

PART II

**PLAUSIBILITY 1:
NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE**

A REAL SHAPE-SHIFTER

American Empire 1783–1944

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

—Jesus, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:14–16

For we must consider that we shall be as a city on the hill, the eyes of all people on us ...

—John Winthrop, ‘A Model of Christian Charity’. 1630

America is a shining city upon a hill whose beacon light guides freedom loving people everywhere.

— President Ronald Reagan, ‘Farwell Address’

And thus has suddenly arisen in the World, a new Empire stiled the United States of America.

—William Henry Drayton, 1776, ‘A Charge on the Rise of the American Empire’. (In Van Alstyne 1960: 1)

This chapter and the next make the case for US empire, from its very beginning at independence in 1783 up to the present. But our story begins much earlier with the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus told his followers that they were a “light” and a “city set on a hill,” endowing them with a holiness. John Winthrop, the first governor of the small Massachusetts Bay Colony, in what amounted to a early form of the tweet, appropriated this sanctity, telling followers on the *Arabella*, the ship bringing them to the New World, that the realm they would build would be “as a city on the hill.” That utterance is said to be the beginning of US “exceptionalism,” that is, the conviction that America was something sacred that emanated the holiness of the Sermon on the Mount. President Reagan, a Hollywood entertainer become Washington performer, continued this

exceptionalism, confirming that the country that sprang from John Winthrop's colony was indeed a "city upon a hill" whose "beacon light guides people." This chapter and the following address the question, What is this American social being that asserts a holiness to "guide"?

In 1776 the Honorable William Henry Drayton, Chief Justice of South Carolina, had an idea about this. Even before the fighting that would make the thirteen colonies a country started, Drayton had decided that they were a "suddenly arisen ... new Empire." Later, after the US had been around for a few centuries and there was some record bearing upon this possibility, the editors of *Life*, *Time*, and *Fortune* magazines in 1942 and scholars in their academic tomes (Williams 1959; LaFeber 1963; Kiernan 1978; Harvey 2003) declared the honorable judge had got it right—the US has a "new Empire." I concur.

But this chapter's argument is that America was an old, formal empire for two-thirds of the nineteenth century and then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, experimented with both formal and informal empire. To make this argument, let us situate it in the context of debates over the US's imperial status and explore what is meant by shape-shifting.

Empire Deniers and Shape-Shifting Empires

No imperial designs lurk in the American mind. They are alien to American sentiment, thought, and purpose. Our priceless principles undergo no change under a tropical sun. They go with the flag. (McKinley 1898, in Eland 2004: 1)

We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. (Bush II, 2004 in Eland 2004: 1)

US presidents occasionally deny any American empire, sometimes at awkward moments. For example, President McKinley declared that America's "priceless principles" precluded "imperial designs" as the US was invading and annexing Cuba in 1898. Similarly, President Bush II repeated this denial after he invaded Iraq in an attempt to make it into what certainly looked like a neo-colony in 2003. Many American political scientists rallied to profess their denial of empire, especially in the 1950s through 2001, when they either ignored or rejected the possibility of empire.¹ The US, they said, was "hegemonic" if it was anything (for a review of hegemony literature see Webb and Krasner 1989). States that were hegemonic were those that had global "control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods" (Keohane 1984: 32). A hegemonic stability theory was proposed, positing that financial and other sorts of stability de-

pended upon their being a single hegemon (Kindleburger [1973] 1986; Keohane 1980). This was the empire deniers' finest moment, because it released the US from the opprobrium of being an empire while affirming that it brought global stability. Thank you, American hegemon—"city on a hill"—for guiding humanity to peaceful stability.

Since 9/11 and the "city on the hill's" subsequent belligerence, scholars of all political stripes have begun to argue for, or against, the existence of US imperialism. Actually, at least one of the central hegemonic theorists recognized its possibility even earlier. This was Robert Gilpin (1981: 23), who insisted "a theory of international political change must of necessity also be a theory of imperialism," it being understood that any such theory included the US. Later on the right-wing historian Niall Ferguson (2003) reviewed the case for US hegemony versus empire in the foreign policy elites' preferred journal, *Foreign Affairs*, and came down on the side of empire. So even though empire denying is an enduring pastime among US political hermeneuts, there is reason to explore the legitimacy of such disavows. The following analysis shows how America was a shape-shifting empire from its very beginning. However, prior to making this argument the notion of shape-shifting needs exploration.

One black evening in an Arab village in the Chadian bush, we men and boys sat in a circle around a glowing charcoal brazier, speaking of hyenas, donkeys, dogs, and sorcerers. Feeling frightened in the immensity of the dark night, I told how I had heard the hyenas howling late, far out in the bush, challenged by the braying of the donkeys at the edge of the village, whose braying was answered by the village dogs barking from their places guarding the villagers' thatched huts. "It makes me feel safe," I announced. Old Umar thought a moment, as if weighing the effect of disabusing me of my comfort, and answered: "Not safe! The hyenas are close to the village. They are sorcerers. Evil things, they shift their shapes from men to hyenas. Cut into their stomachs, you will find the rings they wore as men." Donkeys braying and dogs barking were not sounds of reassurance but warnings of shape-shifting evil lurking in the darkness. "Shape-shifting," the transformation of social form, is frightening when something becomes something else again.

Shifting from sorcerers to states, recall that the historian Walter Nugent (2008: xv), in his *Habits of Empire*, concluded that America "has always been an imperial nation, and [remains] so, but the shape of empire has shifted over time." A curious amalgamation: America and hyenas, both shape-shifters, with the US shifting to different structural varieties of empire. Nugent (2008: viii) distinguished three shapes of empire: old, new, and old/new. His "old" empires are what we earlier termed formal ones; his "new" ones were called informal.

Formal empire, according to Nugent, occurred in the years between the founding of the US (1783) and the acquisition of Alaska (1867). It was a continental empire from the Atlantic to the Pacific in North America, instituted in certain ways along Roman lines. Next, informal/formal empire took shape more or less in the years after the Civil War through the Great Depression in the 1930s. Following a hermeneutic politics over what sort of empire fitted America, this imperial flexibility first led to the instituting of a formal, Caribbean and Pacific off-shore empire, and then to its abandonment during the Great Depression. Finally, a new shape of informal US empire emerged after World War II and continues through the present; it is discussed in the following chapter. The present chapter begins at the beginning of US imperialism.

“Calculated ... for Extensive Empire”

The American War of Independence (1775–1783), an expression of the dominator/dominated contradiction, began in the violence of terrorist groups like the Sons of Liberty (P. Davis 1996) and was resolved due to timely French military interventions in favor of the American rebels (Dull 1975). It resulted in a rare structural moment. Independence meant that American elites—that is, commercial elites in the northern colonies like John Hancock and John Adams together with slave-owning gentry in the southern colonies like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson—who were formerly dominated by British elites, were free to institute a new organization for the thirteen rebel colonies. Violence had granted them a particular agency and constructive power—that of structuring a social being. The question, of course, was what it would be like.

At this point an ideological inconsistency appears. On the one hand, the victorious elites understood their new state as something sacred. On the other, they were influenced by a prevailing, largely secular ideology. The US had gained its independence at a time when central Enlightenment hermeneuts challenged the view that reality was simply divine. Rather, they argued, nature was the product of natural forces, and that reason and science could help humans control nature, thereby giving humanity godly powers to achieve progress, as the title of Frederik van Leenhof’s book expressed it, in the form of *Hemel op Aarde* (*Heaven on Earth*) ([1703] 1704). The term “Founding Fathers” is commonly used to designate those elites who seized the structural moment and instituted the nascent US government in the 1780s in order to build van Leenhof’s Heaven on Earth. They were moved by an Enlightenment hermeneutic voiced by Benjamin Franklin, whose perceptual understanding was that the world was a place of

matter, which imposed the procedural ethic of choreographing the “power of man over matter” (in Kiernan 2005: 4). The problem was, what sort of government brought Heaven on Earth?

At its official founding (1783), the nascent US was a democratic republic. However, David Ramsey, a member of the Continental Congress from South Carolina, at an Independence Day celebration two years after the Declaration of Independence in 1776, mused: “What a substratum for empire! Compared with which the foundation of the Macedonian, the Roman, and the British sink into insignificance” (in Maier 2006: 1). George Washington, the first president, referred to the US in a 1799 letter to John Quincy Adams as “this rising empire” (1999: 321). Second president John Adams (father of John Quincy), wrote in a 1755 letter to Nathan Webb, a cousin, of his view about historical cycles:

If we look into history, we shall find some nations rising from contemptible beginnings, and spreading their influence till the whole globe is subjected to their sway. When they have reached the summit of their grandeur, some minute and unsuspected cause commonly effects their ruin, and the empire of the world is transferred to some other place.

Of course, a major question was, where would empire be “transferred” in Adams and his cousin’s times? “It looks likely to me,” Adams speculated, that there would be a “transfer” of the “great seat of empire into America” (1961, I: 31).

Other important Founding Fathers agreed with the first two presidents. Patrick Henry, one of the more radical advocates of the American Revolution, distinguished by his cry “Give me Liberty, or give me Death!” is less well remembered for his plea “Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire, we must have an army, and a navy” (in Tucker and Hendrickson 1990: 20). Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the Treasury, wrote in the first *The Federalist* Paper that the US was “in many respects the most interesting ... empire ... in the world” (in N. Ferguson 2004: 34). Thomas Jefferson (2004: 169), the third president, confided to James Madison, the fourth president, that “we should have such an empire for liberty as ... never surveyed since creation: and I am persuaded no constitution was ever before as well calculated as ours for extensive empire ...”.

These imperial *délires* were not kept a secret among elites. Rather, they were widely communicated, often by ministers or educators. For example, in 1789 Jedediah Morse, a Puritan minister from Boston, published *American Geography*, which sought to bring knowledge of the newborn country to ordinary citizens. Reverend Morse explained that the reason for writing his geography was that the United States “have risen to Empire,” so citizens should not rely on Europeans for knowledge of their own country

(in Van Alstyne 1960: 9). Hugh Henry Breckenridge, perhaps America's first novelist, educated readers through his various writings. At Princeton University's commencement in 1771, he recited a poem co-authored with fellow student Philip Freneau, "The Rising Glory of America." It promised a united country that would rule North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Seventeen years later, when that country had emerged, he told readers, "Oh my compatriots ... you are now citizens of a new empire: an empire, not the effect of chance ... but formed by the skill of sages. ... Who is there who does not spring in height? ... For you have acquired superior strength; you are become a great people" (Maier 2006: 1–2).²

Certainly there were revolutionary leaders, like Samuel Adams and Thomas Paine, who believed the US ought to be a democratic republic and nothing more, but the preceding has revealed a enthusiastic current of opinion among the founding elite that America should be, in Jefferson's terms, "calculated ... for extensive empire." Implicit in this discursive *délire* was the view that the Enlightenment ideal of Heaven on Earth could be achieved with an "empire for liberty." Jefferson seems not to have been bothered that the conjoining of empire and liberty was something of an oxymoron. After all, empires were, and are, places of domination, and those dominated lack liberty. However, as opposed to contemporary empire-deniers, the Founding Fathers were hermeneutically sealed into a *délire* for empire. They got their wish, as we shall see, in a formal, Roman shape.

Territorial Expansion (1783–1867)

American history from the Treaty of Paris (1783), when the British Crown and parliament formally granted the United States its independence up to the acquisition of Alaska (1867) involved territorial expansion, by military force or negotiation, from east to west against Native Americans or European imperial powers including Great Britain, France, Russia, and Spain.³

Why was there territorial growth? This might be laid at the door of a territorial hermeneutic of Enlightenment statecraft: perceptually, if there was a state to govern, then procedurally, as Tucker and Hendrickson (1990: 24) put it, "the fundamental rule of governments' was 'the principle of extending territories.'" Different presidential administrations instituted policies to expand, and to the degree they did so the territorial hermeneutic became a public *délire*. For the nonelite remainder of the populace this meant there was a procedural cultural message legitimating expansion. To explicate this message, note that in the summer of 1845, when the burning issue of the day was whether to welcome Texas into the Union, the popular New York paper the *Democratic Review* addressed the Texas issue by

urging, “It is time now for opposition to the annexation of Texas to cease” because its addition to US territory embodied “the fulfillment [sic] of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions” (in D. Howe 2007: 703). Manifest Destiny in this optic is an iteration of the Enlightenment hermeneutic that understood perceptually that “Providence” provided a “continent” on which, procedurally, Americans were to “overspread.”

However, there was a qualification to this expansionism. John Quincy Adams—eighth secretary of State and sixth president—was a cosmopolitan gentleman who had grown up largely overseas, traveling with his father, second president John Adams, on diplomatic business. John Quincy was not averse to the empire’s expansion in continental America, but he was reluctant to support US involvement in overseas wars and warned the young country not to go “abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” His fear was that if America did seek foreign “monsters,” then “she might become the dictatress of the world” (1821). John Quincy’s warning might be called the “John Quincy Adams Exception” to the hermeneutic of territorial expansion.

Expand the US did, though respecting, at least for a while, the John Quincy Adams Exception. During 1782 negotiations in Paris over the terms of new country’s independence, Jefferson, Franklin, and Jay demanded it include an area called Transappalachia. At the time, there were few colonists on this land between the western side of the Appalachian Mountains and the eastern bank of the Mississippi River. The Americans had not captured it during the fighting. It was only ambiguously part of the original thirteen colonies. Nevertheless, the American negotiators claimed these western lands, and in the Treaty of Paris the British acquiesced. Consequently, technically, the US territorially expanded even before it had a territory to expand.

Next Jefferson, a “pacific imperialist” (Tucker and Hendrickson 1990: 3) because of his policy of territorial growth by diplomatic negotiation, purchased Louisiana from France in 1803 in an illegal deal (whose corruption is documented in Nugent 2008: 63–69). This added a huge territory—23 percent of the current US—from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Subsequently, General Andrew Jackson ravaged the two Spanish colonies of East and West Florida, which led to the Florida Purchase from Spain in 1819. The same year witnessed the signing of the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain, negotiated by John Quincy Adams, which for the first time extended US territory all the way to the Pacific Ocean. The Annexation of Texas (from Mexico) in 1845 was followed by the Oregon Treaty (and the annexation from England of much of the Northwest) in 1846. The year 1848 saw acquisition of much of the southwest US and

California following war with Mexico, and in 1867 the Alaska Purchase (from Russia) was negotiated. By the late 1860s the US had achieved its North American continental core boundaries.⁴

A Roman Logic

This expansion occurred in a sequence of events that exhibited a Roman imperial logic. First, American settlers would move into an area. Next the area would be acquired. For a time thereafter the region did not have status as a full-fledged “state” in the US. Rather, it had a distinct legal and administrative institutionalization as some sort of “territory” and was in effect a colony, making the US a formal empire. At different times there were the Louisiana Territory, the Texas Territory, the Oregon Territory. More settlers would move into new territories from existing states in search of inexpensive land, replicating the governance structures of their home states.⁵

Settler colonialisms involve migration of imperial core peoples to the colonies, with the core migrants given preference for ownership of the colonies’ resources. Such colonialisms tend to be cruel (Wolfe 2006), as indicated by British Mau Mau troubles in East Africa in the 1950s, French predicaments in Indochina and Algeria during the 1950s and 1960s, and white repression in Rhodesia and South Africa through the 1990s. In the US case, settlers in the new territories found themselves in conflict with Native Americans.

After all, the land that settlers acquired was expropriated from Indians because the nascent US government continued the British practice of regarding Native American lands as *terra nullis*—free and ownerless. These conflicts led US military authorities to “pacify” the “savages.” By the early nineteenth century, due to depopulation from disease and earlier wars, Native Americans were only about 3 percent of the population (N. Ferguson 2004: 35). Additionally, they were generally poorly armed. So with the exception of occasional defeats, notably General Custer’s 1876 debacle at the Little Big Horn, fighting was calamitous for the Indians—a “holocaust,” according to Stannard (1992), of terrible mortality rates, removal from their lands, and concentration in reservations. Then, with the “savages” pacified and governance structures in place, the settlers would petition for statehood. Their petitions were eventually granted, and new states were welcomed into the country.

At any given time during the 1782 to 1870 continental expansion, the US consisted of an eastern core with settler colonies on its western periphery. As time went on, the core gradually expanded and settler colonies became fewer. Those familiar with the ancient Mediterranean will recognize that this process of expansion resembled that of the Roman Empire, which evolved from an original core around Rome by first acquiring territories

by either negotiation or conquest and making them into “provinces” (*provincia*, *provinciae* [pl.] in Latin) with formal Roman provincial laws and governmental apparatus. Over time Rome gradually incorporated provinces into the core by granting their inhabitants Roman citizenship. Consequently, at any point in time the Roman Empire was a core surrounded by colonies being gradually incorporated into a core (Le Glay et al. 2009: 312–313; M. Mann 1986: 254). In this way, the original US empire followed a Roman logic of formal imperialism, one that submitted Native Americans to holocaust, excluded women from the vote, and enslaved enormous numbers of blacks. It is time to begin exploring the extended reproduction of value in this empire.

Extended Reproduction in the Nineteenth-Century Territorial Empire

As defined earlier, extended reproduction involves growth of social forms; including that of an increase in value extracted. Territorial expansion facilitated extraction of value in a number of ways. For example, with regard to Transappalachia,

By the 1740s ... the lands over the mountains beckoned as investment opportunities for ... speculators or developers. Colonial governors ... Franklin himself and the movers and shakers of Philadelphia, the Livingstons and Jays of New York, Washington and other Virginia planters, even some investors in New England, dabbled and planned and chartered land companies of huge extent in the Ohio Valley. (Nugent 2008: 22)

Hence, by acquiring Transappalachia, Franklin increased his and other developers’ speculative *délîres*, allowing them to increase value extraction by increasing their opportunities for land speculation.

The Louisiana Purchase was more about the realization of value of agricultural commodities by Americans who used the Mississippi River to transport their products for sale in New Orleans. Value is realized when a product is sold. If products cannot be sold, then value cannot be realized, and a reproductive vulnerability appears. Jefferson recognized New Orleans’s importance for value realization when he said in 1802, “there is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market” (in Nugent 2008: 58). In October 1802, Napoleon closed the port of New Orleans to Americans, meaning their products could not be sold, nor value realized. How could the farmers continue if they could not sell their crops? Here was a true reproductive vulnerability. Jefferson fixed it by offering Napoleon a deal he could not refuse and buying New Orleans in 1803.

Jefferson had another reason for wanting to use the government to territorially expand. It had to do with overproduction and its effect on the realization of value. This was evident in 1788 in a letter to George Washington expressing concern about what would happen when the production of American commodities exceeded European demand for them—in other words, what would happen if they overproduced. What would occur, he suggested was that the surplus producers would “be employed, without question, to open by force, a market for itself with those placed on the same continent with us, and who wish nothing better” (Jefferson 2004, XIV: 328). In effect Jefferson was saying that one reason for the government to acquire territory was to find markets to address overproduction and thereby increase the realization of value. In the late eighteenth century Jefferson’s worry about this problem was hypothetical, but a century later it would not be.

Of course, the government boosted value acquisition significantly through the territory acquired. The original thirteen colonies’ territory of 360,000 square miles had grown ten and a half times to about 3,790,000 square miles by 1867. This expansion in the force resource of land was so great that it provided “unrivalled natural resources” (North 1961: vi). Land could be, and was, choreographed with myriad other economic force resources to produce enormous quantities of goods and services. In fact, “on the eve of the Civil War the United States had already achieved rapid and sustained economic expansion” and was “an industrial nation second only to Britain in manufacturing” (North 1961: v).

In return, growth in the economic system supported the governmental system by providing it with revenue—the force resource of capital—from various forms of taxation. The governmental elites used this capital to augment governmental violent force, among other things. A comparison of the military resources available to the US government at the time of the Revolution and the Civil War (1861–1865) indicates the extraordinary growth in violent force. The Revolutionary Army was an underfed, underarmed, ragtag organization that numbered 16,782 men at its largest. During the Civil War the Union Army enlisted 2,666,999 men (Weigley 1967: 42). Further, at that time the US government instituted the “first large-scale military application of three technological advances, telegraph, the railroad, and the rifle” (ibid.: 233). The Quartermasters Department’s water transportation expenses likewise point to the magnitude of growth in violent force. These expenses included purchase and construction of 183 ocean steamers, 43 sailing vessels, and 86 barges, as well the rental of 753 ocean steamers, 1,080 sailing vessels, and 847 barges (Weigley 1967: 222). US government violent force during the Civil War was on the level of large-scale, semi-industrial warfare.

In sum, the original territorial empire flourished in a time of extended re-production, during which the US governmental system grew the economic system with huge increases in land force resources while the economic system grew the governmental system with enormous increases in revenues that vastly developed its violent force. The two fused systems operated to acquire so much constructive and violent force that it seemed imperial America would never approach its limits. The US Leviathan appeared to be building an imperial social being with so much force and power that it would be unfettered from any contradictions. But this was not to be.

Old/New: Shape-Shifting Empire, 1870s–1930s

I am an exporter, I want the world. (Charles Lovering, in Williams [1959] 1972: 27).

Who would have guessed it: starting in the 1870s, imperial America began to experience a long-lasting toothach due to pain from jolts of contradictory distress. In response, US elites developed a situational fixation on this contradictory vulnerability and became involved in a hermeneutic politics over the shape of empire to be implemented by public *délire*. The elites in the politics in the six decades between the 1870s and 1930s became involved in experimental fixation, first proposing an informal imperial iteration; then instituting the beginnings of an old, formal imperial iteration; and just as quickly abandoning it. This time might be characterized as one when the US elites were shape-shifting Hamlets muttering “to be, or not to be” over which imperial iteration would choreograph fixes to the contradictory toothache. First documented is the toothache.

Overproduction

After the Civil War, Jefferson’s concern about overproduction became a reality. By 1870 the US was in the midst of rapid capitalist industrial growth, having achieved “takeoff” in the 1840s and experienced rapid industrial development (North 1961) by the end of the Civil War in 1865. It would become the world’s largest economy by the early twentieth century (Hughes and Cain 2010). At this time, according to the historian Walter LaFeber (1963: 407), “the nature of American expansion ... [began] to change. Under the impact of the industrial revolution Americans began to search for markets, not land.” These were markets where US capitalists could either purchase necessary raw materials for manufacturing, or sell agricultural or industrial goods. Markets tended to be beyond the bound-

aries of the US, hence “off-shore,” and were progressively more crucial to burgeoning US capitalism. For example,

By 1870 the American economy depended so much upon foreign markets for the agricultural surplus that the ups and downs for the next thirty years can be traced to the success or failure of marketing each year’s wheat and cotton crop. No matter how many markets could be found, more always seemed to be needed. (ibid.: 9–10)

By the end of the century, commercial elites were urgently expressing their desire for markets. A reporter in *Iron Age* stated in 1877, “As our manufacturing capacity largely exceeds the wants of home consumption, we shall have to curtail the same by shutting up a great many establishments or we shall have to create a fresh outlet through exports” (in Williams 1972: 47). Two decades later in 1898, the US State Department was aware of the problem reported in *Iron Age*, announcing, “It seems to be conceded that every year we shall be confronted with an increasing surplus of manufactured goods for sale in foreign markets if American operatives and artisans are to be kept employed the year round” (in Williams [1959] 1972: 28). The New York State Banker’s Association reiterated the problem in the same year,

Our capacity to produce far exceeds our capacity to consume. The home market can no longer keep furnaces in blast or looms in action. That capital may earn its increment and labor be employed, enterprise must contend in the markets of the world, for the sake of our surplus products. (In May 1968: 194)

The key phrase in this quotation is “our capacity to produce far exceeds our capacity to consume.”

Hence, by the 1890s certain post–Civil War economic elites in both the government and the economy had sensed a disjunction between production and the realization of the value of production through its sale. They had encountered the overproduction that Jefferson had worried about. “Over-production” is “a situation in which various individual capitals ... experience difficulty in selling their entire output leading to a general condition in which total output exceeds total demand” (Bottomore 1983: 358). It is a characteristic of over-accumulation because it occurs when there is “a surplus of capital relative to opportunities to employ that capital. Such a state of over-production of capital is called the ‘over-accumulation of capital’” (Harvey [1982] 2006: 192). Over-accumulation is a manifestation of a contradiction where the need to produce much to make profits leads to producing too much to realize good profits, as evidenced by declining rates of profit that indicate an enterprise is moving toward its limits of accumulation.

The long-running litany of complaints documented in the previous paragraphs suggests that by the end of the nineteenth century, US economic entrepreneurs sensed that over-production hampered their enterprise. Were their beliefs accurate? Duménil and Lévy (2004) collected information about US business from 1870 through the early 1900s and found that these years exhibited a declining profit rate, that is, an indicator of over-accumulation. Caught in contradiction, capital was reproductively vulnerable. US capitalist titans knew they had a toothache and situationally fixated upon it.

Hermeneutic politics over how to fix the vulnerability flourished. The Massachusetts textile tycoon Charles Loring captured the emotional *délire* of such a situation when he wailed, “I am an exporter, I want the world” (in Williams [1959] 1972: 27). To gratify such a “want,” Loring and other US capitalists had to go off-shore. Preston A. Plumb, senator from Kansas in the 1880s, showed willingness to assist Loring on the part of at least some in the political establishment when he said, “We are now on the threshold, in my judgment, of a development outward, of a contest for the foreign commerce of the world” (in *ibid.*: 20). Part of these debates concerned whether informal or formal offshore imperialism would or would not provide the needed reproductive fix. By the 1890s the debates were resolved in favor of a formal empire. Mr. Loring, the old Yankee capitalist, was to be given his want—“the world,” or at least a chunk of it. However, certain unintended consequences of the fix led to a retreat from the formal imperialism by 1934. Let us examine these debates. They will lead to a forgetting of the John Quincy Adams Exception and a new imperial ideology with an associated public *délire*.

Forgetting the John Quincy Adams Exception

US extended reproduction had thrived on territorial expansion. So the hermeneutic politics about how to fix overproduction led the US to more territorial expansion; this time overseas—“going abroad in search of monsters.” Critical participants in these politics were Carl Schurz, Albert J. Beveridge, Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, Walter Page, and John Hay—respected gentlemen at the highest levels of the US official and military elite in the late nineteenth century. Schurz was a popular writer, politician, and secretary of the interior (during the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes)—author of the patriotic credo “My country, right or wrong”—who helped conceptualize American attitudes toward expansion. He put the matter as follows in an 1893 article in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*,

There is little doubt that we can secure by amicable negotiation sites for coal-mining stations which will serve us well as if we possessed the countries in which

they are situated. In the same manner we can obtain from and within all sorts of commercial advantages ... [And] all this without taking those countries into our national household on an equal footing ... without assuming any responsibilities for them. (in LaFeber 1963: 201)

Schurz was clear. During expansion, there was to be no taking of “countries into our national household,” meaning there were to be no colonies. Expansion would occur by “amicable negotiation.”

Albert J. Beveridge was a senator from Indiana in the 1890s, another leading champion of US foreign expansion. He recognized that “American factories are making more than the American people can use.” Here was blunt recognition of US capitalism’s reproductive difficulties. He suggested a fix, declaiming,

Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours. ... We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing points for American products. ... Great colonies, governing themselves, flying our flag and trading with us, will grow up about our posts of trade. ... And American law, American order, American civilization, and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted, but by those agencies of God henceforth to be made beautiful and bright. (In Niall Ferguson 2004: 43–44)

Beveridge was proposing much the same thing as Schurz, though in more extroverted terms. He was imagining a global commercial domination—“the trade of the world ... shall be ours.” It would result from the setting up of trading posts. Beveridge’s “trading posts” are Schurz’s “coaling stations ... with commercial advantages.” But note that although Beveridge calls these trading posts “colonies,” they would be “governing themselves”—they would not be formal colonies. Schurz and Beveridge proposed a global empire where expansion would be achieved through “amicable negotiation.”

Admiral Alfred Mahan, celebrated for his insistence on the centrality of naval force in imperial states in his *The Influence of Sea Power on History* (1890), wrote about what to do if amicable negotiation was not fruitful. LaFeber, summarizing Mahan’s position, says he believed that

the foundation of an expansive policy is a nation’s productive capacities that produce vast surpluses; these surpluses should preferably be sold in non-colonial areas in order to lessen political irritations; and sea power in the form of battleships enters the scheme to provide and protect lines of communication and to settle the conflicts which inevitably arise from commercial rivalry, thus ensuring access to markets for the surplus goods. (1963: 93)

In this quotation, Mahan indicated that any “conflicts” arising during international trade should be addressed with “sea power” that would take

“the form of battleships,” the most technologically advanced violent technology of its day. In effect, Mahan recommended violent force to substitute for colonial administration as a means to “settle conflicts” in ways beneficial to US capital accumulation.

The following conversation between British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey and Walter Page, the American Ambassador to London at the time, gives a further clue as to how some elites imagined utilizing the US military. The two gentlemen had been discussing how the American government might respond to situations it did not approve of in Latin America. Their conversation went as follows:

Grey: Suppose you have to intervene, what then?

Page: Make 'em vote and live by their decisions.

Grey: But suppose they will not so live?

Page: We'll go in and make 'em vote again.

Grey: And keep this up 200 years.

Page: Yes. The United States will be here for two hundred years and it can continue to shoot men for that little space till they learn to vote and rule themselves. (In Niall Ferguson 2004: 53)

There is an authoritarian tenor to the ambassador's discourse about how to treat people in foreign countries. He will “make 'em” do things. Grimmer, he says the US will “shoot men” for “two hundred years” until they do the right thing. The thing they are supposed to do is “rule themselves,” but the tone of Page's language is that they had better do so in the American way.

Hay—the gentleman remembered for enthusing about the Spanish-American War as a “splendid little war”—had been Lincoln's secretary during the Civil War and later a diplomat and journalist who became President McKinley's (1897–1901) secretary of state. As secretary of state, he had to address the commercial rivalries the US experienced in China with more firmly entrenched, older European empires (England and France) and newly emerging Eurasian empires (Germany, Russia, and Japan). Hay's way of doing so was to offer in 1899 what became known as the Open Door Notes, which were policy protocols concerning Chinese trade. The Notes stated all countries should “enjoy perfect equality of treatment for their commerce and navigation” to “safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire” in order to “preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity” (Hay 1899).

The Notes expressed views like those of Schurz and Beveridge but went one step further, effectively taking these from the realm of mere *délire* and making them US government policy, public *délire*. China's “territorial and administrative entity” would be preserved. It would not be incorporated

into anybody's formal empire. Further, in order for any country to do business in China, there must be "perfect equality"—meaning "equal and impartial trade" for all countries—to Chinese markets. In fact, no other nation formally agreed to Hay's *Open Door Notes*. But as US government policy, the *Notes* were a public *délire* and a gauntlet thrown down to European imperialisms in the business of formal empire. The US would do without such empire by insisting on opening the door to free markets. William Appleman Williams argued in *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* ([1959] 1972: 50–51) that this Open Door policy has shaped US global economic policy since the 1890s. Fifty years later Callinicos concurred (2009: 165). The next few paragraphs will draw the pieces of this informal imperialism together.

In a 1900 speech to the US Senate, Beveridge enthused: "God has ... made us the master organizers of the world to establish a system where chaos reigns. He has given us the spirit of progress to overwhelm the forces of reaction throughout the earth" (in Lotta 1984: 172). Talk of being the "master organizers of the world" meant that American elites were forgetting John Quincy Adams's warning and going in search of monsters. In our terms, their discourse concerned an elite ideology to achieve a reproductive fix, one designed to bring Enlightenment "progress."

What was their ideology? First, as expressed by Schurz and Beveridge, the US, which needed to expand due to overproduction, would *not* do so by making a formal empire. Rather, second, expansion would occur via informal empire, by implementing the Open Door policy. Third, as voiced by Mahan and Page, if need be America would use its available violent force to support its enterprises' profits. The hermeneutic of this ideology was perceptually that the US faced overproduction, which procedurally should be fixed by informal empire.

Critically, this iteration of empire was "new," because although informal empire had been practiced earlier, it had been only a sideline to formal empire. Thus, whereas the UK practiced an informal imperialism in parts of Latin America, throughout the rest of the globe its elites worked to establish a formal empire upon which the sun "never set." Only some Yankees—Beveridge and company—imagined running a purely informal imperialism. Contrarily, however, imperial hermeneutic politics took other US elites with other ideas back to a future of old empire—at least for a time.

Old-Time Formal Empire (1898–1934)

Some American elites might have fancied new imperial social beings; but it should be remembered that during the last part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century the old empires were dominant, wealthy, and expanding, so they too had their attractions. Further, it was a time of in-

creasing rivalry between these old empires, driven by a series of depressions occurring in the US in 1873–1878, 1882–1886, and 1893–1897. Everyone agreed that the fix for the depressions was to expand external markets; and formal empires expanded markets the old fashioned-way, by adding territory through procurement of colonies by conquest. While the Americans might imagine an open-door policy, their competitors had been practicing closed-door policies as each empire tended, legally or otherwise, to exclude its competitors from its own territories. Alex Callinicos (2009: 152) reports that “European colonial possessions rose from 2.7 million square miles and 148 million inhabitants in 1860, to 29 million square miles and 568 million inhabitants in 1914.” By the end of the nineteenth century the imperial competitors had conquered most of the world with only a few exceptions, like Afghanistan, Thailand, and Japan. So by 1900, US capitalists found themselves disadvantaged in the search for markets. Otherwise put, they were having trouble getting their fix, according to the “new empire” hermeneutic.

Consequently, there emerged among some US elites a fixation upon formal imperialism instituted in violent fashion. One important member of this group was the young Theodore Roosevelt (TR), scion of the New York Establishment and Harvard University, where he was a member of the Porcellian Club, the most prestigious of Harvard’s exclusive clubs. TR allowed that “No triumph of peace is quite so great as the supreme triumph of war” (in Beale 1956: 40). Concurrently he insisted, “There is no place in the world for nations who have become enervated by soft and easy life, or who have lost their fiber of vigorous hardiness and manliness” (in Beale 1956: 40). Equally belligerent was his Boston Brahmin friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (also Harvard and Porcellian), who in 1895 announced, “We have a record of conquest, colonization and expansion unequalled by any people in the Nineteenth Century. We are not about to be stopped now” (Lodge 1895; in Williams 1966: 345).⁶ Here was an “old empire” hermeneutic politics. Perceptually it was a world in which there was “no place” for nations that had lost their “vigorous ... manliness”; further perceptually, the US had an “unequalled” history of “expansion”; so procedurally, that history of “conquest, colonization” should continue.

These manly elites, like Roosevelt and Lodge, in collaboration with war-mongering hermeneuts, most stridently William Randolph Hearst and his *New York Journal*, convinced President McKinley to declare war on Spain in 1898 over its colonial possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific. This conflict, the Spanish-American War, ended in a few short months (April through August 1898). Spain was humiliated and ceded much of the remainder of its empire to the US. Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and part of Samoa became American territory. In the years that fol-

lowed these territories were formal colonies of the US for different periods of time. For brief periods the US also ruled Panama, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic as formal colonies. Consequently, by the early twentieth century the US government was practicing administration of, in Rudyard Kipling's words, "new-caught sullen peoples, half devil and half child" (1899). Otherwise put, it was running an old empire. Here was a second iteration of American empire.

Old empire meant "gunboat diplomacy" (Healy 1976) and frequent US military intervention, usually naval involving the Marines, in both formal colonies and informal client states. According to one source, Washington "sent gunboats into Latin American ports over 6000 times" (Grandin 2006: 3). The Marine General Smedley D. Butler, who commanded US occupation troops during this period, remembered how closely the fighting was intertwined with the government system supporting the capitalist one:

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. ... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909–1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903. (1935)

Such interventions were especially calamitous in Nicaragua (1927–1933) and the Philippines (1899–1913). Indeed, the Nicaraguan insurgency led by Augusto Sandino, employing hit-and-run guerrilla war tactics, fought the Marines "to a draw" (Grandin 2006: 31). The Philippine-American War, conducted on a larger scale, equally relied upon a peasant guerrilla strategy. This conflict, according to Niall Ferguson, went through seven "phases of engagement":

1. Impressive initial military success
2. A flawed assessment of indigenous sentiment
3. A strategy of limited war and gradual escalation of forces
4. Domestic disillusionment in the face of protracted and nasty conflict
5. Premature democratization
6. The ascendancy of domestic economic considerations
7. Ultimate withdrawal (Ferguson 2004: 48)

Perhaps the key phase in Ferguson's discussion of the US's engagement in the Philippines is the seventh and last: "ultimate withdrawal."

Furthermore, although formal imperialism was intended to back capitalist business, it was costly for government. For example, according to William Pomeroy, "It would no doubt be safe to say" that in the Philip-

piners, “military costs of conquest, suppression, fortification, and garrison maintenance totaled at least \$500 million by the time an Independence Act was voted by the US Congress” (1970: 221). In 1901 Massachusetts Senator George Hoar—a Harvard University graduate and proponent of blacks’ rights and the vote for women—put the figure higher, at \$600 million (*ibid.*). The Old Imperialism was costly for frugal US elites.

Moreover, even as the US government found formal imperialism expensive, it was actually practicing the new, informal imperialism, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. Consider, for example, the case of Mexico. Greg Grandin reports, “In the years after the Civil War, both the US government and private US interests supplied arms and money to help Mexican economic liberals consolidate power and transform their country into a modern, capitalist state” (2006: 28). These “economic liberals” were, in the terms defined in the last chapter, the subject clients of their elite capitalist handlers back in America. Mexican clients working with

New York and Boston financiers bankrolled the construction of roads, rails, and ports, opening up the country’s rural hinterlands to development. By the first decade of the twentieth century, more than a billion American dollars had been invested in Mexican oil, agriculture, mining and ranching, as well as in public utilities like urban electricity. ... To continue to attract capital, the Mexican government cut taxes, allowed high rates of profit repatriation, and repressed labor organizing. (Grandin 2006: 29)

This was the new imperialism in action. It worked. American enterprise flourished in places like Mexico (J. Hart: 2006). Further, American capitalists’ operations there became a something of a model showing how to find overseas regions with accommodating elites, inexpensive labor and resources, and gratifyingly large profits.

Hay’s Open Door public *délire* was expanded in the early years of the twentieth century because during Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency (1901–1909), notwithstanding his attachment to “manliness,” the policy was extended from China to Africa (Beale 1956). During Woodrow Wilson’s presidency (1913–1921), especially under the guidance of Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, the Open Door policy became a way for US elites to imagine US foreign relations in all places (A. Griswold 1938). It was part of President Wilson’s Fourteen Points communication to Congress on 8 January 1918. This speech was intended to assure nervous Americans that World War I was being fought for a just cause and for postwar peace in Europe. Its emphasis on self-determination, both for colonies and for Russia, then undergoing the Bolshevik Revolution, did not sit well with Wilson’s old empire allies (Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of the UK, and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando of Italy). Consequently,

it thrust America into Great Power diplomacy at the end of World War I, issuing an American challenge to their old, formal imperialism.

Finally, during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR's) presidency (1933–1945) under his Secretary of State Cordell Hull, the Open Door policy, now conceived of as applying to the entire world, was championed as a way of helping US capitalists through the crisis of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which some thought had resulted from overproduction (Eckes 1973). This is because, as Callinicos explains it, Hull and those of a similar mind believed “the solution” to the depression

lay in constructing a liberal international order where US capital and commodities could freely flow and from which European Great Power rivalries had been banished. The key obstacle to achieving this objective lay in the protectionist blocs established by the other leading capitalist states and most notably the British Empire. (2009: 167–168).

Importantly, the Open Door policy implied an informal imperialism, where the US dominated not by creating formal colonies, but by having its superior capitalism control client states' economies. In the hands of FDR and Cordell Hull, the Open Door policy choreographed the confrontation with the older, formal imperialisms, a conflict made explicit in the Atlantic Charter (1941), an agreement between the UK and the US intended as a post–World War II global blueprint. The charter promised a global capitalist system for all, with all peoples afforded the right of self-determination (i.e., old colonies would be given their independence), with victors seeking no territorial gains (i.e., there would be no new colonies), and trade barriers lowered. What had happened to the Open Door public *délire* was the expansion of its window of authority. Originally, under Hays, it applied only to China. But TR, Wilson, and FDR expanded its applicability to the entire globe. It became the public *délire* that was imagined as able to solve the reproductive vulnerability facing the US and, at the same time, establish a global informal empire for Washington.

Thus, in the years roughly between 1898 and the start of FDR's administration, US elites received a progressive education—progressive in John Dewey's (1916) sense of “learning by doing,” which in terms of hermeneutic politics meant experimental fixation upon old and new imperial iterations. Capitalists, officials, and military elites spent time “doing” both the old and the new imperial iterations and, if the Philippines and Mexico can be imagined as exemplars of the old formal and the new informal imperialisms respectively, then the Philippines led to “ultimate withdrawal” while Mexico led to “high rates of profit repatriation.” So by the onset of FDR's administration and the coming of World War II, many of the Establishment would agree with what FDR told his son:

The colonial system means war. Exploit the resources of an India, a Burma, a Java; take all the wealth out of these countries, but never put anything back into them, things like education, decent standards of living, minimum health requirements—all you're doing is storing up the kind of trouble that leads to war. All you're doing is negating the value of any kind of organizational structure for peace before it begins. (In E. Roosevelt 1946)

Secretary of State Cordell Hull confided to the Japanese ambassador in 1941, in what was really a summation of the US experience with the old imperialism, “In the past we ... stationed some soldiers in central America, and left them there as long as ten years, but the results were bad, and we brought them out” (in Gardner 1971: 47).

Overview

Imagine a camera high in the sky, overlooking the New World and filming what happened between 1783 and 1944. The resulting film would show a rapidly changing US. Starting small, pinned against the eastern seaboard, it would first grow and grow, always westward, like an old Roman sort of continental empire. Next, at the end of the 1800s, experimentally fixated on overproduction in the youthful ardor of its “manliness,” it began a time of rapid experimentation with different shapes of empire: a first iteration, that of informal empire; a second iteration, that of formal empire; and a third iteration, back toward informal empire. An observer of this film might comment that the US was a real imperial shape-shifter.

This observer might also have noticed the presence of the Open Door public *délire* by the 1930s. Contemplate its implication by recalling how the founding father President John Adams speculated there would be a “transfer” of the “great seat of empire into America.” Now recognize the sheer audacity of US governmental elites just prior to World War II. Their Open Door public *délire* sought to impose an American way of doing business upon the entire world. After World War II, John Adams’ “transfer” occurred, and Washington became the “seat of empire” for the entire globe. That story is told in the following chapter.

Notes

1. Hardt and Negri (2001) on the left argue that empires are a thing of the past; advanced capitalism is organized both politically and economically on transnational lines, making states effectively obsolete and conflict between them a thing of the past. Elsewhere I argue that Hardt and Negri (Reyna 2002b) are neither correct nor incorrect, but incomprehensible.

2. Some might object that the term “empire” was employed differently two centuries ago. Those quoted referring to empire in the text were citizens, subjects, and often employees of

the British Empire. When they used the word they had in mind something like Albion's empire, which in our terminology is an example of a "formal" empire.

3. Nugent (2008) provides a history of US expansion from 1782 to 2000. Weeks (1996) provides a concise discussion of US expansion between 1780 and 1970. Daniel Howe's *What Hath God Wrought* richly describes US expansion between 1815 and 1848. Its bibliographic essay is useful concerning US growth during the entire period (2007: 856–878).

4. Tucker and Frederickson (1990) explicate Jefferson's contribution to the building of an "empire of liberty," especially with regard to the Louisiana Purchase. Remini (2001) discusses Jackson's warring and its role in the addition of Florida. Weeks (1992) considers John Quincy Adams and the Transcontinental Treaty. Winders (2002) can be consulted for questions of territorial expansion in the southwest, including Texas. Stuart (1988) details US expansion against British lands, especially in the Oregon Territory; and Jensen (1975) is useful with regard to Russian lands and Alaska.

5. Van Alstyne (1960) points out that it is inaccurate to insist that the young US went only west. As it drifted westward the US also went south toward Florida, the Caribbean, and Mexico; and north to Oregon, Washington, and Alaska.

6. Theodore Roosevelt is a complex case—part thug, part progressive. Edmund Morris's three-volume biography (2010) is good place to start to understand him.