

## “Anti-Imperialism”

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“America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy,” Secretary of State John Quincy Adams told his audience during a Fourth of July oration in 1821. “She is the well-wisher of the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.” Should the United States adventure into other lands, Adams warned, “she might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit.” It is a great irony that such words, which would constitute a foundation of anti-imperialist thought for future generations, were uttered by the man who acquired Florida, crafted the Monroe Doctrine, and was a principal architect and defender of America’s continental empire.

But then again any examination of anti-imperialism in the United States is replete with irony, ambiguity, and complexity. Whereas in other lands anti-imperialism was often closely identified with the political left and followed Socialist or even Leninist models, and criticized the occupation and control of less-developed countries, American critiques of empire necessarily evolved differently for there was not as strong a radical tradition here and the United

States did not significantly possess a formal empire in the European sense. Thus anti-imperial ideas and actions have to be seen in a broader construction in which individuals or groups challenged the expansion of state hegemony but did so based on the objective conditions of a particular time rather than on a doctrinaire or sustained ideology. Even more, anti-imperialists in the United States developed a broad comprehension of America's imperial mission, and so might oppose not just the political or military control of other lands, but also an aggressive foreign policy, supporting dictatorships abroad, the establishment of international organizations and compacts, or the excessive accumulation of executive power at home, all of which were perceived as antithetical to national values.

America's imperialism certainly could be coercive and militarized, but it was conceptually a grand strategy of economic penetration, a substitution of dollars in trade and investment for the armies and bullets of wars and occupations. As part of the imperialist pursuit for areas in which to invest, manufacture cheaply, find consumers, or trade, American military forces did in fact frequently intervene abroad, but usually pulled out after those lands were made secure for American political and economic objectives, often leaving proxy armies and puppet governments in their stead. Without a tradition of conquest and occupation and believing in an ideology of republicanism, therefore, Adams and

others could champion unrestrained expansion *and* anti-imperialism with plausible claims that they did not contradict each other. By developing the historical sense, or myth, that the United States was not an imperialist power, the national elite—political leaders, business interests, media—could attempt to counter and delegitimize its anti-imperial critics. Making matters more complex, groups often critical of the state in domestic matters such as farmers or workers could be advocates of imperial growth out of self-interest as they needed foreign markets for their crops and manufactures.

Nonetheless, from the earliest days of the Republic forward, there have been significant opponents of American aggrandizement into new lands. Because U.S. imperialism had many justifications—economics, security, mission, racial identification, and so forth—critics offered an analysis and condemnation of empire based on various factors at different times and to varying degrees. American anti-imperialists could oppose foreign interventions because of a moral repulsion at the consequences of such involvement, the betrayal of self-government in other areas, a sense of geographic insularity or security, the contradictions of empire with democracy, or a rejection of the Capitalist economic system. It was, then, a varied line of thought that had economic, political and moral roots, and was real, effective and significant, though at times elusive and not part of a sustained and comprehensive historical process. At the same time, however, the words of John

Quincy Adams and others with similar views would be invoked a century and a half later as the United States waged war in Indochina and intervened in various Third World areas, so there is indeed a salience to American anti-imperialism that must be recognized.

*The Roots of American Anti-Imperialism*

Expansion and empire-building were immediate concerns for American leaders as soon as national independence became a reality, and issues of growth and hegemony grew more important into the first half of the nineteenth century. The United States expanded rapidly and significantly across the continent. By purchase and conquest, national leaders gained lands in the Northwest and Louisiana Territories, Florida, the southeast, the Pacific northwest, and the southwest, while attempting to bring Canada and Caribbean areas such as Cuba under American sway too, though without success. While it would be difficult to observe a consistent anti-imperial ideology in this period, one does notice criticism of and actions directed against territorial acquisition, Indian removal, and Manifest Destiny. Often, such opposition served the interests of political expediency or power—as with northerners or Federalists voting against the Louisiana Purchase or the War of 1812. Critics, however, also objected on moral grounds or, presaging an argument that would become especially powerful in the Cold War era, the excessive, or imperial, use of executive power in foreign

affairs.

The United States was born out of a war of national liberation against the world's greatest empire at the time, so tended to deny or describe benignly its imperial ambitions. Figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, for instance, popularized the idea that America could establish a "benevolent" empire while they condemned the British for policies of the "extermination of mankind," rather than just conquest, in their colonies. Indeed, the founding generation was conflicted despite the apparent consensus on expansion. While there was a compelling political will to develop an "empire of liberty"—to use President Thomas Jefferson's words—there was also a continuing republican ideal which was distrustful of empire and its needs for standing armies, heavy taxes, large bureaucracies, and centralized decision-making.

At the same time, there were strong isolationist tendencies among the ruling class. Not anti-imperialist per se, these isolationists did warn against American "entanglements" in other lands. Indeed, in his farewell address President George Washington, like John Quincy Adams an ardent expansionist using anti-imperial rhetoric, suggested that "harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand, neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things;

diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce, but forcing nothing.” Rooted in the fresh memories of their war against British imperialism, ambivalent views on state power, and an attachment to republican values, this isolationism had real meaning to many Americans and was practiced in their political affairs.

Thus when President Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France, effectively doubling the size of the United States, critics attacked his actions as unconstitutional and imperial. Federalists, ironically using arguments that had been advanced against them by their political foes during the debate over the Constitution, contended that the purchase of trans-Mississippi lands was unnecessary and dangerous, for emigration into the new areas would “be attended with all the injuries of a too widely dispersed population, but by adding to the great weight of the western part of our territory, must hasten the dismemberment of a large portion of our country, or a dissolution of the Government.” Such disputes notwithstanding, the senate approved the acquisition of Louisiana, although the Constitution did not explicitly grant executive power for territorial expansion, and subsequently authorized commercial restrictions and military engagements against Britain, and accelerated a national program of Indian removal.

While the growth of a continental empire in the early nineteenth century

may have been inexorable, it did not always proceed smoothly, as diverse voices were raised in protest against American expansion during the major episodes of territorial aggrandizement in the period. Representative John Randolph of Virginia was wary of imperial designs; “What! Shall this great mammoth of the American forest leave his native element,” he asked, “and plunge into the water in a mad contest with the shark?” Federalists stung by a swing in political influence and sectional growth toward the south and west opposed the War of 1812, with some beginning to develop a critique of expansion and even consider the secession of New England states at the 1814 Hartford Convention. The defeat of various Indians in the Creek War and the Battle of Tippecanoe, followed by General Andrew Jackson’s invasion and eventual seizure of Florida, however, made anti-imperial critiques more difficult. Still, many questioned what they saw as the contradiction of maintaining republican virtues within a growing empire with an expanding military and a willingness to use force in the pursuit of national interests. Though the enthusiasm for new lands might have seemed frenzied, many Americans were concerned about unrestrained growth and especially lamented the destruction of Indian society.

After the War of 1812, the federal and state governments intensified their efforts to oust Native Americans from their lands, with General and later President Andrew Jackson the leading figure in the era, attacking Seminole in

Florida and Cherokee and other tribes in the southeast with particular ferocity. By the 1820s and 1830s, there was significant division over Indian removal and continental expansion. When Georgia, in defiance of a Supreme Court decision but with the support of President Jackson, tried to expel Cherokee from their indigenous lands despite their treaty rights to it, evangelical Christians organized mass protests and condemned removal, comparing it to a crime against humanity.

Questions of morality and constitutionality—not unlike those raised in the late twentieth-century debates over the Vietnam War or intervention in Central America—were common throughout the Cherokee crisis as critics scored the national and state governments for violating the constitution by rejecting Indian treaties. Writing under the pseudonym William Penn, Jeremiah Evarts, the chief administrator of the American Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions, an interdenominational missionary organization, exposed and denounced the U.S. attack on Indian sovereignty based on morality, history, and the Constitution. Throughout the colonial period and under the Articles of Confederation and Constitution, Evarts pointed out, various authorities had, by treaty, guaranteed the territorial integrity of Indian lands and the Cherokee and other tribes, which had never surrendered such title, still held “a perfect right to the continued and undisturbed possession of these lands.” The Indians, he added, did not hold lands *in* Georgia or any other state, but were sovereign, as “separate communities, or

nations.” Removal was, in the minds of Evarts and many other critics of aggressive expansion, “an instance of gross and cruel oppression.” While such views held great currency—the vote in congress to approve Jackson’s removal program was quite close in fact—they did not constitute a majority, and Indians embarked on their infamous “Trail of Tears” while many millions of acres of native lands in the southeast were soon opened to agricultural exploitation.

The appropriation of Indian territory occurred in a period of great expansion, as Americans believed it was their “Manifest Destiny” to acquire new lands. Advocates of this ideology believed that the United States had a providential right and obligation to assume control over less-developed areas in the name of republicanism, Christianity, and white supremacy. Expansionists even had a quasi-legal justification for building a continental empire, the Monroe Doctrine. Crafted by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams and announced by President James Monroe in 1823, the doctrine was a statement of Pan-American influence in which the United States warned European powers to keep their “hands off” newly independent states in Latin America. Unspoken but just as compelling was the idea that the United States had a natural hegemony over the region and would expand control over all the Americas in time.

Again, however, John Quincy Adams seemed to be of two minds, refusing diplomatic or material aid to revolutionaries in South America or Greece because

it would jeopardize the national interest by entangling the United States into the affairs of other countries and delivering his “America goes not abroad” oration, but also penning the Monroe Doctrine as part of his vision of a continental empire. To some critics, Adams’s ideas were in fact endangering the national interest, with one member of congress describing the Doctrine as “assuming an unwarrantable power; violating the spirit of the constitution; assuming grounds and an attitude toward European Powers, calculated to involve us in the strife which there existed, and in which we had no interest; and indirectly leading to war, which Congress alone had the right to declare.”

In addition to such continuing constitutional questions and insular concerns, critiques of expansion and empire invariably became intertwined in the intensifying slavery controversy, and almost always included attacks on the southern political and planter aristocracy, which had designs not only on the continental west but also on areas in the Caribbean such as Nicaragua and Cuba in which to extend their slave system. By the mid-1840s, these conflicting forces of southern expansionism and anti-slavery sentiment would lead to a national antiwar-cum-anti-imperialist movement.

The effective cause of the acute division of the era was the American war against Mexico, begun in 1846 but the culmination of a generation of U.S. attempts to absorb Texas into the Union. While there were strong sentiments

north and south for bringing Texas and other southwest lands into the United States, the inevitable expansion of slave states gave rise to often-fierce condemnations of expansion. John Quincy Adams, now a Whig representative in congress and a leader of anti-slavery, anti-imperialist political forces, feared that the annexation of Texas would turn the United States into a “conquering and warlike nation.” Ultimately, “aggrandizement will be its passion and its policy. A military government, a large army, a costly navy, distant colonies, and associate islands in every sea will follow in rapid succession.” Senator Thomas Corwin of Ohio echoed Adams’s views, describing President James Polk as a “monarch” and his cabinet as a “court” and considering justifications for the war as a “feculent mass of misrepresentation.” The “desire to augment our territory,” Corwin lamented, “has depraved our moral sense.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, noted essayist and earlier advocate of taking Texas, now predicted that the United States would gobble up new lands “as the man swallows arsenic, which brings him down in turn” and his fellow Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau refused to pay war taxes, received a jail sentence, and wrote his famous essay “Civil Disobedience” in protest of the Mexican War.

Such critiques held great popular and political appeal in the 1840s as pacifists, abolitionists, religious leaders, and literary figures pressed an anti-imperial agenda, while 90% of Whig Party members in congress voted against the

war. Following the acquisition of Texas, California and other Mexican lands in the southwest, anti-imperialists may have been on the defensive, but they were not quiescent. When, in the 1840s and 1850s, southern planters began to create and subsidize *filibusters*, clandestine armies that would try to invade and secure Latin American lands for new plantations and slavery, abolitionist anti-imperialists protested vigorously. Whig politicians and an emerging political movement of Free-Soilers, opponents of the extension of slavery into new territories, especially attacked the deeds of soldiers of fortune such as Narcisco López, who invaded Cuba in the late 1840s, and William Walker, the “grey-eyed man of destiny,” who briefly conquered and ruled Nicaragua in the late 1850s. Indeed, the firm opposition of the Whigs and Free-Soilers, as well as abolitionists and some evangelical elements, effectively thwarted southern dreams of a Caribbean empire in the antebellum period. They could not, however, suppress the intensifying sectional crisis, and civil war had become unavoidable by 1860 when Abraham Lincoln, who as a Whig representative in 1846 had opposed the Mexican War, assumed the presidency. Within a half-decade, the conflict between the Union and breakaway states of the Confederacy was over, and the United States was about to embark on its greatest imperial efforts yet, but not without protest and opposition at all points along the way.

*The New Empire and its Discontents*

The Civil War not only ended slavery and the southern plantation system, but marked the conclusive triumph of industrial capitalism as well. Within a few decades, the United States would thus emerge as a global economic power, with the opportunities and problems attendant to such status, including the acquisition of an extra-continental empire. Indeed, as soon as the Civil War had ended, Secretary of State William Henry Seward embarked on a campaign to augment American territory by acquiring Santo Domingo [the Dominican Republic] and Haiti, Cuba, the Virgin Islands, Hawaii, and Alaska. Seward's plans, however, met heavy opposition from anti-imperialists like the noted author and social critic Mark Twain [later president of the Anti-Imperialist League], Senator Justin Morrill, and editor of *The Nation* magazine E.L. Godkin, who collectively called on American leaders to settle domestic issues and create a showcase society that others could emulate instead of seizing or otherwise taking on new territories. Subsequently, Seward's ambitions, except for buying Alaska, were shelved, though expansion and empire-building would remain a priority in U.S. foreign policy.

By *fin de siècle* the American economy, producing more goods and agricultural commodities than the home market was consuming, seemed in deep peril and government, corporate, and intellectual leaders urged that new markets abroad for trade and investment be found and acquired. Such economic

pressures—along with calls for new coaling stations and a larger navy, the popularity of “Social Darwinist” ideas calling on America to “civilize” the less-developed and non-white world, Christian ideology seeking to convert adherents of other, “pagan” religions, and sense that American needed to extend its frontiers as a form of national renewal—led to a rush for new lands to control in the 1890s and set the stage for new levels of imperialism in the next century.

In the 1890s the United States colonized or at least forcibly established hegemony over Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, while Secretary of State John Hay was insisting that an “Open Door” for American products and capital be recognized by other nations. Because the European powers and Japan had colonial footholds, with administrators, collaborating elites, and occupying armies, in various areas, especially China, the United States would have to use its economic strength to develop a new world system based on a free and open door for trade and investment. The 1890s then marked the establishment of a “new empire” not only because the United States forcibly took territory outside the continent, but also because it was announcing a different form of imperialism, based on equal access to the markets and investment houses of other lands, rather than administrative control and military occupation.

American hegemony over Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines also prompted significant and striking opposition. Politicians, commentators,

Christians, and intellectuals spoke out against the new aggrandizement and had a comprehensive analysis of the new empire, one that, again, would foreshadow later anti-imperial arguments and movements. The war against Spain and intervention into the Philippines, critics charged, gave “militarists” too much power; the United States could acquire coaling stations or new trading opportunities without war or empire, they explained. Liberal Republicans known as “mugwumps” who had been drawn to the party by its stand against slavery equated anti-imperialism with abolitionism. Many dissenters contended that the United States had no right or need to “civilize” others peoples, especially considering its own treatment of blacks at home, while, conversely, some did not want American to assume control over and responsibility for non-white, and thus inferior, peoples. Labor leaders such as the Socialist Eugene Debs and the conservative Samuel Gompers agreed that conquest and empire were dangerous, in large measure because they feared the loss of American jobs to foreign workers who would accept lower wages, a charge echoed in the late twentieth century by anti-globalization activists.

Perhaps most pointedly, anti-imperialists argued that territorial annexation would pervert American principles. William Jennings Bryan, titular leader of the Democratic Party and agrarian spokesman, anticipated that the “just resistance” of the United States to Spanish rule in Cuba and the Philippines would

“degenerate into a war of conquest,” giving others the right to charge America with “having added hypocrisy to greed.” Senator George Hoar lamented “the danger that we are to be transformed from a Republic, founded on the Declaration of Independence . . . into a vulgar, commonplace empire, founded upon physical force.” The Anti-Imperialist League, tormented by the spectre of Filipino blood on American hands, even “more deeply resent the betrayal of American institutions” such as representative government at home, international law, and self-government for others. Mark Twain used his biting wit to condemn the new imperialism, offering new lyrics to the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*: “Mine eyes have seen the orgy of the launching of the sword; He is searching out the hoardings where the strangers’ wealth is stored; He has loosed his fateful lightning, and with woe and death has scored; His lust is marching on.” He was particularly outraged by the occupation and ongoing war against the forces of liberation in the Philippines, reporting from Manila and comparing the nationalist leader Emiliano Aguinaldo to Joan of Arc and George Washington. Twain was also quite vitriolic about missionaries who justified imperialism as an extension of the religious duty. “I bring you the stately matron named Christendom,” he wrote angrily, “returning bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored from pirate raids in Kiao-chou [Tsingtao, China], Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious

hypocrisies.” Notwithstanding their passionate opposition, the anti-imperialists were fighting rearguard actions against *faits accompli* in the Philippines and elsewhere, leading Theodore Roosevelt, secretary of the Navy, virile expansionist, and later president, to deride them as “men of a by-gone age having to deal with the facts of the present.”

Roosevelt’s observations probably represented the views of most Americans, who appreciated the extension of American power and influence in 1898 and subsequently. Still, critics of the new empire persisted into the twentieth century, and American anti-imperialism was part of a broader, global attack on colonialism, but one that developed quite differently than elsewhere. Liberals like the Briton J.A. Hobson were offering a pointed economic analysis of empire, tying the European reach into new lands to underconsumption in the home market. More powerfully, Russian theorists and revolutionists Nikolai Bukharin and Vladimir Lenin, writing during World War I, put forth a new Socialist critique of empire that would find great currency in the coming years, though not so much in the United States as Europe or the less-developed world. The great industrial powers, Lenin explained, were matched in a global contest for markets and would increasingly come into conflict in areas yet to be exploited—later termed the “Third World”—where they would vie with each other to establish colonies for consumers, raw materials, and investment. Though there

were, to be sure, Left, labor, and progressive political forces in the United States using such a radical model, anti-imperialism also continued to an American ideology, unique to the nation's history and perceived values.

Anti-imperialists of the Leninist, Liberal or American variety found proof for their theses in the years after the Spanish-American-Philippine War and especially with the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. Struggles for materials and colonies in Africa, Asia, the Balkans, and elsewhere had led to the widespread carnage, principally, many critics held, for the benefit of state elites and corporations who needed expanded economic opportunities. In Europe, Bolshevik, Socialist, Labor and other left parties, after initially supporting the entry of their various states into the war, emerged with this critique of empire. In the United States, similar analyses were apparent, though usually without the Leninist twist. The war, many American critics believed, was a product of great power, sphere-of-influence rivalries, not necessarily the inevitable consequence of economic expansion.

Henry Adams, grandson of John Quincy, often debated the issue of American imperialism with Theodore Roosevelt and other expansionists after 1898. "I incline now to anti-imperialism, and very strongly to anti-militarism," Adams observed. "If we try to rule politically, we take the chances against us." Any U.S. attempt to establish hegemony comparable to the British empire, Adams

and others maintained, was dangerous, futile, and un-American. Many Socialists and other radicals unleashed their wrath on “dollar diplomacy”—the American policy of sending bankers to foreign lands in lieu of armies to gain influence and power—as another form of imperialism, just as nefarious and effective, albeit more subtle, than traditional colonialism. Walter Lippmann, a young but influential journalist, spoke for many progressives in 1914 when he observed that “the arena where the European powers really measure their strength against each other is in the Balkans, in Africa, in Asia. [T]he accumulated irritations of it have produced the great war.” Between 1914 and the April 1917 U.S. entry into the war, Americans pressed their government to stay out of hostilities, effectively enough for President Woodrow Wilson’s 1916 campaign slogan to be “He Kept Us Out of the War.” Senator Robert LaFollette, House of Representatives Majority Leader Claude Kitchin, William Jennings Bryan, and activists such as Jane Addams, Lilian Wald, Oswald Garrison Villard of *The Nation* and others invoked American antimilitarist traditions to oppose entry in the war, contending that intervention would dampen reform at home, provoke a curtailing of civil liberties and increase political repression, lead to war profiteering by big business, and otherwise sully American values. One group, the American Union Against Militarism, even had a mascot, a dinosaur named “Jingo” with the motto “All Armor Plate—No Brains.”

Despite such public dissent, Wilson did in fact ask congress for a

declaration of war shortly after his re-election was secured, thus alienating progressives, liberals, and anti-imperialists who had supported him in 1916 based on his claims of neutrality, noninvolvement, and anti-imperialism. Wilson did in fact advocate self-determination, believing that empires would collapse if their colonies had the right to rule themselves, but his vision was limited, essentially covering the states of Europe that had been constituents of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires, not the underdeveloped and non-white world. More to the point, Wilson's anti-imperialism was, like John Hay's earlier, a means to promote the Open Door; by breaking down existing empires, the United States could use its economic strength to gain a foothold in new markets.

After American entry into the war, many of Wilson's previous supporters began to comprehend his version of anti-imperialism, and were part of a large and diverse antiwar movement, which, though not exclusively an anti-imperialist movement as well, did create a broader critique to challenge the decision for war as a dangerous departure from American traditions. Progressives and future isolationists like Senators LaFollette, Hiram Johnson, and William Borah and others, and radicals like Eugene V. Debs, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, John Reed, Kate Richards O'Hare, Emma Goldman, "Big Bill" Haywood, Scott Nearing, and various Socialist and Labor organizations condemned the war and imperialist frenzy attending it, with Randolph Bourne charging that war, with its

opportunities for profits and new territories, was “the health of the state.”

Woodrow Wilson, anti-imperial critics charged, had never been neutral but was always pro-England because of American economic ties to the British empire.

Businessmen and their media propagandists, they added, had pushed the government into the war for their own self-interest and were hoping to use intervention to expand the Open Door. The war, critics concluded, served the interests of corporations and imperialists, not the national interest.

### *Challenging a New World Order*

Such ideas became even more prevalent in the aftermath of the war as Wilson sought to develop a new global system, based on the Open Door rather than traditional colonialism. The keystone of the president’s new program was to be a League of Nations, a body of the world’s governments that would ensure “collective security” by taking action against aggressor states, militarily if so needed. Immediately, a large and diverse coalition of critics came forth to condemn this departure from America’s isolationist ideology, as they saw it.

Some politicians, led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, a old-line Republican from Massachusetts who represented northeastern commercial interests, feared that the League would damage U.S. sovereignty, forcing America to participate in collective action at the behest of other members of the new organization. “Are you willing to put your soldiers and your sailors,” he asked, “at the disposition of

other nations?” Missouri Senator James Reed invoked a sense of racial superiority, charging that “black, brown, yellow and red races,” ranking low in “civilization” and high in “barbarism,” would be on equal footing with the great, white United States.

Lodge and Reed, however, were not specifically opposed to the extension and use of American power, but many others were and saw danger in the League. LaFollette believed that it would become an “imperialist club” which would maintain the status quo and keep colonies such as Ireland and India in bondage because the new body was not likely to sanction action against the great powers that held sway over the less-developed world. Like LaFollette, others such as Senators Borah, Hiram Johnson, and George Norris were so-called Irreconcilables, who were progressive on domestic matters and believed that the League would not only limit American autonomy but would deny autonomy to poor nations and was not consistent with traditional national virtues of self-determination and isolation from the intrigues and squabbles of Europe and elsewhere. More so, a broad consensus was emerging to question America’s involvement in and future after World War I, fearing that the United States was embarking on a path of global behavior, with entanglements and interests abroad, that would resemble that of the existing empires. Indeed, in the years during and just after the war, a number of anti-imperialist and anti-militarist

groups—including the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the American Friends Service Committee, the War Resisters League, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom—emerged to publicly lobby for a more insular and less aggressive foreign policy. Facing such widespread criticism, Wilson held his ground and refused to negotiate or compromise with his detractors, and the senate accordingly rejected the treaty to join the League. While the war had marked America’s coming out as a great world power, the United States would not don the trappings of empire.

That is not to say, however, that the United States retreated from world affairs. Though the period between World War I and II is usually referred to as a period of isolationism, the 1920s, as the historian and anti-imperialist Charles Austin Beard remarked, saw a “return to the more aggressive ways . . . to protect and advance the claims of American business enterprise.” Trade and investments, and intervention, abroad increased between the wars as a corporative alliance of government offices and business institutions sought to create order and stability at home as well as establish such conditions outside of national boundaries. In addition to reestablishing and augmenting economic ties to a rebuilding Europe and pressing for a greater opening of Asian markets, American officials and corporations continued to move into Latin America in pursuit of expanded business opportunities.

Such circumstances led to another wave of anti-imperialism in the 1920s and 1930s, but, once more, in complicated and seemingly contradictory ways. American officials such as Secretaries of State Charles Evans Hughes and Frank Kellogg, concerned about exorbitant military spending and the potential for another outbreak of hostilities, brokered international agreements on disarmament and to outlaw war as an instrument of national policy. They and their successor Cordell Hull believed that free trade would promote peace, while empire led to conflict. Isolationists in public life and the media also believed that Europe was still trapped in the type of rivalries that had caused war in 1914 and warned that the United States should stay clear of foreign engagements until that continent stabilized. Such critics, however, were often internationalists who did not question America's right or need to expand abroad, but saw contemporary conditions as a deterrent to foreign involvements at that time.

Others offered a more pointed analysis. Critics of the war and League treaty such as LaFollette and Borah continued to warn against American imperialism and militarism, and spoke out against U.S. attempts to crush nationalist liberation movements in areas such as Nicaragua and El Salvador. Marine General Smedley Butler became something of a folk hero and offered a compelling critique of American imperialism when he called himself a "racketeer, a gangster for capitalism." During his thirty-three years in the Marines, Butler

boasted, he had “helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers 1909-12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras ‘right’ for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested. . . Looking back on it, I feel that I could have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents.”

Butler’s views gained widespread acceptance. Huey Long, Governor of Louisiana and putative presidential candidate when assassinated in 1935, agreed with the general and promised to nominate him to be Secretary of (anti)War if elected in 1936. In fact, throughout the 1930s, disillusioned with World War I and alarmed by revelations and charges from the senate’s Nye Committee that corporations, particularly in the munitions industry, had lobbied, if not conspired, for entry into the Great War, a majority of Americans held isolationist positions. Decrying what Senator Gerald Nye had termed the “rotten commercialism” of American businesses during the war years, congress, with public support, passed a

series of neutrality acts and other measures to prohibit President Franklin Roosevelt from becoming involved in foreign conflicts in areas such as China, Ethiopia, or Spain.

The continuing aggression of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, culminating in the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, however, undercut the anti-intervention, anti-imperial consensus and set the United States onto a path of, apparently, irreversible global empire. By war's end in 1945 the United States stood as the world's only great power: as a condition for aiding Britain during the war, the United States had insisted on opening up the markets of the empire and beginning a process of decolonization; Germany and Japan were in ruin as a result of the fighting that laid waste to Europe and Asia; and the principal rival to American hegemony, the Soviet Union, had lost over 20 million people and millions of farms and factories during the war. The United States controlled half the world's trade and had established an economic order, the Bretton Woods system, and a political institution, the United Nations, as means to wield its power and influence. The so-called American Century was in full bloom but, U.S. leaders warned, without a permanent military establishment and arms buildup would be in constant peril. Accordingly, America embarked on its greatest military expansion, began to establish a global network of bases, sought an international Open Door, and established a National Security State at home.

### *Fighting for America's Soul*

Such measures attracted opposition. Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's vice-president from 1941 to 1945 and presidential candidate in 1948, challenged the emerging "Cold War" against the Soviet Union, charging that the United States was using "a predominance of force to intimidate the rest of mankind." Atomic scientists such as Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard eloquently warned of the perils of a nuclear arms race and established organizations and journals to challenge the political status quo. Journalists like Walter Lippmann and the radical I.F. Stone expressed their concern over the extensions of American power and responsibility into all parts of the world. Senators as diverse as the liberal Claude Pepper and "Mr. Conservative" Robert Taft feared the establishment of a military government. Vito Marcantonio, a Labor Party member of the House of Representatives, attacked business and military influences in Washington and the expansion of American capitalism into the developing world. Many liberals feared that the United States was abandoning its republican virtues, especially as the political repression associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy consumed the nation's political affairs in the 1950s.

African-American critics in particular challenged the intensified imperialism, as they saw it. Black leaders like W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, and Harry Haywood believed it was dangerous, not to mention hypocritical, to

expand American values and institutions abroad while maintaining a system of apartheid at home in the southern states. In particular, black spokespersons began to point out the common struggles of Africans trying to gain their national independence from colonial powers with blacks in the United States seeking civil rights. Americans could hardly lead the “free world” by example, they argued, while maintaining legal segregation at home and endorsing continued colonization in Africa and other parts of the Third World. Although many mainstream Black leaders supported the Cold War, hoping to parlay their loyalty to foreign policies into a commitment to act against racism at home, DuBois, Robeson and others offered a more critical analysis, even invoking a Leninist critique of Capitalist expansion and looking to the Soviet Union as an anti-imperialist model and champion of the rights of non-white peoples. Paul Robeson condemned Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech as a scheme for “Anglo-Saxon domination” of the world and called for “united action of all democratic forces to achieve freedom for all colonial and subject peoples.”

Views such as Robeson’s, however, were not conventional wisdom, even in the Black community, and most Americans accepted the new global role ushered in by the Cold War. Throughout the 1950s, then, the United States, without much dissent, intervened in a civil war in Korea, overthrew governments in Iran and Guatemala, offered economic and military support to military

dictatorships throughout the globe, and continued to expand the Open Door. By the end of the decade, however, some Americans were uneasy with such hegemony, and various figures emerged to again challenge the U.S. empire. Cultural figures such as the Beatniks condemned the conformity of Cold War life, the arms race, and the American denial of self-determination in other lands. More powerfully, and perhaps surprisingly, President Dwight Eisenhower, as he was leaving office in 1961, warned against “the acquisition of unwarranted influence . . . by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.” Such thoughts may have remained a novelty in the 1960s, but U.S. intervention in Vietnam, still limited as Eisenhower left office, would mushroom in the coming years, and give rise to a mass antiwar movement that would also question in large measure what critics saw as America’s imperial behavior overseas and the military-industrial complex at home.

As in the 1840s and 1890s, many Americans in the 1960s opposed U.S. intervention in a foreign war and developed a larger anti-imperialist critique as a result of their challenge to the conflict at hand. Even before the major decisions to commit advisors, air assets and combat forces and essentially “Americanize” the Vietnam War, there was evident concern over the growing U.S. role in the world. Movements calling for an end to the arms race, peace with the Soviet

Union, normal relations with Cuba, or recognition of the People's Republic of China, for instance, were in existence during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, and the Cold War consensus on an aggressive foreign policy, though still noticeable, was being questioned in some quarters. Vietnam accelerated that process, however, and brought about the greatest domestic challenge to American involvement abroad in the twentieth century.

By 1964, as the United States began to conduct air attacks against the enemy National Liberation Front in Vietnam, peace activists, professors, and students were beginning to challenge the growing American role in Indochina and the larger foreign policy context of the Cold War. Scholars such as the linguist Noam Chomsky, the historian William Appleman Williams, and the political scientist Hans Morgenthau participated in "teach-ins" on Vietnam, giving rise to a national movement on various campuses and serving as a foundation of the antiwar movement. The Students for a Democratic Society [SDS], the largest radical student group of the period, held the first antiwar rally in 1964 as well, and its adherents not only scored intervention in Vietnam, but offered a comprehensive analysis of the leaders of the American "empire," which, they charged, denied self-determination to Third World nations, intervened on behalf of corporate interests, and betrayed American principles. African-Americans, engaged in an epic struggle for civil rights, added, like DuBois and Robeson

earlier, that the United States had assumed the position of a white imperial power suppressing the yearnings for freedom of nonwhite peoples, whether in Indochina or below the Mason-Dixon line. Martin Luther King, Nobel Peace Prize winner and civil rights leader, went so far as to call the United States “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” while the militant Black Panther Party called on African-Americans to refuse to join the military or support U.S. intervention, and openly sympathized with Third World revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements.

Politicians entered the debate as well, as they had during the fateful League fight after World War I. Senators J. William Fulbright, George McGovern, Ernest Gruening, Wayne Morse, Mark Hatfield, Frank Church and others were, like the progressives of the 1920s, anti-imperialist and internationalist. Fulbright, like Borah, chaired the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and opposed the policies of the president of his own party. The senator from Arkansas believed that America had “betrayed its own past and its own promise . . . of free men building an example for the world. Now . . . it sees a nation that seemed to represent something new and hopeful reverting to the vanity of past empires.”

Similar opinions were held by a significant number of Americans, including religious leaders, businessmen, and even military officials. Following in the

tradition of Smedley Butler, former Commandant David Shoup blasted not only the war but the foundations of U.S. foreign policy. "I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-crooked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people," he said in 1966, "they will arrive at a solution of their own. That they design and want. That they fight and work for. [Not one] crammed down their throats by Americans." Shoup's views, though bluntly expressed, were shared by a significant number of Americans by the late 1960s and 1970s. Millions demonstrated publicly against the war and also called for a new, non-interventionist foreign policy. "Dove" Senators tried to pass legislation to limit the war and, after U.S. withdrawal in 1973, enacted the War Powers Act to restrict the power of the president to commit American forces abroad, a measure that was principally a response to the "imperial" presidency of Richard Nixon, who had waged war without authorization in Cambodia and Laos and was responsible for the Watergate crisis at home. By the mid-1970s, the United States seemed less prone to intervention in world affairs, a condition derided as the "Vietnam syndrome" by conservative critics but hailed as an anti-imperialist triumph by various progressive and internationalist forces.

Such restraints, however, were short-lived, as the Carter and Reagan administrations began to ratchet up the Cold War, increasing military spending, taking a more bellicose approach to the Soviet Union after the detente of the

1970s, and asserting American imperium in Central America and elsewhere. Millions of citizens, often invoking the legacy of Vietnam, challenged such policies as violations of national and international laws and of American values and, amid the Iran-Contra scandal, pointed out the similarities between the imperial presidencies of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Still, the 1980s and early 1990s were not periods of great anti-imperial activity. That would change dramatically, however, by the later 1990s as Americans had a vital role in a global coalition that was challenging the world's economic structure. In some measure, conservatives such as Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot, maverick presidential candidates in 1992 and 1996, had used anti-imperial and nativist themes to sound the alarms about the new global economy. Sounding like progressives in the 1890s or isolationists after World War I, they believed that transnational corporations were moving abroad to find cheaper labor, thus causing American workers to lose jobs, and that the government and business elite was more interested in extending its interests abroad than in taking care of its citizens at home. They, ironically, even called for an end to American sanctions against enemy states such as Iraq and Cuba, governments for which they held little love, because such economic warfare was damaging the people of those lands and not helping to oust Saddam Hussein or Fidel Castro. The United States was "a republic, not an empire," Buchanan often reminded Americans throughout the

1990s.

By the later part of that decade—with many major powers establishing regional and world economic groups such as the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the World Trade Organization—anti-imperialists went on the offensive. Where such institutions had usually existed with little fanfare or opposition, various critics such as Chomsky, the long-time consumer advocate Ralph Nader, and the anti-globalization activist Kevin Danaher emerged to attack what they considered this new form of global empire, with the United States as hegemon. From 1999 to 2001, when environmentalists, union members, student activists, anarchists, and other forces disrupted meetings of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, the World Bank in Washington D.C., and the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Quebec, the lines were drawn in this new round in the global contest between the great powers and the forces of anti-imperialism.

As critics of American power, expansion, or empire enter the twenty-first century, they are using many of the same arguments that George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Mark Twain, William Borah, or J. William Fulbright put forth in earlier periods. Broadly defined to mean the aggressive use of power, the denial of self-determination abroad, militarism, or actions inconsistent with a republican form of government, American imperialism has a long tradition, but so

does its anti-imperial counterpoint. Clearly, anti-imperialists, isolationists, doves and others opposed to the excessive use of power or the extension of U.S. influence have been on the defensive as American leaders have tallied up an impressive array of territorial holdings, military interventions, proxy governments, and economic opportunities. One can ponder, however, how much more expansive the reach of American power or extent of militarism would have been without critics at home challenging the establishment and augmentation of “empire” at all steps along the way.

“The price of empire,” J. William Fulbright remarked during the Vietnam War, “is America’s soul, and that price is too high.” Those words could just as easily have been uttered by John Quincy Adams at the turn of the nineteenth century. As America goes abroad in the future, then, in search of markets, bases, or even monsters to destroy, one can be reasonably certain that there will be significant forces at home questioning and protesting against such extension of U.S. power, as there have been for over two centuries already.

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