an Irish housemaid the same role as the lady of the house. Likewise, a dynamic business tycoon did not meet with the same expectations as a Protestant minister, even if both came from the same class, or even family. The tycoon could step out of one role and into another. At home, he would be expected to be quite similar to the minister, no matter how unruly his business practices. Only white men, however, could consistently maintain an existence outside of a particular role or category.

Nineteenth-century American precepts of categorization resonate through railroading. However, such practices often contradicted the requirements of a consumer driven technology. The intersection between railroads’ business principles and the standards of the society reflects changes occurring elsewhere. Women and men shared sleeping space on Pullman and other convertible sleeping cars, forcing revision of what had previously been considered respectable. How did this innovation impact on the larger society? What echo did the dichotomy of male roles demonstrated by the distinction between genteel riders in the ladies’ car and the unrestrained behaviors of smoking car habitués have in the rest of nineteenth-century America? It seems obvious that changes and variations in the design and culture of smoking cars reflected shifts in male gender perceptions, but how did smoking cars indicate these perceptions? How did railroading demonstrate societal perceptions of respectability, especially by those

¹⁴⁷ This follows Joan Wallach Scott, who defined gender as “the social organization of sexual differences” (*Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 2). Scott looks at gender as something which has meaning “conveyed through implicit or explicit contrast, through internal differentiation” (Ibid., 7). She focuses on this contrast as between men and women. If one were to take the same concept a step further, and compare differentiation *within* a sex rather than between them, contrasts often emerge based on non-class, non-race roles. To discuss these roles, lacking a better term, gender has been the concept used.

considered less than respectable? Questions like these indicate that further examination of railroading as an indicator and formulator of nineteenth-century culture would be productive.¹⁴⁸

This thesis sought to illustrate how societal concepts such as separate spheres, gentility, and an ordered and hierarchical universe affected the creation of practices and space in railroad passenger service. By decorating passenger cars in particular ways and assigning their use according to the perceived worth of passengers, railroad managers demonstrated adherence to certain Victorian values and perceptions, but they did so always cognizant of the bottom line.

¹⁴⁸ One excellent example of a work examining a technology as a social process (which this thesis has attempted to do) is David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992).

Appendix – Illustrations



Fig. 1 Early Car, from M. N. Forney, "American Locomotives and Cars," in Thomas M. Cooley, et al, *The American Railway* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1889), 139.

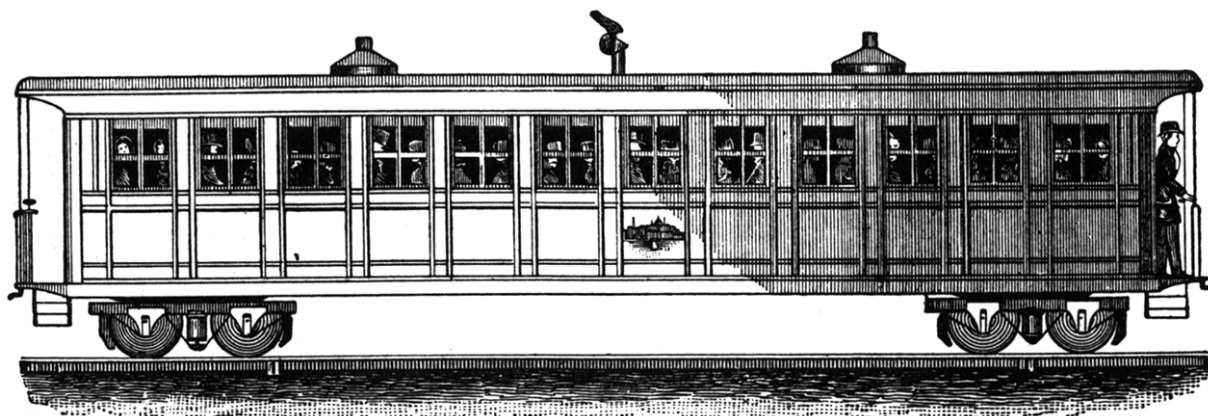


Fig. 2 Early American Car, 1834, from M. N. Forney, "American Locomotives and Cars," in Thomas M. Cooley, et al, *The American Railway* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1889), 140.

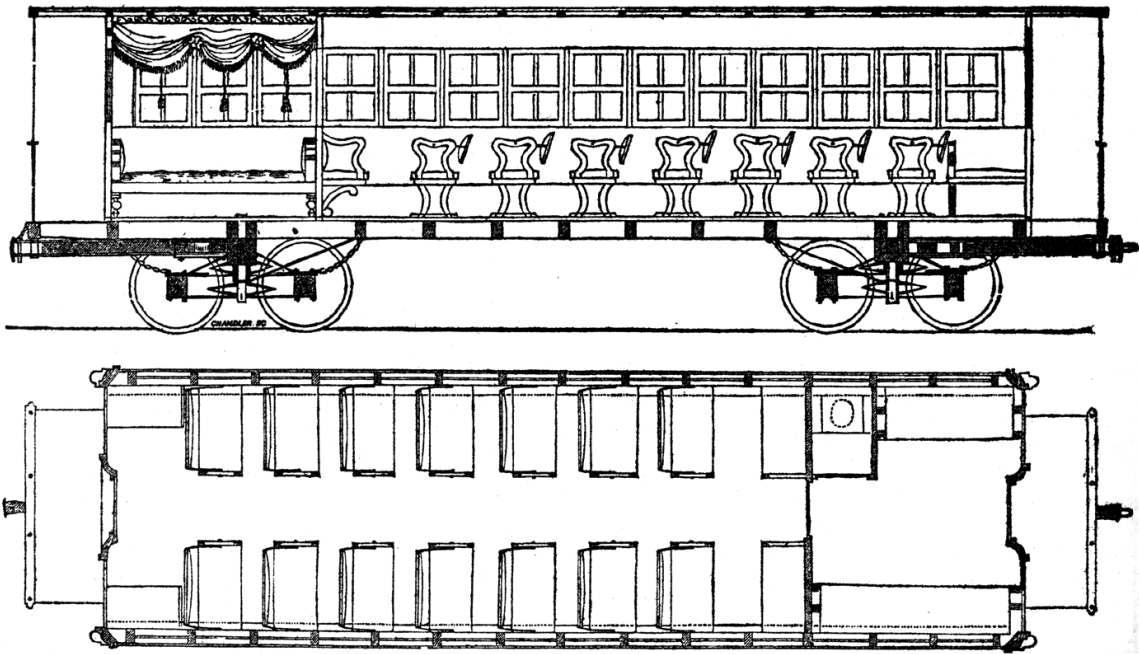


Fig. 3 Section and Plan of car with ladies' compartment, from Hollingsworth, as advertised in *American Railroad Journal*, November 27, 1845

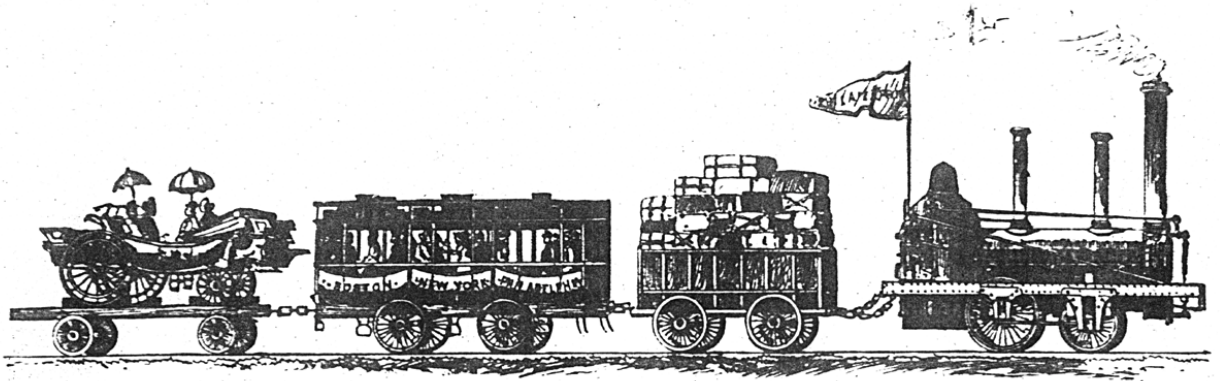


Fig. 4 **Rendering of 1832 Train, as printed in *Harper's Weekly*, August 25, 1888**



Fig. 5 Immigrant Car, as printed in *Harper's Weekly*, November 13, 1886

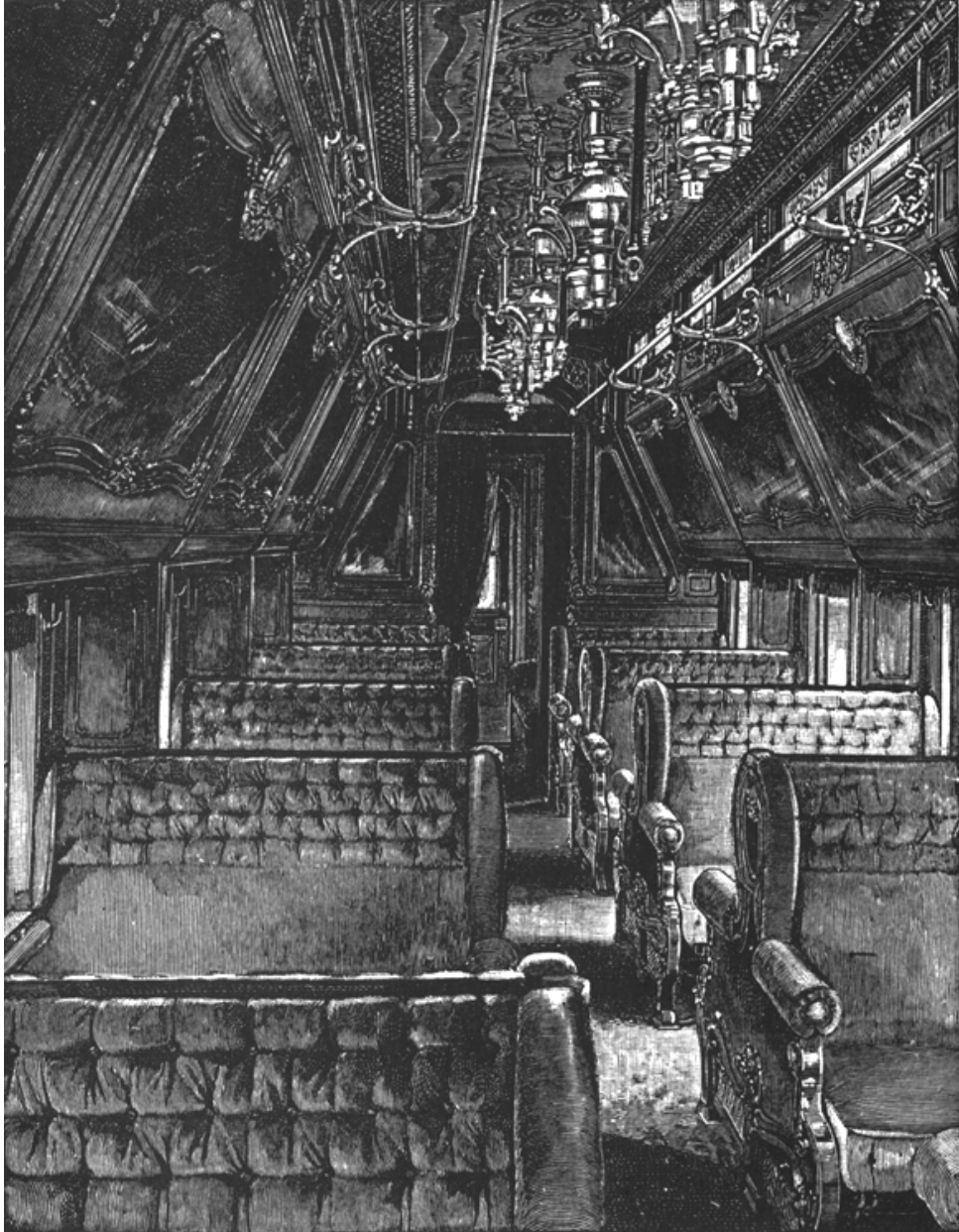


Fig. 6 **Pullman Sleeper**, from Gen. Horace Porter, "Railway Passenger Travel," in Thomas N. Cooley, et al, *The American Railway* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1889), 250.

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