

NEW FOREWORD BY LLOYD C. GARDNER

THE  
TRAGEDY OF  
AMERICAN  
DIPLOMACY  
WILLIAM  
APPLEMAN  
WILLIAMS

NEW AFTERWORD BY ANDREW J. BACEVICH



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# THE TRAGEDY OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY

*William Appleman Williams*

*Fiftieth Anniversary Edition*



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*Foreword*, by Lloyd Gardner

*Introduction*: History and the Transcendence of the Tragic

*Chapter 1*. Imperial Anticolonialism

- I. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EXPANSIONIST OUTLOOK
- II. THE CRISIS OF THE 1890S AND THE TURN TO IMPERIALISM

*Chapter 2*. The Imperialism of Idealism

*Chapter 3*. The Rising Tide of Revolution

*Chapter 4*. The Legend of Isolationism

- I. A GREAT DEBATE OVER THE TACTICS OF EMPIRE
- II. THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF BUSINESS

*Chapter 5*. The War for the American Frontier

*Chapter 6*. The Nightmare of Depression and the Vision of Omnipotence

- I. ROOSEVELT AND STALIN CONFRONT THE DILEMMAS OF VICTORY
- II. THE OPEN DOOR POLICY AND THE ONSET OF THE COLD WAR
- III. A NEW VISION OF OMNIPOTENCE AND A MISREADING OF HISTORY PROMPT THE UNITED STATES TO OVERPLAY ITS HAND
- IV. THE DIPLOMACY OF THE VICIOUS CIRCLE

*Chapter 7*. The Impotence of Nuclear Supremacy

*Chapter 8*. The Terrifying Momentum Toward Disaster

*Conclusion*: The Wisdom of an Open Door for Revolutions

*Afterword*: *Tragedy Renewed*, by Andrew J. Bacevich

***This is a time for searching criticism, all right  
but for criticism of the whole society***

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**JAMES RESTON, 1953**

***We are never so much the victims of another  
as we are the victims of ourselves***

**JULIUS LESTER, 1971**

***How do you ask a man to be the last man  
to die for a mistake***

**JOHN FORBES KERRY, 1971**

# FOREWORD

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Lloyd Gardner

When Bill Williams showed the manuscript of his new book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, to his mentor at the University of Wisconsin, Fred Harrington urged him not to publish it. Harrington admired his former student, and had been instrumental in bringing him back to Madison in the fall of 1957 from the University of Oregon. He was worried, however, about how such a critical book would be received, and what it might do to the career of a very promising young academic.

A Naval Academy graduate, William Appleman Williams had served in the South Pacific before being badly injured when a Japanese shell landed near his boat during an assault on an island. After leaving the Navy at the end of the war, he came to Wisconsin and completed his degree in American history. It was the height of cold war orthodoxy, even in academia. True, the University of Wisconsin had always been a stronghold of progressive thought, but *Tragedy* went beyond the dominant “realist” critique of American policy as overly moralistic to discuss fundamental cold war assumptions and, indeed, the forces that had shaped the nation’s foreign policies since the 1890s. In place of a critique that stressed the dangers of idealism, Williams relentlessly pursued the connections between the nation’s political economy and its foreign policy actions. Midway through the book, for example, Williams quoted William S. Culbertson, a career diplomat who specialized in trade questions from the Wilson era to the New Deal: “Our economic frontiers are no longer coextensive with our territorial frontiers.” Williams argued that this statement summed up American policy: “No one ever offered a more succinct description and interpretation of the single most important aspect of twentieth-century American diplomacy—either in general or pertaining explicitly to the nation’s involvement in World Wars I and II.”

The original publisher of *Tragedy* was a small firm, World Publishing, with offices in Cleveland and New York. Among the first reviews was one written by Adolf A. Berle Jr., an original “brains truster” in the Roosevelt Administration who later went into the State Department at a high level as an Assistant Secretary of State. Berle took the book very seriously and suggested it deserved respectful attention. Since Williams had been particularly critical of the New Deal as a missed opportunity to make both intellectual and material changes in American society, the review was something of a surprise. For this charge (and others) he was often a target of the liberal establishment’s special ire.

But Berle did not seem to care, even at the moment John F. Kennedy was challenging Eisenhower’s supposedly lax attitude about the Cuban Revolution as a rallying cry for liberals. He reviewed *Tragedy* in the *Sunday New York Times Book Review*—the premier location for drawing attention to new books. Entitled “A Few Questions for the Diplomatic Pouch,” it began: “Salute is due William Appleman Williams for a brilliant book on foreign affairs, gladly given despite profound disagreement by this reviewer with many of his statements and with some of his conclusions.” The book attempts a historical critique, Berle wrote, while refusing the free ride historians often give themselves by shying away from developing a theory and drawing lessons. Williams was absolutely right, he wrote, that American policy did not accommodate to revolutionary changes, and that it was now essential to start working with social systems “different from our own.” Berle saw a contradiction, however, between Williams’s economic determinism and his argument that the United States could have developed differently. “The ‘imperialism’ charge, for example, is a piece of semantics,” Berle alleged. “America in the nineteenth century did expand, but into empty land. It is one thing to conquer a subject people; another to occupy vacant real estate. Influence is acquired by expanding trade, but it is not the same as colonial domination seized by conquest.”

Other critics with much less sympathy for *Tragedy's* analysis of the mainsprings of American policy would make similar comments. To the general question of economic determinism, Williams had several responses. First, he argued that his critics often confused specific economic policy issues with a general outlook. Thus, as an example, he pointed out how Washington eased pressure on Mexico during the 1938 oil expropriation crisis, out of concern about Axis rivalries, not simple Good Neighborliness. Second, he argued that policy-makers effectively internalized their beliefs about the way American democracy worked and its needs, and then they predicated policies not upon specific advantages alone (although sometimes they did do so in blunt terms), but on something called the general welfare, or, more often after World War II, national security.

To support this last point, Williams took special note of President William McKinley's description of the impact of the burgeoning Cuban rebellion in the second half of the 1890s, the first "depression decade." In instructions to his new minister to Spain, McKinley made it clear what he expected Madrid to do and what the United States was entitled to expect. The "chronic condition of trouble" in Cuba, he wrote, "causes disturbances in the social and political condition of our own peoples . . . and tends to delay the condition of prosperity to which this country is entitled." Commenting on this cable Williams wrote, "It revealed beyond any possibility of misunderstanding the inner logic of all expansionist thought *whereby both opportunity and difficulty, good and evil, are externalized* As Frederick Jackson Turner once acknowledged in a moment of deep insight, the frontier itself was a 'gate of escape' from existing responsibilities; and when men began to act on the frontier thesis they merely sustained that pattern of defining issues in such a way that the solutions became progressively dependent upon external factors."

The third answer Williams gave to the charge of economic determinism was that motivation really came down to the way one defined the world. His path-breaking interpretation of the Open Door Policy, first enunciated in specific terms by Secretary of State John Hay at the end of the nineteenth century in regard to imperial rivalries in China, posited the way Americans have approached the world ever since. There were two Open Door Notes sent to the European powers and Japan, he observed. The first, in 1899, called upon them to recognize equality of trade opportunities within their acknowledged spheres of influence, and asked for a formal response. The second, sent on July 4, 1900, in the midst of the turmoil of the Boxer Rebellion, did not ask for a response, but proclaimed that American policy was to oppose any effort to take advantage of the turmoil to impair China's territorial or political integrity.

While most historians had seen the Hay gambit as either an idealistic gesture or an example of an effort to piggyback on British policies of keeping China alive for free trade, Williams saw the Open Door Notes as the basic foundation on which Americans constructed their foreign policy. From specifics about America's relations with China and the other powers, it rapidly grew into a generalized outlook on the world, or *Weltanschauung*, that incorporated objectives and means to secure a dominant position for American trade and influence around the world. The Open Door Policy was especially complementary to the nation's self-image as well, because it resolved the problem of American expansion without recourse to formal imperialism. It proved highly successful in that regard, as well as satisfying the requirement that it serve as a rationale for criticizing "empires," whether the old colonial ones or the Soviet Union's policies in Eastern Europe.

The "tragedy" evolved out of the ultimate contradiction between the idea and the reality that the Open Door Policy disguised, and which left American policy-makers imprisoned within a rigid framework of their own assumptions. They were unable to adjust to the inevitable changes in the world as newly independent countries after World War II, and older countries once dominated by the European metropolis, demanded the right to determine their own history. The American claim that the Open Door Policy promoted such objectives grew ever more strident in cold war rhetoric about the

Free World versus Communist slavery; but, said Williams, it was little more than a repetition of Adam Smith's insistence that natural law determined what each country did best, and where it belonged in the larger scheme of things. Indeed, the shape of things to come could be foreseen in reactions to the Cuban revolt against Spain, and in the beginnings of upheaval in China in the Boxer Rebellion. Thus Williams put the Age of Revolutionary Nationalism much earlier, and saw a consistency in the American response that had largely been ignored. The Open Door Policy assumptions had encouraged an absolutist belief that the American Way best conformed to the natural order of things, which meant in practice that when the United States did encourage change abroad, change was to occur only within certain parameters. "This was at best naïve. Even a modest familiarity with history reveals that such alterations have wide and continuing consequences. It was at worst a knowing effort to slap a lid on dynamic development." While America rose to world power, and triumphed in World Wars I and II, it also became embroiled in a series of military interventions that began with the War of 1898 and continued throughout the twentieth century, culminating in Vietnam.

Within a few years of its original publication in 1959, of course, the atmosphere had changed considerably. As the 1960s unfolded, the civil rights and women's liberation movements grew and flourished. And as Washington expanded the Vietnam War, these movements merged with the peace movement. These factors all influenced the way *Tragedy* was being received and read on campuses and elsewhere. Williams's critics seized on the unpopularity of the Vietnam War to explain the book's appeal, as if it were a temporary phenomenon that would disappear once the war was won. It was not won. And *Tragedy* became the most influential exploration of American foreign policy attempted by a historian in the twentieth century. It continues to sell well even after fifty years, while its themes (in many variations) have been developed by a second, and now a third generation of scholars. A not uncritical review of *Tragedy* written by Bradford Perkins twenty-five years after its first publication noted that it had grown sharper and even more critical of policy-makers in its later revised and enlarged editions in 1962 and 1972. Williams had failed to find a system to fit everything into, Perkins contended, "but no comprehensive scheme, no broad generalizations, and few but the narrowest studies of episodes in American foreign relations will be written, if they are to shine, without an awareness of and an accommodation to William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*."

*Tragedy* transcended the Vietnam years. It was Williams's second book after *American-Russian Relations, 1781-1947* (1952), a book that had already created a stir. *American-Russian Relations* grew out of his doctoral dissertation on the American reformer Raymond Robins, who was in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, and who had attempted to mediate between Wilson and Lenin. Those efforts came to naught, but they struck Williams as an entry point for studying the large pattern of American responses to the revolutions that shaped the twentieth century. The final chapter was a searing critique of "containment," the policy "fathered" by George Frost Kennan with his famous "X" article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," which appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, the journal published by the New York Council on Foreign Relations, where articles by and for the policy-making communities and nongovernment elites involved in foreign affairs most often appear. Everyone knew almost immediately "X" was Kennan, a foreign service officer who specialized in Russia and the Soviet Union. Thus began a long-lasting debate over the "sources" of American conduct in world affairs.

Williams's discussion of "containment" began with the Bolshevik Revolution and the aftermath of World War I. He compared Wilson's treatment of the Baltic States at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution with Stalin's demands for his prewar frontiers after Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. Wilson had held out for reserving the Baltic States—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—as

Russian territory for some post-Soviet government, which, he assumed, would have to happen sooner rather than later. But Woodrow Wilson had no doubt they were Russian territory. The United States in World War II insisted, on the other hand, that the territorial integrity of those states was an obligation the Allies must honor. The point was not to excuse Stalin's behavior, but to note that American principle was sometimes as adjustable as a bicycle seat. Where Kennan and his supporters in government and academia saw containment as a realist approach to policy, therefore, Williams saw it as an extension of the Open Door Policy tailored to fit a temporary reality.

After the first edition of *Tragedy* appeared in 1959, it was later revised and greatly expanded in two new editions appearing in 1962 and 1972. Williams called his book an "essay," even in its later editions, which now included source references for the many quotations he used from policy-makers inside and outside the government. *Tragedy* broke with several "tried and true" techniques of the historical profession, particularly those of diplomatic historians. Williams's emphasis on economics and ideology presented readers with a different landscape entirely to come to terms with in order to understand American policy.

In all his books, moreover, citations to State Department documents rated no higher than those from other sources such as Department of Commerce publications, or presentations at the annual National Foreign Trade Convention, or hearings before Congressional committees. He drew heavily as well from other disciplines besides history, especially sociology, but also including philosophy. One day a week during his career at the University of Wisconsin, he carried into the Memorial Library a small black notebook, walked down the hall to the periodicals room, and started through the journals from "A" to "Z." His office bookshelves were filled with authors and titles not then familiar to history students. Responding to a critical comment that he was not multi-archival, in the sense of using documents from foreign archives, Williams quipped that perhaps American diplomatic historians were not multi-archival when it came to their nation's records, and were overly dependent on certain political files in State Department records.

Williams seemed to take a particular delight in tweaking liberal sensibilities and turning everything topsy-turvy. Given his insistence that *Tragedy* was an essay, however, one could come away from reading it with a feeling that he was, at times, asking readers to disagree in order to get a seminar discussion going. He was also an excellent lecturer in large classes, holding students' attention with the force of his material, not dramatics. Probably his most famous instance of taking such an approach came in his treatment of Herbert Hoover, who was anathema to liberals ever since the New Deal. In several places, he gave Hoover great credit for also understanding that it was possible (too easily possible) for big business to take over the government and turn the United States into some variant of a fascist regime. He also gave Hoover credit for understanding the purpose of foreign loans, and how they could be used to establish favorable conditions for expanding exports and foreign trade in general. The only difference between Hoover's approach to these matters in the 1920s and, say, programs like the later Point IV technical assistance plans, Williams obviously enjoyed observing, was that the latter used the American taxpayer to foot the bill for making the world open to American corporations.

It was ironic, then, that in later years, when "social history" began its surge in history departments across the country, Williams's contributions in opening up diplomatic history in these ways received less credit than might have been expected. On the other hand, later critics had to abandon Adolf Berle's assertion that nineteenth-century American expansionism was not imperialistic because it involved "vacant lands." Williams had demonstrated that there was indeed a tragedy involved in an outlook that simply took it for granted that there had been no displacement of the peoples who occupied the continent before the Europeans came. It became harder and harder to draw a distinction between the American rush to occupy the continent from sea to shining sea and U.S. attitudes about



the rest of the world. In the search for a true “international history,” *Tragedy* was a truly path-breaking book on many levels, and remains an essential accomplishment in bringing us to understand ourselves—and our boasts about the essential nation. The themes developed in the book are vital for understanding the dynamics of the twenty-first century.

All his criticisms notwithstanding, Adolf Berle accepted an invitation to speak at Williams’s graduate seminar in the spring of 1960. For almost two hours Berle held forth on the nature and mainsprings of American foreign policy, describing personal experiences in the Caribbean in the Wilson era when American Marines occupied various islands. Although he had scolded Williams in his review for using the term “imperialism” too loosely, his recounting of those times could scarcely have been describing anything other than a form of imperialism, practiced however under a different terminology that allowed Americans to go on criticizing the Europeans as the only imperialist-minded peoples.

After the seminar, Berle invited Williams to join a Latin American task force he was organizing for the likely Democratic presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy. Williams appreciated the offer; most diplomatic historians have a secret urge to be policy-makers. But he could not participate, he commented later, without compromising his belief that more than what Kennedy offered was needed if policy was really to change. Almost exactly a year later, the Kennedy Administration sought to overthrow the Castro Revolution with an invasion at the Bay of Pigs, then followed that failure with a series of efforts to overthrow or assassinate the Cuban leader, all leading to the most serious crisis of the cold war—the missile crisis of 1962. Kennedy also drew the conclusion that America’s “national interest” would have to be upheld elsewhere in Southeast Asia if the United States was to succeed in the cold war. The knot of assumptions that made up the Open Door Policy became the center of a struggle for the soul of the nation.

Bill Williams wrote several other major books, and *Tragedy* ought to be considered in relation to *The Contours of American History*, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire*, and *Empire as a Way of Life*. In all of these volumes, Williams attempted to explain American history and to offer views that challenged orthodox understandings. His objective was to provide readers with a means for coming to terms with the reality of the past and its impact on the present. In an epigraph for the final chapter of *Tragedy*, he quoted Callitrax, a historian in Arthur Clarke’s science fiction novel *In the Cities and the Stars*: “We have lived too long out of contact with reality, and the time has come to rebuild our lives.”

# **INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE TRAGIC**

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*We find genuine tragedy . . . only in that destruction which does not prematurely cut short development and success, but which, instead, grows out of success itself.*

*Breakdown and failure reveal the true nature of things. In failure, life's reality is not lost; on the contrary, here it makes itself wholly and decisively felt. There is no tragedy without transcendence.*

*This transformation may go the way of deliverance, where man rises to supreme reality through conquest of the tragic. Otherwise this transformation may go the way of decline into irresponsible aestheticism of the spectator: man distracted, drifting, falling off into nothingness.*

KARL JASPERS, TRAGEDY IS NOT ENOUGH

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The tragedy of American diplomacy is aptly symbolized, and defined for analysis and reflection, by the relations between the United States and Cuba from April 21, 1898 through April 21, 1961. The eruption of two wars involving the same two countries in precisely the same week provides a striking sense of classical form and even adds the tinge of eeriness so often associated with tragedy.

After three years of pressure culminating in an ultimatum, the United States declared war against Spain on April 21, 1898. The generally avowed objectives were to free Cuba from Spanish tyranny, to establish and underwrite the independence of the island, and to initiate and sustain its development toward political democracy and economic welfare.

During the subsequent 63 years, the United States exercised continuous, extensive influence in and over all aspects of Cuban affairs. This ongoing intervention produced some positive results. The advantages Cuba enjoyed as an American protectorate rather than a Spanish colony were significant and beneficial. Sugar production was modernized and increased. Some public utilities and other improvements associated with the basic sugar economy were gradually provided. And in the city of Havana, Americans and Cubans developed one of the business and entertainment centers of the Western Hemisphere.

As Cuba planted, harvested, refined, and sold more sugar, it enjoyed slow and sporadic economic development. A modest number of Cubans improved their personal and group economic welfare. Furthermore, some of the forms and mechanisms of representative government were established and legalized, and some of the resulting institutions put out shallow roots into Cuban thought and culture. Reforms were instituted that helped stabilize Cuban politics and contributed to the elementary and routine kind of law and order necessary for moderately efficient economic activity. On rather widely separate occasions, small segments of the Cuban population participated in a consequential way in the process of representative government. And perhaps most important of all, the Cubans were encouraged—and exhorted—to define their future in terms of the kind of democracy and prosperity provided in the United States.

Yet when measured by the Cubans in the course of their daily experiences, or by outsiders concerned to discover and evaluate the results of American control, there was clearly a continuing, even increasing disparity between the actuality and the rhetoric. For the United States dominated the economic life of the island by controlling, directly or indirectly, the sugar industry, and by overtly and covertly preventing any dynamic modification of the island's one-crop economy. It defined clear and narrow limits on the island's political system. It tolerated the use of torture and terror, of fraud and farce, by Cuba's rulers. But it intervened with economic and diplomatic pressure and with force of arms, when Cubans threatened to transgress the economic and political restrictions established by American leaders.

That sad result was not the result of malice, indifference, or ruthless and predatory exploitation. American leaders were not evil men. They did not conceive and excuse some dreadful conspiracy. Nor were they treacherous hypocrites. They believed deeply in the ideals they proclaimed, and they were sincere in arguing that their policies and actions would ultimately create a Cuba that would be responsibly self-governed, economically prosperous, and socially stable and happy. All, of course, in the image of America.

Precisely for those reasons, however, American diplomacy contained the fundamental elements of tragedy. It held within itself, that is to say, several contradictory truths. Those truths, allowed to develop according to their own logic without modification by men who understood that process and acted on their knowledge, would ultimately clash in a devastating upheaval and crisis.

There was first the truth of American power. Measured in relative or absolute terms, the United

States has possessed overweening power in relation to Cuba, a power it has exercised vigorously and persistently.

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There was secondly the truth that the use of that power failed to create in Cuba or in its relationship with America a reality that enjoyed any persuasive correlation with the ideals avowed as the objectives of the power. American policy makers did not honor their avowed commitment to the principle of self-determination, and they did not modernize and balance the Cuban political economy.

A third truth resulted from that deployment and use of American power. Gradually, but with increasing momentum, Cubans evolved a coalition of groups committed to important changes in their society. In turn, that objective implied significant modifications in Cuba's relations with the United States. Though this coalition included reformers and moderate conservatives, it drew most of its very drive from non-communist radicals. Their dedication and courage in actively opposing the Batista regime sustained and strengthened the general movement, and ultimately won them recognition as the symbol and positions as the leaders of the campaign for a new and better Cuba.

The convergence and interaction of these three truths produced the Cuban crisis of 1959–1961. Rather than contributing to general and beneficent transformation of Cuban society during the years after 1898, American power and policy produced instead a Cuban and an American crisis that characterized and symbolized the underlying tragedy of all American diplomacy in the twentieth century. In Cuba, the half-century confrontation of the contrasting truths finally erupted in a militant social revolution conceived and designed to establish—in fact and in the present—the kind of Cuban society and development that American diplomacy had promised since 1898.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959–1960 was neither plotted, planned, nor manufactured for export in the Soviet Union. Neither Russian troops nor Russian arms played any role in its success in deposing the Batista regime, or in establishing its authority throughout Cuba. Cuban communists discounted and opposed the revolution until after it had succeeded.

Once triumphant behind the leadership of Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement, the Cuban Revolution was conditioned by two factors: on the one hand, the internal politics of the Cuban revolutionary coalition; on the other, the dynamic effect of American power and policy upon that Cuban struggle. It is possible, though very improbable, that the radical wing of the Cuban coalition would have secured its ultimate control of the revolution even if American policy had been more tolerant, more imaginative, and more helpful. But American policy was none of those things. As a result, so creating the fourth truth and contributing to the tragedy, American policy interacted with the politics of the Cuban coalition in a way that strengthened the radicals. It probably also pushed them much further to the left than they had originally hoped or intended to go.

Two contradictory features characterized the early American response to the revolution. The surface pattern of formal (though noticeably cool and reserved) correctness was interpreted by many observers as a tactical approach to some accommodation to the new circumstances. But beneath that veneer, and clearly discernible from the outset, there was a fundamental antagonism toward the revolution and its commitment to extensive but non-doctrinaire changes in the status quo.

Coming to dominate American thinking and policy within a year, that opposition presented itself in the rhetoric of anticommunism and the cold war. In turn, that ideology served both as justification for a hostile posture and as rallying-cry for strong measures. Undemocratic and arbitrary actions which on a much broader, more vicious level had been accepted and tolerated as routine under the Batista and earlier regimes were suddenly in a truly revolutionary situation advanced as proof that Cuba had become a Soviet puppet. And all Cuban moves toward controlling or nationalizing the powerful and extensive American property holdings in the island evoked similar outcries—and the first thoughts and discussions of retaliation.

In this respect, as in others, the American outlook on Cuba typified a general inability to

comprehend and come to terms with two aspects of revolutions per se. Americans gained neither understanding nor perspective, for example, from the knowledge that during the American Revolution their own Founding Fathers arbitrarily confiscated British and colonial property. And they overlooked or discounted almost completely the economic and psychological needs of poor countries. Those requirements could be met only through extensive aid or through measures of nationalization.

Just as a good many early American fortunes, *and considerable capital for general development*, were obtained through confiscation and other arbitrary measures, so in the twentieth century the new poor countries were prompted to employ similar devices. And neither the Americans in the 1770s (or the early 1800s), nor the Cubans in the 1960s, felt secure and confident about their respective independence until the economic power of their former overlords had been brought under control. But all such considerations were conveniently evaded through the device of explaining everything as the diabolical work of Cuban communists and the Soviet Union.

When initially advanced, and for many months thereafter, the stereotype of Soviet influence or control was grossly at odds with the facts. Yet persistently and subtly advocated by official American leaders, and crudely merchandized as news or expert opinion by the mass media, it became the accepted picture and explanation of Cuban affairs. American policy based upon and derived from that mistaken view produced two grave and tragic consequences. In Cuba, American rhetoric and policy weakened the moderate elements in the revolutionary coalition and simultaneously strengthened the radicals. They also pushed those radicals further along their own revolutionary path and into an increasingly close relationship with the Soviet Union. In the United States, such Cuban developments intensified the original antagonism, served as convenient if distorted proof for the a priori assertion of Soviet influence, and hardened the resolve to oppose the revolution. A momentum toward violence was thus established and sustained.

The United States first tried economic and political weapons to weaken and subvert the Castro Government. Then, after those measures failed, the United States invaded Cuba by proxy on April 17, 1961, in an effort to overthrow and replace that government by force of arms. The counter-revolutionary forces that waded ashore in the Bay of Pigs were financed, armed, trained, and guided in their operation by private and official American leaders. The action was a blatant violation of the treaty system that the United States had solemnly created to govern international relations in the Western Hemisphere, and a violation of its own neutrality laws. It was likewise a callous negation of avowed American principles by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (who was fond of using the rhetoric of idealism).

Those aspects of the invasion, along with other characteristics of the episode, heightened the aura of terror that was developing around American foreign policy. One of the most unnerving features was the extensive elitism that had become ingrained in the policy-making process. The assault on Cuba was conceived, planned, and implemented by a small group of men in the executive department. They opened no general dialogue with members of the Congress (even in private conversation), and expended great effort and exerted great pressure to avoid any public discussion or debate.

That degree of elitism, which goes far beyond the delegation of power and authority required to execute public policy, began to develop under President William McKinley. The decision to acquire all the Philippines at the end of the war against Spain was made by a small group of insiders; and military intervention in China was initiated by executive order. President Theodore Roosevelt dramatized the continuing concentration of power in the executive department with these arrogant remarks about his intervention to control the Panama canal route: "The vital work . . . was done by me without the aid or advice of anyone . . . and without the knowledge of anyone. I took the Canal Zone."

President Woodrow Wilson further extended such elitism during World War I: covertly changing policy on loans to the Allies, and intervening with force against the Bolshevik Revolution without

Congressional authority. In a similar way, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt maneuvered behind the scenes to aid England and France against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan (including the use of American armed forces) at a time when the American public was seriously divided over the question of becoming involved in those conflicts.

The requirements of secrecy during World War II enlarged the power of the men at the top to make decisions without general debate. The practice of informing a few chosen Congressional leaders of a policy just before it was put into operation was developed as a substitute for the kind of dialogue and compromise that characterizes meaningful democracy or representative government. President Harry S Truman used that technique in winning support for his program of global opposition to revolutionary movements at the end of the war. He likewise refined the technique of announcing and defining issues in such a way as to place critics on the defensive as men and women who seemed to be challenging traditional American values and objectives.

Elitism consolidated those gains, and took new ground, during the Korean War crisis of 1950–1952. The decision to intervene was made without public discussion. Women and men in their living rooms, as well as their Congressional representatives, were simply confronted with the information that Americans were engaged in combat against communists. The provisions of the Constitution were evaded by calling the war a police action, and, for the more sophisticated, by arguing that the Congressional commitment to the United Nations included an obligation to resort to force.

During those years, moreover, the Central Intelligence Agency enlarged its power and freedom to undertake various self-selected interventionist projects around the world. It deposed premiers, installed counter-revolutionary governments (and aided other such movements), and in all probability assassinated various men and women it considered dangerous or troublesome. The invasion of Cuba, in which the CIA played a major role, was but another—if a major—stride down the road away from responsive and responsible self-government in the United States.

That in itself generates terror. The kind of terror that Karl Jaspers implies when he speaks of the destruction which grows out of success, and of the possibility that tragedy can lead to decline rather than transcendence. Such terror became ever more omnipresent during the subsequent missile confrontation with the Soviet Union (which also involved Cuba) and the grossly unjustified intervention in Santo Domingo. Then came the deceitful and manipulative climax of the intervention in the Vietnamese revolutionary civil war.

That ultimate manifestation of the tragedy and the terror of American foreign policy began with encouragement to Ho Chi Minh as a way of defeating Imperial Japan. Then the emphasis shifted to helping France maintain its position in Indochina in order to be sure of French support against the Soviet Union in Europe. And to securing access to the raw materials—and the potential customers—Asia. Those commitments were deepened when the Chinese Communists won power. Grants of money to France led to talk about nuclear weapons and then, when the French were defeated, to discussions about how to contain the Vietnamese who would very probably use a free election to self-determine themselves out of the orbit of western capitalism.

The answer to that problem was for the elite to abandon elections. That done, the CIA agents became the new ward heelers. Then, terror of terrors, the acceptance of the philosophy that power and freedom erupt from the muzzle of a gun. And so a few experts became 15,000 advisors under fire in the field; and those mushroomed into more than half a million men, a bombing campaign that surpassed the air assault on Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, a chemical attack that destroyed children as well as vegetation and animals, and an appalling barbarism among young Americans. All in the name of assistance, reform, and self-determination.

Thus, even by itself, the elitism generated terror about what was done as well as about how the decisions were made. Such dismay was deepened by the elite's self-isolation from the nature of

reality, by its loss of the power of critical thought, by its exaggerated confidence in American economic strength and military might, by its own arrogance and self-righteousness, and by its—messianic distortion of a sincere humanitarian desire to help other peoples. Even the American public came more and more to be considered as simply another factor to be manipulated and controlled in the effort to establish and maintain the American Way as the global status quo.

Yet, in truth, the attitudes and the outlook of the public also contributed to the sense of terror about American foreign relations. For, beginning with the depression of the 1870s, an increasing number of farmers and urban businessmen, and even workers, came to favor and support American overseas expansion. Others acquiesced in the imperial policy as it was developed and acted upon. Many such citizens thought this expansion would improve their own economic condition, or strengthen the national economy. Another group wanted to strike a blow for freedom, either by blocking the expansion of European powers or by extending America's activity as a world reformer. Or both. And still others, caught up in the nationalistic or patriotic support for the government that is common in all societies, or perhaps sublimating their frustrations about life in America, provided additional support for the active expansionists. By the 1890s, therefore, most Americans generally favored an expansionist policy, though they might disagree about specific actions.

Beginning with the rise of Jacksonian Democracy during the 1820s, moreover, Americans steadily deepened their commitment to the idea that democracy was inextricably connected with individualism, private property, and a capitalist marketplace economy. Even the great majority of critics sought to reform existing society precisely in order to realize that conception of the good system. The small minority that wanted to change central features of the capitalist political economy or replace it with a new order, was viewed as an odd bag of quixotic idealists, ignorant dreamers, or dangerous radicals—or all three. And foreigners who had created and preferred a different way of life were considered inferior or backward—proper subjects for education and reform in the American Way.

Those two characteristics of public involvement in foreign policy were firmly established by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The general support for American expansion created, ironically, the power base for the increasing elitism among the policy-makers. And the antagonism toward other approaches to organizing society, and toward other value systems, provided fundamental backing for an anti-revolutionary policy.

Whatever the periodic outbursts of opposition to the basic strategy of expansion and intervention or even to specific manifestations of that outlook, the policy-making elite felt steadily more confident of being able to generate or manipulate effective support or acquiescence among the general public. By the 1950s, indeed, the ultimate touch of terror had appeared. Not only could the elite answer critics by explaining that it could not change course because of popular support for existing policy, but even the reformers within the elite believed and acted upon that reading of political reality. The political system was thus immobilized as a process of peaceful change.

Seen in historical perspective, therefore, what we are accustomed to call the Cold War—meaning the confrontation between the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China, between 1943 and 1971—is reality only the most recent phase of a more general conflict between the established system of western capitalism and its internal and external opponents. That broader view not only makes it possible to understand more clearly why American foreign policy has been criticized by conservatives as well as radicals but also provides a fuller grasp of the long struggle by China (and other nations) against being reconstructed as a part of the western capitalist system. It should also deepen our determination to break free of the assumptions, beliefs, and habits that have carried us so close to the abyss of thermonuclear war.

It is not enough to be more prudent, more flexible, and more efficient. We have now to cut to the

bone and scrape the marrow of our traditional outlook. Nothing is more painful or more demanding in human affairs. But we can take heart from the knowledge that such action is the source of individual self-realization and true national greatness.

Only a few Americans in positions of influence or leadership demonstrated that kind of bedrock courage prior to 1965. It was customary for such spokesmen, even when they recognized and described the difficulties, to call merely for more vigor and efficiency in the prosecution of traditional programs and policies. But Walter Lippmann repeatedly and patiently explained some of the root causes of the crisis in American diplomacy, and went on to suggest cogent if often unpopular alternatives. And a few other commentators such as James Reston wrote in a similar vein.

Another striking example was provided by foreign service officer George Frost Kennan. At the end of World War II, Kennan played a key role in developing the containment policy toward the Soviet Union and other radical movements. That policy was predicated upon the assumption that, because of its great relative economic advantage and its absolute monopoly of atomic weapons, the United States was powerful enough to force the Soviet Union to change fundamentally its entire system. But within a decade, Kennan so modified that unrealistic estimate as to call repeatedly and with some eloquence for an end to the rigidity and single-track diplomacy that he had done so much to initiate.

Senator J. William Fulbright has been even more impressive. Beginning in the late 1950s, he initiated a keen and sophisticated critical evaluation of American diplomacy from his position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His talent for asking searching questions and his ability to work through to relevant answers earned him a reputation as one of the nation's most perceptive critics of foreign policy.\*

In his vigorous and unqualified condemnation of the Cuban invasion at a top-level meeting held before the initial landing, for example, Fulbright revealed himself as a man of magnificent personal and political courage and as a man who grasped the full dimensions of the tragedy of American diplomacy. He flatly asserted that the proposed attack was morally, legally, and practically a grave mistake: certain to cause incalculable negative consequences whether or not it succeeded in its immediate objective of initiating the overthrow of the Castro Government. Fulbright also questioned the judgment of the proponents of the invasion in arguing that Castro's Cuba posed a serious threat either to the military security or to the vital national interests of the United States. But even if that argument were granted, Fulbright insisted that the means would subvert the ends of American diplomacy. And that was his key insight into the general as well as the immediate crisis.

Fulbright's powerful performance at the meeting on Cuba can be more fully understood against the background of his earlier analysis of the difficulties underlying American foreign policy. Writing late in 1958, he advanced his central points with unusual clarity and candor. "If there is a single factor which more than any other explains the predicament in which we now find ourselves, it is our readiness to use the spectre of Soviet Communism as a cloak for the failure of our own leadership." Quite aware of Russia's challenge to American leadership, and in no way disposed to discount or evade that issue, Fulbright nevertheless insisted that it was crucial "to ask ourselves some very searching questions." "We must stop thinking about these problems in terms of a stereotyped view of the world," he concluded. "We must abandon the clichés and reconsider all our assumptions."

He then acted to break open the clichés employed by the elite. The drastic escalation of the intervention in Vietnam undertaken by President Lyndon Baines Johnson through the winter of 1964-1965 generated a wrenching awareness of the tragedy and the terror of American foreign policy among a small group of students, professors, and concerned citizens. They struggled, through the tactics of teach-ins and nonviolent demonstrations, to dramatize the issues, to arouse the public, and to force the policy-making elite to open a consequential dialogue with the citizenry. Their efforts did arouse many students, but most others were slow to break free of the chains of tradition. The critics did not muster



the power to force a strategic confrontation with the elite.

Then Fulbright used his position as chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to launch a nationally televised inquiry into the war. The maneuver was skillfully conceived and beautifully executed: he pushed the issue into the daily experience and consciousness of the body politic and revitalized the essential process of serious, sustained dialogue. He forced the policy-making elite on the defensive (though their power was sufficient to mount an effective rear-guard action), he transferred his respectability to the larger body of critics (despite the periodic outbursts of violence that scared many citizens), and he gave other politicians reason to believe that their consciences might win votes (though that kind of confidence in the essence of democracy took a bit longer to materialize). It was a notable achievement.

Fulbright did not go on, however, to “reconsider all our assumptions.” That involves, of necessity a re-examination of the history of twentieth-century American foreign relations (and the relationship between foreign policy and the domestic economy). In proceeding according to that intellectual strategy we first confront directly what happened. We learn the ideas and the actions of the men who made or influenced policy, and the consequences of those events at home and abroad. Second, at the end of such a review of the past, we return to the present better informed. Finally, that increased knowledge and understanding may help us to muster the nerve to act in ways that can transform the tragedy into a new beginning.

For history is a way of learning, of getting closer to the truth. It is only by abandoning the clichés that we can even define the tragedy. When we have done that, we will no longer be merely acquiescing in the deadly inertia of the past. We will have taken the first and vital step in making history. Such a re-examination of history must be based upon a searching review of the way America has defined its own problems and objectives, and its relationship with the rest of the world. The reason for this is simple: realism goes nowhere unless it starts at home. Combined with a fresh look at Soviet behavior such an understanding of American policy should help in the effort to outline new programs and policies designed to bring America’s ideals and practical objectives closer to realization.

In the realm of ideas and ideals, American policy is guided by three conceptions. One is the warm, generous, humanitarian impulse to help other people solve their problems. A second is the principle of self-determination applied at the international level, which asserts the right of every society to establish its own goals or objectives, and to realize them internally through the means it decides are appropriate. These two ideas can be reconciled; indeed, they complement each other to an extensive degree. But the third idea entertained by many Americans is one which insists that other people cannot *really* solve their problems and improve their lives unless they go about it in the same way as the United States.

This feeling is not peculiar to Americans, for all other peoples reveal some degree of the same attitude toward the rest of the world. But the full scope and intensity of the American version is clearly revealed in the blunt remark of former Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson. He phrased it this way in explaining and defending the American program of foreign aid as it was being evolved shortly after the end of World War II: “We are willing to help people who believe the way we do, to continue to live the way they want to live.”

This insistence that other people ought to copy America contradicts the humanitarian urge to help them and the idea that they have the right to make such key decisions for themselves. In some cases, the American way of doing things simply does not work for other people. In another instance it may be satisfactory, but the other society may prefer to do it in a different way that produces equally good results—perhaps even better ones. But even if the American way were the *only* effective approach, the act of forcing it upon the other society—and economic and political pressure are forms of force—violates the idea of self-determination. It also angers the other society and makes it even less apt to

accept the American suggestion on its own merits. Hence it is neither very effective nor very idealist to try to help other people by insisting from the outset that they follow closely the lead and the example of the United States on all central and vital matters.

The same kind of difficulty arises in connection with the economic side of American foreign policy. The United States needs raw materials and other goods and services from foreign countries, just as it needs to sell some of its own goods and services to them. It might be able literally to isolate itself and survive, but that is not the issue. Not even the isolationists of the late 1920s and early 1930s advocated that kind of foreign policy. The vital question concerns instead the way in which America obtains what it needs and exports what it wants to sell.

Most Americans consider that trade supplies the answer to this problem. But trade is defined as the exchange of goods and services between producers dealing with each other in as open a market as it is possible to create, and doing this without one of them being so beholden to the other that he cannot bargain in a meaningful and effective way. Trade is not defined by the transfer of goods and services under conditions established and controlled largely by one of the parties.

Here is a primary source of America's troubles in its economic relations with the rest of the world. For in expanding its own economic system throughout much of the world, America has made it very difficult for other nations to retain their economic independence. This is particularly true in connection with raw materials. Saudi Arabia, for example, is not an independent oil producer. Its oil fields are an integrated and controlled part of the American oil industry. But a very similar, if often less dramatic, kind of relationship also develops in manufacturing industries. This is the case in countries where established economic systems are outmoded or lethargic, as well as in the new, poor nations that are just beginning to industrialize. American corporations exercise extensive authority, and even commanding power, in the political economy of such nations.

Unfortunately, there is an even more troublesome element involved in the economic aspect of American foreign policy. That is the firm conviction, even dogmatic belief, that America's *domestic* well-being depends upon such sustained, ever-increasing overseas economic expansion. Here is a convergence of economic practice with intellectual analysis and emotional involvement that creates a very powerful and dangerous propensity to define the essentials of American welfare in terms of activities outside the United States.

It is dangerous for two reasons. First, it leads to an indifference toward, or a neglect of, internal developments which are nevertheless of primary importance. And second, this strong tendency to externalize the sources or causes of good things leads naturally enough to an even greater inclination to explain the lack of the good life by blaming it on foreign individuals, groups, and nations. This kind of externalizing evil serves not only to antagonize the outsiders, but further intensifies the American determination to make them over in the proper manner or simply push them out of the way.

The over-all result of these considerations is that America's humanitarian urge to assist other peoples is undercut—even subverted—by the way it goes about helping them. Other societies come to feel that American policy causes them to lose their economic, political, and even psychological independence. The people in such countries come to feel that they are being harmed rather than helped. That inclines them to resort to political and economic retaliation, which only intensifies and further complicates a problem that is very complex at the outset. Thus the importance of trying to understand how the contradictions in American policy have developed. If that aspect of the problem can be resolved, perhaps then it will be possible to evolve a program for helping other people that is closer to American ideals and also more effective in practice.

But it is wise to avoid deluding ourselves even before we begin. "History writing," as Sir Lewis Namier has observed, "is not a visit of condolence." History is a mirror in which, if we are honest enough, we can see ourselves as we are as well as the way we would like to be. The misuse of history

is the misuse of the mirror: if one uses it to see not only the good in the image, but to see the image as all good. As Oliver Cromwell spoke to England, so history speaks to all men: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, consider that ye may be mistaken." The courage to accept that challenge is the precondition of winning even a chance to transform the tragedy into a new opportunity for great achievement.

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\* Fulbright is perhaps the best example of the enlightened conservative as critic of American foreign policy. My respect for his position does not imply agreement with him on all foreign or domestic issues.

**THE TRAGEDY OF  
AMERICAN DIPLOMACY**

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# CHAPTER ONE IMPERIAL ANTICOLONIALISM

## I. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EXPANSIONIST OUTLOOK

*Our people are decided in the opinion that it is necessary for us to take a share in the occupation of the ocean . . . and that line of policy be pursued which will render the use of that element as great as possible to them. . . . But what will be the consequence? Frequent wars without a doubt. . . . Our commerce on the ocean and in other countries must be paid for by frequent war.*

THOMAS JEFFERSON TO JOHN JAY, 1789

*A continuance of the present anarchy of our commerce will be a continuance of the unfavorable balance on it, which by draining us of our metals . . . [will bring our ruin]. In fact most of our political evils may be traced up to our commercial ones, and most of our moral to our political.*

JAMES MADISON TO THOMAS JEFFERSON, 1789

*The question is, whether small or extensive republics are more favorable to the election of proper guardians of the public weal; and it is clearly decided in favor of the latter.*

JAMES MADISON, 1789

*[Our success] furnishes a new proof of the falsehood of Montesquieu's doctrine, that a republic can be preserved only in a small territory. The reverse is the truth.*

THOMAS JEFFERSON, 1800

*We have just commenced exporting, yet the home market is even now completely glutted in many articles. . . . We shall be compelled to diminish our production unless a foreign market can be found.*

PRAIRIE FARMER, 1840

*We in the West . . . want the world's wide market.*

REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM WATSON

WICK OF INDIANA, 1840

*It is clear that much the most important factor in maintaining the commercial prosperity of the United States during the recent past has been its agricultural industry. It is further clear that if the commercial prosperity of the country is to be maintained in the future it must continue to find abroad a market for its surplus agricultural products.*

EDITORIAL IN *Bradstreet's*, 1880

*We are rapidly utilizing the whole of our continental territory. We must turn our eyes abroad, or they will soon look inward upon discontent.*

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN ADAM KASSON

*We are now on the threshold, in my judgment, of a development outward, of a contest for the foreign commerce of the world.*

SENATOR PRESTON B. PLUM  
OF KANSAS, 188

*A silver standard, too, would make us the trading center of all the silver-using countries of the world and these countries contain far more than one-half of the world's population.*

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, 189

America's traditional view of itself and the world is composed of three basic ideas, or images. One maintains that the United States was isolationist until world power was "thrust upon it," first to help Cuba, then twice to save the world for democracy, and finally to prevent the Soviet Union and other Communist regimes from overwhelming the world. Another holds that, except for a brief and rapidly dispelled aberration at the turn of the century, America has been anti-imperialist throughout its history. A third asserts that a unique combination of economic power, intellectual and practical genius, and moral rigor enables America to check the enemies of peace and progress—and build a better world—without erecting an empire in the process.

Not even Joseph Stalin maintained that America's record in world affairs was exactly the reverse of this common view, and for Americans to do so would be to mistake a candid and searching re-examination of their own mythology for a tirade of useless self-damnation. The classical ideas about American foreign policy are not all wrong: the United States did come to full, active involvement in international affairs by degrees; it has been anti-imperialist in some respects at certain times; and periodically it has consciously acknowledged various limitations on its power.

But those truisms do not offer much insight into, or much guidance for understanding, the dynamic nature of American foreign relations. It is both more accurate and more illuminating to realize that the successful revolution which began in 1775 and culminated in 1783 established the United States as a world power which sought and played a very active role in international affairs. The War of 1812 offers a revealing example of that strength. Although the United States suffered the embarrassment of having the Capitol in Washington burned, and failed in its grandiose objective of conquering Canada it nevertheless fought the British Empire to a negotiated settlement that secured American ambitions west of the Mississippi. Spain recognized the meaning of that victory, and in 1819 conceded without fight a huge strip of real estate extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. And in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Americans boldly asserted their claim to predominance throughout the entire Western Hemisphere.

The vigorous expansionism manifested in the Monroe Doctrine was only the continuation and maturation of an attitude held by the Revolutionary generation. Americans thought of themselves as an empire at the outset of their national existence—as part of the assertive self-consciousness which culminated in the American Revolution. Though at first it may seem surprising, when contrasted with the image of isolationism which has been accepted so long, in reality that early predominance of a pattern of empire thought is neither very strange nor very difficult to explain. Having matured in an age of empires as part of an empire, the colonists naturally saw themselves in the same light once they joined issue with the mother country.\*

However natural, attractive, and exhilarating, such a commitment to empire nevertheless posed a

serious dilemma for the Founding Fathers. Political theory of that age asserted the impossibility of reconciling democratic republicanism with a large state. Up to the time of the American Revolution, any rate, the British could remain ignorant of—or evade—that issue. Self-governing Englishmen never had to cope with the problem of integrating their conquests into their domestic social and political economy. Americans were not so fortunate, for any expansion they undertook immediately enlarged the mother country. Led by James Madison, they sought to resolve the contradiction between their drive for empire and their politics by developing a theory of their own which asserted that democratic republicanism could be improved and sustained by just such an imperial foreign policy.

Probably taking his cue from David Hume, an Englishman who attacked Montesquieu's argument that democracy was a system that could work only in small states, and from British mercantiles such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Mun, and James Steuart, Madison asserted that expansion was the key to preventing factions—themselves primarily the result of economic conflicts—from disrupting the fabric of society. Institutional checks and balances could help, and were therefore necessary, but they were not enough in and of themselves. Expansion was essential to mitigate economic clashes by providing an empire for exploitation and development, and to interpose long distances (and thus difficulties and delays in sustaining initial antagonisms) between one faction and the rest of the nation and the government itself.

Madison thus proposed, *as a guide to policy and action in his own time*, the same kind of an argument that the historian Frederick Jackson Turner formulated a century later when he advanced his frontier thesis, which explained America's democracy and prosperity as the result of such expansion. Madison's theory was shared (or borrowed) by many other American leaders of his time. Thomas Jefferson's thesis that democracy and prosperity depended upon a society of land-holding and exporting freemen was a drastically simplified version of the same idea. Perhaps Edward Everett of Massachusetts most nearly captured the essence of the interpretation and argument in his judgment that expansion was the "*principle of our institutions.*" In 1828–1829, Madison himself prophesied a major crisis would occur in about a century, when the continent had filled up and an industrial system had deprived most people of any truly productive property. His fears proved true sooner than he anticipated. For in the Crisis of the 1890s, when Americans *thought* that the continental frontier was gone, they advanced and accepted the argument that continued expansion in the form of overseas economic (and even territorial) empire provided the best, if not the only, way to sustain their freedom and prosperity.

That response to the crisis was not simply the result of a few imperial spokesmen imposing their ideas upon the rest of American society. Indeed, the industrial, financial, and political leaders of the metropolis who directed the new imperial thrust after 1896 had been significantly influenced in their own thinking by the agricultural and commercial interests that had pushed expansion for many generations. And, to an important degree, such metropolitans were responding as men who wanted to secure and consolidate their political control of the system.

From the outset, for example, colonial Americans had viewed the acquisition of more land as a primary way of solving their problems and fulfilling their purposes. That perpetual force for expansion (along with a more narrow possessiveness) contributed much to the campaign to drive the Indians ever further west, to the pressure to declare war on Great Britain during the winter of 1811–1812, to the determination to tear Texas and California away from Mexico, and to grab as much as possible of the Pacific Northwest.

Once a pioneer began to produce surpluses, moreover, he became a farm businessman looking for markets.<sup>†</sup> At any given moment, those who had just climbed that step on the ladder of entrepreneurial success sold their extra produce in the nearest village; and some never moved beyond the local market. Others, though they were larger operators, also relied on the domestic consumer. But tobacco

and cotton farmers needed foreign markets from the outset, and the number of food producers whose surpluses went abroad increased steadily after the turn of the nineteenth century.

By the late 1830s, if not earlier, a decreasing number of farmers knew who *really* bought their surplus production. It might go down the road to the town trader and be consumed by his friends. But it might just as easily be shipped to a larger trading center. Yet it could also fill the belly, or cover the back, or go into the pipe of someone in another country. The American agricultural businessman was being ever more fully integrated into the world capitalist marketplace, and he soon realized that he had to sell more abroad if he was going to prosper.

The growth of farm exports benefited the traders and shippers who had always been deeply involved in market expansion, and who had never hesitated to pressure the government for active assistance and protection. By the end of the Civil War, those two groups had developed an even greater interest in overseas markets for agricultural surpluses. Their concern was soon supplemented by the similar involvement of the processors of crude foodstuffs, the directors of the booming railroads, and the southerners who developed a rough cotton textile industry. The reasons were simple: the explosive growth of commercial agriculture in the north and west created a surplus of massive proportions. Beef and pork, as well as wheat, were soon streaming abroad in what seemed to be an always rising river of exports. And the recovery of cotton production re-created that traditional surplus at a time when new competitors had entered the marketplace. As for the railroads, they viewed the export trade as crucial to their profits.

The most perceptive economic and political leaders of the metropolis, men like August Belmont, Senator James Gillespie Blaine, and the editors of key business and financial journals, promptly recognized the implications of those developments. They realized that the farm businessmen (and those pioneers who were becoming such entrepreneurs) constituted a majority of the politically active population. That meant it was vital to provide markets for such agricultural surpluses if they were to maintain—let alone consolidate—the power of the metropolis. They also understood that such exports played a vital part in the functioning of the metropolitan economy, as well as in the life of the individual farmer. The wrenching depression of the 1870s dramatized those points, and awakened other metropolitan leaders to the arrival of a new day: the industrial sector of the economy would soon need such foreign markets for its own profits. Not only did some firms like Rockefeller launch campaigns to penetrate world markets, but agricultural exports were crucial in the recovery of the system from the depression.

Such awareness was intensified by the uneven performance of the economy during the 1880s (and the disaffection thus generated among farm businessmen) and by the action of almost every European nation to limit the impact of American agricultural exports on its own economy (and its social structure). The agriculturalists demanded vigorous government assistance to keep old markets open and to find and penetrate new markets. They agitated for the regulation of railroads in order to retain more of the market price as profit. They attacked aliens and other foreigners who owned land in the United States, developing their own grass roots version of the argument that the frontier was the key to prosperity and welfare long before Professor Turner offered his more sophisticated version of that theme.

And they became ever more vociferously insistent, and emotionally aroused, to force metropolitan leaders to remonetize silver as part of the nation's currency system. That action, they maintained, would open the markets of Latin America and Asia (the Chinese would be converted from rice to wheat), undercut Great Britain's dominance of world trade (in general, as well as in wheat and cotton), and provide an effective demonstration of America's power and right to lead the world into a new era.

From the point of view of the metropolis, the threat from the provinces and the needs of its own economy began to converge. A great many farm businessmen were in trouble, and if they voted



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