

he wrote, 'one could hardly regret the loss of any number of Apaches and Comanches'. And he wrote this before word filtered through at the end of June of the massacre of Colonel George Custer and two hundred cavalrymen at Little Big Horn River.

The news from the South Dakota Territory almost ruined the republic's one-hundredth birthday party on July 4. The fact was, however, that the frontier was all but tamed. The US's transcontinental railway had been completed in 1869. Barbed wire, invented in 1873, contained the vast expanses between east and west. Out in the western mountains, Colorado became the thirty-eighth state of the Union during the exhibition.

The Centennial Exhibition's message was of a thrusting, forward-looking nation. Some popular events played to the idea of the US as pre-industrial idyll: the Strawberry Display, the Trial of Reaping Machines, the Exhibit of Sheep, Swine and Goats. But the flat stoneless plains of the Midwest had long since been transformed into the nation's grain basket. It was forty-five years since Cyrus McCormick had invented his revolutionary reaper. Or had he stolen the idea from the Virginian slave who helped him construct it? The reaper had featured over the years in several grim courtroom battles. For one of them McCormick had engaged Abraham Lincoln, a young Illinois lawyer.

By the time of the Centennial Exhibition the question was being asked whether the US's age of invention wasn't also one of blatant manipulation. Market crashes ran at a rate of one a decade. The 'small man' always ended up ruined. The crash of 1873 had seen President Ulysses S. Grant, the Civil War leader and hero accused of accepting gifts from businessmen. The robber barons were blamed, characters like Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, Daniel Drew and James Fisk. Their preferred title was

'captains of industry'. Gould and Fisk had attempted to buy all the gold in New York City and almost got away with it. The press called Gould the most hated man in America. Drew chimed in that the US had become too democratic.

A hothouse of activity, where was the US to expel its spare energy? For most of the past hundred years, it had turned its back on the Old World, got on with inward development and expanded to its west. But the US had also sketched out a broader frontier. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had thrown a boundary rope around the Americas, a 'Keep Out' sign to foreigners. Outside influences remained – colonial vestiges like Spain in Cuba and Britain in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands – but their power had diminished.

Lately there had been a demand for the US's services within the region. In 1869 the government of the Dominican Republic had called for help and, in a parlous financial state, offered to sell itself to the US. President Grant had drawn up a treaty of annexation. The notion was dropped, however, after complaints within the US that it was wrong for a Caribbean republic with a large black population to turn its independence over to the US, especially so soon after the Civil War.

The Centennial Exhibition's most beautiful building was the horticultural hall. In glass and steel, it was of twelfth-century Moresque style with surrounding pools and flowerbeds, a 'reflection of the Victorian passion for nature'. *Leslie's*, the popular magazine, remarked that it was the displays of exotic – even weird – natural phenomena that visitors considered the best part of the exhibition. The horticultural hall also had the advantage of being a compact and manageable area. Walking it amounted to little more than a kilometre. Visitors flocked to view its orchids, orange trees, date palms, fig trees and pineapples, but one item