

## **1. The Expansionist Impulse**

### **1.**

Americans like to pretend that they have no imperial past. Yet they have shown expansionist tendencies since colonial days. As early as 1613 Samuel Argall, a Jamestown ship captain in the employ of the Virginia Company, raided the settlement of Port Royal in French Canada. Overland expansion, often at the expense of Mexicans and Indians, was a marked feature of American history right through the period of the Civil War, by which time the United States had reached its continental proportions.

The War for American Independence, which created most of the founding myths of the Republic, was itself a war for expansion. The American revolutionaries were fighting to acquire all of Britain's possessions in North America, including the territories in Canada that the British had recently seized from France. General George Washington's raiding parties captured Montreal but failed at Quebec.

Thomas Jefferson nursed even grander plans for empire. Twenty years before he commissioned the Lewis and Clark Expedition, he had pondered an exploration of the Pacific Northwest. He interviewed sailors and explorers who knew the area and amassed the most comprehensive library on it in North America. In 1793 he organized a privately funded but government-sponsored expedition to seek a water route across the continent. The expedition was aborted when Jefferson discovered that its leader, a French scientist, was spying for France. But his aim was already to link the Atlantic and Pacific coasts via the Missouri and Columbia rivers.

Jefferson's greatest coup, the purchase from France in 1803 of vast but undefined western lands misleadingly known as Louisiana,

brought this dream much closer to reality. The American president, Francophile though he was, won Louisiana by threatening to annihilate the French fleet and to fight any French troops who landed at New Orleans. Napoleon I had his own reasons for selling Louisiana. He was at a military disadvantage and feared the Americans would occupy the territory before he could get his army there. He boasted that by strengthening American power, he had given Britain "a rival who, sooner or later, will humble her pride." It was a clever calculation, since the two countries were at war nine years later.

With the addition of the land west of the Mississippi River stretching all the way to the Rockies, the Louisiana Purchase turned the hitherto square-shaped United States into a huge rectangle. In Jefferson's extravagant view the American entitlement went still farther, to the Pacific coast. Even before the mammoth land deal with Napoleon was concluded, he had secured congressional funding for Meriwether Lewis's expedition to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean.

After Jefferson's triumph with the Louisiana Territory, American presidents seized other new opportunities to expand. In the War of 1812 with Great Britain, the Madison administration made no headway in its attack on Canada but consolidated its hold on the Mississippi Valley. John Quincy Adams, President James Monroe's acerbic, depressive, and brilliant secretary of state, scored successes on both ends of the continent. His treaty of 1818 with Britain established the northwest boundary at forty-nine degrees latitude, where it is today. Also, in 1819 Adams bought from Spain the Floridas, comprising a strip along the Gulf Coast reaching to New Orleans as well as to what is now the state of Florida itself, for the modest price of five million dollars.

Adams's main historical legacy was the Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed in 1823 as Spanish colonies in Latin America were culminating their drive for independence from Spain. Adams was determined to blunt the not necessarily firm Spanish intention to use military force, with French support, to reestablish colonial control. The doctrine consisted of four noes: no new European colonization, no extension of European political systems to the Western Hemisphere, no intervention to put down revolutions, and (the U.S. *quid pro quo*) no American interference in Europe's internal concerns.

The Monroe Doctrine was a unilateral U.S. policy, not a treaty. It bound no country but the United States, nor was it uniformly enforced or observed. It was "violated" by Britain in the occupation of the Falkland Islands in 1833, by Spain in the reassertion of colonial rule over Santo Domingo in 1861, and by France in Napoleon III's brazen attempt to turn Mexico into a French puppet state during the American Civil War. There were other examples as well. Nevertheless, the consequences of the Monroe Doctrine were far-reaching, for Latin America became effectively a U.S. sphere of influence, off limits to its European rivals.

John Quincy Adams was a reluctant imperialist. He had opposed the Louisiana Purchase, and twice he renounced the U.S. claim to the territory that was later to become Texas, once as secretary of state and again as an antislavery congressman. But the desire in the South for more cotton land and an additional slave state prevailed. The agent of pro-Texas sentiment was a humorless, puritanical small-town Tennessee lawyer and former U.S. congressman. James K. Polk, a believer in Jeffersonian republicanism and a protégé of Andrew Jackson's, had no qualms about expansion. In his inaugural address as president in 1845, he said: "It is confidently believed that our system may be safely extended to the utmost bounds of our territorial limits, and that as it shall be extended the bonds of our Union, so far from being weakened, will become stronger."

Polk, unmatched among American presidents in his xenophobic belligerence, warned Great Britain not to challenge America's title to the Pacific Northwest and threatened Mexico with war if it interfered with the U.S. acquisition of Texas. He abandoned his attempt to expand the northwest boundary of the United States to north of Vancouver Island, settling for the earlier delineation at the forty-ninth parallel. But he fought a successful war against Mexico for Texas. By the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexico recognized the Rio Grande as the international border and ceded to the United States what are now California, Nevada, and Utah, plus parts of the future New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Wyoming. Mexico had lost half its land, and Polk had added 1.2 million square miles to U.S. territory, an increase of more than 60 percent. This achievement was completed after his presidency with the addition of the southern portions

of Arizona and New Mexico, bought from Mexico in 1853. Alongside his hero Jefferson, Polk can claim to be the greatest presidential expansionist in American history.

Starting from the thirteen original states, the expansion from one contiguous area to another owed much to the diplomacy of Jefferson and John Quincy Adams and to the war policy of Polk. But expansion came from below as well. In the incorporation of the states between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River during the late eighteenth century, backwoodsmen like Daniel Boone were catalysts whose actions were far more important than the government's. In Texas the determination of its inhabitants to belong to the United States helped drive the U.S. government into war with Mexico.

From the very beginning of the Republic, American politicians debated whether new states should be permitted to enter the Union with the same rights as the original thirteen. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which Jefferson helped draft, provided for admission, with equal rights, of states between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. It proved to be one of the most important pieces of legislation passed under the Articles of Confederation. But it did not apply to not-yet-acquired territories west of the Mississippi.

Jefferson himself dithered about the western lands. His approach in 1780 was inclusive: "Our confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all America, North or South, is to be peopled." As president he expressed the hope that the American continent would be settled by people "speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws." Yet he told Meriwether Lewis, as he sent him west, that the land beyond the Mississippi should become a giant Indian reservation and that whites, now free of the Indian threat, should limit their settlements to territory east of the river. Also, on Lewis's return, Jefferson seemed much more interested in exploiting the trans-Mississippi West for the fur trade than for settlement.

Jefferson's farsighted secretary of the treasury, Albert Gallatin, knew that Americans would rush to the West. He made sure that Lewis had instructions to test the new land's agricultural possibilities. Though Jefferson took a more tolerant view of Indians than he did of blacks, his policy was to divest them of title to their lands—by purchase if possible, by war if necessary—and to drive them westward. Even that restrictive policy clashed with the growing demands for

white settlement of the West. Napoleon had predicted what Gallatin also foresaw: Americans were not going to leave the West to the Indians. Attracted by cheap land, settlers would spread out across the continent and ultimately establish claims for new states on the same basis as the original thirteen.

The Northwest Ordinance became the working model for regulation of this westward expansion in the nineteenth century. There would be no colonies, no second-class territories, except on a temporary basis. As it turned out, states were admitted on an equal footing until 1896, when Utah was compelled as a condition of admission to outlaw the polygamy practiced by the Mormons who had settled there. The inhabitants of newly acquired territories, with the significant exception of Indians and slaves, were expected and encouraged to seek equal rights as citizens. They were seen as prospective Americans, not as colonial subjects of a continental American empire. There was no challenge to this principle until 1898, when the United States acquired territory that was not to be settled by Americans and a colonial population that was not to be granted the rights Americans enjoyed.

Some Americans tried to go even further and take all of Mexico and Canada. These historical might-have-beens would have more than doubled the area of the United States. Polk's cabinet actually considered the annexation of Mexico following the American victory, but the idea died with the signing of the peace treaty in 1848. The drawbacks to expansion proved too strong. One was opposition in the American South to conferring citizenship on nonwhites. Another was a reluctance to acquire territory against the wishes of its people. A captured Mexico would have been the first territory taken without a diplomatic agreement or a clear expression of its people's desire to join the United States.

Canada was a larger and even more important target. From the birth of their Republic Americans had assumed that the large territory to their north would become a part of it. Jefferson in 1775 expressed the belief that "the delegates of Canada will join us in Congress and complete the American union." The Articles of Confederation invited an application by Canadians to be "admitted into and entitled to all the advantages of the union." A strategic objective, to deny the British the St. Lawrence River, dictated the American occupation of Mon-

trear and Benedict Arnold's unsuccessful raid on Quebec in 1775. Similarly, in the War of 1812 Henry Clay, speaker of the House of Representatives, saw an attack on Canada as a way to break the British alliance with the Indians and to challenge the British Navy. Jefferson from retirement said that the conquest of Canada was merely a matter of "marching." To Canadians the War of 1812 was not about abstract principles like neutral rights on the high seas. They saw it as an American invasion, and they pushed the attackers back across the border.

Early in the Civil War, Canada escaped another American invasion when the United States and Britain narrowly avoided going to war over the British ship *Trent*, which had given two Confederate envoys free passage to London. After the British North American Act of 1867 created the Dominion of Canada, increasing both its unity and its autonomy, tensions with the United States abated. Still, cross-border raids continued, often stimulated by Irish-Americans, and American politicians, including Theodore Roosevelt, fulminated for annexation.

Why did the American appetite for Canada, often so rapacious during the century after the Revolution, go unsatiated? There are three main reasons. First, Canadians had no consistent desire to join the United States. Tens of thousands of Americans loyal to the British crown fled to Canada during the Revolution. They became a major political force in their rejection of American republicanism and produced in their descendants many of Canada's future leaders. The rhythm in the bilateral relationship discouraged merger of the two countries. Whenever the threat of annexation seemed strongest, as in 1775, 1812, and 1861, Canadians tended to band together.

Second, despite their annexationist jingoism in the early days of the Republic, Americans never reached a clear national position on Canada. In the War of 1812, Henry Clay's Kentucky urged attacks on Canada, but the New England states discouraged them. Over the issue of slavery, a triple dynamic led to standstill: Southerners opposed union with nonslaveholding Canada, northern abolitionists favored it, and most Canadians were appalled at the thought of joining a slaveholding United States. Rational American statesmen pursued moderate objectives. John Jay in 1795 and Daniel Webster in 1842 concluded boundary settlements with Britain; President Martin Van Buren enforced U.S. neutrality laws against American annexationists.

The third reason for Canada's independence from the United States was British power. For the British, retention of their primary territory in the Western Hemisphere was a high priority for which they were willing to fight. American presidents prudently refrained from challenging them directly. American imperialists had to rely on potential, rather than active, threats to ensure Britain's good behavior. For the United States Canada became a hostage instead of a target. It remained—along with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and a few Caribbean islands—one of the last European possessions left in the Western Hemisphere.

## 2.

The United States that emerged from the Civil War concealed a paradox. With the Confederate states reunited in the Union, it was a continental country from sea to shining sea. But it was not yet a continental nation, in a governmental sense. Only ten of the thirty-six states lay west of the Mississippi, and five of those touched the river. An overwhelming majority of the population lived in the states east of the river; the center of American population, by 1850 figures, was in West Virginia. The western lands—except for Kansas, Texas, Nevada, California, and Oregon—were territories, not yet states, when the Civil War ended.

By and large Americans after the Civil War thought of themselves as inhabitants of a middle-size country, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River. For them the "West" meant states like Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee; beyond the Mississippi was the "Far West" or the "Wild West," where buffalo, Indians, and very few whites roamed. Theodore Roosevelt's history *The Winning of the West*, published between 1889 and 1896, was about the border states east of the Mississippi, not west of it. Roosevelt did not have to explain to his readers what he was talking about. In the minds of most Americans the geographic West was not a full part of the United States, and their nation was much smaller than Americans would think of it in the twentieth century.

Between 1865 and 1898 the mental picture of an unfinished country began to change dramatically. Nebraska, Colorado, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and

Oklahoma all were admitted to the Union. Except for New Mexico and Arizona, which were to join in 1912, continental America was now whole. This change found its herald in Frederick Jackson Turner, a professor at the University of Wisconsin. In a famous address before the American Historical Association in Chicago in 1893, when he was only thirty-two, Turner defined the essence of America as a pushing back of the western frontier: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advancement of American settlement westward, explain American development." But that epic period had vanished, Turner warned his listeners; according to the 1890 U.S. census, the frontier no longer existed. "And now," he concluded, "four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history."

In an article three years later Turner drew a foreign policy consequence from the ending of territorial expansion: "That these energies of expansion will no longer operate would be a rash prediction; and the demands for a vigorous foreign policy, for an interoceanic canal, for a revival of our power upon the seas, and for the extension of American influence to outlying islands and adjoining countries, are indications that the movement will continue." The energy for expansion, in other words, would vault from the gorged American landmass to the open seas, where new places beckoned.

Like many majestic conceptions, the Turner thesis did not fit all the facts, at least in foreign policy. The frenetic activities of William H. Seward, the most expansionist secretary of state of the late nineteenth century, occurred too early to have been affected by the completed settlement of the West. The breakthrough of 1898, which came after Turner's obituary for the frontier, marked less a new policy than the achievement of what American statesmen had been trying unsuccessfully to do for three decades. Where Turner's ideas had their greatest effect on foreign policy was in the minds of two of his friends, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the leading expansionist presidents of the coming generation.

America's political expansion to the Pacific coast was accompanied by an explosion in industry and technology that made the United States an economic great power before it was a political or military one. During the Civil War economic strength passed from planters

to industrialists, financiers, and businessmen. American inventors and entrepreneurs were instrumental in bringing about most of the world's technical innovations of the late nineteenth century: turbines, internal-combustion engines, railway air brakes, telephones, phonographs, alternating current, incandescent electric lightbulbs, automobiles, cinematography, aeronautics, and radio telegraphy. Thomas Edison alone invented the lightbulb, the phonograph, and (later) the talking movie.

By the mid-1880s the United States was leading the world in the production of timber and steel, in meatpacking, and in the mining of coal, iron, gold, and silver. By 1890 it had become the leading global energy consumer. By the turn of the century it was producing more coal and steel than Britain and Germany combined. In the last decades of the century the United States advanced rapidly in other indices of economic importance. Population nearly doubled between 1870 and 1900. America achieved world leadership in mass media, putting out 186 million copies of newspapers and magazines. American businessmen began to look abroad for markets. Exports tripled between 1860 and 1897, surpassing imports in most years. By 1893 the United States had become the second-largest world trader, behind Great Britain. It was also in that year that a financial and industrial crisis came close to destabilizing the U.S. economy, but it proved resilient enough to withstand the fall in the market and the factory shutdowns.

Few barriers prevented entrepreneurs with initiative, energy, and luck from growing rich in those days. Of the more than four thousand American millionaires in the 1890s, none were more celebrated than the three industrial titans whose lives personified the growth of American economic power, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J. Pierpont Morgan. All were born between 1835 and 1838. All made fortunes before they were forty; Rockefeller, the most precocious, was the world's largest oil refiner before he was thirty. Carnegie's focus was steel, Rockefeller's oil, and Morgan's finance, but all three were amazingly versatile. They all were deeply involved in the railroad boom that was causing profound changes in the United States, not only industrially but culturally and politically as well. The railroads, even more than the Internet a century later, transformed and shrank space. They brought faraway places conveniently close, creating an

enormous interior market for businessmen and farmers. Toward the end of the century railroads accounted for 60 percent of the issues on the New York Stock Exchange. According to Carnegie's biographer Joseph Frazier Wall, "all American business was related to and dependent upon railroading."

Carnegie's early career was dominated by railroads. He built bridges and sleeping cars and superintended, at the age of twenty-four, the western (Pittsburgh) division of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Rockefeller demanded rebates from the railroads in return for giving them transportation rights to his oil. He eliminated competitors in the oil business by threatening to deny them access to rail transport if they did not let him take them over. Morgan's first major financial success was in marketing New York Central stock. He moved on to taking over and reorganizing bankrupt railroads (the process was called morganization), ultimately controlling one-sixth of U.S. trackage.

With railroads, steel, oil, and finance, Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Morgan dominated most of the major elements of American economic power. Thanks mainly to Carnegie's management genius, American steel production tripled in the last thirty years of the century. When Carnegie sold his company in 1901, he helped create a conglomerate, the United States Steel Corporation, that controlled two-thirds of all American steel output. In the 1890s Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company marketed 84 percent of all the petroleum products sold in the United States, by then the world's largest crude oil producer. Morgan was so powerful that he sometimes functioned as a central bank. He helped pull the country out of the recession caused by the panic of 1893, saving the gold standard in 1896 and issuing \$65 million in gold bonds for the benefit of the beleaguered Cleveland administration.

In the days before the regulation of trusts, American capitalism tended to monopoly rather than competition. Rockefeller was the most relentless in driving competitors out of business, but the other barons did it as well. Trusts dominated in oil, steel, copper, rubber, tobacco, and leather. As Rockefeller said, "The day of combination is here to stay. Individualism has gone, never to return." The Sherman Antitrust Act, directed against the Standard Oil Company and signed by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890, was so ineffectual that it

was ridiculed as the Swiss Cheese Act. It did have the unintended consequence of weakening American labor unions, which were in any case pallid reflections of their European counterparts. Between the 1890s and the 1930s unionism was virtually absent in the largest industries, except for coal mining. Big business in America was free to do pretty much what it wanted.

The entrepreneurs and industrialists were lucky to have sympathetic, if often lackluster, American presidents in their corner. With only one exception, Grover Cleveland, every American president from 1861 to 1913 was a Republican. Throughout that period the Republican platform supported business interests: high tariffs, sound money, powerless unions, and weak controls on trusts. Rockefeller, Morgan, and Carnegie all were major contributors to the party.

Businessmen did not automatically favor territorial expansion—Carnegie, for example, was an ardent anti-imperialist—but they had a natural desire to control overseas environments for the sake of trade. In general, economic advances coincide with, if they do not always create, the emergence of world powers. That was the lesson of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and France and of the unification of Germany into an economic colossus. American imperialists believed that the economic transformation of their country would make it a great power. Business interests usually, though not always, shared this belief.

In the thirty-three years between the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, Americans began to discover the world. They had always had a love of the sea, exemplified by their fast clipper ships and chronicled in Herman Melville's whaling stories. Now the novels of Henry James and Anthony Trollope made them feel more at home in the drawing rooms of London and the Continent. William Dean Howells served a tour in 1861 as U.S. consul in Venice; his travel books on Italy made his name. Bret Harte, bard of the American West, moved to Europe in 1878 as a U.S. consul in Germany and Scotland and never came home again. Lafcadio Hearn settled in Japan in 1890, took a Japanese wife and name, and produced some of his best writing on that exotic culture.

Americans were beginning to shed their provincialism. Foreign tourism was becoming a big business. Ulysses S. Grant took a well-publicized two-year world tour after his second presidential term.

Cornelius Vanderbilt, one of the gaudier of the newly rich, built a 270-foot steam yacht for his first trip to Europe. More fastidious millionaires, like Theodore Roosevelt's father, used commercial liners to take their families to Europe as part of their education, while low-cost steamship fares made the Continent accessible to poorer students and middle-class tourists. In 1879 the two hundred thousand Americans who visited Switzerland were one-fifth of all foreign visitors that year to the Helvetian republic. Mark Twain satirized the gaucheries of American tourists on the grand tour in *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869. Henry James, more snobbishly, reproved their tendency to "stare and gawk and smell, and crowd every street and shop."

As the United States grew more receptive to foreign connections, two secretaries of state took initiatives to make it a global power. They were William H. Seward, who served under Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, and James G. Blaine, who was secretary under James Garfield, Chester A. Arthur, and Benjamin Harrison. Had the times been more propitious, these larger-than-life figures, both of them prominent Republican politicians and presidential hopefuls, would have made history as major expansionists. Their failure was not for lack of trying.

Seward was an irrepressible expansionist. He wanted to push the United States north into Canada, south into Mexico, and west toward Asia. His ambitions were grandiose, even delusionary. "Give me fifty, forty, thirty more years of life," he told a Boston audience in 1867, "and I will engage to give you the possession of the American continent and the control of the world." Rhetoric apart, Seward was a highly skilled diplomat. He frustrated Emperor Napoleon III's effort to take over Mexico in 1863 while the Union was distracted by the Civil War. Relying on diplomacy, since the ongoing war denied him the use of force, Seward bought time until Appomattox, then turned tough and, threatening to use force, achieved a French withdrawal.

Seward recognized that this attempt by France to catapult its power over the Atlantic Ocean, not unlike Nikita Khrushchev's deployment of missiles in Cuba a century later, was a major threat to American security and a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine. It almost certainly strengthened his instinctive belief that the United States had to control its continental neighbors. He must have known that his country lacked the power and the will to annex Canada and Mexico,

but he made no secret of his hope that both would become states in the American federation.

Meanwhile, in joining the European powers in a scramble for territory, he focused on practical possibilities. In the Caribbean he sought a coaling station for the U.S. Navy in the Dominican Republic, signed a treaty with Denmark for the purchase of the Virgin Islands, and won the agreement of Colombia for the right to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. He also made tentative probes at the Caribbean islands of Cuba, Haiti, Culebra, French Guiana, Puerto Rico, and St. Bartholomew. None of these ventures prospered, usually because the Senate refused to approve them. Seward also had designs on Asia and on the Pacific Ocean, which he referred to as "the chief theatre of events in the world's great hereafter." He tried unsuccessfully to acquire British Columbia and to sign with Hawaii a reciprocity treaty that was finally concluded by his successor, Hamilton Fish. He did succeed, thanks to the U.S. Navy, in acquiring uninhabited Midway Island, strategically situated halfway from California to the Philippines.

Seward's imperialism was nothing if not eclectic. He was as interested in cold places as in tropical islands, and he courted Denmark for both Iceland and Greenland. His greatest imperial success, the purchase of Alaska from Russia, was ridiculed by a press that called the new territory a "national icehouse," a "polar bear garden," and "Seward's icebox." But Alaska was a steal, rivaled only in American history by the Louisiana Purchase. It cost under two cents an acre: \$7.2 million, or slightly less than Seward had offered Denmark for the Virgin Islands. Yet he had great difficulty winning congressional approval and had to resort to a lobbying blitz that presaged the methods of modern politics. Seward's "education campaign" used briefing papers, letters of support from influential Americans, and the imaginative reprinting of absurd arguments from 1803 against the Louisiana Purchase. The secretary of state may even have resorted to bribery; the Russian minister in Washington certainly did. When Seward left office in 1869, the most committed imperialist ever to serve as secretary of state had only two trophies to show for his gargantuan efforts: the flyspeck Midway and the Alaskan colossus.

James G. Blaine was a perennial seeker of the Republican presidential nomination and succeeded only in 1884, when he lost to

Grover Cleveland. He served twice as secretary of state, briefly with Garfield and Arthur (1881) and nearly a full term with Harrison (1889–92). Blaine was as activist a secretary of state as he was a politician. His egotism, bombast, and assertiveness—he was known as the plumed knight, not always reverentially—belied what was actually a subtle approach to the diplomacy of expansion. He made a deal with Germany and Great Britain to establish joint control over Samoa, with its strategically attractive deepwater harbor of Pago Pago. Presciently anticipating 1898, he identified Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico as the only three islands “of value enough to be taken,” but he made no effort to take them. Like his predecessors, he hankered after Canada in vain. In practice Blaine preferred trade to outright possession. In what was surely the most famous speech ever delivered in Waterville, Maine, his home state, Blaine said: “We are not seeking annexation of territory. . . . At the same time I think we should be unwisely content if we did not seek to engage in . . . annexation of trade.”

Blaine cast his commercial gaze on Latin America, an area that he saw as vital to U.S. interests. He believed that better political relations would lead to better terms of trade, and in 1889 he presided over the First Pan-American Conference. Blaine encouraged American investments in Latin America and moved to protect them when they fell afoul of the instabilities of Latin politics. His concentration on the hemisphere coincided with the establishment of the United Fruit Company’s broad and baleful influence in Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala. Blaine’s secretaryship was longer on potential than achievement, but his farsighted approach to cooperation with Latin America and his interest in the peaceful settlement of disputes anticipated two of his most clearheaded successors, John Hay and Elihu Root.

Paradoxically, Seward and Blaine pressed their expansionist policies in the absence of any serious foreign threats to the United States. By the late nineteenth century Britain, the traditional enemy, was perceived as less dangerous, and Germany had not yet attained the status of adversary, except in isolated places like Samoa. In arguing for bases in the Caribbean, Seward cited a past enemy (Confederate blockade-runners) rather than a present one. Moreover, although he was not above using anti-Russian arguments in his efforts to win the support

of Congress for the purchase of Alaska, he never pretended that security against Russia was a major reason for acquiring it. In cases where foreign threats did exist, they were not always inducements to imperialism. France’s bid to take over Mexico during the Civil War produced a strong American response, but no new claims on Mexican territory, and despite habitually belligerent words against Britain’s hold on Canada, American efforts to annex their northern neighbor rarely got beyond rhetorical bravado.

Still, the record of American statecraft after the Civil War shows a persistent effort to increase influence and expand territory beyond the continental boundaries of the United States. Symptomatic of this effort was the attempt made by virtually every postwar secretary of state to broaden the scope of the 1850 treaty with Great Britain in order to build and control a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. On this and other issues there was too much consistency in the approach to ascribe the expansionist impulse solely to the personal agendas of several energetic secretaries of state.

### 3.

Whatever the effect of such physical phenomena as the expansion of the American frontier to the Pacific Ocean and the enrichment of the U.S. economy, much of the impetus for overseas expansion in the last third of the nineteenth century was mental. Old political ideas like the Monroe Doctrine were given a more expansionist cast, and newer ones like manifest destiny offered spiritual sustenance for aggressive behavior. Proliferating theories of racial superiority, often backed by science or pseudoscience, became accepted wisdom. It was a rare American, whether of higher or lower education, who did not believe that his country had a special mission, sanctified by geography and race, to lead and dominate less civilized peoples.

The Monroe Doctrine had been devised to help defend the United States against European encroachments in the Western Hemisphere, but it grew beyond John Quincy Adams’s famous disclaimer that “America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” Through the nineteenth century the doctrine became expansionist as well as exclusionist, a divine text for any president or secretary of state who sought to plant the flag in new lands. Polk invoked it to support

his policy of depriving Mexico of Texas, California, and New Mexico and to ward off "any future European colony or dominion" on the North American continent. He had in mind British interest in the Pacific Northwest, but the language was general. He also cited the doctrine to ensure that the British did not take the Yucatán Peninsula, irrespective of the consent of the inhabitants.

After the Civil War the Monroe Doctrine was applied even more widely. Out of interest in the Dominican Republic, Secretary of State Fish prevailed upon President Grant to issue a no-transfer proclamation: "Hereafter no territory on this continent shall be regarded as subject of transfer to a European power." The ill-fated French effort to build a canal across Panama brought a ringing declaration in 1880 from President Hayes that "the policy of this country is a canal under American control." The next year Secretary Blaine badgered Britain for modifications of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, which barred either country from exerting exclusive control over a canal. Blaine argued that the treaty contravened the Monroe Doctrine and "our rightful and long established claim to priority on the American continent."

Even the Pacific Ocean and parts of Asia came under broad interpretations of the Monroe Doctrine. In a dispute over Samoa in 1886, the German Foreign Office complained that Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard was interpreting the Monroe Doctrine "as though the Pacific Ocean were to be treated as an American Lake." A Russian official voiced a similar complaint with regard to Alaska; he said that the Monroe Doctrine "enters more and more into the veins of the people and . . . the latest generation imbibes it with its mother's milk and inhales it with the air."

When President Cleveland's last secretary of state, Richard Olney, opposed Japanese pressure on Hawaii in 1896, the Hawaiian minister in Washington exulted that the United States had in effect extended the Monroe Doctrine to Hawaii. Olney, who made more imperious claims for the Monroe Doctrine than any other secretary of state in the entire century, grandly informed the British that the United States was "practically sovereign" on the continent. The doctrine had been transformed from a ban against foreign interference to a vindication of unilateral American intervention. It had become a tool of American imperialism.

The phrase "manifest destiny," which first came into use in the 1840s, was a quasi-theological justification of America's continental expansion and of the Monroe Doctrine. In fact, John Quincy Adams himself had come close to coining the phrase when in his text of the doctrine he used the words "destiny" and "manifestation" in the same sentence. But the actual originator was a journalist named John O'Sullivan, who wrote in 1839:

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True.

For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field.

O'Sullivan's phrase "destined to manifest" became "manifest destiny," a convenient catchword for American expansionists. The triumphal looseness of language made the phrase doubly attractive; it could be applied to the whole world or any desired part of it. It was an apt way to describe the ambitious American nationalism that had grown from the rich soil of economic success. In most cases it was used to justify overland expansion, with the emphasis on acquiring land rather than subject peoples. The West was won under the rubric of manifest destiny. The western territories were "destined" to be states of the Union, not colonies in a far-flung empire.

In that sense manifest destiny was consistent with imperialism, though not identical to it. Sometimes manifest destiny was given a frankly imperial spin. John Fiske, a popular lecturer, scoured the country with a set-piece presentation entitled "Manifest Destiny." He declaimed: "The work which the English race began when it colonized North America is destined to go on until every land on the earth's surface that is not already the seat of an old civilization

shall become English in its language, in its religion, in its political habits and traditions, and to a predominant extent in the blood of its people."

The homegrown principle of manifest destiny was reinforced by the importation from Britain of Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection. "Social Darwinism," the application or misapplication of Darwin's biological theories to human society, had two major functions in the United States. The first was to justify the superiority of American capitalism. The Yale economist William Graham Sumner contended that millionaires were the product of natural selection and should be unimpeded in their accumulation of wealth. On a more popular level, the Baptist minister Russell Conwell gained nationwide distribution for his sermon "Acres of Diamonds," which preached: "It is your duty to get rich. It is wrong to be poor."

In the boardrooms of industrial America, social Darwinism appealed to businessmen who assumed that "survival of the fittest" was a description of them. Darwin's associate Herbert Spencer visited the United States in 1882 and lectured to 150 industrial and intellectual luminaries at a banquet in his honor at Delmonico's, New York's most famous restaurant. Darwinism gave scientific luster to the capitalists' defense of the status quo, validating their preference for laissez-faire over state interference and soothing their consciences about making money. The great railroad builder James J. Hill and John D. Rockefeller both invoked Spencer in justifying the trend toward monopoly in railroads and oil respectively.

If the Darwinian revolution reinforced the cult of capitalism on the economic side, the biological side validated the older American tradition of Anglo-Saxonism, which celebrated the superiority of the so-called Anglo-Saxon race. Anglo-Saxonists held that America's democratic institutions—e.g., the New England town meeting—came not from ancient Greece but from the early German tribes via England. They quickly incorporated Darwinism into their new approach to imperialism. The peripatetic Fiske argued that Anglo-Saxon expansion, based on Teutonic theories of democracy, justified any conquest.

An even more popular propagandist, the Reverend Josiah Strong, went farther. In 1885 Strong, the U.S. Evangelical Alliance's repre-

sentative in Ohio, wrote a paean to Anglo-Saxonism, *Our Country*, which quickly became a best-seller. To the 185,000 Americans who bought the book, Strong cited Darwin in arguing that "the wonderful progress of the United States as well as the character of its people, are the results of natural selection." For Strong the Anglo-Saxon race represented civil liberty and "pure spiritual Christianity." North America was to be "the great home of the Anglo-Saxon, the principal seat of his power, the center of his life and influence." With its biological advantages, Strong predicted, the Anglo-Saxon race "will spread itself over the earth," to Mexico, to Central and South America, and "out upon the islands of the sea" to Africa and beyond. Shedding no tears for the "inferior races" doomed by the Anglo-Saxon advance, he asked rhetorically: "Is there room for reasonable doubt that this race, unless devitalized by alcohol and tobacco, is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?"

Strong's divine boosterism would be easy to dismiss if it had not been so popular or if echoes of it had not reverberated in some of the best American academic institutions. Universities of the late nineteenth century were steaming jungles of racial theories, some absurd, most misguided, but nearly all accepted as appropriate subjects for intellectual discourse. Darwin, often to his horror, set scholars scrambling to determine racial superiority by measuring facial angles, skull size, brain weight, even human hair. There was hardly a major university in the United States that did not include racially based courses in its core curriculum.

At Harvard Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, dean of the Lawrence Scientific School and one of the most respected professors on the faculty, taught white supremacy based on the racial heritage of England. The great Harvard historian Francis Parkman contended that Anglo-Saxon superiority was the key to the British victory over the French in North America. At Columbia the political scientist John W. Burgess wrote that the national state was the product of Teutonic political genius, a fact that "stamps the Teutonic nations as the political nations *par excellence*, and authorizes them, in the economy of the world, to assume the leadership in the establishment and administration of states."

At Johns Hopkins, Professor James K. Hosmer bragged: "The primacy of the world will lie with us. English institutions, English speech, English thought, are to become the main features of the political, social, and intellectual life of mankind." Hosmer's colleague Herbert Baxter Adams, who introduced the German seminar method at Hopkins, was a major advocate of the Teutonic origins of civilization, bringing this viewpoint to the American Historical Association, which he founded in 1884. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford, held that "poverty, dirt, and crime" were the consequence of poor human material. Against this distinguished academic company there was little organized intellectual opposition. Racially tolerant scholars, like William James at Harvard, were the exception, not the rule.

Hierarchical racial theories helped shape the intellectual formation of virtually every American who reached adulthood during the second half of the century. Without even trying, well-educated American politicians carried into their careers large doses of Anglo-Saxonism administered to them in their universities. Theodore Roosevelt studied under Shaler at Harvard and Burgess at Columbia. Both Roosevelt and Lodge were close to Parkman at Harvard; Roosevelt dedicated his western history to him. Lodge imbibed the Anglo-Saxon tradition in Henry Adams's medieval history course. Adams, no ideologue himself, conceded the academic pressure when he admitted flinging himself "obediently into the arms of the Anglo-Saxons in history." Woodrow Wilson, as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, was a protégé of Herbert Baxter Adams's.

With so much racial prejudice hanging in the American air, it is perhaps not surprising that the late nineteenth century was a time of considerable domestic violence, directed primarily against the two groups most easily branded as inferior: Indians and immigrants. The last major battle between the Sioux and the U.S. Army was fought near Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota in 1890. In an exchange of fire that quickly became a massacre, a cavalry unit dispatched by General Nelson Miles killed 150 Indians, many of them women and children. Miles, a veteran Indian fighter, suffered no career setback for this disgraceful action. In 1895 he was promoted to commanding general of the army, a position he held through the Spanish-American War.

Rallies and strikes by disaffected workers, many of them immigrants and some of them anarchists, became a focal point for violence. At an anarchist-led workers' rally in Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886, four workers and seven policemen were killed. Four foreign anarchists were convicted and hanged for inciting violence. Ten people were killed by militia fire in a strike by Slav, Hungarian, and American-born coke workers against Andrew Carnegie's autocratic partner Henry Clay Frick in 1891. The most famous strike of the 1890s broke out in the summer of 1892 against Carnegie's Homestead, Pennsylvania, steelworks. While Carnegie was on his annual vacation at his castle in Scotland, Frick brought in Pinkerton detectives as strikebreakers; about a dozen workers and Pinkertons were killed. Several weeks later Frick survived an assassination attempt by a Russian-born anarchist.

In 1894 a strike in Illinois by Pullman train workers, many of them immigrants, led to a widespread stoppage of rail traffic, extensive property destruction, the deaths of four workers, and a trial of the union's leader, Eugene Debs, that went to the Supreme Court. Sporadically throughout the decade, Italian laborers were lynched out of xenophobic hysteria: eleven in New Orleans in 1891, three more in Louisiana in 1892, six in Colorado in 1895. In the worst disaster of the 1890s, twenty-one striking Polish and Hungarian coal workers were shot to death by police near Hazleton, Pennsylvania.

America near the end of the nineteenth century was a restless and racist society. Those who believed the myth of Anglo-Saxonism could ascribe inferiority to masses of people at home and abroad: blacks, Indians, workers, immigrants, and most foreigners. Such a cultural atmosphere was extremely conducive to imperialist initiatives, because imperialism—like Anglo-Saxonism, social Darwinism, and manifest destiny—was also based on the principle of racial inequality.

#### 4.

With a propitious intellectual and cultural climate; a burgeoning economy, a swelling self-confidence, and the preparatory activity of several vigorous secretaries of state, the United States seemed overdue for imperial adventure. But why was it so long in coming? Three

elements were lacking and were not supplied until the 1890s: military power, a political consensus, and an imperial opportunity.

Before the air age the military power of a maritime country was assessed by the strength of its navy. The United States did not have a navy that could sustain an expansion overseas until late in the century. The U.S. Navy, one of the world's largest after the Civil War, had plummeted to twelfth by the 1870s, behind sleeping China, decrepit Turkey, and tiny Chile. It would not have been capable of taking and holding any territory contested by another power. But by 1898, as the result of a sustained shipbuilding program begun in the 1880s, the U.S. Navy was among the best in the world.

Behind the decision to build a world-class navy was a gradual but important political shift. The decades after the Civil War were a period of exceptionally weak presidents. Between Lincoln and McKinley, only Grover Cleveland had significant stature. The Congress was correspondingly stronger and jealous of its prerogatives, a point made by Woodrow Wilson in his precocious book *Congressional Government*, published in 1885. And in the early postwar period Congress was not disposed to support an imperial agenda; it beat back efforts by several presidents to buy offshore territories.

As the century drew to a close, Congress, enlarged by representatives of new states that themselves exemplified American expansion, became more amenable to assertive policies. In parallel, as the country and its economy grew, the executive branch and the federal bureaucracy became more necessary to the effective functioning of government and therefore more powerful. By the time William McKinley began his first term in 1897, Congress had become both a more cooperative and a less dominant branch of government. The large appropriations for the navy were a consequence of this redistribution of power.

In 1895, with possibilities becoming more favorable for a burst of imperialism, a revolution against Spanish rule in Cuba provided the opportunity. The strategic importance of Cuba, the U.S. interest in the island's sugar economy, and a well-publicized record of Spanish atrocities against the Cuban people combined to make war with Spain a realistic option. Hay, Mahan, Root, Lodge, and Roosevelt all had grown up in a period of weak presidents, an exploding economy, growing military power, rising expectations, and disappointing per-

formance. Now the time for action had come, and they seized it. In helping make the United States a great power, they were more than simple agents of history. Conditioned by decades of frustration in foreign policy, they could now lead it into a new realm and become the movers and shakers of American expansion.