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Apostle of Expansion

And then he came home to politics. Benjamin Harrison, twenty-third president of the United States, remembered Roosevelt's loyalty to the party in 1884—after being repeatedly reminded by Roosevelt friends and supporters. The Mugwumps had deserted the Republican side that year and cost the party the election, but Roosevelt stayed, despite his misgivings and despite the furious denunciations from his erstwhile allies in the Mugwump camp. Now he was back in New York, more or less permanently, with a new wife and a new home on Long Island: Sagamore Hill, he was calling it. He needed a job. He was writing books and a few essays and supposedly enjoying his new family—he had a son now, Ted—but he wanted back into politics. When the New York Republicans needed a mayoral candidate in the fall of 1886, for what was sure to be a losing campaign, he had dutifully allowed his name to be submitted. Roosevelt had been a loyal soldier. Harrison decided to reward him, bring him to Washington with a post on the United States Civil Service Commission. What better place for an advocate of administrative reform? The Pendleton Act, passed in the wake of President Garfield's assassination by a disaffected office-seeker—a Stalwart, no less—placed nearly fourteen thousand federal offices under an examination system for future appointments. That was in 1883. The size of the nonpartisan service had grown since then, and the commission was in charge of supervising examinations, investigating allegations of wrongdoing, and recommending rules to govern federal employees under its care, among other things.[1]

For Theodore, the civil service job meant a ticket to Washington, and that was enough. He knew Harrison was not exactly enthusiastic about attacking the spoils system. Only 11 percent or so of federal employees were covered by the Pendleton Act, and the president was hardly pressing for more. But Roosevelt believed the work was worth doing, and, more importantly, he was back in politics,

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national politics, right in the center of the action. In 1882 Roosevelt had met a young politician from Boston, also from a wealthy patrician family, also a Republican and would-be reformer. His name was Henry Cabot Lodge. He and Lodge both opposed Blaine's nomination as the Republican presidential candidate in 1884, but both decided to stay in the party together when Blaine carried the convention. Now Lodge was in Washington, too, as a congressman from Massachusetts. Theodore looked forward to many an hour together, talking and strategizing about the future of the Republican Party and the nation. He reported for work on May 13, 1889.[2]

Part of the price of remaining a Republican regular included following the party's shifting orthodoxy. In 1889, orthodoxy was economics, and free trade was decidedly and completely out. The protective tariff was in. Inconveniently, Roosevelt had started his political life as an avid free trader. Six years before, in the spring of 1883, he had been giving speeches at the New York Free Trade Club. "He thanked his stars," he told the *New York Times* after one meeting, "that he was not dependent in any way upon politics and as soon as any disagreement upon subjects of public importance"—like free trade—"arose between himself and his constituents, he was prepared to step out of office without reluctance." Times changed. With the ascent of James Blaine and his Half-Breeds, the Republicans forged a new, national alliance with emerging industries, the centerpiece of which was the protective tariff. The tariff, Half-Breeds argued, fostered American manufacturing, safeguarded American workers, helped farmers, and generally fueled the development of the American industrial economy. "Under the Protective system, agriculture, manufacturers and commerce have flourished in equal degree," Blaine contended. This was his alternative to the politics of the Stalwarts, the sectional politics of North and South. A high protective tariff bound the country together, benefiting all sections; it promoted economic nationalism. Growth, nationalism, prosperity, wise economic management: these were the new Republican keynotes. Roosevelt sang along.[3]

Actually, he did feel much more strongly about national development than about free trade. His visions of national expansion were, if anything, grander than those the Half-Breeds and other tariff true believers entertained. Roosevelt saw development of the American interior as only the first step. He wanted a policy to extend American power to the world. The United States, let it not be forgotten, carried the torch of civilization, and he believed it was Americans' mission, it was their destiny, to push civilization forward worldwide. This was as much a moral imperative for him as a geostrategic necessity, a great moral calling the United States was bound to answer. Earlier generations had called this dream manifest destiny, and Roosevelt fashioned his own version with verve, in-

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corporating his racialist theories and history of the American frontier, drawing on earlier Americans' imperial ambitions as well as on the trends of present-day world politics. There was no better place than Washington to gild these grand visions, with fellow schemer Henry Cabot Lodge and his salon of intellectuals. Let economic development be just the beginning. International power, a "continental policy," was the best program for a truly "progressive Republican party," as Senator William E. Chandler (an imperialist) put it in 1893. A progressive policy. That's what Roosevelt was after.[4]

It was clear to Theodore Roosevelt that the human species progressed through the domination of one race over others. "The torch has been handed on from nation to nation, from civilization to civilization, throughout all recorded time," he said in 1910. Leadership of the species passed from race to race as history unfolded, the torch dropping "from the hands of the coward and the sluggard," kept high "by those mighty of heart and cunning of hand." Great races, like great individuals, grew tired and weary. Eventually others succeeded them at the fore, pushing onward the thin line of human progress. This much Roosevelt concluded in the 1880s, if not earlier, and he believed then that a baton pass was in progress. He saw leadership of the species shifting from the English to what had become the American race.[5]

The Americans, Roosevelt wrote in his *Winning of the West*, "began their work of western conquest as a separate and individual people, at the moment they sprang into national life." He was confident that the British and the North Americans shared a common racial heritage. But in Roosevelt's mind the English colonists in North America had encountered a wholly different environment than the subdued and tranquil landscape inhabited by their brethren at home. This radical change in geographic circumstance produced a corresponding change in racial character, a rejuvenation, by Roosevelt's lights—a recovery of the warrior virtues. And so, while the American settlers remained descendants of "English stock," their environment, principally the Western frontier, wrought in them such a change of character that Roosevelt could speak in his *Naval War of 1812* of the "contest between the two branches of the English race." One branch had nearly reached its zenith, as the following years would show, while the other, more "rapidly growing one of these same two branches"—the American branch—was just beginning the work that would make it great.[6]

Though the British Empire would not attain its full splendor until the mid-nineteenth century, Roosevelt believed the rapid population growth and swift western expansion of the American peoples as early as the 1790s clearly foretold their future ascendance over the British. Under the American banner, English

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civilization had marched across the continent. From Roosevelt's point of view, the irony of that Anglo-American spat known as the War of 1812 was that, in purporting to pursue their national interest, the "English of Britain" were in fact "doing all they could to put off the day when their race would reach to world-wide supremacy." In North America the English race had secured a continental outpost that would ultimately prove more durable and more powerful than the Empire. The American continent, once fully populated, provided a base from which the English-speakers could extend their reach over an entire hemisphere. Great Britain's colonial holdings, meanwhile, unless populated with Britons, offered no comparable advantage. They were administrative entities, not permanent racial outposts. All that was required to activate English ascendancy in the Western Hemisphere was the western expansion of the United States. Britain's eclipse as the leader of the English-speakers was at hand.[7]

The Americans' gathering strength conferred weighty responsibilities, however. As he knew from Shaler and Spencer and Freeman and Burgess, the English represented the most advanced, most progressive civilization yet achieved by humankind. They had developed parliamentary democracy and the common law, written a great national literature, and safeguarded the Christian religion. Their civilization was the hope of the human race; it was the future possible for all peoples, given proper racial and cultural development. Americans now had an obligation to spread that civilization across the globe, to bring it to the world's "waste spaces," as Roosevelt called underdeveloped countries, just as the British had been doing for centuries. Having settled the continent, Americans now needed to turn their attention to the rest of the Western Hemisphere, where there was much work to be done. In 1889, that work began with ejecting the Spanish from Cuba.[8]

The American confrontation with Spain illuminated for Roosevelt the moral nature of expansion. Spanish iniquity threw Anglo-American virtue into sharp relief. The Spaniards' empire was autocratic and backward, Roosevelt charged, hostile to Teutonic self-government. The Americans never could have established their imperium of liberty had they not first driven the Spanish from the continent. Unfortunately, when the expanding United States forced Spain off the North American landmass, the Catholic kingdom retained island holdings in Cuba and the Caribbean, and continued to "misgover[n] the islands as she had misgoverned the continent." This geopolitical state of affairs presented the United States with a dilemma. Liberty and autocracy, Roosevelt believed, could not coexist. Either the Americans would displace Spain's Catholic, monarchical, exploitative system with the democratic liberty and Protestant ethos of English civilization, or the Spanish regime would gradually infect the Americans'

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own and eviscerate their English heritage. Conflict was certain and unavoidable, ordained by the unfolding of history. The only question was the identity of the victor.[9]

The English-speakers' role as the guardians of civilization and their resulting moral duty to expand were linked, in Roosevelt's mind, with their advocacy of self-government. The Spanish had never practiced free government in any portion of their realm, while the English had virtually invented modern republican democracy. For Roosevelt, the development and exercise of self-rule was another sign of Anglo-American racial superiority, for, tellingly, like the racialist "new historians," he regarded free government as the trapping of a strong, vigorous people, not as a right common to all people everywhere. Liberty was a good thing, to be sure, but only for those racially suited to it, and one burden borne by the English and now the Americans was to bring the gift of liberty to the world through territorial and political expansion. Freedom, as it turned out, depended on conquest.[10]

"Self-government is not an easy thing," Roosevelt judged. "Only those communities are fit for it in which the average individual practices the virtues of self-command, of self-restraint, and of wise disinterestedness." Admittedly, few peoples possessed these qualities. "It is no light task for a nation to achieve the temperamental qualities without which the institutions of free government are but an empty mockery." The American settlers on the frontier "solved the difficult problem of self-government," Roosevelt boasted, by fashioning rough-and-ready democratic institutions like town assemblies, impromptu courts and juries, executive councils, and law-enforcement bodies. Settlers in what is now Tennessee went so far as to form an independent association and write a constitution for themselves as early as 1772, Roosevelt noted proudly, to say nothing of the constitutions and social compacts drafted by the first English comers to North America. "Our people are now successfully governing themselves," Roosevelt concluded, "because for more than a thousand years they have been slowly fitting themselves, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, toward this end."[11]

If races acquired the capacity for self-rule only over time (if at all), the need for free government sprang from a race's conquering character. Those individuals who won honor and glory, those who pressed forward frontiers or conquered adversaries were invariably "bold, self-reliant, and energetic." Or, as Roosevelt sometimes summarized, virile men and women tended to be "strong individualists." There was more than a faint echo of Herbert Spencer's sociopolitical theory here, his idea that racial advancement led to greater individualism—human his-

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tory culminating in a society of self-reliant, self-supporting, independent individualists. Roosevelt suggested something very similar. The strong person, living in a political community, "will demand liberty for himself, and as a matter of pride will see to it that others receive the liberty which he thus claims as his own." Virile races, then, full of strong-willed, independent-minded individualists, required a form of self-government in order to accommodate the peculiar virtues of their members. Rather than a right, republican democracy was one expression of a mighty people's moral strength. Freedom and "orderly liberty" were won through centuries of struggle, as races developed the virtues that required self-government and the capacity to sustain it.[12]

What took the Anglo-Americans "thirty generations to achieve, we cannot expect to see another race accomplish out of hand," Roosevelt cautioned, "especially when large portions of that race start very far behind the point which our ancestors had reached even thirty generations before." Liberty should spread around the globe, not because it was a birthright, but because free government had proved to be the highest form of rule developed by the most advanced races—the best of which the human species was yet capable of achieving. Those races who had developed the capacity for freedom, the English and Americans preeminently, advanced the cause of liberty by bringing order and republican institutions to regions of the world where they did not currently exist. The American frontiersmen did precisely this as they pushed westward, Roosevelt maintained. Though they came as conquerors, and as such had a right to "treat the defeated as they wished, yet it was ever their principle to free, not to enslave, the people with whom they came into contact." The settlers brought with them democratic practices and freedom of religion, the great ornaments of their race. When asked by a group of recently subdued French Creoles in the Illinois country whether they might open a Catholic church, George Rogers Clark replied, "[A]n American commander had nothing to do with any church save to defend it from insult, and that by the laws of the Republic [their] religion had as great privileges as any other." The "mercurial creoles [*sic*]" listening to Clark's speech, Roosevelt recorded, "instead of bewailing their fate . . . could not congratulate themselves enough on their good-fortune." Americans were conquerors, yes, but liberators at the same time.[13]

Whether on the Western frontier or in the Caribbean, "our aim is high," Roosevelt asserted. In the case of the Filipinos, for instance, a people oppressed by the Spanish for decades, "we do not desire to do for [those] islanders merely what has elsewhere been done for tropic peoples by even the best foreign governments." The United States would not rob and pillage indigenous societies for its own benefit or leave them benignly neglected. Rather, "we hope to do for them

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what has never before been done for any people of the tropics—to make them fit for self-government after the fashion of the really free nations." Because self-rule stemmed from racial strength and required for its preservation additional qualities of character beyond virility and independence—qualities like restraint and wise disinterest—tutelage by the elder races of those "but recently arisen from the barbarism which our people left behind ages ago" was absolutely essential. The less-advanced, quasi-barbaric races were like a young child, gifted and promising, but desperately in need of a parent's guidance to meet her full potential. And just as the parent cajoled and directed, demanded and exhorted, for the good of his charge, "there can be no justification for one race managing or controlling another," Roosevelt held, "unless the management and control are exercised in the interest and for the benefit of that other race."[14]

The United States had a unique historical mission, Roosevelt argued. This was his own form of American exceptionalism. That mission was "to bring civilization to the waste spaces of the earth," to expand liberty by building a liberal empire. Through territorial enlargement, the United States would help less-advanced races progress, further democracy, and push forward the development of the entire human family. American expansion would, in short, be America's gift to the world. In so arguing, Roosevelt adopted the messianic aspirations of his national forebears even while subtly reshaping them. The first English Puritan settlers had intended to build a colony that, governed by the word of God, would act as an inspiration for humans the world over, an emblem of the good life possible when men followed God's will. "Wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill," John Winthrop wrote in 1630, thinking of the passage from Matthew's gospel. "The eies [*sic*] of all the people are upon us." The Puritans' sense of mission was an outgrowth of their ecclesiology—their conception of the church and its function in the world. Much like their theological inspiration, John Calvin, the early American Puritans made little if any distinction between the ideal political community and the church, that is, the assembly of believers in a particular place. One had to be a professing Christian to be a member of political society. This Christian state that Calvin had attempted to found in Geneva, the Puritans aimed to replicate and perfect in Massachusetts.[15]

As the colonial period gave way to the revolutionary years, Americans' sense of purpose became somewhat more secular, less tied to any particular ecclesiology, but still distinctly religious. The agnostic Thomas Jefferson captured this changing sense of national mission elegantly when he announced in the Declaration of Independence that Americans held "these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," sentiments com-

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mon across the thirteen colonies and voiced in strikingly similar terms in town assemblies and meetings for months preceding the Declaration's composition. The colonists, the Americans, would fight for these rights, waging a war of principle for their own sakes and for the sake of all humanity, who shared in the Americans' inalienable, God-granted liberties. To enunciate and defend this common, divine grant was America's special purpose.[16]

Roosevelt didn't give much attention to the rights-based component of early American nationalism. "Rights" was not a word often found in his vocabulary. Instead, Roosevelt drew on another, somewhat newer strand in the American tradition, an expansionist strand that emphasized the benevolent possibilities of American empire. Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and even Thomas Jefferson had all understood the need for a unified, consolidated, well-fortified, and expansionist state able to establish itself in North America. But it was not until the early nineteenth century that Americans took up the dream of a continental empire in earnest. John Quincy Adams was one of the first to foresee that, with the advent of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the path was cleared for the American nation to spread from coast to coast. America would occupy an entire continent. Thanks to the Louisiana Purchase and Monroe Doctrine, no European power would be present to halt its progress. As American expansion pushed westward and the country's population grew to match, the United States, he predicted, would become the center of a new global equilibrium. It would stand midway between Europe and Asia, astride two great oceans, a center for trade and commerce at the crossroads of the world. "He who won America," John Quincy's grandson Brooks Adams summarized, "might aspire to that universal empire which had been an ideal since the dawn of civilization."[17]

For this empire to become a reality, internal development was a necessity. Asa Whitney, the man who sold Congress on a transcontinental railroad, captured the imperative. He proposed to link Oregon with the East Coast via steel rail, opening the American interior and facilitating commerce across the continent. The effect would be to blaze a new route to Asia, by connecting American manufacturers in the East and farmers in the Midwest with Pacific ports. And if America was connected, Europe would be connected. The railroad, he said, would "revolutionize the entire commerce of the world; placing us directly in the centre of all." All the earth would be tributary to America, "and, in a moral point of view, it will be the means of civilizing and Christianizing mankind." Mathew Fontaine Maury, United States naval hydrographer, took Whitney's schematic one step further. Cut a canal through Panama, he urged Congress, and European shippers would be forced to reach Asia through territory under the control, direct or indirect, of the United States. To forgo the shortened route

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would be foolhardy for foreign traders, and bad business. By leveraging American control of the continent into hemispheric dominance, Maury proposed to take manifest destiny global.[18]

Asa Whitney had hinted at the moral case for continental expansion. Expansion's advocates hoped to erect in America a citadel for political liberty and Christian truth, which many, by the 1840s, regarded as more or less the same thing. "We point to the everlasting truth on the first page of our national declaration," journalist John O'Sullivan wrote in his famous 1839 essay, the one that coined the phrase "manifest destiny," "and we proclaim to the millions of other lands, that 'the gates of hell'—the powers of aristocracy and monarchy—'shall not prevail against it.'" America became the church militant on this reading, God's pilgrim people on earth establishing a political kingdom of freedom and justice over which Christ would come one day to reign. It was America's destiny "to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High. . . . Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation . . . hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality." The 1850s sectional crisis threatened to destroy this noble project and disciples of manifest destiny worked to avert the gathering war with one purpose above all: to save the messianic American state. William Seward, cofounder of the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln's secretary of state, warned the South that secession would destroy America's global supremacy and, with it, the hopes of Christian civilization.[19]

Foremost among these apostles of expansion was Stephen A. Douglas, a Democrat but a committed opponent of Southern secession. It was Douglas, perhaps more successfully than any other advocate of manifest destiny, who bent America's redemptive identity into a doctrine of conquest, an attractive example for Theodore Roosevelt. Douglas explained how manifest destiny would *work*, and melded it with larger geopolitical considerations. For him, the rationale for expansion rested on a single critical claim: American territorial growth meant the advent of equality and constitutional liberty for the native peoples. "Our federal system is admirably adapted to the whole continent," Douglas said in the 1848 debate over the annexation of Texas, "and while I would not violate the laws of nations, nor treaty stipulations, nor in any manner tarnish the national honor, I would exert all legal and honorable means . . . [to] extend the limits of the republic from ocean to ocean." Douglas wanted to "make the area of liberty as broad as the continent itself." His reasoning was twofold. First, the U.S. Constitution knew no "provincial" designation in the tradition of, say, imperial Rome. Any territory acquired by American expansion was presumably a future state,

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destined to be a full and equal member of the American Union, its inhabitants future citizens—not subjects—to whom would accrue all the constitutional privileges and protections afforded every American citizen. In brief, American arms brought American liberty. And for places like Mexico, the site of perpetual revolution and, in Douglas's view, lawless, crippling anarchy, to come under American control would be to find true liberation. American rule would bring the first real promise of self-government ever vouchsafed to the native people. The Union's expansion was therefore a fundamentally liberating enterprise, moral in a way no other imperialism before had been. And while Douglas loudly insisted he desired no territory beyond the North American continent—"I do not wish to go beyond the great ocean, beyond those boundaries which the God of nature has marked out"—he pointedly refused to renounce territorial ambitions in Mexico, modern-day Canada, or Central America.[20]

Douglas offered another reason for continental expansion, one that adumbrated Roosevelt's later logic. "I would," he declared in the debate over Texas, "exert all legal and honorable means to drive Great Britain and the last vestiges of royal authority from the continent of North America. . . . I would make this an ocean-bound republic, and have no more disputes about boundaries or red lines upon the maps." Identifying Great Britain as the villain in America's morality play much as Roosevelt would forty years hence identify Spain, Douglas characterized American territorial growth as the antidote to Britain's royal tyranny. That is, he called American expansion a geopolitical imperative. Douglas was convinced that Britain was a royal despotism, whatever Whitehall's rhetoric, and if America hoped ever to emerge from Britain's shadow it would have to grow strong and large enough to rival Britain's mammoth empire. America would never be a force for world liberty if it became just one nation among many on the North American continent. Unless the United States wanted to find itself like the German states at mid-century, surrounded by potential enemies, disunited, distracted, and perpetually on the brink of war, it would have to possess the continent entire. Preventing the re-creation of European political chaos and, not incidentally, despotism was what made manifest destiny politically important. A strong, united, continental America might conceivably challenge the British Empire and its reactionary allies in their attempts to crush republican revolutions in central Europe, India, Africa, and elsewhere.[21]

Roosevelt's reasoning ran remarkably parallel to these advocates of American continentalism, though with important variations. Roosevelt wanted the United States to bring the cultural habits and mores of free government—or what for Roosevelt was the same thing, the racial characteristics—to the people it ruled,

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with the intention of eventually rendering them self-governing nations (or races), rather than political members of the American Union. In this way, Roosevelt's scheme was more truly imperial than, say, Douglas's version. Roosevelt envisioned not the enlargement of the nation proper, but enlargement of the nation's political power and influence over other, admittedly and permanently foreign peoples. Nevertheless, Roosevelt still conceived his imperial project as a moral one, for much the same reason Douglas had, though here again there is an important distinction. Douglas understood self-government as humans' God-given right, which the United States, in extending its territory and concomitant system of civil and political rights, was helping to secure. Roosevelt, by contrast, regarded the self-government brought by American power as an opportunity for backward peoples to join the progress of the human race, to become "civilized" and show themselves worthy of obtaining a form of government their betters had already attained.[22]

If the indigenous peoples resisted America's gift of political freedom, conveniently disguised as conquest, their wishes were to be ignored and, if necessary, forcibly thwarted. For after all, the first and greatest imperative was the progress of the human species, and America represented that progress. The frontiersmen's encounter with the native American peoples offered a case in point. Roosevelt readily admitted that the white settlers on America's western border were not the most refined personages. "One who in an Eastern city is merely a backbiter and slanderer, in the western woods lies in wait for his foe with rifle; sharp practice in the east becomes highway robbery in the west." The decades-long war between settlers and Native Americans along the Western frontier was "bloody and cruel," and the settlers stood guilty of much bloodshed. However, in the final analysis, Roosevelt acquitted them entirely of any noteworthy wrongdoing. Bloody, even tragic, though the struggle was, Roosevelt concluded, "we are bound to admit" that it "was really one that could not possibly have been avoided." For unless the Americans were willing "that the whole continent west of the Alleghanies [*sic*] should remain unpeopled waste . . . war was inevitable."[23]

The Anglo-American settlers represented the vanguard of civilization, the most highly evolved of the human species, and, as such, it was their duty as well as their right to expand their regime of freedom and self-government, for the uplift of the whole human race. The frontiersman and the American Indian "represented two stages of progress, ages apart; and it would have needed many centuries to bring the lower to the level of the higher." For Roosevelt, the inescapable reality of America's imperial duty was simple: when the interests of the American race and those of the indigenous peoples conflicted irreconcilably,

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their clash had to be "settled by the strong hand." The war that came was "in its essence just and righteous on the part of the borderers."[24]

Whether Douglas or Adams or Maury or any other advocate of 1840s manifest destiny would have sanctioned an imperial ethic on this order is doubtful. But then those earlier proponents of American expansion did not harbor a conquest-based, warrior morality, which Roosevelt fused with his expansionist logic to produce a strange imperialism—liberal in aspiration, yet illiberal in practice and racist as well. Roosevelt may have embraced a basically Christian ethical system for his preachments on politics and public life. But in his interpretation of history, he was far more willing to hue to his own cold, evolutionary logic and treat moral standards as biological products, created and refined by humans over the millennia of their development. He sometimes talked as if morality was an essentially utilitarian construct of the human experience, useful for helping humans evolve. Taken to its logical conclusion, this train of thought cast moral systems as products of force. "It is indeed a warped, perverse, and silly morality which would forbid a course of conquest that has turned whole continents into the seats of mighty and flourishing civilized nations," he wrote in *Winning of the West*. "It is as idle to apply to savages the rules of international morality which obtain between stable and cultured communities, as it would be to judge the fifth-century English conquest of Britain by the standards of today." This was moral historicism on a Machiavellian scale. Though he never said so outright, Roosevelt's reasoning strongly implied, as Machiavelli's *Prince* said bluntly, that moral systems came into being when the conquering power imposed its value preferences on the conquered. And while Roosevelt spoke of the "great rule of righteousness, which bids us treat each man on his worth as a man," if one follows strictly his logic, rather than his glittering moral conclusions, one sees that his moral universe is, in the end, a desolate place founded on force, violence, and raw power. His doctrine of imperialism and its consequences for the American Indians revealed as much. "[I]t is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races." What the strong could take belonged to the strong. It is difficult to imagine a more thorough or repugnant apology for oppressive exploitation.[25]

Of course, by "dominant world races" Roosevelt meant the Teutons and their progeny, whom he believed had invented self-government. But why, ultimately, free government should be prized and extended, Roosevelt was hard pressed to say. Self-rule both begat and sustained mighty races, in his understanding, but surely Americans did not intend to make every other race under its influence strong.

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This self-defeating exercise would result only in the multiplication of potential racial competitors. Nor did Roosevelt intend the United States to absorb every people it occupied, as Stephen Douglas might have advocated. Like his commitment to various moral absolutes, Roosevelt's devotion to republican government defies any systematic philosophical rationale and evaporates finally into the realm of unarticulated personal conviction. However, Roosevelt's advocacy of democratic rule, where democracy is equated with English civilization brought by either the Americans or the British, did have immediate, practical uses.

To begin with, it provided a handy justification for establishing political control over allegedly unstable or nondemocratic states, as Roosevelt would explicitly urge as president. As a matter of geopolitics, expanding American political and military influence in these troubled areas would help fill power vacuums that might otherwise tempt rival world powers to interfere themselves. At the same time, preemptory American interference would enlarge the United States' civilizing sphere of influence. It would make America a major player in the international system, just at the moment the system was beginning to disintegrate.

Though the British Empire looked impressive enough in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, Roosevelt sensed acutely by the 1890s that the balance of power was shifting away from Britain. British exports as a percentage of the world total, a key measure of economic strength, had slipped into a steady decline from their mid-century highs. Joseph Chamberlain's turn-of-the-century plan for a free trade area within the commonwealth was actually a protectionist scheme for British industry, a proposal that betrayed economic weakness and self-doubt. There were now four times as many mouths to feed in Britain as there had been a hundred years earlier, and the government struggled at once to feed its poor and to defend its far-flung empire.[26]

Imperialist Germany was rising to fill the void. Unified in 1871, that nation in the heart of Europe matched Britain's economic output by the end of the nineteenth century and showed a desire matched by capacity for colonial expansion that chilled the British Foreign Ministry. Though he admired Germany's economic efficiency, racial lineage, and social welfare policies, and though he was sympathetic with their hunger for colonial expansion, Roosevelt remained wary of the Germans. Otto von Bismarck's play for the Samoan Islands in 1889 caught his attention, and not in a favorable way. Samoa was in the South Pacific. German presence there could threaten America's position as the gateway to Asia. Roosevelt wanted a coaling station in the islands for American ships. For that matter, he wanted to annex Hawaii for use as a naval port. The Pacific held great potential as an American highway, and Germany needed to be kept out.[27]

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With the startling rise of German imperialism, to say nothing of Japan, the system of states and their pattern of engagement that had existed for close to a century were growing brittle, he observed. The ability of Europe's powers to settle disputes by diplomatic compromise was eroding, as Britain's ability to end any conflict and keep any peace gave way before mounting German strength. Roosevelt judged that the existing balance of power in the international system could not be kept indefinitely without the intervention of the United States. Given the facts before him, "we are ourselves becoming, owing more to our strength and geographical situation, more and more the balance of power of the whole world," Roosevelt concluded. If English civilization were to continue its ascent, America would have to assume a greater global role.[28]

The moral and geopolitical justifications for an expansive foreign policy, what he and confidant Cabot Lodge called their "large policy," merged powerfully in Roosevelt's mind. The United States was obligated to advance the reach of civilization—their civilization—and the free government that characterized it. To do this, America had to look outward and become a global power strong enough to defend its interests and advance the cause of liberty. His foreign policy was idealistic, but also practical. He tallied up specific policies he thought the country should adopt forthwith, beginning with a larger navy. Roosevelt began the drumbeat for a robust fleet as early as 1882, writing in his first book that "people are beginning to realize that it is folly for the great English-speaking Republic to rely for defence [*sic*] upon a navy composed partly of antiquated hulks, and partly of new vessels rather more worthless than the old." It was "worthwhile to study with some care that period of our history" in the first place because then "our navy stood at the highest pitch of its fame."[29]

His discovery in 1890 of Alfred Thayer Mahan's book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* further stoked his enthusiasm for a strong forward naval presence. Mahan's message was bracing. If America wanted to rise to world power, it must emulate the example of Great Britain: expand trade, build a merchant marine and navy, and acquire naval bases at strategic points around the world. Indeed, acquire, acquire, acquire; that was the order of the day. Roosevelt couldn't have agreed more. He saw the Hawaiian Islands as essential fueling stations for an expanded American navy, from which American ships might project power and dominate shipping lanes in the Pacific. Hawaii was also essential, he decided, for protecting the California coast, especially if the United States dug an isthmian canal, and he was all for that, too. A canal would turn the Caribbean into a veritable American lake, not only bolstering commerce, à la Mathew Fontaine Maury, but allowing the United States to launch a two-ocean navy.

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Roosevelt also eyed the Spanish-held Philippines with interest. They could serve as another valuable American port-of-call on the doorstep of East Asia. In fact, he saw no reason why the United States should not assume the entire Spanish Empire. Cuba, especially, would be a choice piece of real estate if and when Washington finally built a canal through the Panamanian isthmus.[30]

This was Roosevelt's plan of action, derived from his imperial vision and, more broadly, his view of history and warrior moral code. He believed it reflected the grandest and most noble aspirations of the American nation. But Roosevelt's historical understanding was sometimes blinkered. Americans had never embraced an expansionary policy in quite the way he seemed to think. Manifest destiny had never been American gospel in quite the way he believed. In the 1850s, it was Abraham Lincoln and his Whig political allies who presciently pointed out that a policy of imperialism would undermine the country's most cherished democratic ideals. America's primary role as freedom's advocate, the Whigs and Lincoln believed, was to act as an example, not to impose its way of life on other nations or peoples. Lincoln worried that Douglasite expansion would actually weaken traditional American support for individual rights and liberties. This line of criticism drew on a vibrant anti-imperial tradition in the American historical experience and served to temper popular enthusiasm for continental expansion. The truth was, while the United States had been an expansionary nation from the first, it had expanded only episodically and without a powerful overarching rationale. Most Americans in the 1880s, as in the 1850s, rejected imperialism, identifying it with the European powers. Which is to say, Americans were Lincolnites in rhetoric and Douglasites in practice. But only in practice. Douglas and other advocates of manifest destiny failed to convince their countrymen to adopt self-consciously the role of an expansionary power, and, in advocating an even bolder version of the Douglas program, Roosevelt tempted the same historical and cultural mores. This did not stop him from trying.[31]

President Harrison's reluctance to implement it frustrated him, and he found Harrison's successor, Democrat Grover Cleveland, a true foot-dragging trial on this score. William Seward as secretary of state had tried but failed to annex the Danish West Indies, Santo Domingo, and the Hawaiian Islands. Presidents since Grant endorsed an isthmian canal, but none did much to carry it forward. "I do wish our Republicans would go in avowedly to annex Hawaii and build a canal with the money of Uncle Sam," Roosevelt complained to Lodge in 1894. But they didn't. Not yet, anyway. Roosevelt was pushing harder, and for grander plans, than the leadership of his party. He was casting traditional Republican issues—economic nationalism, commercial expansion, territorial acquisition

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—in a new mold, redeploying them as components of an aggressive policy of American national greatness. At times, party grandees didn't know what to do with him. The man would not sit still.[32]

Not content to formulate sweeping foreign policy strategies, at the civil service commission Roosevelt had launched an investigation of President Harrison's handpicked postmaster general, John Wanamaker. Wanamaker had been a Philadelphia businessman before his appointment as chief of the postal service, and as such he symbolized the Republican Party's emerging partnership with industry. He helped party campaign managers raise nearly $400,000 from Eastern businessmen in the election of 1888, the one that put Harrison in the White House. He knew how to butter up the business community and make the Republican case for greater prosperity through tariff protection and internal development. When Harrison gave him the most coveted patronage position in the federal government, reform advocates wailed. For his part, Roosevelt launched a four-year effort to force Wanamaker out, eventually alleging that postal clerks in Cleveland had raised campaign funds within their office, in direct violation of the Pendleton Act. Roosevelt blamed Wanamaker and publicly called for his resignation. The president sided with the postmaster.[33]

Frustrated with the marginal powers of the civil service commission, unable to influence policy, Roosevelt looked for greener pastures. Democrats replaced Republicans in Washington in 1893, but Roosevelt lingered, invited by President Grover Cleveland to stay on at the commission. He did, for two years more, but his attention was elsewhere. He wanted to be a policy-maker again, a doer, a man with real sway. To steer the ship-of-state, he needed power. And he wanted it. As the presidential election of 1896 loomed, Republicans were plotting to return to power, and Roosevelt plotted to return with them.

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