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AN EMPIRE AMONG EMPIRES



In 1884–85 representatives of the major European powers met in Berlin. The topic was empire. Great Britain, France, and Germany agreed on ground rules for their great game. They negotiated a blueprint for carving up Africa among themselves, an agreement that, along with new technologies of violence, medicine, and communication, accelerated their imperial expansion and tightened control over their colonies.¹ Between the Berlin meetings and the world war, nearly a quarter million miles were added each year to empires worldwide. By the turn of the century it had become clear to many, including V. I. Lenin, that “the world is completely divided up.”²

The United States was invited to Berlin (probably because of its interest in Liberia, founded by the American Colonization Society in 1821), and it sent a representative but refused to be a signatory to the final agreement.³ The reasons derived in part from the legacy of Washington’s warning about entangling alliances, and also from a widely held belief, sometimes loudly broadcast, that America’s republican institutions were a standing rebuke to Europe’s corrupt politics and imperial pretensions. Histories of the United States and Europe have largely accepted this American pretension.

An essential part of American national identity is based on difference, on a tendency to define America as distinct from, even separate from, all that is foreign, whether Europe or those parts of the world Americans unself-consciously called “uncivilized” or “savage.”⁴ American republi-

canism and Protestant Christianity, they thought, were the keynotes of their distinctiveness, as was their rejection of imperial ambitions. One could argue—and I will—that here they were indulging in a semantic sleight of hand. They obscured their actual empire by describing it as “the westward movement” or the “westward expansion” of their country. True, the Constitution had a unique provision that seemed anti-imperialist on the face of it: it allowed territories to become states on equal terms with the original states, which is why westward expansion was considered a fair description of the Euro-American settlement of the continent. But it was fair only to the degree that its prior possession by Indians and Mexicans was erased or denied. Empire, as William Appleman Williams long ago argued, has been an American way of life.⁵ Dispossession and colonial rule have been central if unacknowledged themes in American history.

It is true and important that with the unhappy exception of the annexation of the Philippines and the somewhat more successful instance of Puerto Rico at the end of the Spanish-American wars of 1898, the United States did not formally colonize any overseas territories. That differentiates it from the European powers and Japan, but it does not close the question. U.S. citizens avidly acquired an entire continent, and they did it through conquest; meanwhile, they developed and militarily defended an overseas empire based on trade and finance. It has been said that the United States was an empire without being imperial.⁶ In eschewing territorial control and favoring an empire of commerce and finance, the United States was perhaps prescient. Certainly it helped to shape the global economy and culture that it dominated for most of the twentieth century. The American way of empire raised fewer moral issues than did the European empires—though moral questions there were, and they were revelatory ones.

It has been difficult for Americans to recognize their continental expansion as an empire, especially when ethnocentric assumptions obscure the presence of Native Americans on the supposedly “empty” land. The empire as market power is similarly difficult to grasp, not being visible or tangible. Its abstract character may partly explain the paradox of a nation which is a global power and which does not teach geography in its schools and whose public has little interest in geographical knowledge beyond the borders of the United States.⁷ The comparison with Euro-

peans on this point is striking—and it is evident in American mapmaking. World atlases published in the United States typically included more domestic maps than did European ones—and the difference is substantial: up to 80 percent for American atlases, compared with 7–20 percent for those published in Europe.⁸

The participants at the (Berlin Conference) were not unaware of the rising power across the Atlantic. They had observed closely the military might of the Union armies, and they knew that the United States was on the verge of becoming the world's leading manufacturing nation. They feared that the size alone of the continental nations—the United States and Russia—would confer a worrisome advantage on them in international competition. And they feared that if they themselves could not expand, they would be vulnerable. In 1883, the English historian John Seeley warned,

If the United States and Russia hold together for another half century, they will at the end of that time completely dwarf such old European states as France and Germany and depress them into a second class. They will do the same to England, if at the end of that time England still sees herself as simply a European state.

German and Japanese leaders made the same point. In France, Jules Ferry told parliamentary critics of his colonial policies that if France abstained from empire, it would “descend from the first rank to the third or fourth.”⁹ The language of competition was pervasive in this era that relied so often on metaphors of Darwinian struggle. Many leading German academics, including Gustav Schmoller and Adolph Wagner, both liberals who favored the development of social citizenship, were pro-empire. The historian Heinrich von Treitschke told his students at Berlin that “every virile people has established colonial power” and warned that Germany must colonize to preserve the nation, phrasing the issue as a “matter of life and death.”¹⁰ The masculinity theme was evident everywhere, including in the United States, and in its decision for war and empire in 1898.¹¹

The nineteenth-century system of nations encouraged competition, and it was played out among national empires. Many factors were involved. Economic interests were surely part of the equation, but in a complicated way. The empires were money losers for national treasuries from

the beginning, though some individuals made fortunes in them. Yet there were counterbalancing risks in not having an imperial market—being shut out of the markets controlled by rival nations was one. So a defensive economics was as important as visions of new markets.¹² Americans were attuned to this issue in 1898. Prestige and even moral regeneration pressed the newly consolidated nation-states toward empire, and so did fear of internal divisions, which, it was hoped, might be moderated or wholly displaced by a collective imperial pride.¹³ Leaders of rapidly industrializing nations, notably Germany and the United States, might see a way to deflect social conflict in imperial adventures, while in other cases empire was pursued in the interest of completing national consolidation, as in Italy's North African colonial efforts or in the United States after the Civil War. The United States entered the race for empire for all these reasons.

There are and have been both (imperial) and (anti-imperial strains) in American politics and culture. Often the two battled in the mind and heart of the same person. It is often difficult to predict or even later explain why one or the other is dominant in a given instance. Americans are drawn to both liberty and empire, yet the two political logics have an unstable relation with each other, even if they are often linked. Americans celebrate liberty and sometimes seek to extend it beyond their shores, often by means that others cannot distinguish from imperial ones. To themselves the two are joined by the articulated intention of doing good. An anticolonial logic of empire can be read in Theodore Roosevelt's justification for continuing the control the United States reserved for itself in an “independent” Cuba:

not only because it is enormously in our interest to control the Cuba market and by every means to foster our supremacy in the tropical lands and waters south of us . . . but also because we should make all our sister nations of the American continent feel that we desire to show ourselves disinterestedly and effectively their friends.¹⁴

Of course, some Americans saw through talk of disinterested commitments in extending what Jefferson called the (empire of liberty.) They recognized that empire put liberty at risk. Abraham Lincoln was one such

critic. When those Americans shouting "Manifest Destiny" proposed to extend the blessings of liberty (and slavery, too) by taking half of Mexico's national territory, he objected. The expansionist, he said,

is a great friend of humanity; and his desire for land is not selfish, but merely an impulse to extend the area of freedom. He is very anxious to fight for the liberation of enslaved nations and colonies, provided always, they *have* land, and have *not* any liking for his interference. As to those who have no land [that is, slaves in the U.S. South], and would be glad for help from any quarter, he considers they can afford to wait a few hundred years longer.¹⁵ — Lincoln

It has been argued that American slavery and American freedom were bound together and justified each other, and one might say the same about empire and liberty.¹⁶ Just as a society that depended on slavery formed the basis for republican liberty for white males and even nourished republican statesmen (four out of the first five presidents), so empire has been justified as a means of extending the blessings of American liberty and Protestant Christianity and improving the world.

But another connection between liberty and empire must be addressed, too. The American celebration of the free individual and the release of his (usually his) unbounded ambition implicitly promise access to all the goods of the world (usually by purchase)—and that includes lands of the Native Americans as well as worldly resources beyond the continent, whether or not the possessor desires to sell.

AHAB AND EMPIRE

Few Americans of his time understood the global dimensions of American enterprise better than Herman Melville. Whaling was a global industry, and the United States dominated it, searching out the necessary "raw materials" in the world's oceans and selling to a world market. Melville knew this world, knew the tropical peoples who were being colonized by Europeans and whose cultures were being reformed by evangelical Protestants from the United States. "The same waters," he wrote, "wash . . . the new-built California towns . . . and lave the faded but still gorgeous

skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham . . . while all between float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying endless, unknown archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japan."¹⁷

Melville knew his America and Americans well. And in Captain Ahab, who relentlessly pursues the white whale to the farthest reaches of the South Pacific and Asian seas, he created an exemplar of the way Americans lived empire. Having lost a leg to the whale, Ahab has a straightforward reason for his pursuit; American empire was often motivated in part by an unexceptionable concern for security. But if that was all Melville had to tell us, *Moby-Dick* would be no more than an ordinary adventure story, and the story of American empire would be similarly simple. But neither is so.

Moby-Dick is a book of great complexity with innumerable themes, and one of the most obvious concerns Ahab's self-regarding, unbounded ambition. America as opportunity—especially material opportunity—has shaped a culture in the United States that encourages escape from the past, starting over, expanding one's horizons and, ultimately, empire. By naming Ahab's ship the *Pequod*, Melville signals that empire is on his mind, for it was the Pequot War between Puritan settlers and Indians in 1636–37 that established "English hegemony in southern New England" and opened the way for settlement.¹⁸

Like Ahab, white Americans and especially male Americans were always seeking to expand a temporal and spatial future, repeatedly abandoning the past for newer and wider horizons of ambition. Like the whale, these symbolic and material horizons continually moved out of reach of the sometimes violent quest. Foreign commentators repeatedly noticed this aspect of American culture, none more profoundly than Alexis de Toqueville, who was fascinated by the endless pursuit that never realized itself, that always fell short of satisfaction. It was the product, he thought, of a combination of professed equality and an absence of formal social barriers: the American's "feverish ardor" for his "own welfare" envisions the realization of a "complete felicity" that "forever escapes him."¹⁹ The ambitious Americans were ever sipping Tantalus's cup.

Almost unthinkingly—and to an extraordinary degree—Americans came to associate the meaning of America with an entitlement to unrestricted access to land and markets. Land, freedom, opportunity, abundance, seemed a natural sequence, which nourished something of an

American compulsion to use new lands and opportunities to achieve wealth.²⁰ The remarkable expansion of America's agricultural frontier, of its cities, and of its markets rested on the premise that people could and should "exploit the wealth of nature to the utmost."²¹ This combination of aspiration and abundance reflected and nourished a distinctive way of life, what Richard Hofstadter once called a "democracy of cupidity."²² The international thrust of this democracy, beginning with the expansion of the United States in the West, constitutes a powerful version of empire.

Melville's remarkable book both elaborated and challenged the expectation that the world should give itself to the ever-aspiring American.²³ He understood, too, that Americans seldom grasped what those on the other side of the territorial or commercial frontier thought or felt about contact and exchange, whether of land or goods. John Quincy Adams, perhaps America's ablest secretary of state and an architect of its empire, was worldly enough to realize that other nations found Americans peculiarly, even graspingly ambitious. Yet even he did not think that required an American adjustment or response. Writing in 1819, he observed that "any effort on our part to reason the world out of a belief that we are ambitious will have no other effect than we add to our ambition hypocrisy."²⁴ Twenty years later, attacking China's efforts to restrict its trade with Western countries, he revealed the degree to which he shared this American sense of entitlement and presumption that the world should accommodate itself to American desire and enterprise.²⁵

The story of American empire dates from the initial European settlement of the Western Hemisphere. With their utopian dreams and material ambitions, English settlers in North America took possession of lands they alleged to be empty and unused. The American *national* experience thereafter focused on territorial expansion and on developing global markets for agriculture, manufactures, and investment. As we have already seen, the global historical framing requires that we view the American empire in multiple perspectives, and the narrative is as much spatial as linear. We might again take our cue from Melville, who, in his novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852), described a narrative strategy that "goes forward and goes backward, as occasion calls. Nimble center, circumference elastic you must have."²⁶ The American story also requires a certain nimbleness in respect to ethical matters. Empire, like slavery, sustained Abraham Lincoln's observation that "the philosophy of the human mind"

was such that "the love of property and a consciousness of right or wrong have conflicting places in our organization, which often make a man's course seem crooked, his conduct a riddle."²⁷

Henry J. Raymond, founding editor of *The New York Times*, writing in 1854—three years after *Moby-Dick* and about the time of Lincoln's reflection on the human capacity for compartmentalization and self-deception—urged Senator William Henry Seward (Lincoln's future secretary of state) to curb his imperial ambitions. "Empire," Raymond wrote, "is a grand ambition, but *Freedom* is loftier . . . We are the most ambitious people the world has ever seen: —and I greatly fear we shall sacrifice our liberties to our imperial dream."²⁸ Raymond was not the first or last to make such a warning. This American worry about its own democracy was far more deeply felt than any concern for those affected by American power. It was almost as if empire were somehow wholly a domestic matter. Anti-imperialists were often no more curious about the experience of empire on the ground than were imperialists.

Historians have been no exception. Most chroniclers of American imperialism, even when highly critical—and perhaps for that reason—limit themselves to questions of intention and morality. But there is more to be examined: a global perspective invites and demands examination of the way American presumptions and policies were understood by those affected by them, and how American empire looked from the outside.²⁹

Empire worked in complex and often unpredictable ways; imperial intrusions altered balances of power, allowing, for example, Native Americans to play the European empires against each other in eighteenth-century North America, or the Chinese to do the same when the Americans arrived in their country a century later, advancing the "self-strengthening" policy of chief minister Li Hung-chang.³⁰ The arrival of imperial authorities could bring new resources but also alter local hierarchies, relations of power, and structures of opportunity. Such was the case in Puerto Rico after 1898. The United States invested in infrastructure, schools, and public health; equally important, the introduction of American law gave support to Puerto Rico's own movements for women's rights, particularly access to divorce, which undercut the ruling elite's paternalistic notions of the island as a harmonious "great national family." Similarly, American consolidation of sugar production there made an island-wide labor movement (the Federación Libre de Trabajadores) both

possible and necessary. Empire extracts wealth, but it also creates new opportunities—usually without so intending—that create new possibilities, enabling local groups to make novel claims of political and economic rights.³¹ The intrusion of American corporations similarly shook up local power arrangements, and sometimes shifts in patterns of opportunity invited families to adopt novel strategies for advancement, enabling them to rise to positions of greater wealth or power or standing.³²

In the Philippines and in Cuba, American officials aligned with the conservative local elites, and in the latter case this collaboration tipped the Cuban Revolution's fragile commitment to antiracism ever since 1868 toward a reemphasis on racial difference.³³ In the former, the elite *ilustrados*, as they were called (the educated or "enlightened ones"), were able to limit American colonial authority by raising the specter of popular unrest when the Americans pressed them too hard.³⁴ These are examples of what Steve J. Stern calls "reverse colonization," whereby the colonized utilize the apparatus of colonial control for their own purposes, a process limited in range of action but nonetheless significant.³⁵

Historians writing the history of empire rightly emphasize these complex forms of interaction. It is important to recognize the agency of the colonized, whether in territorial empires or in commercial ones. But one must not overlook the uneven distribution of power. Here I emphasize the structure and power of empire and I do not ignore the circumstances at the "other end." I am especially concerned to challenge the commonplace notion that the United States never or rarely self-consciously deployed its political, economic, and military power to shape the world in the interests of its empire. I challenge, too, the notion that its imperial moment, 1898, was unthinking or accidental.

Americans are always anxious to deny the relevance of empire to their history. They tend to rely on a contrast with Europe to justify this way of understanding their past. They point out that except for an aberration that resulted in the taking possession of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and, indirectly, Cuba, Americans did not colonize or rule territories as European powers did. Instead, they used their economic, military, and diplomatic leverage to create a world of free trade available to all. America's activity in the world, according to this account, was primarily that of private actors in the marketplace, not government rule over distant peoples and territories.

The point is true but misleading in two broad ways. First, it is true that the land hunger of individual settlers drove the westward expansion of the United States. Yet the expansion was sustained by national policy and enforced by military means when needed. Taking territory from Native Americans and from Mexico was, except for the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves, the most important activity of the U.S. government in the nineteenth century. The government also secured, by purchase and treaty from European powers, other land and had little regard for the rights or preferences of those long resident on it. Empire was not wholly the work of private actors.

Second, there was a consistent use of diplomacy and even force to protect Americans' access to global markets and to secure freedom for missionaries abroad. The commercial policy dates at least from the Jefferson administration, which brought the United States into its first foreign war to protect American commerce in the Mediterranean from the Barbary pirates of North Africa. At the same time Jefferson used diplomacy rather than war to secure New Orleans as a shipping point for American agriculture. The Mexican War brought to the United States vast new territory and the great natural harbor of San Francisco. And U.S. government policy was equally evident in the determination to make the Caribbean an "American lake." One sees the twentieth-century formulation of this in Woodrow Wilson's hope, informed by American moral and political precepts, for a postwar world safe for American trade and investment.

The United States, then, entered the twentieth century well experienced in taking territory and in the affairs of empire. It was prepared to seek and protect markets for American agriculture, manufactured goods, and capital, especially in Latin America and Asia.³⁶ And it competed aggressively with the European powers for market share in the global economy.

The United States was thus part of a larger history of European or Western economic and cultural domination of the planet. If we put it in the provocative formulation of W.E.B. DuBois a century ago, the United States participated in the domination of people of color by the white nations of the North Atlantic. Both as a colony and as a nation, we Americans became part of the larger, ever changing European work of empire that began in the fifteenth century.

passé historiography

BEING THE WHALE

Ahab has lost his leg to the whale, and, as he says, that lessens him as a man. But an apter symbol might have been the loss of his sight, for it was blind ambition that marked Ahab's and the Americans' endless quest. At the core of empire as a way of life is precisely this incapacity to see oneself as a potential enemy.³⁷ Confident in their ambition and desire, and sure of their own goodwill, Americans were strangers to self-reflection. As Lincoln Steffens acerbically noted, this meant they never learned to do wrong knowingly, but others endured the consequences of the American dispensation. Three brief accounts of interactions with "others" show us the heart of the problem: the Cherokee removal, the taking of half of Mexico's territory, and an obscure trade mission to Korea.

Two themes unite these disparate cases. First, Americans presumed a position of superiority to the people whose land they coveted or whose trade they sought. Tocqueville made this point with a brutal analogy. Whites, he wrote, consider themselves "to the other races of mankind what man himself is to the lower animals: he makes them subservient to his use, and when he cannot subdue he destroys them."³⁸ Second, Americans repeatedly misunderstood the culture, ideas, and aspirations of other peoples and nations. Again and again they presumed that their own parochial assumptions were universal and should be controlling in intercultural and international exchanges. Leaving out the guns for a moment, this quality of empire can be partly described as a massive, consistent failure of empathy.

With Native Americans this pattern was especially significant. The terms of interaction—partly contributed by the Indians, it is true—were consistently paternal, marked by a practice of human diminution. Listen to Thomas McKenney, the highly sympathetic superintendent of Indian Trade in the 1820s: "Our Indians stand pretty much in the relation to the Government as do our children to us. They are equally dependent; and need, not unfrequently, the exercise of parental authority to detach them from those ways which might involve both their peace and their lives."³⁹ That easy presumption of the government's right to "detach" Indians from their inappropriate "ways," their historical culture, made even humanitarian concern frighteningly similar to the frontiersman's greed in its results, if not its intentions.

It did not have to be this way. The first British explorers and adventurers who encountered Native Americans reacted in a far more complex way. They were curious about the Indians and their culture, whom they appreciated as different, novel, perhaps dangerous, and worth some reflection.⁴⁰ But by 1776 curiosity had long since been replaced by firm antagonism toward peoples considered anomalous, obstacles fated to disappear through assimilation or death. The well-known story of the Cherokee removal, the tragic "Trail of Tears" (translating the Indian phrase literally, "the trail on which we cried"), is perhaps the most poignant example of this tragic misapprehension, and it reveals the white investment in not understanding. In the hope of preserving their lives, land, and culture, the Cherokees of Georgia accepted the invitation, most famously offered by Jefferson but supported by every president from Washington to John Quincy Adams, to abandon their hunting life, to become "civilized" by adopting Euro-American ways of living, including private property and the pursuit of agriculture, and to live in peace and harmony with whites. "You will mix with us," Jefferson told them, and "your blood will run in our veins and will spread with us over this great land."⁴¹

To a remarkable degree and in a very short time, the Cherokees did acculturate to Euro-American norms. They took up farming and lived in nuclear family units instead of clans. While they did not accept the Euro-American idea of landownership, they did recognize private ownership of improvements on the land and rights of use of it. This already involved a major change for them: Cherokees had in fact always cultivated the soil; it was an activity of women. But acculturation required that men give up the hunt and do this women's work while women were confined to domestic duties. To put it differently: the line between domesticity and the rest of everyday life shifted, and certain tasks once done by women were now done by men. Also, they began to pass down property along patrilineal lines, weakening, though not wholly abandoning, their earlier matrilineal traditions.

By the 1820s the Cherokees were governing themselves with a written constitution and in 1825 established a capital at New Echota, not far from today's Atlanta. Taking the white world around them as the model of civilization, the more prosperous of them built Greek Revival houses and purchased African-American slaves. A Cherokee named Sequoia invented a Cherokee alphabet and the language became a literate one; they

established a printing press and newspaper. They welcomed missionaries from New England, who arranged for some of the most talented Cherokee boys to be sent north to boarding school.⁴²

One of those who went north was Galagina ("Buck"), known to history by the name he took for himself in 1818 when he went north to school, Elias Boudinot, after the then president of the American Bible Society. The Native American Boudinot devoted himself to the cause of informing Americans of the successful acculturation of the Cherokees. In "An Address to Whites," a lecture delivered to missionary groups mostly in New England in 1826, he explained that he was born to a "language unknown to learned and polished nations." But now "I am not as my fathers were—broader means and nobler influences have fallen upon me." He believed and meant to inform the white society that "the time has arrived when speculations and conjectures as to the practicability of civilizing the Indians must forever cease."

A period is fast approaching when the stale remark—"Do what you will, an Indian will still be an Indian," must be placed no more in speech. With whatever plausibility this popular objection may have heretofore been made, every candid mind must now be sensible that it can no longer be uttered, except by those who are uninformed with respect to us, who are strongly prejudiced against us, or who are filled with vindictive feelings towards us; for the present history of the Indians, particularly of that nation to which I belong, most incontrovertibly establishes the fallacy of this remark.⁴³

White leaders knew, as Senator John C. Calhoun did, that the Cherokees had made great "progress" in "civilization" and that they were "all cultivators, with a representative government, judicial courts, Lancaster schools [run on the then progressive Lancaster model], and permanent property."⁴⁴ But this circumstance produced a "great difficulty," as Calhoun noted. Did civilization protect the Indian lands from those whites who coveted them?

Whites had failed to understand the specific meaning that the work of becoming "civilized" had for the Cherokees, who did not see it as an end in itself. Whites encouraged Cherokees to adopt "civilized" ways because it meant they would need less land. They did not and probably could not

have grasped that the Indians valued their land for reasons other than productive or economic, and went along with the acculturation in order to hold on to it. This Native American strategy and commitment disproved an assumption held by Jefferson's generation: that when the Indians, often thought to be a part of nature, left their "natural environment" they would lose their "Indianness." In fact, the Cherokees, like all humans, were adaptable, but land and culture were sufficiently enmeshed for them that they were willing to use the land differently to maintain this connection.⁴⁵

Education and the world around them—including the increasing talk of democracy and nationalism in the Atlantic world—enabled the Cherokees to understand the settlers' concept of territorial sovereignty. In their constitution of 1827 they mixed this idea with their traditional notions of clan loyalties to claim exclusive jurisdiction over the historical lands they held by treaty.⁴⁶ But there was a problem. In 1802, when the Jefferson administration had persuaded Georgia to abandon its claims to western lands (in the present states of Alabama and Mississippi), it promised the state that it would "extinguish" the Indians' lands within its borders. Typically, there had been no consultation with the Cherokees, but the agreement indicated the transfer would be done through treaties and mutual consent. Except for a group of fifteen hundred to two thousand Cherokees who moved in 1817, no agreements were made, and fifteen thousand Cherokees remained in Georgia. President Monroe recognized that "the great object to be accomplished" was the removal of the tribes, but he made clear in a message to Congress in 1825 that it could be done only on terms "satisfactory to themselves [the Cherokees] and honorable to the United States."⁴⁷

By 1828 the situation had become critical. With a cotton boom driving up land values, Georgians were impatient with the federal government's inability to secure the Cherokee territory for them. When the Cherokees promulgated a constitution in 1827 that claimed territorial sovereignty within Georgia's borders, the impatience became rage. Even friends of the Indians thought the claim of sovereignty went too far. "They seek to be a People," Thomas McKenney noted, but it was "much to be regretted that the idea of Sovereignty should have taken such a deep hold on these people."⁴⁸

The election to the presidency in 1828 of Andrew Jackson, the famous Indian fighter, emboldened the Georgia legislature to pass a law nullify-

ing the Cherokee constitution. The situation worsened a year later: gold was discovered on Cherokee land, and ten thousand miners flooded into the region. The Cherokees called it the "Great Intrusion," and intrusion it was. With their government abolished, the Cherokees were defenseless and completely exposed to the avarice of the Georgians and others streaming onto their land.⁴⁹ John Eaton, Jackson's secretary of war, urged emigration upon them, but they would have none of it. John Ridge, like Boudinot a Cherokee educated by missionaries, embarked on a lecture tour in 1829 to make the Cherokee case at Washington and elsewhere:

We have noticed the ancient ground of complaint, founded on the ignorance of our ancestors and their fondness for the chase, and for the purpose of agriculture as having in possession too much land for their numbers. What is the language of objection this time?

The case is reversed, and we are now assaulted with menaces of expulsion, because we have unexpectedly become civilized, and because we have formed and organized a constituted government.

In other words, Ridge pointed out, what we have learned has made us "Politicians," and that has made us more strongly attached to our soil. We therefore "set our faces to the rising sun, and turn our backs to its setting." Recalling that "our ancestors revered the sepulchral monuments of the noble dead, we cherish the sacred spots of their repose."⁵⁰

Taking the side of Georgia, as the Georgians had been sure he would, President Jackson pushed through Congress the Indian Removal Act (1830), which empowered him to "extinguish" by treaty the claims of Indians to any lands in existing states and to "forever secure and guaranty to them" land west of the Mississippi in "exchange."⁵¹ Three days after Jackson signed the law, the state of Georgia laid claim to 4.6 million acres of Cherokee land.⁵² The Indian Removal Act did not authorize either coercion or intimidation. But obviously Georgia's related actions greatly encouraged the Indians to accept removal. John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, described its vulnerability in an address to the Iroquois in 1831:

Brothers: The tradition of our Fathers . . . tells us that this great and extensive continent was once the sole and exclusive abode of

our race. Ever since [the whites came] we have been made to drink the bitter cup of humiliation . . . our country and the graves of our Fathers torn from us . . . [until] we find ourselves fugitives, vagrants and strangers in our own country.⁵³

The Indians challenged Georgia's suspension of their right to governance in the courts, carrying their case to the Supreme Court. In *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), Chief Justice John Marshall, in a decision asserting the supremacy of national authority over that of a state, described the Cherokees as

a distinct community occupying its own territory, with boundaries accurately described, in which the laws of Georgia can have no force, and which the citizens of Georgia have no right to enter but with the assent of the Cherokees themselves, or in conformity with treaties, and with the act of Congress. The whole intercourse between the United States and this nation, is, by our Constitution and laws, vested in the government of the United States.⁵⁴

The Cherokee leader Elias Boudinot welcomed this "Glorious news!" But President Jackson, who believed that the Indians must "yield" to "another and superior race," immediately deflated such celebration. The Court, he said, "cannot coerce Georgia to yield to its mandate," because he would not enforce it.⁵⁵ Henry Clay, who was more sympathetic to the Indians than Jackson, nonetheless shared the Indian fighter's sense of racial hierarchy. The Indians, he declared, "were destined to extinction," for they were "inferior to the Anglo-Saxon race which were now taking their place on this continent."⁵⁶

While some religious leaders and a few politicians from New England tried to protect the Indians, it was all too clear that American political culture had no place for them. Politicians had nothing to gain by protecting the Native Americans, while providing land to frontiersmen not only brought votes but was thought to ensure social stability through geographical expansion.⁵⁷ Henry Schoolcraft, an early Indian ethnologist and somewhat controversial Indian agent, remarked in 1851 that "the whole Indian race" did not equal in "worth one white man's vote."⁵⁸

In 1835, when John Ross was in a Georgia jail, a small group of Cherokee leaders, including Elias Boudinot, signed a treaty committing

the Cherokee Nation to remove themselves from Georgia. By Cherokee law this group had no authority to do such a thing, yet the United States negotiated it with full knowledge that the faction was not empowered to bind the nation. An overwhelming majority of Cherokees rejected the treaty; fifteen thousand of them (90 percent) signed a petition to Congress opposing it:

The land on which we stand we have received as an inheritance from our fathers, who possessed it from time immemorial, as a gift from our common Father in heaven. They bequested it to us as their children, and we have sacredly kept it, as containing the remains of our beloved men. This right of inheritance we have never ceded nor ever forfeited.⁵⁹

Their way of life was founded on this local ecology: their herbs, the minerals they used for healing and divination, their mythologies, were all associated with the place of their historical lands. They believed, moreover, that this homeland was the center of the earth; for them the western territory was associated with death.⁶⁰

Those who signed the treaty did not disagree with the sentiments of those who wished to stay, but they thought it was impossible to survive the assault mounted against them in Georgia. To their minds the best chance for preserving the Cherokee culture was to move west. But they had a further reason. The Indians who signed were among the most acculturated and prosperous, and, equally important, they were darker-skinned than John Ross and other leaders who fought to stay. Elias Boudinot and John Ridge had experienced the racism of white Americans directly, even in the North among the Indians' supposed friends. At boarding school in Cornwall, Connecticut, they met and subsequently married white women, whose relatives disowned these women, saying they had succumbed to "mere lust." The Cornwall townspeople burned pictures of Boudinot and his wife on the village green. In the end, Boudinot argued for removal on racial grounds. With "all the unrelenting prejudices against our language and color," he argued, the Jeffersonian scheme of "amalgamation with our oppressors is too horrid for a serious contemplation . . . Without [Cherokee] law in the States, we are not more favored than the poor African."⁶¹

After 1836, the Indians who remained in Georgia risked starvation

and lived as outlaws in the hills. But permanent resistance was impossible. General Winfield Scott, who a decade later would command the American conquest of Mexico, brought seven thousand troops to Georgia. He concentrated the Cherokees into camps, and then in 1838 marched sixteen thousand of them "at the point of a bayonet" a thousand miles west to Oklahoma; a quarter of them died on the way.⁶² The Cherokee experience was not singular. The administration of Andrew Jackson made seventy removal treaties with Indians. In 1890, when the Battle of Wounded Knee marked the end of the Indian wars in the American West, the journalist Theodore Marburg celebrated this final war in the multi-century conquest of the Indians in a way that anticipated the next phase of American imperialism. "We have brushed aside 275,000 Indians," he wrote. "In place of them [we] have this population of 70,000,000 of what we regard as the highest type of modern man . . . [We] have done more than any other race to conquer the world for civilization . . . and we will probably . . . go on with our conquests."⁶³

Even as the United States was accumulating Indian lands, there was a developing aspiration to expand American settlement into northern Mexico, beginning with a movement to annex Texas, then a Mexican state. In 1829, when Andrew Jackson proposed to buy Texas from Mexico, Simón Bolívar, the liberator of Spanish America, observed that the United States seems "destined by Providence to plague America with torments in the name of freedom."⁶⁴ Advocates for expansion in the United States saw their providential destiny differently, and they tended to be oblivious to the possibility that the beneficent developments they planned could have victims. Taking the lands of the Southwest was simply part of the larger story of their westward expansion, what the Mexican historian Josefina Zoraida Vázquez refers to as North American "spontaneous expansionism."⁶⁵ For Mexicans the war was and remains the "central event of Mexico's history and destiny." Not only is it well remembered, but it is remembered as a trauma.⁶⁶ The Mexican Nobel laureate in literature Octavio Paz wrote that the U.S. war against Mexico, which "deprived us of over half our national territory," was "one of the most unjust wars in the history of imperialism."⁶⁷ In *Memories of the North American Invasion* (1902), José María Balcena thought the war resulted from a combination of Mexican "inexperience and vanity" and U.S. "ambition unconstrained by concepts of justice."⁶⁸

Admittedly, the war against Mexico was a divisive issue within the

United States. When he wrote his memoirs in 1885, Ulysses S. Grant, who had been a young officer in it, recalled his bitter opposition to the annexation of Texas and his feeling that the war itself was "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation." It was, he added, "an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory."⁶⁹ But North American expansionists, blinded by visions of Manifest Destiny, did not grasp—as most Americans today do not—the perception of the United States as greedy and dangerous, as an enemy. For Stephen A. Douglas and most Americans at the time, expansion concerned only the United States. "You can make as many treaties as you want to contain . . . this great Republic," he declared, but "it will shrug them off and its people will be directed toward a limit I will not dare describe."⁷⁰

We also forget that in the early years of the nineteenth century there were *two* newly independent nations sharing the territory of the North American continent, with equally promising futures. Mexico's constitution of 1824 was a liberal one, significantly influenced by that of the United States.⁷¹ Mexico was 1.7 million square miles, with 6 million people; the United States extended over 1.8 million square miles, with 9.6 million people—so the magnitudes were comparable. (The consequences of the war between them are revealed in the statistics for 1853: Mexico had lost 1 million square miles to the United States; the population in the booming United States grew to 23 million, bolstered by a massive flow of European immigrants, while Mexico stagnated at 8 million.)

Mexicans at the time understood that to have the United States as a neighbor was a challenge, even a trouble. When it was still a Spanish colony, Spanish officials had been apprehensive. Luis de Onís—who on behalf of Spain negotiated the Adams-Onís, or Transcontinental, Treaty (1819), which settled the border between Spanish land and the Louisiana Territory—worried about U.S. expansionism, which he characterized as "presumptuous and frenetic."⁷² After their own independence from Spain had been achieved, Mexican leaders continued to feel vulnerable. José María Tornel, minister of war in 1837, observed that the "pronounced desire" of the "Anglo-American people" to "acquire new lands is a dynamic power which is enhanced and nourished by their own industry."⁷³ Manuel Eduardo de Gorostiza, a distinguished Mexican man of letters and minis-

ter to the United States during the Jackson administration, had an even harsher view. Writing in 1840, he asked:

Who is not familiar with that race of migratory adventurers that exist in the United States . . . who always live in the unpopulated regions, taking land away from the Indians and then assassinating them? Far removed from civilization, as they condescendingly call it, they are the precursors of immorality and pillage. we

Having himself been condescended to in Washington, he was intensely aware of the negative, openly racist attitudes of North Americans toward Mexicans. The Americans, he wrote, believed that like the Native Americans, Mexicans should get out of the way of the Anglo-Saxons. He referred to a New Orleans newspaper article that described Mexicans as "semi-Indian" and "semi-Negro." Even in New Orleans, Anglo-American anti-Catholicism was palpable: all Mexicans, one newspaper proposed, "ought to be killed because they are Catholics." And he cited other newspapers that called Mexicans "savage," "barbaric," and "immoral."⁷⁴ Luis Gonzaga Cuevas, the lawyer and diplomat who negotiated the treaty that ended the war between the United States and Mexico, concluded that the United States "will never stop bringing about ruin and disaster of entire peoples in order to add to themselves a span of territory."⁷⁵ A great irony of the U.S. victory over Mexico in a war waged under the slogan of extending freedom is that its effect in Mexico was to discredit the liberals who had taken the republican United States as a model, and to empower conservative landowners who leaned toward monarchy, religion, paternalism, and a program of "law and order."⁷⁶

The trouble between the United States and Mexico had begun with the first Anglo-American settlements in Texas in the 1820s. Mexicans had initially welcomed this; they even made a specific exception to allow Americans to bring slaves with them, though the Mexican Republic outlawed slavery in 1829. But the danger to Mexico's territorial integrity rapidly revealed itself. In that same year President Jackson tried to purchase the territory and in 1836, over the objections of the Mexican government, sent U.S. troops into Texas in support of its revolution.

At the time Mexico's extreme political instability made it difficult to resist the aggressive Texans and, later, the United States.⁷⁷ Between 1829

and 1844, Mexico had fourteen different presidents, with the presidency changing hands twenty times. Many Mexican leaders blamed Joel Poinsett, the first U.S. minister to Mexico, for much of this political division and disorder. Cuevas was convinced that Poinsett, who had arrived in 1825, "worked to foment disorder" and "should be condemned to the execration of history and posterity."⁷⁸ Whatever the precise merits of this view, Poinsett, who knew Mexico well and considered himself a friend of Mexico, acknowledged to Secretary of State Martin Van Buren that he was hated in Mexico. But secure in his belief that his interventions would further the cause of republicanism in both Mexico and the United States, he indicated that he "cheerfully encountered all the obloquy and calumny" directed at him.⁷⁹

Mexicans feared the United States because an expansionist spirit and an attitude of ethnocentric superiority were pervasive among the Anglo-Americans with whom they had personal contact. But the Americans' discussion of Texas was especially unnerving. The widespread debates in Washington and elsewhere over whether the United States should annex Texas were mostly arguments about slavery and its extension; rarely did the Americans acknowledge that they were discussing Mexico's national patrimony, its "northern territories." It was no surprise that Mexicans believed the United States was promoting a revolution in Texas. They rightly feared that Texas was the prelude to a larger drama. In 1836 Mexican and Texan troops clashed in San Antonio and then at the San Jacinto River, where the Mexicans were defeated. But Mexico refused to recognize the battlefield Treaty of San Jacinto, signed in Texas by General Santa Anna, at the time held under duress as a prisoner of war, and deemed it invalid because of the circumstances of its execution. Nor did Mexico relinquish its claims to Texas, its official position being that Texas remained a rebellious province. Nonetheless, the United States quickly recognized the new Republic of Texas.⁸⁰

After this, the Mexican press was consistently anti-American. Mexicans were distressed but not surprised when in 1842 Captain Thomas ap Catesby Jones of the U.S. Navy, thinking war had been declared, mistakenly seized the Mexican fortress at Monterey in California. American designs on Texas and California were transparent enough for a Mexican newspaper to declare that the Anglo-Americans believe "themselves destined to occupy [before Americans used the term] the entire continent."⁸¹

With all these tensions, the Mexicans closely watched the election of 1844, hoping that Henry Clay, who was hesitant about annexation, might, if elected, negotiate a resolution of the conflicts between the two nations. But the winner was James K. Polk, who in Mexican eyes stood for "the South, slavery, and annexation."⁸² Using a contrived pretext and slogan ("American blood has been shed on American soil"), Polk sent a war message to Congress, and war was declared May 13, 1846. Representative Abraham Lincoln, elected to the House of Representatives as an opponent of the war, vigorously challenged the justification for war, though most Americans accepted it. Polk's war with Mexico was one of territorial aggrandizement. When the United States triumphed, it took the New Mexico Territory, which became eight states, and California. This treatment of neighbors to its south established a long-standing pattern of U.S. presumption of empire in relation to Central and South America, whether it was repeated Marine landings, shelling of ports, and police actions in Caribbean and South American republics, or wrenching Panama away from Colombia in order to negotiate a Panama Canal Treaty with a government that it had created.

Another war that is largely forgotten by Americans, including historians, is known to Koreans as the "barbarian incursion of 1871."⁸³ Yet the American public at the time had an intense interest in what a New York newspaper called "The Little War with the Heathens." This was the first time American forces seized Asian territory and raised the flag there, even if only briefly. And it very clearly reveals how Americans unthinkingly dismissed different cultures, especially of nonwhite peoples, while presuming the universal appeal of their own values and national aspirations.

U.S. diplomatic interest in Korea had developed after the Civil War. In 1866 a heavily armed American merchant vessel arrived in Korean waters seeking a trade agreement. The Korean government had recently driven out French Catholic missionaries, and they sent a message to the Americans indicating they wanted neither Christianity nor trade. When the Americans ignored the message and landed at Pyongyang, a crowd formed. The U.S. sailors fired on them, and the Koreans retaliated by killing those whom they presumed guilty and burning the ship. There was war talk in Washington, but nothing was done. Then, in 1870, Hamilton Fish, Grant's secretary of state, sent instructions to Frederick F. Low, the new U.S. minister to China, asking him to open negotiations

with Korea to the end of establishing commercial relations and provision for proper treatment of shipwrecked U.S. sailors. He counseled Low that "little is known . . . of the people who inhabit that country."⁸⁴

Lack of knowledge notwithstanding, Americans had strong opinions about all Asians. Low had previously served as governor of California, which had a substantial Chinese population, and he was confident that he knew what was necessary. "I apprehend that all the cunning and sophistry that enter so largely into the oriental character . . . will be brought to bear to defeat the object of our visit," he informed the secretary of state, "and if that fails it is not unlikely that we may be met with a display of force." He also believed that "orientals" were likely to misunderstand Western restraint; a failure to deploy force would only invite a Korean use of force.⁸⁵ However wrongheaded his understanding, it produced the predicted results. A sequence of misunderstandings, largely based on racist and cultural presuppositions of superior moral virtue on both sides, produced needless violence.

Korea maintained formal relations with China, and Low now asked Chinese officials to communicate his intentions, which they reluctantly did. Korea's leaders did not respond to the American request. They believed that China and Japan had been corrupted by having regular relations with the Christian West. By contrast, they professed to uphold the true Confucian morality through a policy of self-sufficiency and isolation. Even to establish a dialogue with the Americans would violate their long-standing policy of seclusion and commitment to nonintercourse with the West. Had they received a reply to this effect, the Americans would likely not have had an empathetic understanding of the Korean views. But without a reply, Low determined to visit the emperor anyway, presumably believing that his purposes were obviously benign. However, a flotilla of warships and supporting vessels might have looked other than benign when anchored at the mouth of the Yomha River, a strategic position that led to the Han River and direct water access to Seoul, where the emperor was in residence.

Without making formal contact with Korean authorities, the Americans began to survey the river and coast. Local officials might easily have interpreted these actions as provocative, but the Korean emperor had ordered them to avoid conflict. The Americans misunderstood this restraint, and, finding no resistance, they pressed on, confident of the purity

of their motives and rightness of their mission. They believed, moreover, that international treaties and trade relations were central to civilized life, and that they were offering the option of civilization to a people whose commitment to isolation marked them as uncivilized.

Finally, communication of a limited sort commenced. The Americans were asked in writing about their purposes, and in reply they expressed their interest in discussions with a high court official. Lesser bureaucrats met the fleet to begin discussions, but Low refused to talk to them because of their low rank. The emperor then sent a message indicating that he had read Low's initial message, that he desired friendly relations with the United States, but that he had no interest in meeting Low or in negotiating any treaties. The Americans affirmed their peaceful intentions—and indicated their plan to continue the surveys. When survey parties entered the Han River and proceeded upstream toward Seoul, the Koreans opened fire. The American ships landed a contingent of 651 Marines, who defeated the Korean force on shore and then departed.

Low interpreted the Korean attack as "unprovoked and wanton, and without the slightest shadow of excuse." The Koreans, he wrote to the secretary of state, were no more and no less than a "semi-barbarous and hostile race" who resisted the Americans' reasonable aspirations.⁸⁶ But the Koreans had understood the withdrawal as an indication of their victory, an example of their moral virtue overcoming the Westerners' superior technology.

The historian Gordon Chang, the principal scholarly analyst of this episode, rightly observes that the American failure to understand the Koreans' point of view or why they might have perceived the U.S. convoy as a hostile one derived largely from their ethnocentric presumptions about Korean barbarism and American superiority. "The very premise of the mission, which aimed to force Korea to join the 'civilized' nations of the world" and to engage in regular intercourse, defined the Koreans as "backward" and "inferior." The United States, by contrast, assumed that its commitment to trade and open markets "represented advanced civilization and a system of international relations in accord with the natural order."⁸⁷ Korean resistance to the American pursuit of wealth through global trade was considered unnatural, not just an erroneous policy. Strikingly, the Americans never second-guessed themselves, nor revealed any curiosity about the Korean desire for self-sufficiency and isolation. After

the event, reflecting on the loss of life, Low betrayed his real views about Korean racial inferiority and ignorance: for the Koreans, he observed, "human life is considered of little value, and soldiers, educated as they have been, meet death with the same indifference as the Indians of North America."⁸⁸

THE RHETORIC OF EMPIRE

American imperial action, whether on the North American continent or in more distant places, was justified by a cocktail mixed of various rationales—religious mission, theories of social efficiency, and ideas of racial hierarchy and capacity. Happily, or so many Americans thought, self-interest and humanitarianism apparently converged in empire American-style. Richard Olney, secretary of state in the Cleveland administration, gave a lecture at Harvard College in 1898 arguing for greater U.S. engagement in the world, assuring his audience (and readers of *The Atlantic Monthly*) that "our material interests only point in the same direction as considerations of a higher and less selfish character."⁸⁹

Christian missionaries carried these higher considerations throughout the world, and represented the major American cultural influence beyond the borders of the United States. The first generation of them, in the 1830s and '40s, were Christians first and Americans second, having neither a nationalist nor a modernizing agenda. They were propagating God's word. It would be a "mistake," as the secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions put it, to "reproduce our own religious civilization in heathen lands."⁹⁰ But by mid-century, they were carrying specifically American Christianity with them. American culture in its global extension, whether brought by missionaries or by businessmen, increasingly had a similar content, a message of uplift and modernization. Culture and commerce both promised modernity, much as Hollywood culture did a century later. According to a nineteenth-century consular official in the Middle East reporting on missionary activity there: "They are raising the standard of morality, of intelligence, of education . . . Directly or indirectly every phase of their work is rapidly paving the way for American commerce."⁹¹

The different European empires had particular theories of legitimate

possession that governed the way they took land in the Western Hemisphere. From the beginning of settlement in North America the English had framed their justifications in the language of religion and of God's intentions for the world, presuming that effective use—or social efficiency—justified and legitimated their claims to land, whether taken by direct theft or by treaty. The Portuguese believed that discovery itself, or more precisely the technical capacity to discover, conferred dominion, while the Spanish claimed that speech—a ritualized "declaration" of possession—was sufficient to claim actual possession. But for the English, legitimate possession depended on use, on making the land fruitful. Agriculture, fences, and hedges indicated ownership.⁹² Unused land, at least as the English would define use, was available for the taking.⁹³ John Winthrop thus explained the Puritan taking of land in Massachusetts Bay: "[T]he Natives in New England . . . inclose noe land neither have any settled habitation nor any tame cattle to improve the land by . . . soe as if wee leave them sufficient for their use we may lawfully take the rest."⁹⁴

A grander formulation of this logic begins with a presumed right of the world itself to growth, expansion, and the development of resources. This philosophy had religious overtones in the seventeenth century, as the resources were considered God-given. Some centuries later, the justification was a secular social efficiency or economic development. Walter Weyl, a leading American progressive, declared in 1917 that "the resources of the earth must be unlocked."⁹⁵ Speaking of the colonization of the Philippines, Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that the right of "an indigenous population" to retain their land "depends not upon natural right" but rather upon their "political fitness," which would be demonstrated in the "political work of governing, administering, and developing [it], in such a manner as to ensure the natural right of the world at large that resources should not be left idle."⁹⁶ Local ownership, in other words, was subject to the most productive use.⁹⁷

In the nineteenth century, the taking of land beyond the Mississippi River was thought to be justified by Providence. John L. O'Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review* and a leader among the New York intellectuals who called themselves "Young America," declared in 1845 "the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experi-

ment of liberty and federated self-government."⁹⁸ O'Sullivan here fused liberty, democracy, and the United States. Lincoln made the same connection in his Gettysburg Address. But the implications of these two formulations differed: for Lincoln, the aim and result was an expansion of freedom, while O'Sullivan wanted to justify territorial aggrandizement and empire.

When Jefferson and other founders had spoken of an "empire of liberty," they meant a large and populous nation, not imperial rule, and they did not envision a nation of continental proportions, believing that more than one republic would thrive in North America. William Thornton, first superintendent of the Patent Office (1802–28) and architect of the U.S. Capitol, in 1815 published his "Outlines of a Constitution for United North and South Columbia," which envisioned thirteen confederated states stretching the entire length of the Western Hemisphere, with a capital, to be called America, located on the Isthmus of Panama. Freedom would reign throughout, with mestizos respected and blacks emancipated.⁹⁹ In the same year, Simón Bolívar's "Jamaica Letter" hoped a pacific union of nations in the "New World," perhaps led by Mexico, would protect self-rule and freedom.¹⁰⁰

In only a little more than a decade these mutualist visions of an America of republican freedom beyond the United States gave way to a North American appropriation of "America" to refer to itself and its dreams of hemispheric hegemony. In a private letter of 1843 intended for public disclosure, former President Jackson linked the diffusion of republican government to the open-ended process of incorporating new territories into the United States, slightly but significantly emending Jefferson's phrase to "extending the area of freedom."¹⁰¹

Over the next century the religious, social-efficiency, and political arguments associated with the dispossession of the Native Americans were subsumed under the rubric of race. Indeed, throughout the Atlantic world race emerged as a fundamental social category. Partly this was because the romantic movement accented differences among peoples, but it was also the product of so-called racial science, whether identified with the American school of anthropology or the French race theorist Joseph Arthur de Gobineau and his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55).¹⁰² Perceived differences needed explaining, and race was a clarifying option, establishing a literally visible hierarchy. The politics of

this race theory carried the implied threat that lower orders of humanity had either to adapt or to become extinct—or both, as the Cherokees had discovered.

"The white race will take the ascendant, elevating what is susceptible of improvement—wearing out what is not," declared Thomas Hart Benton, senator from Missouri, in 1846.¹⁰³ Over the next generation, white racial pride became steadily less generous in its expectations of "improvement" of dark-skinned people. In his widely read book *Our Country* (1885), Josiah Strong, a leading Protestant intellectual, observed that "whether the extinction of inferior races before the advancing Anglo-Saxon" seems to be a matter for regret or not, "it certainly appears probable." He proudly noted that Anglo-Saxons represented only "one-fifteenth part of mankind" but ruled "more than one-third of the earth's surface, and more than one-third of its people."¹⁰⁴

At the top of the nineteenth-century racial hierarchy were the Germanic peoples (meaning whites, or Teutons). In England and the United States special pride was taken in the idea that the Anglo-Saxon line of the Teuton race was, supposedly, the repository of those capacities necessary for self-government. For the historian Francis Parkman, the "Germanic race, and especially the Anglo-Saxon branch of it, . . . is peculiarly fitted for self-government." Senator Benton made the same point: the Anglo-Saxons carried the "Magna Carta and all its privileges" in their "luggage."¹⁰⁵ Ironically, this Anglo-Saxon race pride had been a weapon used against royal absolutism in the seventeenth century,¹⁰⁶ a history that no doubt helped legitimate the ugly work it later performed.

By the late nineteenth century, Manifest Destiny was as much a racial concept as a political one, about the rights (and responsibilities, too, it was believed) of "civilized" nations to rule lesser, uncivilized peoples. For those who accepted it, race offered a comprehensive, if crude, interpretation of global history. At one level, therefore, the spokesmen for Anglo-Saxonism would wholly agree with W.E.B. DuBois that "the Negro problem in America is but a local phase of a world problem," and, as he said, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."¹⁰⁷ But the perspectives and politics differed on either side of the color line. For DuBois the issue was freedom, justice, and dignity for all peoples; those shouldering the "white

man's burden" thought they had the task of educating people of color for their (limited) participation in civilized society and of managing them as a labor force for the profits of empire. The principal American scholarly journal addressing global affairs in the first years of the twentieth century was *The Journal of Race Development*, which in 1919 became *The Journal of International Relations* and then, three years later, *Foreign Affairs*, the prestigious journal of the Council on Foreign Relations.¹⁰⁸ The Anglo-Saxons, being a people of the temperate zone, considered themselves called upon to govern and develop the tropics. Franklin Giddings of Columbia University, the first American scholar to hold a university chair in sociology, argued that the "task of governing . . . the inferior races of mankind will be one of great difficulty . . . but it is one that must be faced and overcome." The "civilized world" requires it, he wrote, so that it can continue the "conquest of the natural resources of the globe."¹⁰⁹

In 1898, when Americans debated the annexation of the Philippines, masculine Anglo-Saxonism was as prominent and probably as influential as the strategic and economic arguments favoring an empire.¹¹⁰ According to William Allen White, the famous Kansas editor and Progressive, "Only the Anglo-Saxons can govern themselves." It is their "manifest destiny," he continued, "to go forth as world conqueror." Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana, a leading imperialist, agreed, for Anglo-Saxons and Teutons were made by God to be "the master organizers of the world."¹¹¹ As for the Filipinos, he declared, "they are not a self-governing race. They are Orientals, Malays, instructed by Spaniards in the latter's worst estate."¹¹²

Many imperialists may have come across as bullies, but there was a good deal of anxiety about the challenge of empire in the 1890s. Intellectuals had absorbed the language of Herbert Spencer's "struggle for survival" and Darwin's notion of "natural selection" and transferred them to races and nations. Thus Josiah Strong spoke of "the final competition of the races, for which the Anglo-Saxon is being schooled."¹¹³ Besides a certain energy, aggressiveness, and persistence, the Anglo-Saxon racial capacities supposedly being developed through this evolutionary struggle included a "money-making power—a power of increasing importance in the widening commerce of the world's future"—a "genius for colonizing," and an unmatched excellence "in pushing his way into new countries." But the Anglo-Saxons' virtues went beyond money and power.

Besides being the custodians of liberty and enterprise, they possessed great spiritual resources. The English-speaking peoples of the North Atlantic were, as they saw it, "divinely commissioned" to be their "brother's keeper."¹¹⁴

The political theorist John W. Burgess agreed, although his language of justification was racial and political rather than religious. He shared his generation's belief that the Teutonic races had a special capacity for government. In his studies of Reconstruction politics and of international law, Burgess argued against allowing non-Teutons to participate in government, whether at home or abroad. It would result only in "corruption and confusion."¹¹⁵ The civilized peoples, those organized into nation-states, the political form par excellence, were called upon to govern other peoples, the majority in the world, who "remain in a state of barbarism." The condition of allegedly uncivilized peoples "authorizes" the political nations, as he called them, to "force organization upon them by any means necessary." Such rule, he argued, "violates . . . no rights of these populations which are not petty and trifling in comparison" with the imperial power's "transcendent right and duty to establish political and legal order everywhere."¹¹⁶ This powerful argument in favor of imperialism on the eve of America's war with Spain, Cuba, and the Philippines contributed to the climate of opinion that accepted the end of Reconstruction, the disenfranchisement and lynching of black Americans, and the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that gave constitutional approval to Jim Crow America. Racism at home and abroad mutually reinforced each other.

The openly racist rhetoric of empire was eventually supplanted by a vocabulary of "order," "development," "responsible government," "economic efficiency," and "freedom and democracy." It is not clear, however, that the North Atlantic states have wholly abandoned the assumptions that diminished the dignity and even the humanity of those in what is now called the "global South."

A GLOBAL STRATEGY

Historians and journalists often remark on the historical moment when the United States stepped onto the world stage with a new global aware-

ness. Surely there was such a moment, but in my opinion it came earlier than the ones commonly cited—1898, World War I, 1941, 1945, or the beginning of globalization talk in the 1980s. From at least the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, American leaders have been aware of their nation's global position and have sought consistently to expand its commercial and cultural influence. The major cultural influence emanating internationally from the United States was once religion, but in the twentieth century the volume of cultural exports became vastly larger and more diverse. The projection of American culture, whatever its form, is not recent.¹¹⁷

Since Jefferson, perhaps even since George Washington, the United States has had a sequence of presidents and secretaries of state who have self-consciously fashioned a global strategy for the nation. "Globalization has been at the heart of American strategic thinking and policy" for the whole of the national history of the United States, the journalist Walter Russell Mead has written.¹¹⁸ By paying too much attention to President Washington's warning against entangling alliances with the warring European powers of his time, we may have overlooked his encouragement of global trade. We have also underestimated the comprehensive strategies and policies devoted to that end for the next century; the United States was not wholly preoccupied with developing the West and not wholly inward-looking. Charles Francis Adams, writing in 1899 as an anti-imperialist, rightly read Washington's oft-repeated advice as favoring international commerce but with "as little political connection as possible."¹¹⁹ And American interest in commerce was not limited to residents of its seaport cities. The expansion of the agricultural frontier—and the remarkable productivity it brought—were as important a motive as the development of manufacturing for Americans to want global markets.¹²⁰ An Illinois congressman insisted in 1846 that his state "wants a market for her agricultural productions, she wants the market of the world." By the 1850s farm journals were referring to the United States as the "granary of the world."¹²¹ And of course, when the United States acquired vast new continental territories from Mexico by war and entered the China market by treaty, it was acting on behalf of expansive interests and also trying to limit Britain's global influence.¹²²

The United States was not reluctant to use its power to negotiate favorable commercial treaties or to use force to protect its commercial in-

terests abroad. Between 1787 and 1920, it intervened abroad 122 times (excluding declared wars); 99 of these interventions occurred in the nineteenth century and involved every continent.¹²³ Historians and analysts consider that the American state was weak at the time and lacked a military establishment in the nineteenth century, excepting the Civil War era, yet the state effectively supported aggressive territorial expansion and protected American commerce abroad.¹²⁴

As we have already seen, the politics and economy of the early American republic were dominated by the struggle to find markets for agricultural produce and to secure sea-lanes for its merchant marine. This emphasis on international commerce rather than politics was reflected in a preference for establishing "consular" rather than "diplomatic" representation abroad. In 1792, the United States had only two diplomatic missions (in London and Paris) but had established thirty-six consulates.¹²⁵ The Louisiana Purchase was a by-product of Jefferson's response to pressure from Ohio Valley farmers wanting free passage to the sea on the Mississippi River and access, by ownership or treaty, to the port of New Orleans. Jefferson not only was sympathetic to their commercial aspirations but characteristically raised their material demands to the level of philosophy. As a matter of natural right, he argued, "the Ocean is free to all men, and the Rivers to all their inhabitants"; that natural right implied a further "right to some spot as an entrepot for our commerce."¹²⁶ As Washington's secretary of state, he had declared that since "the ocean" was the "common property of all," it should be "open to the industry of all."¹²⁷ National governments should not get in the way of this right, which belonged to private individuals, being a human right. If access to American trade was blocked anywhere on the globe, the United States, Jefferson argued, must be prepared to deploy its resources, including armed force, to protect commerce. Jefferson's—and America's—universalism could be strikingly parochial.

This way of thinking and the policies that followed from it continued to define American foreign relations well into the twentieth century: the global search for markets, initially for agricultural products and later for manufactured goods, too; unrestrained oceanic trade and equal (or "most favored nation") trading rights; support of private entrepreneurs in the global marketplace; a ready deployment of force when need be in support of American business but rarely in advance of it. The United States was

thus reenacting abroad the policies at the heart of its westward expansion.¹²⁸ The most significant change came when, at the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. investment abroad increased and the United States moved from being a capital importer to being a capital exporter, from being a debtor nation to a creditor.¹²⁹

Each of the two greatest nineteenth-century secretaries of state, John Quincy Adams and William H. Seward, elaborated comprehensive strategies for an American empire that was both continental and global. And the leading imperialists of 1898 built upon their ambitions, ideas, and achievements.¹³⁰

John Quincy Adams came to the offices of secretary of state and president with exceptional preparation in foreign affairs. Before he was twenty, he had studied in France and Holland and served as a secretary to American representatives at the courts of Russia and Great Britain (the latter being his father, John Adams); in his twenties, he was ambassador to the Netherlands and then to Prussia, and he was chairman of the peace commission that negotiated the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812. He was appointed secretary of state by James Monroe, and he shares credit, perhaps even principal credit, for the doctrine that bears Monroe's name.

The Monroe Doctrine declared that the lands of the Western Hemisphere that Spain was in the process of losing were off-limits to further European colonization. British Foreign Secretary George Canning, worried that European powers might take advantage of Spain's collapse and acquire territory among the former colonies, closing them to British trade, proposed a joint Anglo-American agreement to preserve the independence of the new republics and ensure free trade in the hemisphere. Jefferson and Madison counseled Monroe to agree to this proposal, but Adams had a grander idea. The United States, he argued, could assert itself in world affairs by acting alone to warn European powers away; Britain's interest in commercial access would lead them inevitably to support such a declaration. And in return, the Americans would agree not to meddle in European affairs such as the Greek war for independence against the Ottoman Empire. Adams had envisioned a circular letter to the relevant powers, but President Monroe incorporated the declaration into his annual message to Congress in 1823.¹³¹ Little noticed in European capitals at the time, it became and remains a keystone of American

hemispheric policy, and it grew with use, especially as expanded by Theodore Roosevelt's "corollary" to it, which asserted a U.S. right to intervene to bring order to badly managed states in the Western Hemisphere. The doctrine has since been invoked repeatedly to justify American expansion and intervention—to protect against supposed threats of outside colonization or dominion, including that of communism during the Cold War.¹³²

Adams also took great pride in his negotiation of the Adams-Onís, or Transcontinental, Treaty (1819). "The achievement of a definite boundary line to the South Sea [Pacific Ocean] forms a great epocha in our history," he wrote in his diary. The world should become familiar with "the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America" as a "law of nature," he believed, but he did not support the use of military means to secure this goal.¹³³ He had faith in treaties and the natural course of events, and, fearful of the expansion of slavery, he openly opposed the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War, and various schemes to acquire Cuba.¹³⁴

In the 1840s, as a congressman from Massachusetts, he shifted his interest to global trade, especially in Asia. Extending his belief in the general freedom of commerce, he was disturbed by China's preference for limited contact with the West and considered trade in China to be of "pre-eminent interest to the People of the North American Union." When China enforced its prohibition against the importation of opium by destroying a large shipment of it owned by British merchants in Guangzhou, and the British retaliated with force, Adams lent his support to the British position with an argument against China's "anti-commercial" stance that was predictably learned but also tendentious. He insisted that "the right of exchange, barter, or, in other words, of commerce, necessarily follows" from the right of property, which was protected by natural law. He went even further: commerce was not only a natural right but one of the "duties of men." And not only men but nations had this duty: "Commercial intercourse between nations is a moral obligation."¹³⁵

This resort to a natural-law argument was prompted, no doubt, by the lack of support for his position in leading theories of international law. The authoritative work on the subject, *The Law of Nations* (1758), by the Swiss jurist Emerich de Vattel, claimed a universal right to buy, but also

Opium Wars

use

an "equal right to refuse to sell." Such a position, Adams declared, revealed a "manifest inconsistency."¹³⁶ Whether Adams himself was consistent or not, his predisposition became commonplace over the next generation; it had become second nature for Frederick Low in 1871. In the 1840s, however, Adams's argument—or the way he made it—was apparently a hard sell. *The North American Review*, for example, declined to publish it.¹³⁷

But in 1844, after China had ended the Opium War on British terms, the United States negotiated similar terms for itself in its first bilateral trade agreement with China. Over the next generation the principles and the policy orientation for which Adams argued were completely accepted in the United States. And the policies he had adopted as Monroe's secretary of state and then in his own presidency anticipated the nation's later global trade policy—with Navy support for U.S. shipping, trade agreements based on reciprocity, and collaboration with Britain in support of free trade.¹³⁸

William H. Seward, Lincoln's secretary of state, considered Adams his patron, guide, and counselor, and he built on Adams's base.¹³⁹ Textbooks often refer to the purchase of Alaska in 1867 as "Seward's folly," but in fact it was a key element in a strategy to establish American presence in the Pacific. If the United States, even before the Civil War but especially after the construction of the Panama Canal, wanted the Caribbean to be an "American lake," Seward grasped the possibility of making the same of the North Pacific.¹⁴⁰

American dreams of a Pacific or Asian empire were already old in the nineteenth century. The colonization of America had been a product of that ambition, and early on American merchants were familiar with the great arc of the "Pacific Rim"—and with the oceanic islands in the middle, particularly Hawaii, where a substantial American community of missionaries, adventurers, sailors, and planters was well established. The Reverend Samuel Chenery Damon, whose library Melville used, published a newspaper in Honolulu to establish and sustain the American world of the South Pacific.¹⁴¹ When Melville was writing his novels, American whalers were blanketing the oceans, especially the South Pacific, numbering 722 of the world's 900 whaling vessels.¹⁴²

One of President Polk's major foreign-policy objectives was to obtain a West Coast port, and with the acquisition of Oregon in 1846 and Cali-

fornia in 1848, the United States had its place on the Pacific Rim. A decade later President Franklin Pierce commissioned Perry McDonough Collins to explore trade possibilities in Asia. In his report Collins reminded the president that the "problem of the Northwest Passage [which had] occupied the great minds of Europe for centuries" had been "solved by the continuous and onward march of American civilization to the West."¹⁴³

Perhaps it was paradoxical: the great bulk of American trade was with Europe, but talk of the future was all about Asia. Thomas Hart Benton was particularly entranced by the possibilities of escaping from the Atlantic world, where the "European legitimates," as he called them, held "everything American in contempt." The United States would carry "science, liberal principles of government, and the true religion" to China and Japan, while American farms could become Asia's "granary."¹⁴⁴ Like many others, Benton imagined a new, oceanic "silk road,"¹⁴⁵ and he reminded Americans in 1849 that those who have possessed the riches of Asia have "reached the highest pinnacle of wealth and power, and with it the highest attainments of letters, arts, and sciences."¹⁴⁶

Seward shared these views. In the Senate in 1852, he argued that Europe would "sink" in importance while Asia would rise. The United States would face not the great powers of western Europe but the Slavic empire of Russia in the Pacific. Here was the "new Mediterranean," and its "shores, its islands, and the vast region beyond, will become the chief theatre of events."¹⁴⁷ He had in mind "an empire of the seas," which, he believed, "alone is the real empire."¹⁴⁸ "Commerce," he told his Senate colleagues, is "the empire of the world."¹⁴⁹

The nation must be liberal and unified to take advantage of its global potential, Seward knew, so it is no surprise that he had a leading position in the Republican Party and the Lincoln administration. Transcontinental transportation was also vital, and the continental railroad and telegraph were major Republican objectives. In addition, Seward as secretary of state secured a transit treaty with Nicaragua so as to connect the Pacific and the Caribbean, and he tried to acquire the Isthmus of Panama (unsuccessfully) and the Danish West Indies (successfully negotiated with Denmark but not ratified by the Senate). He also aimed to make the Pacific accessible from both New York and San Francisco. Just as regular communication was crucial to the Atlantic economy, Seward established

regular mail service from San Francisco to Honolulu and Hong Kong. And he worked to establish an international agreement on uniform coinage, based on the dollar if possible.¹⁵⁰

Seward believed in continentalism, but not colonialism. He imagined in various statements in the 1860s that Canada would someday voluntarily join the United States, and perhaps Mexico would as well. But if so, it would be by "peaceful negotiation."¹⁵¹ Colonization, he feared, would militarize the United States.¹⁵² (He had opposed the Mexican War.) His ambitious global vision was animated by commerce, "the chief agent of advancement in civilization and enlargement of empire." And his purpose in acquiring Midway Island and Alaska, whose arc of Aleutian Islands reaches nearly to the coasts of Japan and Korea, was to lay the foundation for a network of Pacific coaling stations that would support American commerce with Asia, extending "through the Manilas, and along the Indian coast, and beyond the Persian gulf, to the far-off Mozambique."¹⁵³ The war in 1898 aimed to solidify the U.S. commercial presence in the Pacific that he had envisioned and summed up in 1853 in one tight paragraph:

Open up a highway . . . from New York to San Francisco. Put your domain under cultivation, and your ten thousand wheels of manufacture in motion. Multiply your ships, and send them forth to the East. The nation that draws most materials and provisions from the earth, and fabricates the most, and sells the most of productions and fabrics to foreign nations, must be, and will be, the great power on earth.¹⁵⁴

One could say that Seward anticipated the famous theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan in recognizing ocean commerce as empire, along with the importance of coaling stations and naval support for that commerce. But while Seward's liberal commercial vision presumed a somewhat conflict-free ocean, Mahan was a realist concerned with power. If in his great book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* he referred to the ocean as an open "common," Mahan the naval strategist imagined the sea as a domain of power. In a widely read essay titled "Hawaii and Our Future Sea Power," published in 1893, he explained that sea power demands control of "the world's great medium of circulation." For a nation to secure that

dominance, "it is imperative to take possession, when it can be done righteously, of such maritime positions as contribute to secure command."¹⁵⁵ When in 1898 the United States secured Puerto Rico, considerable control over Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, and Wake Island, it represented the realization of Mahan's global strategy.

1898

The events of 1898 are often considered an aberration, a departure from American tradition, prompted by a desire to participate in the end-of-the-century European race for empire. Mahan said that American colonization of the Philippines was "but one phase of a sentiment that has swept over the whole civilized European world."¹⁵⁶ It has been estimated that across the globe in 1901 there were 140 colonies, territories, and protectorates, most of them in the tropics.¹⁵⁷ Surely this context is important, but it ought not obscure a key local point: the events of 1898 were also a continuation of America's "westward expansion."

Theodore Roosevelt so understood the matter, as did his fellow imperialist Henry Cabot Lodge. In a new preface for the 1900 edition of his *Winning of the West*, Roosevelt wrote that 1898 "finished the work begun over a century before by the backwoodsman," that "the question of expansion in 1898 was but a variant . . . of the great western movement."¹⁵⁸ Senator Lodge agreed that "to-day we do but continue the same movement." If the anti-imperialists are right, he added, "then our whole past record of expansion is a crime."¹⁵⁹ Buffalo Bill's popular Wild West Show marked both the continuity of western history and its new geography, when in 1899 it replaced its re-creation of Custer's Last Stand with one of the Battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba.¹⁶⁰

The reason 1898 seems so different from the Indian removal in 1838 or from the taking of Mexico in 1848 is that the earlier work of empire had been "domesticated" as an internal affair—an idea that depended, of course, on ignoring the claims of Indians and Mexicans.¹⁶¹ Indeed, as we have seen, in 1871 Congress formally transformed relations with Native Americans from a foreign to a domestic issue. At the same time there was continuous American involvement in East Asia: the Charles Wilkes expedition in 1839, the Wanghai Treaty with China in 1844, the so-called

opening of Japan in 1854, and a treaty with Hawaii in 1875 that forbade Hawaiians from disposing of any territory to foreign powers. Americans thought of the Pacific and East Asia as extensions of the West, as well as the focal point for their oceanic commercial ambitions.

In fact, the imperial adventures of 1898 were prompted in large part by worry over the closing of the continental frontier, as well as by fears about the overproduction of agricultural and manufactured goods. In that year, the United States for the first time exported more manufactured goods than it imported; with no more than 5 percent of the world's population, it produced 32 percent of the world food supply.¹⁶² Albert Beveridge surely had these developments in mind when he took the Senate floor in 1899 to explain that "American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume." Under the circumstances, he continued, "fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours."¹⁶³

Americans had always looked to expansion as a remedy for social conflict. Free land and opportunity would spare the nation the class conflict that marked Europe. When Frederick Jackson Turner spoke of the closing of the frontier, such a development was clearly on his mind, as it was on the minds of many others. Growing labor strife and turmoil toward the end of the nineteenth century, including the Haymarket Riot of 1886 and the Homestead and Pullman strikes of the 1890s, prompted many to look to American expansion beyond the continent and into the Pacific as a contemporary version of this long-standing mythic solution. Indeed, three years after his famous address of 1893 on "the significance of the frontier," Turner noted—in *The Atlantic Monthly*—that for "three centuries the dominant fact in American life has been expansion"; current "demands for a vigorous foreign policy" seeking to extend American influence to "outlying islands and adjoining countries" suggest that this "movement will continue."¹⁶⁴

In the nineteenth century United States trade was with Europe, but, as the widely read British sociologist Benjamin Kidd pointed out, in 1898 the North Atlantic economies were converging, becoming more similar in their manufacturing capacities. New markets would thus be necessary. Kidd pointed to the tropical regions, which had not only resources that needed to be unlocked but markets as well. Josiah Strong predicted that in the twentieth century the east-west trade pattern of the

nineteenth century would shift to a north-south one, for "commerce, like water, flows only when there is inequality."¹⁶⁵ Kidd advised his American readers that the "relation of the white man to the tropics" must be properly organized, for "these regions must be administered from temperate regions." The low "social efficiency" of the "natural inhabitants" of the tropics could not be permitted to weaken the whole world economy.¹⁶⁶ Making much the same point, but by means of poetry rather than social science, Rudyard Kipling—in a poem specially written to influence President William McKinley and published in *McClure's Magazine*—urged the Americans to take up "the White Man's burden."

McKinley had to make a decision. Given the foregoing, perhaps his decision was predetermined. But still, he had not anticipated such a development, and he went to some lengths to persuade the public that he had deliberated long and seriously. He told the following story, which has been oft quoted, to a group of visiting leaders of the Methodist Church:

When I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess I did not know what to do with them . . . I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance . . . And one night late it came to me this way—I know not how but it came: (1) that we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government . . . ; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them . . . and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them . . . And then I went to bed, and went to sleep, and slept soundly.¹⁶⁷

Why it would have been "dishonorable" to "give them back to Spain" is unclear, the more so since the United States itself did not in fact possess the Philippines. Nor did it have any right to them, save a claim of military conquest over Spain, but not—and this is important—over the Filipinos, who were still fighting for their independence. As for Chris-

tianizing them, the Protestant McKinley speaking to the Methodists seems to have overlooked that the official religion of the Philippines was Roman Catholicism, or he did not consider several centuries of that faith sufficient evidence of Christianity. As for their unfitness for self-rule, the Filipinos, who had been fighting Spain for their independence since well before 1898, had a provisional government and a constitution in place.¹⁶⁸ That leaves avoiding "bad business"—or affirming good business—as the strongest reason for establishing American imperial rule.¹⁶⁹

The opposition to taking possession of the Philippines was generally based on two considerations, or two sides of the same consideration, one racial and the other constitutional. As 1848 showed, Americans opposed incorporation of and citizenship for peoples they supposed to be racially inferior—Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos. And this consensus led to the second problem. The United States, it was said, had never taken a territory without the intention of eventually making it a state equal to existing states. To abandon this practice in 1898, it was argued by the anti-imperialists, would compromise republican principles.

There were, in fact, all too many precedents for the United States to become a colonial power. They were bad ones, but the imperialists treated them as good ones. The political scientist and future president of Harvard University A. Lawrence Lowell saw no problem: "The question is not whether we shall enter upon a career of colonization or not, but whether we shall shift into other channels the colonization which has lasted as long as our national existence."¹⁷⁰ As for the question of equal citizenship or political empowerment, he pointed out that the equal-rights tradition did not apply to "tribal Indians, to Chinese, or to negroes."¹⁷¹ The closest "domestic" analogy was the government's treatment of Native Americans, which provided a model for establishing the legal standing of colonial subjects. They were legally "nationals" owing allegiance to the United States, but not citizens.¹⁷² Harry Pratt Judson, future president of the University of Chicago, argued that Filipinos would hold the "same status precisely as our own Indians . . . They are in fact, 'Indians.'"¹⁷³ The Harvard historian Albert Bushnell Hart (who had served as W.E.B. DuBois's dissertation adviser) agreed with these views. The United States was already a "great colonial power," he observed, for "our Indian agents have a situation very like that of British officials in the native states of India."¹⁷⁴

Thus the constitutional standing of American Indians became a precedent for the rights of peoples in newly annexed territories. In the so-called Insular Cases (1901), the Supreme Court established the legal status of these new territories and their inhabitants. The most important case, Downes v. Bidwell (1901), addressed the issue of whether Puerto Ricans were entitled to the "full panoply of constitutional rights." They were not. Overseas possessions, the Supreme Court decided, were "subject to the jurisdiction of the United States," but they were "not of the United States." That meant, according to a narrow majority, that the island and its people were "foreign to the United States in a domestic sense."¹⁷⁵ The exceedingly awkward phrasing is strikingly close to John Marshall's description of the situation of the Cherokees. Indians, he had written, were "domestic dependent nations" in a "state of pupillage."¹⁷⁶ Since racism and paternalism were so prominent in the discussion of the constitutionality of colonial rule, it seems pertinent that the author of the controlling opinions in both Downes v. Bidwell and Plessy v. Ferguson was the same, Justice Henry B. Brown, and that Justice John Marshall Harlan dissented in both cases. Harlan's second dissent echoed his earlier one:

Whether a particular race will or will not assimilate with our people, and whether they can or cannot with safety to our institutions be brought within the operation of the constitution, is a matter to be thought of when it is proposed to acquire territory . . . A mistake in the acquisition of territory cannot be made the ground for violating the constitution.¹⁷⁷

REVOLUTION AND EMPIRE

The Spanish-American War is a misnomer. The misnaming is significant because it masks a central issue and legacy of the war. It was more properly two wars: the Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Spanish-Filipino-American War, each of which was itself two wars. The usual name of the war suggests that the United States went to war with Spain, failing to acknowledge that after two quick victories over Spain, American forces snuffed out long-standing revolutionary wars for national independence in two very different places. In the case of the Philippines, the

United States annexed the islands, and then engaged in several years of brutal warfare against Filipino armies committed to achieving independence. Cuba was not annexed, but the Platt Amendment, which Cuba was forced to accept, recognized a U.S. right to intervene in its affairs to protect "life, property, and individual liberty."

Although both the Filipino and the Cuban armies had long been fighting the Spanish and collaborated with the Americans in the final phase of their war against Spain, neither took part in the surrender ceremonies. In fact, they were both denied access to the cities where the surrenders took place, Santiago de Cuba and Manila. Nor was either consulted on the protocols that established the terms of peace, or a party to the Treaty of Paris (1898) that ended the war. As the American government saw it, it was liberating the Cubans and Filipinos. Certainly the pro-empire faction believed this, but Americans were divided, even in the governing elite, many of whose members, of the same class and status as Roosevelt and Lodge, opposed empire. While the press fanned the flames of imperial nationalism to build popular support for the war, many Americans had particular reasons to favor it. American Jews, thinking of Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492, were happy to see it lose an empire that dated from that year. Nationalist feelings in immigrant groups, especially Irishmen and Poles, whose homelands suffered under the rule of empires, made them sympathetic to Cuban independence. Michael Kruszkka explained that Poles naturally sympathized with peoples struggling for independence, even if "they be half-savage Malays." In fact, many immigrants were nervous about all the talk coming from American authorities about "civilization" and political rights; they had suffered from such talk both at home and in the United States.¹⁷⁸ Yet W.E.B. DuBois wondered whether imperialism might improve American race relations by increasing the ratio of nonwhites to whites in the population.¹⁷⁹

But hardly anyone—not imperialists, not anti-imperialists—could get beyond parochial American interests and imagine themselves outside the United States, imagine how the American empire appeared in the eyes of Cubans or Filipinos. Had they been able to do so, they would have had to recognize the different meaning of the war and peace.

The Cuban struggle for independence from Spain began in the mid-nineteenth century, later than in Spain's other possessions in the Americas. And it led to war three different times: the Ten Years' War (1868–78),

the Little War (1879–80), and the War of Independence (1895–98). A striking feature of all three is that they were fought by multiracial Cuban armies, officers and soldiers, a novelty in the history of the Americas. The United States was using race as a fundamental, hierarchical category of human difference, but José Martí, the Cuban writer and independence leader exiled in New York, challenged the category. "This is not the century of the struggle of races," he wrote in 1882, "but rather the century of the affirmation of rights."¹⁸⁰ The Cuban revolutionaries were ready, perhaps even eager, to work for a society without a color line. American intervention hijacked their independence movement and subverted their powerful antiracist rhetoric and practice.¹⁸¹

By early 1898, the Cubans were clearly on their way to victory over the Spanish, who they believed were demoralized and had "lost the will to fight." The American minister to Spain shared that view; he had reported in late 1897 that Spanish sovereignty in Cuba was "extinct."¹⁸² Americans as far back as John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay had expected that a weakened Spain would lose this island colony, but they were uneasy with the idea of an independent Cuba and deeply opposed the idea of Cuba being attached to another, stronger European power. Americans, especially southern planters before the Civil War, presumed that in due course Cuba would become an American possession, though there was, as with Mexico, the problem of the island's mixed-race or "mongrel" population.

Such was the matrix of concerns when, on professed humanitarian grounds of liberating the oppressed Cubans from the yoke of Spanish tyranny, the United States went to war against Spain in Cuba, alleging that Spain had engineered the explosion of the American battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15, 1896 (now thought to have been the result of a badly engineered boiler near a powder magazine). The leaders of the Cuban insurrection had explicitly informed President McKinley that they would interpret American intervention as a war against the revolution, but this concern was somewhat allayed by the Teller Amendment to the war resolution, which disclaimed any American intention to acquire sovereignty over Cuba and promised self-rule at the end of hostilities. But the United States found it difficult to let go after victory and soon was opposing the liberation movement there. Its influence on Cuba was substantial, for the thrust of its intervention was to

give support and legitimation to the most conservative—and mostly white—Cuban political leaders, who took advantage of their American connections to bolster their position and to reinstall the principle of racial hierarchy.¹⁸³

American participation in this war with Spain was initially brief; seventeen thousand American troops sailed from Tampa, Florida, on June 14, 1898, and the Spanish in Cuba capitulated on July 17. The manner of ending the conflict at Santiago de Cuba raised troubling questions, however, for the Cuban revolutionaries. The Spanish surrendered not to the Cubans, whose war it was and had been since 1895, but to the Americans, who had been in Cuba for only a few weeks. The Spanish commanders acknowledged the centrality of the Cuban army in their own defeat, but the Americans could not take seriously an army made up of people of color.¹⁸⁴ More provocatively, the Americans and Spanish, as they later were to do in Manila, forbade local military leaders from even attending the surrender ceremony, though it was occurring in the city that was the birthplace of Cuban nationalism. Cubans were even forbidden to enter any of the island's cities or towns to celebrate the victory over Spain. Oddly, though Spain was the enemy that had lost the war, Spanish bureaucrats remained in power and Cubans were required to relinquish their weapons.¹⁸⁵

The bizarre asymmetry of the victory is difficult to grasp. The American expeditionary force was a small one, and casualties had been minimal, while during several years of war the Cubans had lost tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, some to death in battle or in the detention camps, others to disease, and yet others to exile. Indeed, over the course of the 1895–98 war, the population of Cuba was reduced by as much as 15 percent. The price that the Cubans paid for their ambiguous victory was a “shattered world.”¹⁸⁶ Yet the Americans claimed both the victory and the authority to shape Cuba's future.

The Teller Amendment notwithstanding, after the surrender American officials presumed a right to determine the Cubans' capacity for self-rule. The American commanding general, Leonard Wood, sounding like a modern college football coach, declared that he would give the Cubans “every chance to show what is in them, in order that they either demonstrate their fitness or unfitness for self-government.”¹⁸⁷

In making this determination, the North Americans were predisposed

to rely on their notions of racial hierarchy. They were skeptical about the capacity of a mixed-race people to rule themselves, and this racist supposition fitted with an important ambiguity in the way upper-class Cubans thought. Even before the American intervention, when Cuban leaders discussed the future, they spoke of “exceptional men” of learning and cultural attainment, men with the marks of high civilization. This was not necessarily a racial concept, but it easily slid into making an elite, white, European-educated Cuban the norm for a leader. This logic undercut the earlier idea of “civilization” articulated by Martí, Juan Gualberto Gómez, and Antonio Maceo, for whom transcendence of race was the mark of civilization. Moreover, in the language of 1898—that of some Cubans as well as Americans—there was an implication that most Cubans did not have the qualities needed for bearing political responsibilities. This notion was well expressed in the circulars that revolutionary leaders distributed after the war urging Cubans to behave in an orderly fashion to show that they deserved to be free and self-governing. The American occupiers unthinkingly but consequentially gave a racial gloss to these Cuban comments. Whiteness and civilization were almost assimilated, one to the other, as in the United States at the time, a racist assumption that prompted Americans to consider most Cubans unfit for self-rule—unless tutored by themselves.¹⁸⁸ And, as was to occur in the Philippines, it meant that Americans formed ties with and supported a Europeanized and conservative elite, often large landholders.¹⁸⁹

The Cuban constitution was drawn up in 1901 under the watchful eye of General Wood, who also modernized, reorganized, and upgraded the island's public finances and its public-health infrastructure and institutions—all significant gifts to the Cuban people. But the constitution was a different matter. Cuban leaders were told that the withdrawal of the American army was conditional upon their accepting the Platt Amendment and incorporating it into their constitution. This stipulation, which substantially compromised the promise of the Teller Amendment, was predictable, given the historical American fear that a Cuba in hostile hands would threaten American security and commerce in the Caribbean. The provisions imposed on the Cubans prohibited their entering into any treaty with a foreign power that would impair Cuban independence, limited their power to contract public debt, and authorized the United States to intervene to preserve Cuban independence, protect property, and

maintain order. (Cuba was released from these terms only in 1934, as part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.) In addition, the Cubans were required to lease lands permanently to the United States for coaling and naval stations, including what is now the Guantánamo Bay facility.

U.S. intervention in Cuba had a substantial cultural effect; according to the historian Louis Pérez, it "changed everything," as North American "normative standards and moral hierarchies worked their way into everyday life." Cubans, weakened materially and culturally by their long struggle against Spain, could not project an alternative way of life for a postwar Cuba.¹⁹⁰ There is truth to what Pérez claims, but Ada Ferrer, the best student of the Cuban Revolution, points out that the achievement of even semi-independence made a difference. Cuba's constitution established universal manhood suffrage, for example; had the people of Cuba lived ninety miles north, in the Jim Crow American South, the substantial black majority among them would have been disenfranchised.¹⁹¹

Although Theodore Roosevelt and his "Rough Riders" are well remembered as part of the lore of the American triumph in Cuba, Roosevelt played an even more decisive role in the taking of the Philippines. Months before war broke out between the United States and Spain on April 21, 1898, as an assistant secretary of the Navy he had placed Admiral George Dewey in command of the Asiatic squadron and ordered him to Hong Kong, only a few days by sail from Manila. And on April 25, the day Congress declared war, Dewey received a telegraphic command from Roosevelt: "War has commenced between the United States and Spain. Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavor." At this point, President McKinley like many Americans could not locate the Philippines on a map.¹⁹² Entering Manila Bay in the dark of night, Dewey engaged the Spanish fleet at dawn of May 1, achieving a spectacular naval victory in seven hours.

But here, too, as in Cuba, the Americans were injecting themselves into a complex situation where local opposition to Spain's rule was active and ongoing. The struggle for Philippine independence went back at least a decade. *Noli me tangere* (1886), a novel critical of Spanish rule written by José Rizal, the Filipino physician, poet, and nationalist, perhaps marked its beginning. In any case, Rizal's execution by the Spanish in

1896 sparked a full-scale anticolonial rebellion. Rizal represented the *ilustrados*, elite Filipinos who initially sought reform within the empire. In 1892 Andres Bonifacio had organized a broader revolutionary society, the Katipunan, devoted to the overthrow of Spanish rule;¹⁹³ when hostilities broke out in 1896, Filipinos fought under Emilio Aguinaldo, one of the Katipunan. In December 1897, Aguinaldo and other leaders agreed in the Pact of Biak-na-Bato to end their resistance and leave the Philippines in return for a promise of reforms within five years and a considerable sum of money.

Neither side lived up to the terms of the agreement. Aguinaldo used a portion of the money to purchase arms in Hong Kong, where he also made contact with various American officials and aides to Dewey. A few days before Dewey received Roosevelt's message, Aguinaldo left Hong Kong for Europe, but stopped on the way at Singapore, where he spoke with the American consul, E. Spencer Pratt. Pratt promised him that the United States would support Philippine independence, though later he denied this, and telegraphed Dewey that he had agreed to a "general cooperation" with the "insurgents." Newspaper reports in Singapore at the time indicated that this was indeed the case, and when the press quoted Aguinaldo's claim that he anticipated "independence" for the Philippines with the support of American "friends and liberators," Pratt made no public comment. Nor did he comment when he forwarded the newspaper account to Washington.¹⁹⁴ He reported to Dewey that Aguinaldo was ready to return to Hong Kong, and Dewey replied that the Filipino leader should come "as soon as possible." But by the time Aguinaldo arrived again in Hong Kong, Dewey had received Roosevelt's command and left for Manila. Before departing, however, the American commander arranged for a Navy ship to bring Aguinaldo to Manila Bay, returning the exiled leader of the independence campaign—no small matter.¹⁹⁵

Although the Americans sank or burned the entire Spanish fleet in Manila, they needed ground troops to take control of Manila and the archipelago, so Admiral Dewey welcomed Filipino support. He gave captured Spanish weapons to Aguinaldo and urged him to recruit an army, clearly and openly expressing sympathy for the rebel cause, whether sincerely or not.¹⁹⁶ Aguinaldo would have been satisfied at this point with independence under the protection of the American Navy, which he thought was agreeable to the Americans.¹⁹⁷ Precisely how much encour-

agement Dewey gave to Aguinaldo is not clear, but he did not object when Aguinaldo announced that he had returned to his homeland with the support of the "great nation" of North America, the "cradle of liberty."¹⁹⁸ Beyond any dispute, however, was the contribution that Filipino troops under Aguinaldo made to the taking of Manila, which they had surrounded on three sides, with Dewey's fleet on the fourth. Dewey acknowledged this at the time, as did the anti-imperialist Carl Schurz, a former Civil War general, Radical Republican senator, and civil service reformer.¹⁹⁹ The United States quickly forgot this vital contribution of the Filipinos, though it had been appreciated at the time.

Such was the context when on May 24, 1898, Aguinaldo established a provisional Revolutionary Government, followed by a declaration of independence on June 12 and, eleven days later, the establishment of the Philippine Republic. Officials in Washington reprimanded Pratt for his support of Aguinaldo's plans of independence; Dewey, too, was warned against making any political commitments and required to report on all his contacts with the rebels, who were of course his allies. Dewey complied but at the same time commended the Filipinos' capacity for "self-government."²⁰⁰ From this point on, the more Washington became involved, the more the Filipino nationalist aspirations were challenged.

The American effort to marginalize the Filipinos' military contribution resulted in an elaborate charade that brought the conflict to a close. Working through the Belgian consul in Manila, the Americans and Spanish agreed to stage a pretend fight between themselves, followed by a Spanish surrender on August 13. Late on the evening before, Aguinaldo was informed that he and his army were not invited to the ceremony, denying them a presence at this crucial event in the history of the Filipino independence movement, and denying them as well the fruits of victory.

With the Treaty of Paris in December 1898, the United States gained legal possession of the Philippines, though the Filipino rebels controlled almost the whole of the archipelago. They had, in the words of Renato Constantino, a Filipino nationalist historian, "won their war of liberation."²⁰¹ Refusing to acknowledge these facts on the ground, the United States established a military government the next day. Needless to say, the Filipino revolutionaries were disappointed. During the fall of 1898, Felipe Agoncillo, their chief diplomatic officer, had been in Washington

and Paris seeking a chance to speak to members of the American administration, but he met with no success. So he put his argument for Philippine independence in a letter to the State Department, hoping to influence the Senate debate over ratification of the peace treaty. Like the Americans a century before, he explained, the Filipinos had struggled to drive out a colonial oppressor, and they had established a constitutional government, based on the right of the people to rule and in a form that was similar in structure to the American government. He also pointed out that Spain, which at the time of the signing of the treaty controlled little more than Manila, had no authority to cede the remainder of the nation, then governed by the Philippine Republic. Renewed war was inevitable, this time between the Philippine Republic and the United States. It broke out on February 4, 1899; two days later the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris.

The United States sent seventy thousand troops to fight in what became a guerrilla war that lasted for a decade, though Roosevelt declared it ended in the middle of 1902. As in Vietnam later, in this guerrilla war American troops could not hold territory, and then resorted to unconscionable tactics, including the destruction of whole villages, water torture practiced on captured soldiers, and a policy of forcing Filipinos into overcrowded detention camps. One American general ordered his troops to render a locality into a "howling wilderness."²⁰² Certainly this brutality was partly enabled by "race antipathy," as John Bass, a correspondent for *Harper's*, phrased it. The soldiers he spoke to associated Filipinos with Indians and African-Americans. "I am in my glory," one told him, "when I can sight some dark skin and pull the trigger." A soldier from Kansas declared that the Philippines would not be pacified "until the niggers are killed off like the Indians."²⁰³ The result was devastation. Mark Twain, a leading anti-imperialist, pondered the sense or lack of it in all this: "There must be two Americas: one that sets the captive free, and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him."²⁰⁴

Still, popular resistance in the Philippines had its effect. When the American army used such brutal methods and the same kind of detention camps that the Spanish had used so infamously in Cuba in order to put down the Filipino insurgents, support for the war in the United States eroded. It also gave the Filipino elite leverage to demand a share in governance, accelerating the shift of governing responsibility to Filipinos and

a promise of eventual independence. American leaders also had to appraise the very high price they had paid for territorial colonization, and to consider alternative forms of empire.

The casualties of the Philippine-American War vastly exceeded those of the conflict between the United States and Spain in the Philippines, yet both Americans and Filipinos—for their own reasons—have tended to forget this war. Memory of it interrupts and confuses the nationalist narrative in each country. If, as McKinley said to Americans, the United States knew and acted on behalf of “every aspiration of their [Filipinos’] minds, in every hope of their hearts,” then the war simply did not make sense to them and escaped memory.²⁰⁵ Filipinos who learned their history from textbooks written by American colonial authorities could not but see their own resistance as a foolish rejection of benevolence and enlightenment. Since many of those who had fought the Americans later assumed public office in the colonial regime, which lasted nearly four decades, the textbook interpretations seemed to be ratified. From their perspective, according to Reynaldo Ileto, a Filipino historian, the “war of resistance was a waste of effort, an event that was best forgotten.”²⁰⁶

If the war did not find a place in the historical memory or the political culture of the two combatants, it was nonetheless recognized at the time all over Asia, especially in China, as a political earthquake. Chinese intellectuals committed to nationalism and modernity saw in the Philippine Revolution, even if crushed by the Americans, an inspiring sign of a revolutionary future toward which, they hoped, China and other parts of Asia and Africa might struggle. The Filipinos had given form to revolution “as a modern mode of being in the contemporary world.”²⁰⁷ Although Americans thought it was they who had brought the ideas of freedom, modernity, and nationhood to Asia, Fujia Ou, a leading Chinese nationalist, thanked the Filipino resistance, not America, for the “wind of freedom and independence” that was blowing across Asia.²⁰⁸

The United States, the Chinese believed, had betrayed the Filipinos who had joined them to defeat Spain. When the United States turned against the independence movement, Chinese opinion toward Aguinaldo changed, elevating him from a “bandit” creating “disorder” into a “leader” of a “revolution.” The United States, which had been identified with freedom, became a powerful symbol of hostility to independence, to nationality, to freedom.²⁰⁹ Liang Qichao, another Chinese nationalist intellectual, writing in 1901, pointed out that when the Philippine-

American War began, the Philippine Republic controlled almost 170,000 square miles of territory with a population of more than 9 million people, while the Americans held “not more than 143 square miles of territory and not more than 300,000 people.” Having relied on Filipino military assistance and encouraged Filipino expectations of independence, the Americans turned on them in a “bloody three-year war in which the number of dead and wounded was enormous.” (The usual estimate is 200,000 Filipino deaths, mostly civilians.) Nationhood was destroyed. Liang Qichao warned fellow nationalists against relying on foreigners promising help; they represented a new means “for destroying countries.”²¹⁰

The American imperialists had not anticipated the anti-American nationalism that opposed their venture into modern colonization and that brought their aspirations for formal colonies to an end. Theodore Roosevelt, who had been so anxious to enter the race for empire in 1898, was chastened by the Philippine-American War, which as president he officially ended—though skirmishes continued for several years more. The era when American colonies were established abroad by force was quite brief—indeed, concentrated in only one year, 1900—and thereafter the United States backed away from the imperialism associated with the European powers. Experience taught Roosevelt and his generation of imperialists what William Marcy, one of the least notable secretaries of state, had apparently grasped intuitively in 1855: “Remote colonies are not a source of strength to any Government, but of positive weakness, in the cost of their defense, and in the complications of policy they impose.”²¹¹

The Americans took away different lessons for the future from the Philippines and from Cuba. Formal colonial rule, such as they had insisted on in the Philippines, was eventually rejected, but intervention in the domestic affairs of a weaker nation such as Cuba, especially in Latin America, to enforce fiscal responsibility, to protect property, rights of contract, and commerce, and to ensure regional security was developed in various ways over the next decades. This American way of empire was even presented as anti-imperialism because it guaranteed openness, in contrast to the exclusivity of the old empires. While the methods of sustaining America's informal empire based on commerce and finance were novel, even technically creative, the fundamental ideas shared much with the earlier ones of Jefferson, Adams, and Seward.

MAKING THE WORLD SAFE FOR EMPIRE

Though in 1898 Woodrow Wilson was less certain of the merits of imperialism than Roosevelt, he did not join the anti-imperialist chorus. The situation, he thought, demanded serious reflection, which he gave to it.²¹² By 1901, when the brutal war against the Filipino insurgents was becoming a national embarrassment, he was conscious of the complex interplay of American traditions and world opinion in the work of empire:

The best guarantee of good government we can give to the Filipinos is, that we shall be sensitive to the opinion of the world, that we shall be sensitive in what we do to our own standards, so often boasted and proclaimed, and shall wish above all things else to live up to the character we have established, the standards we have professed.²¹³

By the time of the First World War, when American power made him a world leader, he had become a leading opponent of colonization. Less publicly, Roosevelt and his former imperialist colleagues had also ceased advocating territorial expansion.²¹⁴

In the midst of the world war, and before America entered it, Wilson became convinced—like DuBois, Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Crystal Eastman, and others far more radical than he—that imperialism was the cause of international anarchy, not its cure.²¹⁵ Competition among imperial powers was responsible for the war, he believed. The alternative he proposed was a world governed by international law that was enforced by an international institution. Such a structure would be a framework for national self-determination and would lead to international stability.²¹⁶ This view of the world positioned Wilson against the illiberalisms of the time, against the autocratic imperialist regimes of Europe and Asia—and after 1917 against international communism.

Notwithstanding these views, Wilson was committed to a vision of America and the world that amounted to an endorsement of the American way of life as empire. Like many leaders before him, he thought the United States was at once unique and a universal model. The world should look like the United States writ large, he thought, and then it would offer America sufficient space—the globe itself—in which to pur-

sue the felicity that so struck Tocqueville. Jefferson had thought that in the long run the United States would be secure only in a republican world, a world like itself. Wilson offered a similar idea with his Fourteen Points in 1918. Similarly, National Security Council document 68 (1950), the foundation of American policy in the Cold War, sought a particular "order among nations" that would allow "our free society" to "flourish." That society would be not only in the American interest but in the interest of all humankind, of "civilization itself."²¹⁷

While Wilson spoke in universalist terms, he presumed, as Americans always had, that global commodity, goods, and financial markets should always be at the disposal of the United States. Conservatives agreed, but somehow thought an American protective tariff was compatible with this idea. The natural resources, commerce, and investment opportunities of other nations ought to be available whenever and wherever Americans desired and on the terms they preferred. The success of the United States in the global economy would, Wilson and others thought, ratify America's claim to represent a universally desirable future.²¹⁸ Whether they realized it or not, Wilson and the America for which and to which he spoke were engaged in their own version of Ahab's restless ambition and tireless pursuit of the whale.

One cannot quite imagine Herbert Hoover as a soul mate of Ahab, but his experiences in his first years out of college offer a good example of the ambition and mobility that circulated American things, money, and knowledge around the globe. In the twelve years after he graduated from Stanford University in 1895, the freshly minted engineer worked in Australia, China, England, France, India, New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, Italy, Canada, South Africa, Egypt, and Burma—and few of these were onetime engagements. Talented and ambitious Americans were highly mobile, and more and more often mobile internationally. Note also that he had no work in any of the territories the United States obtained from Spain: Cuba, Puerto Rico, or the Philippines.²¹⁹ The letterhead of the New York Life Insurance Company illustrated the general point: "The Oldest International Insurance Company in the World," "Supervised by 82 Governments."²²⁰ Colonies, Americans were realizing, were not necessary to their global ambitions.

At times Wilson insisted that this American commercial drive should not be indulged at the expense of compromising the freedom and politi-

cal independence of smaller nations. On July 4, 1914, when his views on domestic and foreign policy were at their most radical, he declared that when "American enterprise" abroad has the effect of "exploiting the mass of the people in that country, it ought to be checked and not encouraged," especially in "those foreign countries which are not strong enough to resist us." Two years later, speaking to the Pan-American Scientific Congress, he imagined the United States moving beyond the unilateralism and hierarchical assumptions of the Monroe Doctrine. American republics, he proposed, should unite in "guaranteeing to each other, absolutely, political independence and territorial integrity."²²¹

Sometimes Wilson spoke generously; at other times his language was tough. But he always carried a big stick, bigger in fact than Roosevelt's—and he used it more often. Wilson was perfectly comfortable with Roosevelt's "corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, which justified U.S. intervention to repair "chronic wrongdoing" in the Americas. Roosevelt's standard for a nation's doing right included "efficiency and decency," maintaining "order," and paying "its obligations."²²² Using that standard, Wilson intervened in Haiti in 1915 (where troops remained until 1934), in the Dominican Republic in 1916 (where troops remained until 1924), in Mexico twice (1914, 1916), and in Cuba (1917). He sent troops to Russia in 1918–20 in support of supposed liberal opponents of the Bolsheviks, overestimating the prospects of the liberal opposition. He was more cautious, however, in central Asia and the Middle East, showing no interest in discussions at the time of possible U.S. mandates in Armenia, Albania, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, or Palestine.

It could be said that for Wilson the United States as international policeman was an alternative to imperialism as a way of ordering the world. He might even have thought that remaking the world in the image of America was in itself a form of anti-imperialism. But here again one encounters the recurring problem of Americans not being able to see their country as others saw it, to imagine the United States as an enemy. Wilson, and Americans generally, tend to miss the point made several generations later by Sukarno of Indonesia at the Bandung Conference of 1955: "Colonialism does not just exist in the classic form." There is also "a modern dress in the form of economic control . . . [and] intellectual control."²²³

In the end, Wilson, like Theodore Roosevelt, shared the Anglo-

Saxons' assumption that they had the right, even responsibility, to rule and raise up the lesser peoples of the non-European world. Latin Americans, Asians, Slavs, and Africans were, as Roosevelt phrased it, in "the childhood stage of race development." Wilson used almost the same language, saying they were "in the childhood of their political growth."²²⁴ The idea of the civilizing mission and the language of uplift had progressive connotations at the time, and the promise of modernity, efficiency, and open markets also seemed to give a progressive cast to the regulation of the administrative, fiscal, and commercial affairs of smaller nations.

International economic relations had become vastly more complex than they had been in the era of Thomas Jefferson.²²⁵ For Wilson and his generation international economic relations went beyond simple trade or exchange, though most multinational enterprise was still oriented to trade. But America's increased manufacturing capacity and greater investment abroad now gave it an elevated and central position in the global economy. From the periphery the United States was moving unmistakably to the core.²²⁶

While in the nineteenth century trade diplomacy had mostly concerned access and tariffs, the expanded American economy increasingly depended on a regular supply of raw materials, which meant that matters internal to other nations became important. And as U.S. businesses developed plantations and factories abroad, labor and taxation policies for manufacturing and extractive industries were equally important. The security of investments in foreign public and private sectors was likewise a matter of national interest when direct investment in foreign nations increased significantly.²²⁷ The United States, a debtor nation in the nineteenth century, was a creditor nation by the time it entered World War I, as Wilson noted at the time; by 1918 it was in fact the world's leading creditor nation, with major investments on every continent. Commercial diplomacy now had to be concerned with the internal domestic affairs of other nations.

John Hay, one of the circle of imperialists around Theodore Roosevelt and McKinley's secretary of state, had famously circulated a series of what were called Open Door notes in 1899 and 1900, which outlined policies that he saw as complementary to the U.S. taking of the Philippines. (Admiral Mahan worked with him on them.²²⁸) Partly prompted by America's new colonial presence in East Asia, the notes recalled the nation's

long tradition of concern for global free trade, not real estate, and they pointed to the future as well. Wilson, for example, admired and built upon them, and it has even been claimed—with good reason—that the World Trade Organization is “a linear heir of the Open Door.”²²⁹

The notes also responded to the then current disorder in China: the Boxer Rebellion erupting in 1900 aimed to overthrow the Qing dynasty and threatened the stability of China’s imperial government. To boot, the Chinese authorities as well as the rebellious forces were challenging foreign influence in China, and in the chaos several thousand European military forces arrived, along with a small American contingent dispatched from the Philippines, to maintain their established trade and other treaty rights. Hay worried, however, that the European powers might try to gain yet more control and to partition China into exclusionary markets in their respective “spheres of influence” previously agreed on. After consulting with the British, but without thinking to consult the Chinese government, he circulated his notes, which stated the principle that all foreign powers should have equal commercial opportunity in China, including the freedom to mount financial operations, with no favoritism given to nations in their spheres of influence.²³⁰ This matter was to be worked out among the European imperial powers, not by the Chinese. He also proclaimed a general commitment to preserve China’s administrative integrity—that is to say, to allow no formal colonies. Maintenance of American access to trade in China was obviously one objective, but Hay also wanted to prevent rivalry in China among the European powers that might lead to conflicts disrupting the Atlantic world as well as the Pacific.²³¹

The important point here is not the impact of his notes; there was none. The United States had neither the armies nor the moral authority to enforce the principles he outlined. In a moment of honest self-reflection Hay admitted as much, characterizing the excited newspaper talk about how the United States could now dictate to the world as nothing but “mere flap-doodle.”²³² Still, these famous notes express, at the very moment of its colonizing the Philippines, America’s alternative to formal colonization. Hay defined instead a liberal empire and a liberal world order, pointing toward Woodrow Wilson’s global statement of principles in the Fourteen Points. Though Wilson didn’t call his policy “dollar diplomacy,” for which his predecessor in the White House,

William Howard Taft, became famous, in a technical way the policy of expanding and protecting American export of capital and importation of profits and goods was extraordinarily creative. It made empire almost invisible to Americans and was often welcomed, even solicited, by the leaders of small nations that wanted to grow economically.

Although the United States was still a debtor nation in the time of Taft’s presidency, New York City was becoming a tremendously important center of global finance. Declining returns on domestic loans prompted New York’s banks and investment houses to look to less developed countries for better interest rates, and they also pursued opportunities in western Europe.²³³ Kuhn, Loeb, a New York private investment house, and National City Bank had underwritten German imperial bonds in 1900; with another syndicate they financed Japanese bonds in 1904; J. P. Morgan provided credit to Mexico in 1899. More important, Morgan made substantial loans to Britain to finance the Boer War. While making a large loan to the world’s leading creditor nation enhanced the international standing of this bank, the whole cluster of loans brought “global recognition” to American investment banks.²³⁴ There had been no U.S. government involvement in these transactions, but the risks in financing smaller, more volatile nations encouraged bankers eventually to turn to the government.

In 1904 the Dominican Republic, which wanted to divert to itself some of the American capital going to Cuba, approached American banks. Cuba’s compromised sovereignty made it attractive to the banks, but the Dominican leaders were unwilling to make concessions, nor did the United States want to take territorial control. President Roosevelt had said, “I have about the same desire to annex it [the Dominican Republic] as a gorged boa-constrictor might have to swallow a porcupine wrong-end to.”²³⁵ Still, Kuhn, Loeb hesitated to invest without some form of security. The creative solution that emerged is usually associated with Roosevelt’s successor, but it antedated Taft’s presidency. It came from two sources: one the British example in Egypt, and the other an extension of a domestic banking practice used in corporate finance. Both involved some form of participation in management and, often, formal financial reorganization.

In 1876 Britain had refinanced Egypt’s deficit in an arrangement that placed British “Financial Advisers” in charge of certain revenue sources.

They also controlled borrowing. The British management of Egypt's finances reduced the debt and successfully attracted new investment. It did this without overt colonial control; the expert managers were in the pay of the Egyptian government, not the British. Similar arrangements were subsequently made in Greece and Turkey.²³⁶

American corporate finance had developed an analogous system. When investment banks made large financial commitments to corporations, they usually demanded a place (or places) on the boards of directors and some power to select managers. Translation of this practice from the corporate sphere to the government raised an important issue that was elided with barely a second thought: in corporations the people whose power was reduced in the arrangement were stockholders, whereas in nations the losers were citizens. But the businessmen in nations seeking and needing capital were not necessarily committed to democratic politics, and they willingly sacrificed the notion of popular sovereignty.

In the case of the Dominican Republic, the United States arranged to have Americans manage the Dominican customs service to ensure its integrity, and 55 percent of the customs revenue was reserved for debt service, which secured the loans.²³⁷ Thus did loans and financial expertise emerge as an alternative to colonization and sometimes, but not always, to military intervention. Britain ended up intervening militarily in Egypt in 1881, and the Americans did the same repeatedly in the Caribbean and South America: in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, the American loans were followed by interventions ordered by President Wilson to maintain financial obligations. Wilson had an assertive idea of America's place in the world, and he was quicker, perhaps, than Taft would have been to make these interventions. Whatever the merits in each case, intervention was a mark of failure, for the whole point was to avoid formal colonialism and military force.

The system was refined—and protected even more from anti-imperialist critique—in Taft's last year in office. In 1912, his administration negotiated a combination of loans and fiscal reforms for Honduras and Nicaragua, but Congress, in the wake of the Pujo Committee hearings of April 1912 on the "money trust," refused to ratify the convention he had arranged. Taft responded by proposing that the banks write the terms of proper fiscal administration into the contract itself, thus making it a set of obligations between private actors in the marketplace, not a

government-to-government agreement.²³⁸ After World War I and until the Great Depression, American financial missionaries were commonplace in the treasury ministries of Latin American nations.²³⁹

Each case tended to be different, but the important point was that finance, or the establishment of financial dependency, wholly replaced territorial acquisition and partly replaced armed force as a means of bringing order from chaos, responsibility from irresponsibility in the Americas and beyond. Today, finance—in the form of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, both vehicles of American interest and fiscal expertise—is an even more powerful instrument of empire. Debt produces dependency and loss of control for the debtor, but the result advances American empire almost imperceptibly, masking power as technique. In the twentieth century, then, American power found a barely visible means to influence, even control, global financial management. It sustained a world responsive to American economic aspirations and moral expectations.

This quasi-invisible American internationalism notwithstanding, Woodrow Wilson, more than any other single person, shaped the way Americans thought about their place in the world.²⁴⁰ Washington and Lincoln had been greatly admired abroad, but Wilson was the first American to be a world leader (a stature signified, perhaps, by the frequency with which one finds a street named for him in the world's great cities). The now nearly century-long debate between advocates of his internationalist vision and those espousing unilateralism or the unbridled nationalist exercise of power is still a vital one, and consequential to Americans and to the world at large.²⁴¹

For Woodrow Wilson nineteenth-century imperialism carried a large double meaning. It implied outmoded forms of top-down politics of all kinds, and he was not surprised that autocratic rule and conflict among the imperial powers brought forth both a terrible world war and the Russian Revolution. Looking to the future and a world fit and safe for American ideals, he tried to position himself and the United States as a global alternative to both "atavistic imperialism and revolutionary socialism."²⁴² He repeatedly professed himself thrilled and excited by the idea of the Russian people rising up against autocratic rule. The revolution was part of his justification for American entry into the war, "to make the world safe for democracy."²⁴³

The United States in 1914 was not what it became after the Second World War: the most powerful and consistent counterrevolutionary force in the world. Wilson invaded revolutionary Mexico twice in the hope of teaching Mexicans a proper politics, but the former professor of politics learned more than he taught. His experience there informed him that sometimes the deep social and economic roots of political issues required more than merely free elections to resolve. He was learning the same from radicals in the United States whom he befriended and with whom he repeatedly spoke and corresponded, from Jane Addams to Max Eastman. It was they who tugged him toward the internationalism that became central to his historical significance.²⁴⁴

He could participate in these exchanges because the line between liberalism and socialism was not then so absolute as it became in 1918–20 and then, even more so, in the 1940s.²⁴⁵ He was open to the ideas of thinkers far more radical than he was or, as president, could be. Wilson opposed Bolshevism, but he never regretted the Russian Revolution, and he hoped a liberal Russia would emerge from the convulsion; he even lent military support to Siberian opponents of Bolshevism who, he hoped, might bring about that result.²⁴⁶

Wilson and Lenin shared the world stage by the end of 1917. They both offered the world a new future of social justice at home and peace abroad, and they both directed their vision beyond established leaders to those whom Wilson called “the silent mass of mankind.”²⁴⁷ If in domestic affairs they defended radically different ideas about the proper roles of the state and of private property, their international proposals sounded strikingly similar. They were far more alike than one might expect from the nearly century-long global division that their overall differences first defined.

When Russia left the war in November 1917, Lenin offered the “Petrograd Formula” for ending it: “no annexations, no indemnities, free determination of nationalities.”²⁴⁸ This set of precepts was not far from the precepts in Wilson’s great Peace Without Victory address to the Senate in January 1917, nor from his Fourteen Points, which Lenin praised as “a great step toward the peace of the world.”²⁴⁹ In presenting the Fourteen Points to the Senate in January 1918, Wilson in fact specifically associated himself with the “largeness of view” and “universal human sympathy” articulated at Petrograd. He especially commended Lenin’s exposure

to the public gaze of the secret war agreements that had been found in the Russian archives, and he joined Lenin’s plea for open diplomacy.²⁵⁰ The Petrograd Formula did not, as it turned out, guide Soviet policy, and the Soviet domestic experiments became a nightmare. But in 1918, Wilson and Lenin were in the same conversation. However different the liberal and communist visions of the world order, both proposed to drag the world from an imperialist past to a modern, progressive future.²⁵¹

Wilson’s vision was rooted in American tradition and it continued the American way of empire. His astonishingly smooth projection of historical American principles into a global future translated American ideals and interests ever so easily into presumed universal human ideals. Such were the foundations of a century of American liberal internationalism, compromised domestically only by a few recurring episodes not of isolationism but of American unilateralism.²⁵² Of course, the Soviet Union challenged this world order, and many weaker states caught in the web of empire were not wholly accommodating.

The Fourteen Points were intended to set a global agenda. The first five set out large principles, all of them well grounded in American traditions and practices going back to Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams. Like the Russians, Wilson proposed “open covenants of peace, openly arrived at.” He echoed the past in affirming the “absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas,” a point logically followed by an endorsement of the removal “so far as possible” of barriers to “an equality of trade conditions among all nations.” Arms and imperial rivalry had been the root cause of the war, he believed, so he called for the reduction of “national armaments” and “a free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims.” Points six through thirteen proposed national self-determination and the right of European nations, including Turkey and Russia, to determine their “own political development.” The fourteenth point proposed a “general association of nations.”

In the history of American empire two of the fourteen points are of special interest. In the last point, Wilson was proposing that the United States finally reject the advice of Washington’s Farewell Address as well as the implication of the Monroe Doctrine. In endorsing a “concert of nations,” he accepted the idea of enduring political—not only commercial—relations with the rest of the world. In his Peace Without Victory address he insisted that such an international body would not imply “en-

tangling alliances"; he called it a "community of power" as opposed to a "balance of power."²⁵³ But surely it was the prospect of entanglement that energized the fierce opposition to the League of Nations that killed its prospects in the American political arena.

Even more interesting was the point dealing with colonies. Wilson's concern for self-determination was mostly directed to eastern Europe and the Balkans, where he believed that "unsettled" conditions had been a problem in the past and could be again.²⁵⁴ He had nothing to offer to the peoples of Asia and Africa. He was thinking of adjustments among the European imperial powers, not between colonized and colonizers. In other words, he did not seriously interfere with the colonies held by European powers or the United States. The system of mandates, where European powers presided over certain areas of the Middle East but did not actually colonize them, was codified in the Treaty of Versailles; it implied a commitment to tutelage but seemed to be little more than a fig leaf to hide the continuous presence of European powers in the areas they had sought to draw into their empires.²⁵⁵

The tragedy of Wilson and, as it turned out, the deeply flawed peace that was agreed on at Versailles was that he compromised the hopes of liberals and radicals without winning the support of conservatives. If his goal was, as he said, a "world . . . made fit and safe to live in," it is clear that it would be fitter for some than for others. It was to be a world marked by international law, securing property and contract, thus safe from imperial power politics and the revolutionary socialism of the Bolsheviks. It would be a world where the United States, possessed as it was of the largest economy and the greatest financial resources, would readily acquire "moral and economic pre-eminence."²⁵⁶ This liberal world would be very fit indeed, a veritable empire tailored to American ambitions and talents.

Even though the League of Nations failed, Wilson's vision was largely realized, reanimated, and developed in the financial and political construction of the "free world" after World War II. Wilson set the course for the twentieth-century iteration of empire as a way of life; he achieved an "ideological fusion of American economic self-interest with American liberal internationalist idealism."²⁵⁷ This liberal consensus has been dominant. Such debates as have developed from the right have not challenged the premise on which empire as a way of life is founded: the availability

of a world to indulge (and suffer) America's passion for the display of moral rectitude and the pursuit of profit. Disagreements within the United States have historically centered on whether the best strategy is unilateralist or internationalist. Ironically, the First World War—and the enhancement of the state it brought as well as the spirit of nationalism it enhanced, partly through repression of dissent—may have reinforced conservative unilateralism. If the multilateral aspect of Wilson's vision is still episodically contested, there has been since Jefferson's presidency near American consensus that the whole globe should be open and available to American enterprise.