

Passage to America: Celebrated European Visitors in Search of the American Adventure

Gloria Deák

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Passage to America: Celebrated European Visitors in Search of the American Adventure Gloria Deák America was a source of fascination to Europeans arriving there during the course of the nineteenth century. At first glance, the New World was very similar to the societies they left behind in their native countries, but in many aspects of politics, culture and society, the American experience was vastly different – almost unrecognisably so – from Old World Europe.

Europeans were astounded that America could survive without a monarch, a standing army and the hierarchical society which still dominated Europe. Some travellers, such as the actress Fanny Kemble, were truly convinced America would eventually revert to a monarchy; others, such as Frances Wright and even Oscar Wilde, took their opinions further, and attempted to fix aspects of America – described in 1827 by the young Scottish captain Basil Hall, as 'one of England's "occasional failures".

Many prominent visitors to the United States recorded their responses to this emerging society in their diaries, letters and journals; and many of them, like the fulminating Frances Trollope, were brutally and offensively honest in their accounts of the New World. They provide an insight into an America which is barely recognizable today whilst their writings set down a diverse and lively assortment of personal travel accounts.

This book compares the impressions of a group of discerning and prominent Europeans from the cultural sphere – from the writers Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Oscar Wilde to luminaries of music and theatre such as Tchaikovsky and Fanny Kemble. Their reactions to the New World are as revealing of the European and American worlds as they are colourful and varied, providing a unique insight into the experiences of nineteenth century travelers to America.



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