

IMPERIALISM, AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN:

SOME HISTORICAL CONTRASTS

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"AMERICAN imperialism" is a thing we hear about continually. To conservatives, with their blind eye staunchly to the telescope, it is only a pair of words, a nonentity, as unreal as the unicorn. To liberals it is a chronic embarrassment; to many further left it is—to borrow the title of Felix Greene's new book—The *Enemy*,¹ the adversary of the human race. We see it stirring in Latin America, in the Middle East, in the Far East; we guess at its secret burrowings in other regions, including the British Isles. Its character and direction are of vital concern to the whole world, yet to see them in a clear focus is puzzlingly difficult. A frequent allegation is that American prosperity has come to be dependent on huge armaments production and the aggressive policies required to justify it. Many Americans have their own motives for encouraging such a belief; left-wing critics who endorse it may be unwittingly playing into their opponents' hands. A less irrational look is given to aggressive policies by the contention that the U.S. must increasingly get raw materials from outside, and must have access to them, and for secure access and cheaper procurement must have political control, and without this the economy and the living standards of the people will crumble. Here too critics eager to convict the U.S. of economic imperialism may show a perilous readiness to accept the assertions of the monopolists. Capitalists over the years, we may recall, have assured us that national prosperity must collapse if child labour is stopped, or trade unions started, or tariffs reduced, or wages raised, or India lost.

Even the inhabitants of Utopia sent out colonists to seize land from their neighbours. Imperialism of one sort or another has run through all world history; but we have no general theory capable of embracing or classifying its multifarious doings. Marxists have curiously seldom tried to ~~look~~ outside the framework of Lenin's theory. Present-day America's vast export of capital may seem to fit neatly enough into this. But it properly applies only to history from about 1914, and was worked out in 1916 very much as an attempt to explain the Great War, and capitalist war as a whole; since the second World

War it has lost some of its relevance because wars between capitalist States have become virtually impossible.

It may be of some use then to look back over the story of American expansionism, comparing its motive forces and lines of development with modern Europe's, and noticing that at every stage there have been analogies but also significant divergences which call for explanation in terms of contrasting social and mental patterns. An enquiry into them cannot by itself answer the question of what American imperialism is today, or what can be expected from it tomorrow. But besides offering something towards the general theory of imperialism that we lack, it may in some degree help us to form a clearer view of America as the biggest practical problem of our time.



By the late 19th century Europe and the U.S. were both ruled by plutocracies, but in one case with tenacious survivals from an older feudal society, in the other with a still active leaven of democracy. In Europe empire and war, before becoming useful to influence the working class, were of essential service in bringing together aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Tory and Liberal in Britain, royalist and republican in France, Junker and chimney-baron in Germany, all found in expansionism and militarism a common ground that allowed them to combine into solid modern ruling classes. Blue-blooded landowners and their younger sons were to the fore in all the Continental (and Japanese) armies and the British navy, and in the running of colonies, particularly the British: Radicals could allege with some reason that the colonies existed largely to provide them with employment. To a nobleman accustomed to the management—sometimes intelligent, sometimes even benevolent—of large estates, that of an Indian province came naturally. To the son of a Lincolnshire squire, accustomed to run his own parish and jail his own poachers, it came naturally to run a district in Ceylon, where the natives could not be much further beneath him on the human ladder than the degraded race of farm-labourers at home. Empire and war gave these men moreover a sense of function, of being needed by their countries, such as any upper class requires to keep it in good heart. The rich cannot live by cake alone, any more than the poor by bread.

In Europe higher government service was a dignified calling, being in form or in fact service to the Sovereign, most markedly in the departments reserved for "good" families, the diplomatic and military and imperial. America had no notion of official employment being more reputable than commerce, and it was unquestionably less

lucrative. There was no old **landowning** class conditioned to prefer such employment. There were no ready-made colonial administrators, eager for colonies to manage, or officers to the manner born, eager for an army. Nothing has so clearly marked America off from Europe, or revealed the tenacity of its early ways of thinking, as its lack of interest in the glorious trappings of war. Even Britain, in this as in many things the stepping-stone between the two continents, loved to admire uniforms, if not to wear them, and loved its navy, if not its army. America inherited from it the old Whig conviction that a standing army was dangerous to liberty; and in spite of periodic fits of alarm it suffered far less from the corroding anxiety about social anarchy that did so much to reconcile middle-class Europe to its aristocratic armies. Only one war has ever faced Americans with what a European would think a real casualty-list, and that was a civil war, less likely than any other to kindle a taste for martial **glory**. At the end of it the victorious army went quietly home, instead of marching off to conquest abroad like the army of the French Revolution.

To Europe with its numberless battlefields, where every State was forged by ages of war, expansion has meant first and foremost conquest by the sword. To America it has meant profit, influence, even power, to be acquired by trade, and technology, with war only as a last resort and then fought if possible with machines in place of flesh and blood. Even the gadgetry of war America, today loaded down with it like the medieval knight in his cumbrous **armour**, was remarkably slow to accumulate. Navy as well as army grew sluggishly until well on in this century. A steel magnate like Carnegie was all against warships, when his compeers across the Atlantic were **clamouring** for them to fill order-books. To them this "staunch **pacifist**" must have sounded like Lucifer denouncing sulphur.

Many European countries came by colonies long before modern political consciousness dawned, and Demos took them over as he took much else from the past. In Britain most of all he grew up familiar with the romantic trappings of empire, the governors in plumed hats or princes in jewelled turbans wending their way to Buckingham Palace, regimental banners inscribed with names of battles far away, echoes of bugles from the Khyber Pass. Misgivings about whether this was doing any good, on either side, were slow to stir, and down to the end seldom if ever seriously troubled the working classes of western Europe. By contrast the U.S. came into existence through rebellion against an empire, and started with a **disposition**—which has never been consciously cast off—to regard all empires as wicked, like the depraved monarchies that begot them.

At the outset the instinct of the State in Europe, as in **Asia**, was

to expand within its own continent, to stretch its frontiers to include adjacent areas. Such growth has more chance of permanence than seizure of colonies far away. It is thanks to geography as well as to socialism that of all Europe's empires (except Portugal's) only the Russian has, much transformed, survived. Russia had next door to it the vast vacancies of Siberia, readily occupied though not readily developed. America combined this asset of immense contiguous territory with the British asset of advanced political institutions for colonists to carry with them. Like the settlement of the white British Dominions its westward march was at the same time a "people's imperialism"⁸ of free settlers and an operation of modern capitalism. If the U.S. was born in revolt against British control, this very revolt was partly inspired by a nascent expansionism of its own. Franklin and Washington were, besides high-souled patriots, participants in companies formed to grab new lands to the west, beyond the line drawn by London, from their native owners.⁴ One is reminded of how two centuries earlier the Dutch, heroically fighting for their independence from Spain, simultaneously embarked on their long career of rapine in Indonesia.

On a map, Massachusetts is a tiny dot, and the whole of, New England northward from Virginia, the nucleus of the entire trans-continental expansion, is a mere strip some 750 miles long, scarcely bigger than Old England. The opening of the prairies by pioneers and homesteaders was followed up and taken toll of by the big-scale capitalism growing concurrently in New England, by means of loans, investments, railway concessions. Plundering of the public domain and its resources went on in a style that must be supposed to have given some hints to European financiers on the prowl for concessions in Turkey or China. All this represented for American capitalism its stage of primitive accumulation. Westerners often grumbled about the behaviour of Eastern bankers, and might go through moods of something very close to anti-imperialism. Bryan's words about mankind being crucified upon a cross of gold would serve very well today to describe U.S. capitalism in Asia or Latin America. But within the U.S. the framework of a democratic constitution and State rights kept such tensions from going too far, and brought about a commonwealth instead of an empire, with a capitalism of a new, buoyant kind such as Europe with its social and mental rigidities could never have hit upon for itself; a signal example of how economic systems are modified as they evolve by their social and economic environments. Without America, **Marx's** forecast of the future of capitalism would have been much more nearly accurate.

Most of the European States that colonized outside Europe were, like Japan, small countries with resources too limited to support their

ambitions. America by contrast was rather a Common Market than a single nation, big and varied enough to go on enriching itself without much need to suck nourishment out of colonies. If a certain commodity was lacking, its absence would be felt by one industry or group of interests rather than by the entire economy. In any case the old simple urge of a Portugal or a Holland to get hold of the sources of commodities like silver, spices, sugar, and monopolize the profit of retailing them to the rest of Europe—an urge with which national feeling was quick *to* identify itself—was out of date by now. True, the old situation might recur with the discovery of new materials, notably oil, which British capitalism after the first World War had a brief rosy dream of cornering. In general, by the time the U.S. came of age the business of tapping colonial products and bringing them into a world market had been done: many of them could be found inside the U.S., the rest it could easily buy.

Curiously free as it was from the sabre-rattling jingoism of Europe, the U.S. in the course of its gigantic growth was bound to come by a national conceit of its own. For any country the sensation of being in the van of progress, of having something to teach all the rest, is likely to prove a strong intoxicant. The Melville of *White Jacket*, even cooped up in the beastliness of an American man-of-war, was heartened by a glowing conviction of belonging to a new civilization, whose advent was a stride forward in human history. Bret Harte saw the "bland, indolent autumn of Spanish rule" in California followed by "the wintry storms of Mexican independence" and then by "the reviving spring of American conquest."⁶ Walt Whitman felt the West wind prevailing over the East, American might overflowing across the Pacific, when he wrote, on the arrival of the first envoy from Japan,

"I chant the new empire . . .

"I chant America the new mistress . . ."⁶

These may seem literary daydreams. But empires must first have a mould of ideas or conditioned reflexes to flow into, and youthful nations dream of a great place in the world as young men dream of fame and fortune. In our day it is the unquestioning assumption of a diplomatic historian like Kennan, one of the most enlightened of his kind, that his country may often have been foolish, but is incapable of wickedness, because Democracy, virtuous itself, only wants all mankind to be virtuous. He complains of a "mystical, Messianic" streak in Soviet Russia, and in the same breath speaks of the unmistakable summons of "history" to *America*.⁷

The planting of the new civilization across the prairies included the pushing out (or *flushing out*, as operators in Vietnam would call

it nowadays) of their scanty Red Indian population. This could be set down as part of the necessary cost of progress, and to Americans did not feel at all like the brutal aggression that Europeans overseas were always committing. Like Australians cleansing the territory God had given them of its blackfellows, they kept a good conscience, but were none the less imbibing a belief that this was how all creatures recalcitrant to the American way of life must if necessary be dealt with. Protests were occasionally heard, as they were in European countries, about such treatment of natives; but one fact that stands out is America's inability to produce a decent type of public servant for handling native questions. It was misconduct by Indian Agents that provoked the Apache trouble in 1882. "As one reads of the outrages perpetrated by these savages", says an American army historian, "one can hardly believe them to be the work of white men."⁸ He was poorly informed about white men and their history, to be sure; but there is a striking hint in this record (or in that of the occupation of the South after the Civil War) of what the administration of an American colonial empire would have been like.

Red Indians could be killed, but not turned into helots. A worse incitement to moods favourable to imperialism came from the South. New England's linkage with the slave-owning South was as if Old England and South Africa had been joined together geographically as well as politically. In economic terms the South, like the West, was in some degree a colony of the North-east, which drew profit from loans to the plantations.⁹ But the Southern States before the Civil War had (like the South Africa of Cecil Rhodes) a private imperialism of their own. With their soil-exhausting agriculture they needed more land, and looked greedily towards the Caribbean. Their ambitions descended directly from the 18th-century wars of European merchant-capital over West Indian islands and slave-plantations; a "Southern" empire would have been regressive and barbarous even by comparison with the not too elevated standards that European colonialism was now attaining.

But Southern society had closer affinities than the North with that of Europe, and would have found it easier to provide administrative cadres, if at a very low level; also to provide an army of conquest and occupation, out of the mass of poor whites who were to provide the Confederate soldiery, men with resemblances to the dispossessed Irish and Highland peasantry that provided Britain with a great part of its colonial army. There were dreams of a Latin-American empire, including all Mexico.¹⁰ Walker's "government" in Nicaragua in the 1850s was an unofficial experiment; it was recognized by Washington, where Southern politicians and wirepullers were always active. Cuba was the grand objective. Devious methods and contradictory aims

have been characteristic all along of America, that large, variegated, changeful country and elastic government; they showed themselves freakishly in the doings of Soulé as U.S. envoy at Madrid in 1854, and in the "Ostend Conference" of U.S. representatives in western Europe in October of the same year, in furtherance of "the 'Young America' programme of Cuban annexation through revolutionary machinations in Europe."¹¹

Washington rejected this scheme, and the defeat of the South in the Civil War scotched its ambitions, though not without some germs surviving to infect the national life. Southern police brutality against Negroes finds a counterpart in the violence that has marked many American interventions in other countries, very much as massacres of workers in Paris in 1848 or 1871 went with similar treatment of rebels in French colonies. Ideas such as were current by the end of the 19th century of an "Anglo-Saxon" or a British-German-American bloc, and pointed forward to later Herrenvolk theories, could find nourishment in Southern racialism. One Southerner talked of "the noble Gothic race" destined to rule America and the whole earth.¹² When the Filipinos, America's first victims in Asia, were being conquered in 1899 they complained that even the highly educated among them were called, by their not very well educated assailants, "niggers".¹³ Kipling's call to America to take up its share of the white man's burden was falling on sympathetic ears.

It was also unhealthy for the U.S. that (apart from Canada) it had no neighbours on anything like its own level. European nations often fought, but they were always aware of one another as sharers of common standards. In the New World the Latin countries, which had started their independent lives not long after the U.S., lagged very far behind it, and the contrast between their prevailing backwardness and its own dizzy advance was bound to stimulate a Yankee vanity already too cockahoop. German aggressiveness in the modern world has rested on similar foundations laid long ago, before the first industrial capitalist was born, in the predominance of German feudalists over Slav peoples and primitive tribes south and east, and of German traders over Scandinavia and the Baltic.

To a U.S. infected with racialism the Amerindian and African infusions in nearly all the Latin-American States—some of them like Ecuador with scarcely any "pure" white blood—were likely to deepen other unfavourable impressions. But even without this, a country worshipping efficiency was sure to feel impatient at their sloth and shiftlessness. English businessmen, who were first in the field, felt the same impatience; and in lands where even a tourist is almost compelled to grease official palms or brandish a stick, a foreign corporation will soon slide into the same practices. Righteous indignation in the

U.S. today about communism in Latin America has been superimposed on an older feeling of much the same kind about muddle or anarchy there.

Little as the Monroe Doctrine might often seem to mean in practice, it did at least mean that from early days the U.S. saw its interests and rights not as confined to its own territories, themselves ill-defined, but as spreading out in some nebulous fashion over an entire continent. European meddlings helped to foster the hazy feeling of a "special relationship" between the U.S. and its "sister-republics"; and it has been a constant part of the pattern of U.S. expansionism to be drawn into regions where older empires have misgoverned or interfered. In 1815 a patriot argued that the U.S. ought to assist the cause of emancipation from Spain, and make an alliance with Mexico, thus striking a blow at Britain which battered on the wealth of Spain and Spanish America and meant to use it for an onslaught on its own lost colonies.¹⁴ Three decades later the U.S. was fighting Mexico instead of allying with it. But this early piece of jingoism was, very typically, seen by most Americans as liberation of worthy settlers in Texas oppressed by a barbarous government, very much as Britons tried to see their South Africa war half a century later as a deliverance of Uitlanders or settlers from oppression by the Boers. When Napoleon III and his Hapsburg puppet threatened Mexican independence not much later the American army, formidable at the close of the Civil War, provided a strong deterrent.

Had Europe secured Mexico it might have gone on to spread its tentacles into other parts of southern America. That U.S. protection was sometimes genuinely needed there made it insidiously easy for thoughts of U.S. domination to sprout. After Chile's victory over Bolivia and Peru in the War of the Pacific in 1879, which many saw as really a victory for Britain, the U.S. representative at Lima suggested a protectorate over Peru. He thought the downtrodden masses would be happy to be governed from Washington, and within ten years Peru could be thoroughly Americanized and then become a member-state of the Union and ensure for it a commanding position in all South America.¹⁵ About this time Blaine as State Secretary was emphasizing earlier loose claims to a "paramount interest" in the New World, which sound as if they may have owned something to the precedent of British claims to paramouncy in India and its borderlands; the Pan-American ideals that he sponsored lent it a more inoffensive colouring. In 1879 President Hayes confided to his diary that it must be part of the nation's destiny, though not one to be unduly hastened, to annex all the neighbouring lands, including Canada.¹⁶ In 1880 he talked of control over a future Canal in "language which implies the reduction of the Central American

republics to a position of virtual vassalage to the United States."¹⁷ In Europe no Great Power talked openly in this style about its smaller neighbours, even in the Balkans. One reason for this difference was that the U.S. had no diplomatic service worth the name, again partly because it had no aristocracy. It could be friendly or unfriendly, but found it hard to be civil.

To these vaulting ambitions, **all** the same, public feeling remained apathetic, as it had been during the "shoddy episode" of Grant's scheme to grab the Dominican Republic in 1869-70;¹⁸ and this at a time when Europe was moving towards its noisiest frenzy of imperial expansion. Private American enterprise, it is true, was pioneering the routes that Dollar Diplomacy would follow along. Until national resistance began to be provoked, individual adventurers could get their way as a rule by bribing local bosses as they were accustomed to do at home. Henry Meiggs building railways and a financial empire in Peru and Chile during the 1860s and 1870s was a buccaneer of this sort, but American also in having a genuine passion for **construction**.¹⁹ C. R. Flint, international dealer in guns and warships, was **another**.²⁰ Railway speculations and plunderings in the U.S. spilled over into **Mexico**;²¹ and struggles for control of railways at home fought out among men like **Gould** and **Fisk** with the aid of armed gangs were a realistic rehearsal for Caribbean operations by the Marines.

American mercenaries in China took part in the suppression of the great Taiping Rebellion, and were suspected of wanting to carve out a principality for themselves. About 1853 a notion was afloat that America had designs on Burma, and this served as a further pretext for the British war on Burma in that year and the annexation of Pegu. **Karl Marx**, who welcomed signs of American interest in the Old World because America was "the youngest and most vigorous representative of the West", derided the **notion**.²² If there really was any inclination about this time to join in the European game in Further Asia, its one distinct emergence was Commodore Perry's arrival in Japan in 1853 to demand a trading treaty. Americans and Victorian Britons shared the same mystic faith in the life-giving virtues of commerce. But it was typical of the ambiguous processes of American official thought that while Perry was sent with a squadron, and was himself convinced that it would be an error to be "over-conciliatory",²³ he was forbidden to use it; and **Townsend Harris**, the first American envoy, got his treaty by telling the Japanese (truthfully enough) that if they did not give way the British would bombard them. On his way out he had been instructed to impress on the Siamese the contrast between British greed and American disinterestedness; his gifts to the royal family included electrical gadgets

and other novelties, symbolic of the new era that America was ushering in.¹⁴

From the Far East as from the Caribbean energy was diverted by the Civil War and then the great industrial leap forward. For the most part America was content to straggle behind European Powers, critical of their high-handed methods but happy to share in resulting gains to trade. How this ambivalent attitude was developing can be gauged from decade to decade by the way Americans reacted to the grand empire of the age, the British. Decadent and vicious as Europeans were, Asia's ruling classes were undeniably far worse; and to Americans—insular and shut up in their own habits and opinions even by comparison with Britons—all Asiatics looked mysterious and unprepossessing. When the zoologist Hornaday visited Singapore and Malaya in the 1870s the snobbery of British colonial society struck him as contemptible, its hard-drinking habits as appalling. Yet some good was coming out of it. "It takes the British Government to rule such places and make them habitable for producers, and worth something to the world."¹⁵ Americans being too civilized to do this rough work themselves, in other words, ought to welcome its being done by others. When ex-President Grant toured Asia and hobnobbed with its monarchs, whose descendants were to be the camp-followers of his successors, he also was in two minds about imperialism. He told the Mikado that he considered British rule in India a good thing on the whole, but was indignant at the way Europeans were behaving in many other parts of Asia.¹⁶

Europeans frequently felt the same irritation at American sermonizing and moralizing as Charles Surface at his brother Joseph's fine sentiments. The average American out in the East was less picky, being there frankly, like other mortals, to make money. In early days in China he was often an opium-dealer. At Canton, Hickey tells us, Americans were known to the Chinese by "the expressive title of second chop Englishmen."¹⁷ "The presence of foreigners is a protection and a blessing to the people", the American community in Shanghai declared in 1869. ". . . The withdrawal of pressure would be dangerous to native and foreign interests." The English community added that the policy being adopted by both their governments of treating China as an equal was a huge blunder. The Hon. J. Ross Browne, retiring U.S. minister, perfectly agreed.¹⁸ Practical attitudes towards China went on converging, until in 1900 American troops were fighting side by side with Europeans and Japanese, under a German commander, to put down the Boxer rebellion.

In the uncharted Pacific the advance-guard of American civilization was more unsavoury than in either Latin America or Asia. It was made up of men like the whaling-crews who, as R. L. Stevenson

learned when he lived in the Pacific, stopped at the Marquesan Islands to carry off by force a stock of their beautiful women.²⁹ Perry had been sent to Japan primarily to secure a better footing for American ships and crews, whose chief concern there was to obtain supplies of women and liquor, by fair means or foul.

At the end of the century Captain Mahan could speak of an "extraordinary change of sentiment on the subject of expansion", a "revolution" in American opinion.³⁰ This burst of imperial enthusiasm, not quite so sudden or unheralded as he thought it, was evidently in many ways an echo of Europe's. It was the climax of a phase in America's evolution—the epoch, among other phenomena, of Henry James—that brought it closer in various ways to Europe and European ideas than ever before or since. In economic history it was the time when the U.S. established itself as the world's biggest industrial State. By 1890 it was overtaking Britain in iron and steel production; in the 1890s it was going on to pile up a very large export surplus. With this came a novel sensation of dependence on foreign markets; a fever of high tariffs on both sides of the Atlantic was erupting in trade wars, and the U.S. had a fit of alarm about a shortage of customers. It was an irrational fear, in view of the bounding population that supplied a growing internal market. But capitalists are often as irrational as other folk, and many Americans had too little purchasing power as yet to be of much value to them as customers: Negroes, in particular, and the mass of recent immigrants.

Immigration was bringing fresh problems with it. The newcomers pouring across the Atlantic were Europeanizing their new home at least as fast as it was Americanizing them. Their numbers were swelling, and most of them were now coming from less developed parts of Europe: more than three millions from eastern Europe, the same total from Italy and Iberia, and so on. An influx of old-fashioned peasants on this scale, together with the growth and concentration of capital that their labour made possible, could not but mean a heavy dilution, over a fairly long period, of America's hopeful new way of life. There was of course no ingrained inferiority in them, and they had talents and qualities of their own to enrich their adopted land. But they were for the time being ignorant of many things, hampered by difficulties of language, often superstitious and priest-ridden, sometimes demoralized by suffering. They provided therefore a mass of labour easily exploited by employers, and of voters easily duped by politicians. It was an irresistible temptation to the voracious elements of the older American society, and brought these forward rapidly at the expense of the more idealistic. Already in 1847 when Sarmiento the exiled democrat from Argentina visited the promised land he was painfully struck by symptoms of

degeneracy.³¹ The great experiment in democracy was beginning to sink (never quite completely or finally) into Tammany Hall demagoguery, the labyrinth of corruption and manipulation that Ostrogorski described in 1902.³² By 1871 even Whitman's faith was being staggered by the "hollowness of heart" all round him, despite the "hectic glow and these melo-dramatic screamings" (essential ingredients of imperialism, he might have added)—by the "depravity of the business classes", by public life "saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood", by the "almost maniacal appetite for wealth."³³

These business classes for their part were soon as deeply alarmed, in a different way. With the strikes of 1885 the reality of class struggle, the possibility of social explosion, broke on them suddenly and frighteningly—to the delight of Engels, who visited America and kept a watchful eye on it.³⁴ In the following decade troops were called out on 328 occasions to deal with disturbances in 49 States or Territories. 1893 was a particularly bad year. Fear of socialism, or of social disorder, could be expected to inspire, as in Europe, thoughts of adventure abroad to distract popular attention, and also to weld a heterogeneous population into an American nation. Hearst and his yellow press combined demagogic agitation with jingoism, and did much in 1898 to whip up feeling against Spain. Behind this was the calculation which the English observer E. Dicey read correctly when the Spanish war came: America was going in for expansionism for the same reason as Britain, recognition that "democratic institutions are no longer a panacea for the cure of social discontents".³⁵ Meanwhile the long struggle of respectable America to lick masses of raw immigrants into shape—with the Gatling-gun as one instrument—was itself a sort of domestic experiment in colonial administration.

One trait that immigrants were likely to pick up quickly and to deepen was the racialism already in the air of America. To poor whites from Europe, as to poor whites in Alabama, it was a consolation to find someone to look down on, and against whom they could feel at one with the respectable folk who looked down on *them*. A common prejudice against the black man helped the melting-pot of white nations to do its work; American nationalism itself was thus tinged with racial arrogance. Asians were another element too alien to be absorbed.³⁶ They were coming to undercut the white man and steal his job; and it is not hard to trace an emotional connection between the massacre of Chinese at Wyoming in 1885, and the more wholesale massacre of Vietnamese eighty years later for the crime of wanting to steal Asia from free enterprise.

From the time when America's westward-facing frontier reached the Pacific a mood could be felt like Alexander's, pining for fresh worlds. An expanding territory had come to be part of American life,

an end in itself, difficult to renounce. Born with more of an instinct of progress than Europe possessed, the country wavered between progress in terms of quality or of mere size, as it still wavers today between the choice of being a "Great Society" or the Greatest Power. There may have been a lurking wish to put off the day when America, having reached its natural frontiers, would have to stop walking and sit down to look at itself, to take stock of what had become of its soul.

As the largest of oceans the Pacific had a fascination of its own for the richest of nations. On its further shores were some of the few materials America lacked, among them tungsten and manganese, in demand because of the growth of steel production.⁸⁷ On those shores lay also, dragons guarding a golden fleece, two peoples who were taking shape in American imagination as two grand forces of evil. Tsarist Russia was an unrepentant despotism, as loudly condemned as Soviet Russia later. A Russian ascendancy would inaugurate a new Dark Age, ten times worse than the old one, wrote an alarmist.⁸⁸ Japan was "yellow", and Japanese settlement in California was a chronic cause of irritation. Fears of Japan striding across the Pacific by way of Hawaii were easily conjured up, and ensured official backing for the settlers and traders in Hawaii who were taking over power step by step from the native government, until in 1893 Queen Liliuokalani was deposed, and in 1898 the islands annexed.

When the Senate Foreign Committee, approving the annexation, talked of Japan affronting the "national honour", it was falling into one of the clichés that Europe had inherited from its old monarchies and their dynastic squabbles. In the mind of this fledgeling nation a crowd of antiquated ideas jostled, as Engels again noticed.⁸⁹ It was a blend of atavism or nostalgia with a groping effort to express new sensations in old images, in a land whose religion, philosophy, literature, had nearly all grown in alien soil under far-off skies. American trade unionists called themselves "Knights of Labour", mothers christened their urchins "Marquis" or "Duke".

In the Old World that America was still tied to, the fresh outburst of imperialism beginning about 1880 may have received further stimulus from fear of America's industrial supremacy, every year more unchallengeable. In turn it incited Americans to follow suit—as earlier when Perry crossed the Pacific—by arousing an uneasy sense of being left out of something good, a kind of new gold rush, or of something grand, that a high-principled nation ought not to stand aside from. All imperialism in history has been largely imitative; it has seldom or never grown spontaneously out of the needs or impulses of a single State. Greece caught the contagion from Persia, Rome from Carthage, Islam from Byzantium, Holland and England

from Spain and Portugal. European States themselves were now to a great extent rushing after one another in search of colonies because they saw their neighbours doing so. Witte observed that the Russian generals who were so anxious to lay hands on Manchuria were quite unable to explain what they wanted to do with it. He was struck also, when in America, by the dense ignorance of the world displayed even by responsible *men*.⁴⁰

A special factor was that among the old colonial Powers one, and that one Britain, was eager to draw America into the *stampede*.⁴¹ It would be a splendid vindication of British colonialism to be emulated by the great Democracy: this would go far to disarm the protests inside Britain that had never ceased to be heard. British investors in America could look for a share in any profits that might accrue. Most important, Britain's strength was over-extended, it was isolated, its rivals were clamorous and pressing. It was time to bring in the New World again to redress the balance of the Old, like Canning in 1823. America's advent on the scene was "the most hopeful and the most surprising feature of the Far East problem", wrote a traveller in 1899.⁴² It was heartening in the Boer War which began that year that America had just fought a war of empire under cover of very similar watchwords. During these contests the two countries were each other's only sympathizers—and Germany was the most hostile critic of both.

In American eyes British colonialism usually appeared less disreputable than others, and as a French cynic pointed out Liberal scholars like Froude and Seeley had been making it look so progressive that "Imperialism became the latest philosophy of history and almost the last dogma of *religion*."⁴³ Mahan, the apostle of American *sea-power*, was also a very uncritical admirer of the British empire. It had taken to heart, he believed, the lessons of the American Revolution and the Indian Mutiny, and given its allegiance thenceforward to the purest ideals of *enlightenment*.⁴⁴ Tempered by justice and conscience "and the loving voice of charity", the British sword had done wonders for *India*.⁴⁵ Englishmen frequently felt themselves to be doing the Roman empire's work over again, with improvements; to Americans like Mahan the British empire offered similar inspiration. Another thought sedulously encouraged by Britons was that if the crown of India ever fell from Britannia's head it would be picked up by the *Tsar*.⁴⁶

When Kipling was crossing the Pacific in 1888 his American companions were full of laments over the sad state of their country, its rotten politics and so on, and one of them wound up with the remark that what they needed was a war. "A war outside our borders would make us all pull *together*."⁴⁷ Britons all pulled together, and

Bismarck had shown how blood and iron could unite Germans. America had only fought a civil war, whose morbid echoes still lingered, and uneasiness about the nation's solidarity was being worsened by the undigested mass of immigrants and the spectacle of foreign Powers with restless ambitions and new designs of warships. There was too an undercurrent of an impulse to show the world that America knew how to fight. Europe had been impressed more by the bungling of the Civil War, on the winning side especially, than by its heroism. In this land without an army many an ordinary citizen owned a gun as a sort of badge of free citizenship, much as Europeans had worn swords as a badge of gentility. Again an antique convention was perpetuating itself in a novel social and material context. Warlike prowess was Europe's loudest boast, soon to be put, in 1914, to its supreme test, Japan won genuine recognition at last by defeating China in 1895. Only through the same ordeal could America shake off the reproach of being a mere nation of shopkeepers, preferring filthy lucre to "honour".

The war of 1898 with Spain, conducted with the dash of a Wild West film, satisfied these cravings; it yielded, like any of the small colonial campaigns that Queen Victoria and her subjects delighted in, a crop of what could pass for "glory". Among its immediate motives economic aims played only a secondary or indirect part. Norman Angell, arguing his life-long thesis that capitalism has nothing to gain by war, would be able to portray not unconvincingly a reluctant U.S. government pushed into war by popular frenzy, against the inclinations of big business.⁴⁴ Unlike the Transvaal with its gold, Cuba contained little but sugar, and over this American interests were divided: the "Sugar Trust" or big refiners were ready to welcome an extra source of supply, the growers of cane-sugar or beet at home wanted no extra competition from outside. Planters and settlers in Cuba who wanted to get things into their own hands made the most, as in Hawaii, of its alleged importance to strategic security. This chimed in with a spirit of national self-assertiveness, made up of diverse elements. Jingoism was most rampant in the South, and in the West where Indian skirmishes and Buffalo Bill had engendered something of the same mentality as Negro-baiting and Jim Crow. From these two regions also came the bulk of the volunteers, many of whom must have been poor whites with visions of high pay or plunder.

Paradoxically the rallying-cry that brought Americans of very different sorts together was sympathy for the unfortunate Cubans, in revolt as they had often been before against a senile and vicious Spanish rule. That the struggle would be against one of the reprobate European monarchies, a contest between New World and Old, lent

it a further appeal, and might be expected to impress immigrants with memories of heartless treatment in their native lands. This unconventional republic was breaking into one of the old colonial empires, towards which, as towards that of Portugal, the greedy Powers of Europe had exercised a curious self-restraint, as if from respect for the sacred rights of property. In the 19th century indeed, in strong contrast with the 17th or 18th, Europeans never directly fought one another over colonies, even if they frequently quarrelled.

At opposite poles in so many ways, America and Russia yet had moral as well as physical resemblances. For both of them, with their huge resources, any new enlargement was in a special sense irrational, and in need of the camouflage of irrational sentiment. Among Russians it was always the summons to march into the Balkans and liberate fellow-Slavs and Christians from Turkey's barbarous grasp that stirred popular enthusiasm; and while material interests were not lacking, increasingly the chief end in view was to refurbish the Tsar by giving his discontented subjects something to admire him for. Likewise in 1899 it was "borne in upon the moral consciousness of a mighty nation"—as Mahan put it—that Cuba was lying at its door like Lazarus at the door of Dives.⁴⁹ It is noticeable that Mahan repeatedly drew an analogy between the compulsion of conscience that good Americans used to feel to aid runaway slaves, and the compulsion they ought now to feel to aid downtrodden peoples.⁵⁰ Because America had lately emancipated its slaves, Russia its serfs, each felt morally fitter to emancipate other nations. Perhaps each felt all the more ardour because they had to smother an uneasy recognition that their work of liberation at home had been done very imperfectly, that neither moujik nor Negro was much better off than he had been before.

Puerto Rico was annexed: it was small enough to be viewed as, like Hawaii, a strategic outpost rather than a colony. Since competition from its sugar was not wanted it could not be given equal status within the Union, and an exercise in casuistry by the Supreme Court was required to square democratic principles with "the doctrine of inferior races".⁵¹ But thanks to its Negro minority the U.S. was already familiar in practice if not in theory with the distinction between first- and second-class citizenship, which in European empires was as obvious and natural as, until recently, restriction of voting rights to men of property had been. In America in other words race-consciousness was in some ways the equivalent of class-consciousness in Europe.

As to Cuba, whatever patriots there might feel, the U.S. felt entitled to stand astonished, like Clive, at its own moderation. By the Platt Amendment of 1901 it insisted on no more than naval bases and (like Austria in its treaty of 1815 with the Bourbons after helping

to restore them in Naples) on a right of intervention whenever dissatisfied with the way the country was managing its affairs; and Cuba's affairs included those of American planters, bankers, and merchants. This amounted to a stranglehold on Cuban independence; but the dismal record of most independent Latin American countries could make it seem good for Cuba as well as for the U.S., and European practice outside Europe supplied ready models: the Capitulations imposed on Turkey or Morocco, extraterritorial rights in China, the Unequal Treaties with Japan. "Neo-colonialism" of this kind might just as well in fact be called "proto-colonialism": it had grown up side by side with full occupation of colonies from the beginning. The novelty was that the U.S. was doing spontaneously what Europeans had done where a country's size or remoteness, or their own mutual jealousies, prevented them from taking it over completely.

Besides Puerto Rico the Philippines were annexed, also at some expense of moral and verbal jugglery. Thoughts of keeping these islands only came uppermost after war broke out, and were again very mixed. So were the imperial motives trumpeted in jingo newspapers in Europe: the difference was merely that American statesmen, to the amusement of educated Europe, solemnly repeated the rhapsodies that elsewhere were left to journalists. It was a fresh manifestation of America's more democratic spirit. President McKinley's reasons for taking the Philippines sounded as if some malicious caricaturist had made them up. "The march of events rules and overrules human action", imposing fresh duties on "a great nation on whose growth and career from the beginning the Ruler of Nations has plainly written the high command and pledge of civilization. Incidental to our tenure in the Philippines is the commercial opportunity to which American statesmanship cannot be indifferent . . ."

Boswell was always seeking scriptural warrant for polygamy, and his Bible was always falling open at the history of King Solomon. But America could truthfully deny cupidity about the Philippines themselves. Commercial opportunity meant China; the islands were only a convenient *piéd à terre* close by. America's presence might be reckoned good for China as well. In 1898 the other Powers were closing in on it, and a partition was threatening. America with its superior competitive power, like Britain with its established position in all Far Eastern markets, felt no need of a private share of China, and only wanted an Open Door.

Yet though America was not being led into temptation by Filipino sugar, it found itself immediately committed in these islands to a naked war of conquest; an abrupt transition prefiguring on a small scale the course of American imperialism after 1945. Ostensibly it had come here to assist another revolt against Spain, but it was easy

to argue that the Philippines were not a nation like Cuba. Rather they could be looked upon as a miniature India, illiterate in fifty languages, where American sway could promise the same beneficial results as British sway in India. America in short was coming as liberator and remaining as master, like Prospero releasing Ariel from the cleft tree-trunk and keeping him as a bond-servant. But it was embarking on empire in an Asia where, thanks to what its predecessors had done, colonial nationalism was already smouldering. Faced with mass resistance Americans sank at once to the same level as Europeans before them or Japanese after them. No ideology, anti-communist or any other, is needed to brutalize soldiers fighting such a war. Spain's attempt to break the resistance of the Cubans by herding them into concentration-areas, which America had denounced, was now repeated against the Filipinos, as in later days against the Vietnamese; it made a good symbol of the chaining up of colonial peoples by their white conquerors. Memories of Red Indian wars stirred again; Filipino guerrillas seemed "even more perfidious" than the redmen of Arizona," and General MacArthur like many commanders on the Western frontier quickly grasped "the profitlessness of treating the captured insurgents with consideration". His methods yielded results, even if they "did not please some American ethicists 6000 miles away."¹⁴

It was, a British businessman on the spot wrote, a scene of chaos and massacre, "one of the blackest records which has ever stained the pages of history".¹⁵ There is another reminder of the Vietnam war in the gloomy words of an American officer to another Englishman—"We know we have got into a dreadful mess, but how are we to get out of it?"¹⁶ Then as now it was not every Englishman that welcomed America's plunge into imperialism; this one wrote of what was happening, as a friend and admirer, in sorrow more than in anger. America's own "ethicists" agreed with him, and three thousand pages of an enquiry into the army's behaviour piled up. It must have done something to turn America away from such adventures for a long time, like the revulsion of feeling in Britain after the Boer War with its "methods of barbarism".

In the 1900 election a remarkable number of parties took the field, some of them anti-imperialistic, and some more or less socialist. Home politics and foreign policy were both at the same time in a state of flux. Yet the outcome in both was anti-climax: the old two-party system reasserted itself, imperialism—in the sense of a popular cult of the establishment of direct American rule abroad—went off the boil. Once the war with Spain was over there was a precipitate retreat from glory: volunteers were eager to be home again, war-fever was forgotten like any other craze, the later craze of sending Americans

to the moon for instance. Mahan saw with regret a public "gorged and surfeited with war literature" swept back into indifference by "an immense wave of national prosperity".⁸⁷ More philosophically Dr. Johnson might have said of nations, as of individuals, that they are never more harmlessly employed than when they are making money. This little war had been a tonic to national unity and self-respect, easily translated into a mood of business confidence. Negatively this was strengthened by a gradual discovery that polyglot immigrant masses were a handicap to socialism more than a menace to law and order. But a more positive development was under way. Under pressure of a vigorous labour movement American capitalists, reluctantly but less so on the whole than their European rivals, were learning the lesson that higher wages mean better customers and bigger profits. They learned it more willingly because they had no alternative customers in the shape of a big army and navy. Capitalism was taking on a qualitatively new character; God, the Great Salesman, was revealing America as his chosen land.

There were still ups and downs, as always: employment sagged in 1904, 1908, 1912. But the general trend was of rapid expansion, and conditions of life acceptable especially to newcomers from Europe helped to quench any desire for radical change. Correspondingly the ruling groups were less tempted than those of Europe to look for further diversions in the style of 1898. One leading attraction of empire to crowded Europe was in any case missing here. Britons found room in their Dominions to make new homes; Frenchmen could settle in Algeria; Germans and Italians were at least tutored to think of colonies as areas where surplus population could be settled under the national flag. Export of men and women, irrelevant as it might be to capitalist interests, was as important to imperialism, by strengthening its popular appeal, as export of capital. Still half empty and receiving millions of foreigners—whose loss European nationalism increasingly grudged—America could not think of it as a passport to prosperity.

It was from the Philippines, America's new base in the Far East, that troops were sent to China in 1900 to take part in the blood-thirsty suppression of the Boxers. But in 1900, as again in the intervention in Russia two decades later, for which it provided a rehearsal, there is some substance in the contention that America was going in with the others in order to restrain them. Unable to restrain them from further pressure on China, it was soon drawing back. It was turning away too from the cordial relationship with "civilization";⁸⁸ and that the French cynic saw (like De Gaulle in our day) as threatening the world with a hegemony of "Pan-Britain that an American had seen as "the protection of our common

britainism".⁵⁹ Nothing is more striking than the divergent paths taken by the two "Anglo-Saxon" countries from this point: the U.S. returning on the whole to industrial expansion, or contenting itself with unadventurous sallies into its own Caribbean backyard, Britain by comparison neglecting its industry and reposing on its imperial couch.

After 1900 the next event in the Far East was the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05, the first serious war for many years and thk first of a new and warlike century. It gave a vivid demonstration of the price in blood to be paid for power in this climactic epoch of mass armies and mass slaughter; a price America was sensibly reluctant to pay. When it was over the belligerents soon came together, drawing with them their allies. France and Britain. In face of this combination any active American policy beyond the Pacific was impossible, a fact which healthily reinforced the tendency to give priority to development at home. The Great War split the Old World, but along lines little desired by the U.S., which would have preferred a European grouping against tsarist Russia and Japan, as a quarter-century later it would have preferred one against Soviet Russia. Powerful American interests came it is true, for adventitious reasons, to favour entry into the war; all the same, the government drifted into it very hesitantly, and the country took only a trivial share in the fighting, at a time when the romantic glow of 1914 had long since faded in the morass of the Western Front. Still more disillusioning, the war ended with a Bolshevik revolution and Japan poised for further conquest. Economically and financially, it is again true, America came out on top. But the next twenty years were to show how little economic strength not backed by military strength could guarantee political influence in a militarized world.

"Few Americans have ever taken any interest in their insular possessions", one of them wrote in 1921.⁶⁰ Englishmen took equally little interest in their colonies, so far as any intelligent knowledge of them went, but were immensely conscious of possessing them, as a Victorian husband was of his wife and children. If there was in 1898 a touch of impatience to prove that whatever the European could do, even running colonies, the Yankee could do better, as soon as he had his Philippine toy he was tired of it. As a basis of power in the Far East the islands were soon coming to seem futile. Their sugar was not wanted; immigrants from them still less. An exodus of Negroes from the South into the big cities was already causing grave race riots in the early years of the century: the prospect of another coloured influx was another reason for not wanting colonies. Remarkably soon there was talk of giving the Philippines complete independence.

In Europe the prime function of government, inherited from a feudal past, was to discipline the rude masses; similarly in colonies the grand gift it professed to bring was Order. In British or French colonies, as compared with Portuguese or Russian, this came to be tinged with the newer ideal of Progress. America was in duty bound to put Progress first. But the medley of peoples and languages in the Philippines was a formidable obstacle, and there was a very wide gap, -material and cultural, between Americans and the mass of any "native" race. They stood at the opposite pole from the Spanish and Portuguese pioneers who set out from Europe with a material equipment little more elaborate than that of some of the peoples they subdued. And America, lacking a true civil service even at home, had no administrators to take the place of the Spanish friars in whose lethargically greedy hands the running of the islands had always largely been. On the other hand it found it natural—as Britain did by comparison with France, Spain, or Russia—to allow a good deal of local autonomy. Its businessmen were accustomed to control their own city governments and State legislatures through local bosses and lobby influence; to control a colony through its own politicians would be a logical extension of this.

Older and more static empires too were making use of puppet rulers, always men of feudal stamp, relics of a moribund past: Indian princes, Javanese rajas, Emirs of Bokhara. In the Philippines after three centuries of Spanish rule no such genuine feudal antiques survived. A partner more congenial to American taste was ready to hand in the form of an upper class long semi-Europeanized and now willing enough to adopt American ways, especially of making money. Its better element had come to the front in the revolt against Spain, but was easily split off from the rebel peasantry; there was no socialism yet in Asia to lend ballast to nationalism. At bottom the mass rising against Spain was an agrarian rising,⁶¹ as all later anti-imperialist movements in S.E. Asia were to be (and as most Balkan risings against the Turks had been). To the extent that American policy steered investment away from land, into sugar mills as against sugar plantations,⁶² it represented evolution along bourgeois lines instead of feudal stagnation.

But the relationship corrupted the colonial Clite very much as big business had corrupted American politics; it turned it into something very much like the *comprador* bourgeoisie of China, out of which was to come the Kuomintang and America's most disastrous alliance in Asia. Even more than the British or Dutch, the Americans made contact only with the upper stratum they worked through, and knew nothing of the masses below. When the Philippines were finally granted independence after the second World War they were a

country tied to U.S. capitalism and run by the class of collaborators who had battered on "an economy in which the rich grew richer and the poor poorer".¹³

Virtually shut out for many years from the big world beyond the Pacific, the U.S. was the more disposed to make itself felt in Latin America. It could still believe that it was acting defensively, to ensure its own security, or protectively, to save its weaker neighbours from molestation. During the Spanish war there was some panic fear of enemy warships bombarding America's open coasts, and this lent colour to defence arguments which to foreigners might appear disingenuous. In 1903 came the seizure of the Panama Canal zone from Colombia. It was the kind of coup that the Goulds and Rockefellers had practised inside the U.S., and that public opinion on the whole acquiesced in as a short cut to material progress, with the impatience of a nation of technicians. Theodore Roosevelt was anxious to follow this up by getting the Danish West Indies. "They were, he said, the key to the Panama Canal."¹⁴ Every "key" in this game requires another key to make it safe. But though the Canal Zone might come to be part of an empire's infrastructure, its seizure contrasted with Britain's conduct two decades earlier in making the security of the Suez Canal the pretext for occupying all Egypt and turning it into a lucrative colony. And newspaper prophecies in England after the Spanish War that the U.S. would go on to annex Mexico and Nicaragua¹⁵ were not being fulfilled. It was intervening forcibly only in civil broils, or what could be made to appear such, as in Colombia in 1903, or in San Domingo in 1904 when debts to Europe might have invited European meddling, or in Cuba, under treaty right, in 1906. When General Pershing—a graduate of both Red Indian and Philippines campaigns—was sent into Mexico in 1916 the invasion was a reprisal for what all foreign interests agreed in regarding as outrageous conduct by revolutionaries. It was reminiscent of the Austrian reprisal two years before against Serbia, but very unlike this it amounted in the end to little more than a gesture. Mexico was one of the bigger countries, where intervention could not be passed off as a mere police action; more important, it was united against the intruder as Latin American countries seldom were. "The whole Mexican nation was actively hostile to our troops."¹⁶

However, while British Toryism had failed to inveigle the U.S. into adopting its own type of imperialism, the U.S. was fast developing another of its own, less extreme but often highly irritating to both victims and rivals. British Liberals who hoped to see it setting a new standard of international conduct were disappointed. Lord Bryce was exhorting Washington to treat the other American nations with great tact, to be "the disinterested, absolutely disinterested and

unselfish advocate of peace and good will".⁶⁷ Instead it was giving more and more backing to businessmen who had an instinctive sense of being entitled to something better than fair play anywhere in the New World. A British competitor complained of being squeezed out of Colombia by "that economic penetration which is thought in the United States to be the proper accompaniment of the Monroe doctrine".⁶⁸ A traveller more concerned with Latin American feelings reported them in the 1910s to be embittered by "high-handed aggression, disguised under the name of progress and regard for liberty".⁶⁹ "To save themselves from Yankee imperialism", wrote a Peruvian, "the American democracies would almost accept a German alliance or the aid of Japanese arms . . ."⁷⁰ As now interpreted, the Monroe doctrine was defeating its own ostensible purpose. "Dollar Diplomacy", that Caribbean forerunner of American world policy after 1945, was by this time a familiar phenomenon. Yet even at this stage it marks a significant difference, not of psychology alone, from European precedent, that such interventions were hole-and-corner affairs, furtively carried on at the bidding of one lobby or another, not in the open with fire and enthusiasm.

In the rest of the world, still largely composed of empires, the unique industrial strength of the U.S. allowed it to buy whatever it wanted from them, and in some ways become a participant in their habits of mind as well as their profits. South-east Asia was producing tin and rubber very largely for the British, French and Dutch to sell to America, in return for American goods for their own consumption in Europe.⁷¹ Here was a trade triangle not unlike the older one of Indian opium paying for China tea to be drunk in Britain, in which too the U.S. had come to be involved. In a sense it was employing the old empire-builders as managers, to spare itself the embarrassing task of running colonies on its own. Even if the price of raw materials from Asia had to include the commission paid to them, it was still low, because they helped to keep Asian earnings low. Altogether the situation lent some meaning to Kautsky's prediction of a "super-imperialism" uniting all capitalist interests. An idealized version of this may be detected in Colonel House's scheme of early 1914 to avert a European war by getting all the big States to cooperate in 'a grandiose development of the backward world'.⁷²

American feeling about the old empires still wavered. Increasing investment in the countries owning them gave U.S. capital a sort of sleeping partnership. It was an ill omen that the first big American investment in Europe consisted of loans to Britain for the Boer War.⁷³ Liberal objections to imperialism were still alive, on the other hand, and some unflattering pictures of colonial conditions were drawn. One observer in the 1920s described an Indochina run by bored Frenchmen

only longing to get home to Paris, while behind a civilized façade oriental oppression still flourished.¹⁴ Britons in India were frequently irritated by American failure to appreciate their work. A book like *Mother India* made amends. It depicted India as incapable of looking after itself, an attitude clearly linked with the racialism in American thinking; it was full of indignation (often well warranted) about the way Hindus treated their women, and full of admiration for British efforts to improve things.¹⁵ These efforts could be put in the same category with America's periodical descent on some disorderly Central American republic under colour of straightening out its affairs.

On balance the U.S. was moving towards a solidarity of feeling with the old empires, at any rate the British which it heard most about. Much of the style and matter of American apologetics of world power today can be traced back to British imperialism in its later, defensive days; to such windy rhetoric as Younghusband's, with an *obligato* accompaniment of religious phrases, about the high moral purposes of the British invasion of Tibet in 1904,¹⁶—or Zimmern's eulogy of British imperial history with the navy invariably "the champion of common human rights", almost too eager to go "crusading" in defence of right against wrong.¹⁷ Britannia must rule the waves, not for any selfish ends but for the good of all. In the same vein an American expert on China wrote a book in 1904 to convince his countrymen that they must secure the mastery of the Pacific; "mastery", he explained, not implying ill will to anyone else. If British imperialism failed after 1900 to secure the U.S. as partner, it was destined to have the U.S. as heir. In recent years indeed America has looked like a provincial actor jumping on the stage to repeat the same catch-phrases and claptrap that Britain won applause with, now when they have grown stale and silly; an illustration of Marx's dictum about history doing things twice, the second time as a farce.

Only in the past twenty years has opportunity come to America to add political power to economic. In the inter-War years, when Red peril and Yellow peril were so evenly balanced, nothing could be done beyond the Pacific (in the Manchurian crisis, for instance) without worsening one or the other. The Slump, which turned Germany and Italy back to imperialism, pushed America further into withdrawal. While Europeans had alternatives to look to, socialist or fascist, America had none, and the breakdown of the "way of life" that all classes had come to identify themselves with had all the more prostrating an effect. Even Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean flagged during the 1930s, as much from this paralysis of the nation's belief in itself as from New Deal enlightenment. This was the gloom from which the public was rescued, psychologically as well as materially, by Pearl Harbour. Victory over Japan, and possession of the atom bomb, raised

relief to exaltation. It was the first, and the only, clear-cut victory in a big war that America has ever won; everyone else was crippled; an "American century" seemed to be dawning.

It was America's turn to be carried up to the mountain-top and shown the kingdoms of the earth. Yet it could not, without loss of faith in itself as well of others' faith in it, annex any of them, even a Guatemala. Instead it wanted to play once more, on the grandest scale, what history and national character had made its favourite rôle, that of Perseus or St. George slaying monsters and throwing a shield over life, liberty, and the pursuit of profit. Hollywood has reflected this fantasy among the rest of America's daydreams. Just as all the Kaiser's army manoeuvres ended with a triumphant cavalry charge, every American adventure-film had to end with a hero galloping or driving at full speed to rescue some unfortunate in the nick of time; in Griffith's classic *Intolerance*, for example, made in 1916 just before the U.S. sprang (or more accurately, shuffled) to the rescue of European democracy.

Japan between 1941 and 1945 professed, not altogether groundlessly, to be liberating South-east Asia from its Western oppressors. America in turn, in its grand irruption into Asia, was coming to liberate it from Japan, as in 1898 it came to save the Philippines from Spain. And however much it had been already flowing, financially and spiritually, into the mould of the European empires, taking their shape and ready to replace them when they crumbled, its outlook and tactics were still, until a few years ago, more modern and adaptable than theirs. It was Europe's obstinate clinging to power after 1945 that drew America on, creating situations that it could scarcely help taking advantage of or, as in Vietnam, being sucked into. Thus in Iran the U.S. stepped in to assist a royalist counter-revolution and win a big share in the oil-fields when Britain's foolish obstinacy had pushed one wing of a divided ruling class into a programme of nationalization. By and large America in contrast with its predecessors was buying its way into the Middle East by offering higher royalties. Its "imperialistic" backing of Zionism has only hampered it, and helped Russia. But every onward step in regions where colonialist practices had long been habitual made them more a part of American habit too, and enabled a hydra-headed C.I.A. to multiply its activities.

One legacy from the old empires was a besetting fear of Red plots up and down the planet. Britain, France, Holland, from 1917 on were anxious to make it appear that all nationalist movements against their rule were instigated by agents of Moscow. To some extent their governments really believed this, being now shaky and uncertain, and their subjects; but they had in addition to disarm liberal criticism not wanting to admit to themselves that they were really disliked by

at home, and also in America where there was for instance an "American League for India's Freedom". Japan's profession of defending Asia against communism, as well as Western greed, and Hitler's of defending Europe, was something else that America could take over from its defeated opponents. It was shouldering now the responsibility that haunted Wilson when he tried to keep out of the Great War because only a U.S. with intact strength could shore up "'white civilization' and its domination over the world".¹⁹ His academic phrase meant, in the vernacular, defence of capitalism. But this could still masquerade as defence of freedom against its arch-enemies, communist Russia and China. Unhappily the character of the Stalinist régime made it easier for old American dislike of European monarchies and their colonialism to be turned into condemnation of Stalin and his "Soviet empire", or Mao the "Red emperor". It was helpful too, so far as Western opinion was concerned, that China was the old "Yellow peril" in new guise, neatly filling the blank left by Japan, while the U.S.S.R. could be viewed as a half-Asian country under a barbarous Asiatic despotism.

Instead of a Doctrine protecting the New World against the Old, we now have one to protect all the old world of class society against socialism. In effect the Platt Amendment imposed on Cuba has been generalized to cover all countries under the American umbrella, with even the small fry being left under their own, however dubiously independent governments. There was a precedent in the Mandate system invented as a concession to the spirit of the age by the victorious Allies in 1919, and operated in countries like Iraq through client rulers who remained clients when the Mandate nominally ended. A working model was provided by the Philippines, where a reliable governing class had been successfully fostered, and was tied to America by common interests and by fear of its own discontented poor. The islands could now be given independence, and were a showpiece highly attractive to other propertied groups in eastern Asia.

King George had plenty of friends in America, and President Nixon has plenty of friends in Asia, though even his stomach must turn at some of them. The more fiercely nationalism flares up in Asia, becoming at the same time a mass movement for social reform, the more class interests it necessarily antagonizes, and all these are eager allies of America. It does not take much shrewdness for them to see that the way to get money or guns is to discover a Red plot, as Titus Oates discovered Popish plots, or as a quack doctor might scare a rich old patient. In America itself there are always interested parties to lend them a hand, and to palm off the most unsavoury characters as so many William Tells resolved to sell their lives dearly against communist aggression. In the meantime they sell their services dearly to

America. Tory England after all had no difficulty in seeing Southern Secessionists as men rightly struggling to be free, and even had thoughts of intervening in the Civil War on their side.

It is an instance of the fine distinctions that a national conscience often draws that the U.S. even now feels a little uncomfortable with monarchs, but is quite at home with dictators, military or civilian. Bao Dai was less congenial to it than the much more tyrannical Ngo Dinh Diem. An implicit assumption is indulged in—a capitalist version of the withering away of the State—that authoritarian government backed by an American-trained army and police will establish conditions for "free enterprise" to flourish in: a modern middle class will then grow up, and the country will become safe for something like America's own mode of guided democracy. In most social contexts this prospect is quite chimerical; and from the point of view of mass welfare indirect rule may be even worse than actual colonialism. It has occurred to visitors in Latin America that if Washington were directly responsible for things there, roads and hospitals and schools could not be quite so scarce.

It is America now that sets out to police the world, while European and Japanese capitalism calmly looks on and shares in the proceeds. Yet America is in various ways less well equipped for the task. In Latin America and some parts of Asia it has had on the whole a deceptively easy time in asserting its suzerainty. It is the Far East that has proved baffling. Militarily the old empires, set up before Asian nationalism took form, relied heavily on native troops. America has endeavoured to follow suit. Eisenhower talked hopefully of "setting Asians to fight Asians", and may have thought with Pompey that he had only to stamp his foot and the legions would spring up. In South Korea it would seem for the time being that a useful recruiting-ground has been discovered. Elsewhere, and especially in South Vietnam, things have not gone so well. One awkwardness is that for the sake of appearances local troops have to be left to fight, or run away, under their own leaders. In any case there is nothing in their make-up to qualify Americans to officer native armies as Europeans used to do, any more than to administer colonies themselves.

They have it may be said a species of "native troops" of their own, Negroes whom army service has offered some opportunities denied to them in other fields.⁸⁰ But after years of war the American people at large seems—to its credit—scarcely less un-military than it was before. No officer-caste has grown up in the image of the Junker or the Samurai; even now "officership is a low-status profession".⁸¹ A Vietnam war has no cavalry charges and little glamour. Instead we see increased reliance on scientific methods of destruction, that can lead to nothing better than a grotesque future of government from the air, of peoples

condemned to live a nocturnal existence while in the daytime American planes fly about distributing good-will leaflets and napalm. We see, too, increased reliance in client countries like Brazil on scientific methods of police terror, borrowed by the C.I.A. from the Gestapo and the S.S.

The C.I.A. would look the most un-American of all things, were it not able to claim ancestry in the private detective agencies like Pinkerton's that thrive by supplying employers with spies and gunmen to keep their workers down. Today the morbid police mentality **that it** embodies, with its doctrinaire ban on any popular change anywhere in the world, suggests an ideology stiffened into dogma, floating free of any base in rational calculation. Something like this may have occurred towards the end of other epochs, as in the last phase of the Holy Alliance when the Tsar Nicholas I was the policeman of the continent, wielding his power in some ways quixotically, in a spirit of infatuated devotion to an order of things that no one else any longer took so literally for gospel. It is only Russia and America, the two nations which could be seen more than a century ago as the two great ones of the earth,⁸² born alike to extraordinary if conflicting destinies, that have been able in modern times to preside by turns over the last stand of an epoch or the inauguration of a new one. They have been the two extensions or amplifiers of western Europe, inventor of almost everything that has made the modern world, but too small and too divided to work out its conceptions on a grand scale, or doing so only in botched forms by fighting wars and making empires. In the ancient world Greece lay in something like the same position between Persia to the east and Rome to the west.

Whatever its bosses may desire, America is the last country to be easily kept immobile for **very** long. More than any other it has been a bundle of contradictions, jungle economics and Puritan conscience, generosity and greed, jostling together, and has swung to and fro more widely. It lost interest overnight in its first flutter in colonialism, in a volatile fashion impossible to a Europe rancid with hereditary ambitions and vendettas. Ability to forget is one part of learning, Engels thought of America as likely to "travel in tremendous zigzags",⁸³ but to progress towards socialism faster than Europe once it **began**.⁸⁴ There is more than mere hypochondria in the nervous anxiety of conservatives ever since 1917 to seal it off hermetically against socialism, to keep "dangerous thoughts" out of its head. American imperialism, by origin a **racket**, an outgrowth of big-business racketeering at home, now has this obsession added to it. In eastern Asia it has landed the country in "one of those dreadful, tragic, hopeless situations which seem to mark the decline or exhaustion of a colonial relationship":⁸⁵—the words are Kennan's, describing Spain's final

efforts to hold Cuba, and written a few years before America's efforts to hold South Vietnam began. Vietnam may turn out to have saved not only itself but also America, by tearing the web of deception and self-deception that Americans have been weaving round themselves.

The hopeful view that they are still economically and morally capable of changing course, and prospering without either arms-race or colonialism, was stated again not long ago, with due caution, by the American Marxist Perlo.⁸⁰ Progress has always been halting and imperfect, and whatever its shortcomings a country can only be measured by comparison with others. Peace and fraternity, America's early watchwords, have never lost all their virtue. If they do, if there is to be an ultimate failure of democracy in its first homeland, it will be a misfortune for the world only less great than an ultimate failure of the first homeland of socialism.

NOTES

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84. *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 237, 243.
85. Kennan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
86. V. Perlo, in *Morning Star* (London), 7 June 1968. I have benefited by discussion of this point with Mr David Horowitz, and by his trenchant criticisms of the first draft of this article throughout.

