

## INTRODUCTION

*Contending with the American Empire*

IN 1783, the year the United States formally gained its independence from Great Britain, George Washington described the newborn republic as a “rising empire.” He elaborated a few years later, as the fledgling nation struggled for viability under the restraints imposed by the Articles of Confederation and the constraints imposed by the European powers. America was but an “infant empire,” Washington conceded to his former comrade-in-arms, the Marquis de Lafayette. “However unimportant America may be considered at present,” he nevertheless predicted, “there will assuredly come a day, when this country will have some weight in the scale of Empires.”<sup>1</sup>

Washington could not have been more prescient. Yet it remained for the young Alexander Hamilton to capture the complexity of what would become the American experience. For the purpose of generating support for the new Constitution, Hamilton characterized the United States in the lead *Federalist Paper* as “an impire [sic] in many ways the most interesting in the world.” That it was, and that it still is.<sup>2</sup>

Little about the history of the United States is more contested than the question of whether it warrants the label *empire*. It took eight years of bitter war to liberate America from the shackles of the British Empire. To classify the United States with its imperial ancestor, let alone more recent exemplars and wannabes—the Germans and Soviets, for example—seems perverse, an affront to America’s self-identity as well as history. Former president George W. Bush is but one among many to scoff at the suggestion that the United States should be tarred with the imperial brush. “America has never been an empire,” he proclaimed indignantly when campaigning for the presidency in 1999. This denial was not enough. Bush added, “We may be the only great power in history that had the chance, and refused—preferring greatness to power, and justice to glory.”<sup>3</sup>

Allowing for political hyperbole, Bush expressed American orthodoxy at the dawn of the twenty-first century. A small minority did

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dissent, even at the height of the Cold War. One of the first books I read as an undergraduate was Richard Van Alstyne's *The Rising American Empire*, the title of which he took from Washington's words. Bracketing the Vietnam War era, William Appleman Williams spearheaded an interpretive school of the history of U.S. foreign policy developing the premise that in the United States empire was "a Way of Life" and a tragedy of American diplomacy. Three of his celebrated students collaborated on a textbook entitled *The Creation of the American Empire*.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the farthest most (although not all) historians and other commentators would go was to admit that the United States joined the "new imperialism" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this era the world's great powers claimed some one-quarter of the world's landmass as colonies; Queen Victoria added *Empress* to her list of titles. For the United States to be perceived as a great power by the British, the Germans, even the Russians and Austro-Hungarians, it had to behave like one of "them." So it did, by annexing Hawaii, conquering Spain's colony of the Philippines, establishing a protectorate in Cuba, acquiring sovereignty over the Panama Canal Zone "in perpetuity," and more.

But this burst of American empire-building was the exception that proved the rule—the "Great Aberration," as Samuel Flagg Bemis characterized it. After the clash of empires ignited World War I, the United States returned to normalcy. Every subsequent U.S. president proclaimed America was the enemy of empire. If the United States was denounced as an "imperialist," the fault lay with the denouncer. "We have no interest in conquering territories," explains former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, who holds a Ph.D. in history. "We have every interest in getting people to believe in their freedom and getting people to govern themselves. And those are inherently threatening." Niall Ferguson, who wishes that the United States wore the mantle of empire proudly, captures the national delusion best: "The great thing about the American empire is that so many Americans disbelieve in its existence . . . . They think they're so different that when they have bases in foreign territories, it's not an empire. When they invade sovereign territories, it's not an empire."<sup>5</sup>

Following on the heels of all the post-Cold War talk about, and protests against, "globalization," however, the Bush administration's

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military response to the tragic attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, a response that included the invasion and occupation of Iraq as well as assaults against Al Qaeda bases in Afghanistan and the ouster of its Taliban government, created a sea-change in perspective—and scholarship. Suddenly, an avalanche of writers rejected the mind-set that “America was the empire that dared not speak its name.”<sup>6</sup> “The American Empire (Get Used to It)” was the title of a lead article in the *New York Times Magazine*. Similar coverage appeared in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *National Journal*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Foreign Affairs*, and other diverse publications.<sup>7</sup> An article in *Foreign Policy* quoted an anonymous “senior advisor” to Bush as confiding, “We’re an empire now,” and pointed out that Vice President Dick Cheney’s 2003 Christmas card featured the question, “And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?”<sup>8</sup> Soon lining bookstores’ shelves were such titles as *American Empire*, *Irresistible Empire*, *The New Imperialism*, *The Sorrows of Empire*, *The Folly of Empire*, *Incoherent Empire*, *The Sands of Empire*, *America’s Inadvertent Empire*, *Among Empires*, and *Habits of Empire*. According to Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, the term *American empire*, which had virtually disappeared from common parlance, appeared more than 1,000 times in news stories during the six months prior to May 2003.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of these books, whether written by liberals or conservatives, blame the ascendancy of a small number of disproportionately influential “neoconservatives,” an amorphous group or cabal, for what the authors perceive as a misguided, counterproductive departure from, and violation of, America’s traditions and values.<sup>10</sup> Others, again liberals as well as conservatives, support or supported Bush administration initiatives because they maintain that “many parts of the world would benefit from a period of American rule,” but they lament that America’s traditions and values deter it from acting as the empire that it is. “Nobody likes empires,” writes one respected journalist who covered crises in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. “But there are some problems for which there are only imperial solutions.” As an “Empire Lite,” he complains, America cannot, or will not, provide them.<sup>11</sup> Niall Ferguson, perhaps the most prolific writer about and advocate of an American empire, ardently concurs. “Most Americans will probably

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always reject the proposition that the United States is (or operates) a *de facto* empire,” he writes. “Such squeamishness may be an integral part of the U.S. empire’s problem. To be an empire in denial means resenting the costs of intervening in the affairs of foreign peoples and underestimating the benefits of doing so.”<sup>12</sup> Most who consider modern American imperialism the lesser of the contemporary world’s evils nevertheless suggest that with a bit of fine-tuning, the United States should be able to manage an empire that’s just, and just about right.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this explosion of literature, the debate continues over whether the United States is an empire, is not an empire, or is, in the words of one of America’s most thoughtful political scientists, “something very much like an empire.” One historian is so ambivalent that even while arguing that the United States is an empire he insists on enclosing the word in quotes each time he modifies it with *American*. Another prefers the label *hegemon* because “empire does not suffice. It evokes a picture of colonies and spheres of influence that falls well short of describing the U.S. position.” Current president Barack Obama is purposefully obtuse. In an address specifically targeting the Muslim world, Bush’s successor would go only so far as to describe America as “not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire” and remind his listeners that “we were born out of revolution against an empire.”<sup>14</sup>

Whatever America is now, has it always been that, or has it changed over time? This book addresses these two most fundamental of questions. Its primary purpose is not to judge the American empire in terms of good or bad, up or down (although I do make such an assessment). Rather, it seeks to persuade the reader that America is and always has been an empire. Further, as I will explain, by historicizing six exemplary individuals who influenced U.S. behavior in a variety of ways, the book will not only chronicle the trajectory of the “rising American empire” from its inception to the present, but will also analyze what that phrase means and how that meaning has evolved. The definition of empire is no less dynamic than the history of American expansion. Appreciating the dynamism of both is essential in order to weigh the varying motives that drove American empire-building: greed and racism, for example, versus progress and protection. That appreciation is likewise essential in determining whether the American empire is and has been an “exceptional” antidote to truly “evil” empires.

Indeed, there has been one constant in the evolution of the United States, and it is suggested by this book's title. The American empire, regardless of what the term denoted and connoted at any given time, has always been inextricably tied to establishing and promoting "liberty" in the contemporary context. Further, the extension of America's territory and influence has always been inextricably tied to extending the sphere of liberty. The "core ideas that had led Americans to nationhood were the same ones that commanded them to seize the vastness of America and transform it in their images," recently wrote one non-American expert on American history. "First among these core ideas was the American concept of liberty. . . . It is what gave meaning to the existence of a separate American state."<sup>15</sup>

Perceived through the lens of America's ideology, empire and liberty are mutually reinforcing. Here again, though, the historian's perspective allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding. Prior to the ratification of the Constitution, when the viability of the new nation was highly precarious, Thomas Jefferson famously labeled the United States the "Empire of Liberty." More than a quarter-century later, however, after Jefferson had abandoned his initial optimism regarding the potential for the peoples native to America to embrace liberty as defined by immigrants to America, and having played an instrumental role in America's enactment of the Northwest Ordinance and purchase of the Louisiana Territory, the Declaration of Independence's lead author relabeled America the "Empire for Liberty." This book argues that Jefferson's revision signaled a commitment to a more aggressive, proactive extension of that sphere of liberty—and hence a greater American empire.<sup>16</sup>

Further, for Americans *liberty* is even more difficult to define than *empire*. Americans believe in liberty and they support the advancement of liberty, but they interpret the word so broadly, and in so many different contexts, that it all but loses its meaning. Were not both sides during America's Civil War committed to defending liberty? Do contemporary Americans on the political left or political right "stand" for liberty? In Hawaii I used to shop in the Liberty House department store. The branding was popular, yet meaningless. Near where I live in Philadelphia is a district called Northern Liberties. What does that name signify? When it comes to liberty, about the only thing Americans

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agree on is that it is good. Long before Paul Revere's ride from Boston to Lexington, explains a recent book, "'liberty' became a battle cry, a placebo, a panacea." So it has remained.<sup>17</sup>

Having disclaimed the purpose of evaluating empire, I am not agnostic. Nor do I seek to conceal my views. They are as follows: I appreciate the arguments that America has been a force of good in the world, that its ideals and values, especially those concerned with liberty, do have universal applicability, that its missionary zeal to modernize less developed areas can be beneficial, and that the pursuit of foreign policies and strategies designed to promote the security of domestic and international constituents is legitimate and necessary for any state. That said, my judgment is that by building an empire through either direct conquest or informal control the United States has frequently done evil in the name of good. I do not accept the proposition that some problems require imperial solutions, a proposition that leads to what a British historian, referring to recent American behavior, calls "the imperialism of human rights."<sup>18</sup>

In addition, I identify what I consider the greatest contradiction—and irony—in the history of the American empire. Through much of the nineteenth century Americans considered the word *empire* benign, not the term of opprobrium it became once the United States began to behave more like a traditional empire in the decades following the Civil War, the touchstone for Bemis's "aberration" and Williams's "tragedy." The means by which the United States expanded across the continent may at times have appeared unsavory to observers within and beyond Washington. The prevalent opinion was, nevertheless, that Americans goals and motives were consistently benevolent or defensive, not imperialistic. (The concept of imperialism, initially associated with France's Napoleon III and Benjamin Disraeli in England, did not come into vogue until the late nineteenth century.) Yet it was precisely during the earlier years—the century preceding America's annexation of Hawaii and conquest of the Philippines, that the United States was most ruthless in creating its empire and least respectful of non-Americans' (even if they were Native Americans) liberty. Those who criticize America's current empire-builders for violating U.S. history have it wrong.

What complicates the history of the American empire, and adds further irony to that history, is, like *liberty*, the ambiguous meaning

of the word. In fact, Americans became increasingly defensive about their “status” as an empire after, combining force (primarily) and diplomacy (secondarily), they acquired uncontested political control—sovereignty—across the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson proudly juxtaposed America with empire. That was the norm until after the Civil War. But then the ethos, or at least the rhetoric, began to change. William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson recognized the baggage that accompanied the term. By their time Americans had divided between anti-imperialists and imperialists. And only very recently did George Bush vehemently deny that the United States ever was an empire. Scholars have had to grapple with this dynamic even as they seek to distinguish “empire” from “hegemon,” “great power,” and other terms that frequently serve as euphemisms for empire and generate less emotion and controversy.

*Empire*, as a noun, was value-free at the time the United States gained its independence. While its precise definition is elusive because of the problem of translation, it derived from the Latin *imperium*, which in English approximates the words *rule* and *sovereignty*. Hence its definition was functional or instrumental. Greeks used it to describe the relationship between the city-states that united to oppose the Persians (who also comprised an entity called an empire). But Athens exercised leadership over its fellow city-states; it did not really rule them. Consequently, empire gained greater currency during the Roman era. Indeed, the first century AD, following Augustus’s defeat of Marc Anthony at Actium, constitutes a watershed in the evolution of the concept of empire. To borrow Michael Doyle’s phrase, this period was the “Augustan Threshold.” Augustus implemented a range of administrative reforms that centralized the imperial state. Cities, provinces, the army, government appointees, economic decision-making, and other functions all came under the control of the emperor. So did citizenship—in the second century AD, Augustus’s successor Caracalla proclaimed all “free men” within the empire to be Roman citizens. Transcending the limited concepts of sovereignty and rule, the Roman Empire incorporated administrative centralization and political integration.<sup>19</sup>

Centralization and integration are distinct from equalization—equality. Class and regional (ethnic/national) differences remained.

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This fundamental feature of empire is of critical significance to the history of empires. It was likewise of critical significance to Rome, especially after “empire” in the later Roman era came to envelope another dimension—size. This addition produced a combustible amalgam of centralized control, class and regional inequality, and an expansiveness that created the conditions for the Roman Empire’s fragmentation and collapse. Its fate notwithstanding, the Roman Empire’s experience explains the definition of empire inherited by the British, especially following their defeat of the French in the eighteenth century. Americans, “classically educated and self-consciously looking backward,” as well as contributors to the growth of the British Empire, embraced this definition at the time of their War of Independence. When George Washington used the word *empire*, he meant a polity that exercised sovereignty over and was responsible for the security of a large expanse of territory that, composed of previously separate units now subordinate to the metropolis (thus distinguishing an empire from, for example, a commonwealth or even an alliance), included many peoples of diverse “races” (as broadly defined at that time) and nationalities. As would be expected because of violence’s historic role in the establishment of empires, not all the people within the heterogeneous population could qualify as citizens, not all were equal, not all could or would assimilate, and not all consented to the rule of the sovereign.<sup>20</sup>

There is thus merit to Arthur Schlesinger’s argument that Washington and his fellow Founding Fathers used *empire* interchangeably with *state*.<sup>21</sup> But their use of *empire* was not due simply to their desire for a synonym. They had ambitions that went beyond consolidation and were signaled by the word *empire*. They had in mind a particular “genre” of state that would grow in size, strength, and prosperity, exercise control over populations that either considered themselves autonomous or resided beyond America’s political boundaries (a consensus had not yet been reached on how this control would be achieved and exercised), and possess a centralized government (again, how centralized was hotly debated). Further, theorists of empires and political leaders normatively thought of empires as land-based entities that acquired additional territory through the formal annexation of conquered territories administered as colonies. The Founding Fathers conceived of the United States even in its infancy as expanding

prodigiously—certainly across the North American continent, perhaps southward to Cuba and beyond. Under the Articles of Confederation Congress enacted the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 to prepare for this eventuality. Americans did not consider war-making against the Indians conquest, however, and to them the establishment of colonies was anathema. Hence from its birth America would indeed be a “most interesting” empire.

The meaning of empire changed over the course of the nineteenth century, especially by its latter half. Until then its definition remained primarily functional, with the emphasis on the exercise of governance. In this anodyne sense there was little reason to associate empire with anything pejorative. Americans did not, even as they annihilated or forcibly relocated Native Americans, executed foreign nationals, and conquered territories. This was because *empire* and *state* were still largely synonymous, and U.S. behavior was acceptable for a state with its capabilities; because U.S. expansion remained continental and restricted to contiguous territory (in the view of many, as a consequence, “natural”) with the purpose of bringing civilization to what was perceived as wilderness; because empires were commonplace features of the international system (what nation did not aspire to be an empire?); and because there were few audible voices of opposition or protest. That the U.S. Constitution required the incorporation of added territory as states, and the populations of these states were invariably eager to apply for membership, reinforced the consensus that Americans should be proud of their empire.

The Civil War and the occupation of the Southern states during Reconstruction served as a catalyst for changing views about empire. Contesting the meaning of liberty, white Americans as well as black, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and others challenged the central government’s authority to deny them self-rule. The implications transcended traditional disputes over federalism, republicanism, and states’ rights. Further, the extension of the British Empire through the exploitation of its commercial dominance to acquire political jurisdiction without establishing colonies, for example in Asia and Latin America, indicated that a metropolis could exercise rule informally. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that scholars, following John A. Gallagher and Ronald E. Robinson, began to use the phrase

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*imperialism of free trade*. In the late nineteenth century, nevertheless, imperialism as a stand-alone concept dramatically entered the political vocabulary.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to empire, imperialism refers to a process by which one state employs instruments of power to acquire control over peripheral peoples and territory. This process may result in the extension of liberty for some (for example, the liberty to attain more wealth and power), but the loss of others' liberty is unavoidable. As such, from the beginning *imperialism* was a much more value-laden term than *empire*, freighted with negative weight. There is no euphemistic substitute. What is more, no sooner did the concept of imperialism originate than it spawned competing theories to explain its origins. The dominant ones tied the word to militarism, the selfishness and greed of special interests, or the requisites of rapacious monopoly capitalism. Advocates of American expansion in the late nineteenth century consequently were not "merely" empire-builders. They were imperialists. And they generated opposition not only among subject peoples, but also from Americans themselves. The key debate, as one historian frames it, was whether American imperialism resulted from "the conscious choices of statesmen . . . or [was] the inevitable result of the industrial capitalist political economy and social structure."<sup>23</sup>

That the American empire was imperialistic in the nineteenth century was not disputed then or now. No one doubts that the acquisition of such far-flung noncontiguous territories as Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Panama, none of which at the time was considered by virtually any American as qualified for statehood, fit the definition of imperial behavior. The two questions are whether the United States "practiced" imperialism during its more formative decades and whether it continued to behave imperialistically as the twentieth century wore on and *imperialist* became such a widely applied adjective that it lost much of its meaning.

Because the connotation of *empire* underwent change that can be correlated to the origins of *imperialism*, the answer to both questions is yes. The United States fit even the most restricted definition of empire by the outbreak of the Civil War. It exercised sovereignty over a large expanse of territory that enveloped previously autonomous units and included peoples of disparate races and national origins whose

residence within that empire was not voluntary. Further, at least its continental expansion was the product of violence. Antebellum Americans used the word *empire* to describe the United States as a sovereign state. But that sovereign state grew by wresting away the sovereignty of non-American, indigenous populations, just as had the more traditional “Old World” empires of that day. This was not an Empire for Liberty.<sup>24</sup>

More open to debate is whether subsequent to World War I (the United States acquired formal control of the Virgin Islands in 1917), America continued to rank as an empire. While George W. Bush probably is unaware that the literal definition of empire derived from *imperium*, he surely recalls the orthodoxy he learned in grade school: empire-building requires the conquest and colonization of alien territory. America, in contrast, fought two wars in the twentieth century to defeat empires bent on conquest. Indeed, whether represented by Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Franklin Roosevelt’s Atlantic Charter, or the body of Cold War rhetoric, the United States has stood for anticolonialism.

Yet twentieth-century scholarship such as Gallagher and Robinson’s on the “imperialism of free trade” demands a more expansive definition of empire. Focusing on the British experience, they and others afterward argued that the latter part of the nineteenth century did not constitute an era of “new imperialism.” It was imperialism by other means. The concept of new imperialism suggested that the colonization of Africa, the most notorious example, represented a return to the imperialism characteristic of the European empires from the Age of Exploration through the Napoleonic Wars. This periodization, however, required defining imperialism and the resultant empire as the acquisition of formal control of one people over another. This is the limited definition identified with William Langer—and it characterizes the antebellum American experience. The more expansive definition popularized by Gallagher and Robinson posits that the acquisition of informal control—through trade arrangements, political mechanisms, and the like—is no less “imperialistic” (even if indigenous collaborators facilitate the acquisition). By this definition, “The U.S.A. had something that should rank as an empire long before it became fashionable to talk about one.”<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, by this definition the United States remained an empire following World War I. The operative principle is the exercise of effective

control. Effective control can result from assuming various functions of government, such as the collection of customs and taxes; participating in treaty systems that deny sovereignty to a nation; orchestrating trade agreements that create the dependency of one nation on the other; deploying military forces directly or taking on the responsibility for the training and supplying of indigenous armed sources of control; and dominating cultural institutions (which is more difficult to achieve than many have suggested). The form is less important than its power. The barometer is whether the external influence can shape the lives of the native population in such a way that it molds the population's politics. Throughout the twentieth century the United States effectively exercised control of national politics in the states of the Caribbean and Latin America, the Pacific and Asia, the Middle and Near East, Africa, and to some extent even Europe. In certain cases one can argue that the nation America controlled benefited, and that America has not always profited. Yet these were all imperial relationships that impinged on people's liberties.

The empire that America constructed in the twentieth century is the most powerful empire in world history. Its rival Soviet empire, and its antecedent British Empire, pale in comparison. Its global leadership, when measured in terms of technological innovation, manufacturing, gross domestic product, or any other frame of reference, far eclipses all competitors. Its military superiority is breathtaking, and it continues to grow. It has assembled institutions—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the Organization of American States, the World Trade Organization, and more—that provide potent mechanisms for global management. Arthur Schlesinger, for decades a vigorous critic of William Appleman Williams and likeminded theorists of America's empire, asks, "Who can doubt that there is an American empire?—an 'informal' empire, not colonial in polity, but still richly equipped with imperial paraphernalia: troops, ships, planes, bases, procounsuls, local collaborators, all spread wide around the luckless planet?" Who can doubt indeed?<sup>26</sup>

As Schlesinger implies, when it comes to empires one size does not fit all. Empires reflect a mix of formal and informal, direct and indirect rule, and that mix differs. Whether the empire is essentially land-based or commercial and transoceanic affects this mix. An equally

robust variable is the structure of the empire, whether its basis is primarily iron-fisted hard power (military, sometimes economic) or less coercive soft power (ideology, culture, expertise, even language).<sup>27</sup> Related to this structure, but again to differing degrees, empires can be either “multicultural” or “homogenizing.” In the former, the governing elite of the dominating metropole makes little effort to change the languages, religions, rituals, and other “habits of the heart” of the diverse national and ethnic constituents that comprise the empire. The British Empire is a modern example. Homogenizing empires, conversely, seek to establish an all-inclusive national identity. The U.S. metaphor of the melting pot, or Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous “crucible of the frontier,” illustrates this type.<sup>28</sup>

No two empires in history are identical, and the American empire is like none other. The reasons include but transcend America’s refusal to consider itself an empire, and for that matter, its power and reach. One of its peculiarities is that because so rarely in U.S. history has it been willing to pay the price of empire as measured in human lives, administrative costs, and ideological “contamination,” once Americans acquired control over the territories of North America, they preferred indirect rule. For example, even as the United States agreed to serve as the temporary “trustee” for former Japanese or Germany territories after World War II, it “liberated” the Philippines. Moreover, with a small percentage of U.S. citizens choosing to live abroad (and of these three-fourths live in Mexico, Canada, or Europe), America is an “empire without settlers.”<sup>29</sup>

It follows, therefore, that not only is the United States an imperialist with a history of opposing imperialism, but it has also experienced an unprecedented amount of trouble imposing its will on its dependents. In part this difficulty inheres in the informal nature of its domination; in part it is a function of its lack of international population and institutions; and in part it evolves from America’s reluctance to look like an empire. At least as salient, however, is Americans’ self-image as the bastion of liberty and their identification with the Constitution and historic struggle to strike the proper balance between central government and states’ rights. To borrow from David Hendrickson, America projected its domestic system onto the international arena.<sup>30</sup>

As a consequence, despite having built its empire on a foundation of military might and a combination of trade, loans, and investment,

America has rarely flexed its military and economic muscle fully. In many instances, moreover, it has sought to present at least the appearance of encouraging consultation and dissent. That Americans do genuinely value liberty as an ideal deters them from imposing, or exercising, the degree of political control that they could have. Until the dawn of the twenty-first century, the United States preferred the status of being but the first among equals. Ironically, although former president George Bush may prove to be the most vigorous denier of an American empire among all U.S. presidents, he was forced to issue so many denials because among all U.S. presidencies he acted the most imperially in the classical sense.

Bush illustrates that the American empire developed into what it is today because individuals make—or made—choices. This is not to play down the power of broad political, economic, social, and cultural forces at the national and international levels. But when one sifts through the multiple influences that are the stuff of history, one ends up with individuals who choose to do one thing and not another. That is a crucial ingredient of contingency. Blessed with abundant natural resources and exceptional geopolitical assets, the likelihood that American would grow in size and power was great from the start. Because certain individuals made certain choices, nevertheless, it grew in a certain manner and with certain consequences. From this perspective the story this book tells is an American story. The American system provides its leadership with the political space not only to make choices but to act on the choices leaders make.

The following chapters will historicize and contextualize six American leaders whose choices affected the growth of the American empire and whose lifetimes span America's history. Readers will doubtless quarrel with the selection. Not all were primary decision-makers. None were presidents, with the exception of one, whose single term in the White House was of marginal significance compared to his prior and subsequent careers. The priorities and programs of presidents will figure prominently in the narrative. Still, too often America's chief executive receives undue credit—and blame—for initiatives undertaken during his administration. The individuals on whom this book focuses were (or are) exceptional in who they were and what they achieved. But they were not unique. They represent attitudes toward,

and visions of, the American empire that were grounded in a specific time and environment. Further, they debated other representative Americans whose attitudes and visions differed.

At the core of these debates were questions about how the United States should behave within the constellation of domestic and global actors to promote its national interests (which often included the pursuit of a contested sense of American “mission”) while at the same time preserving and frequently expanding a particular definition of individual and collective liberty. These debates expose the fissures in the respective contemporary political cultures even as they illuminate those political cultures. Neither the formulation nor implementation of U.S. foreign policy is democratic. Only an elite few get a “vote.” But neither are they conspiratorial. Without broad public support, policies are unlikely to succeed. By their rhetoric and by their actions, these individuals gave voice to the values and aspirations of the many who remained silent, thereby shaping both politics and policies. As a consequence, they played pivotal roles in shaping the course of the American empire.

I did not hesitate to choose Benjamin Franklin as the individual with whom to begin. He was the “foremost believer in an expanding American empire,” writes one scholar. According to another, Franklin articulated the “first conscious and comprehensive formulation of ‘Manifest Destiny.’” At the same time, yet for intellectually consistent reasons, he was counterintuitively reluctant to break free from Britain’s imperial shackles. Franklin personified the link between the two empires and expressed elegantly and explicitly the principles of reciprocity vital for an empire to function effectively—and virtuously.<sup>31</sup>

Franklin thought longer and deeper about the relations between individuals and governments, and governments and governments, and security and liberty, than any principal player at the time that America achieved its independence. An avid proponent of landed expansion, he forcefully argued the “American” case for the British acquiring Canada, not Guadeloupe, after the Great War for Empire. Yet born in Boston and escaping to Philadelphia, Franklin is inextricably linked to these commercial and later industrial centers. His sympathy for Jefferson’s agrarian ideal and Hamilton’s promotion of a strong central government reflects American’s continuing effort to resolve the

difficulty of democratic management of an ever-growing empire. This issue bedeviled each of the individuals in this book as they sought to reconcile liberty, stability, and security.

It certainly bedeviled John Quincy Adams, by most accounts the outstanding secretary of state in American history and peerless exponent of America's mission to expand the sphere of liberty. Schooled in international relations at his father's knee during the War of Independence, Adams matured politically and intellectually during the initial years of the American Republic. He observed America's vulnerability as it struggled against the British Empire after gaining independence, he won election to the U.S. Senate the year before Thomas Jefferson orchestrated the Louisiana Purchase, and he was a member of the negotiating team that reached an accord at Ghent to end the War of 1812. As secretary of state in 1819, Adams exploited Andrew Jackson's misbehavior in Florida to conclude the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain. Among the greatest triumphs of any U.S. diplomat, it gave the United States title to East and West Florida, established a western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, and provided the United States with a claim to the Northwest Territory equal to that of the British. In 1823 Adams authored the Monroe Doctrine, described by Williams as "the manifesto for the American empire."<sup>32</sup>

Yet no one was more ardent in insisting that America's had to be an empire of, albeit not an empire for, liberty. Not only did Adams turn his back on what he judged an empire of slavery, but he also came to oppose the very expansion he had so strenuously advocated. Further, it was Adams who pronounced that Americans must not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, regardless of their sympathies for "freedom fighters." Literally up until the time of his death, Adams personified the paradoxical America's relationship with both empire and liberty.

While William Seward has received less scholarly attention than Adams, he is almost his equal in his contribution to the design of the American empire and—at least initially—his devotion to liberty. Seward also detested slavery, and he joined with Adams in the 1840s in opposing expansion unless uncontaminated with chattel labor. His consolation prize for failing to realize his ambition to be president was his appointment as secretary of state under Abraham Lincoln, a post

he retained under Andrew Johnson. During the Civil War Seward distinguished himself as a resolute opponent of France's effort to extend its empire to Mexico. He distinguished himself more in the post-Civil War years by envisioning a transoceanic empire, earning from Walter LaFeber the title "prince of players" in the creation of America's "New Empire"—"new" in that it exchanged territory for trade that would serve as an outlet for production, not population.<sup>33</sup>

Seward was convinced that the United States could exercise political control of foreign territories without bearing the costs of establishing colonies. He was likewise convinced, or convinced himself, that such an "informal empire" did not violate the fundamental principles of liberty. Seward therefore conceptualized a systematic program of insular expansion. He proposed that the United States negotiate reciprocal trade treaties, acquire scattered strategic outposts across the Pacific, and purchase the Alaskan "drawbridge" in order to facilitate access to the fabled China Market. Moreover, the intrinsic appeal of America's ideals and values, what Seward referred to as the "process of political gravitation," would ultimately lead to U.S. predominance throughout the nineteenth-century version of the Third World, thereby endowing its peoples with liberties they had not previously experienced. Domestic concerns—the politics, racialism, and constitutionalism that infected the Reconstruction Era—frustrated Seward. But he left a vibrant legacy for his successors.<sup>34</sup>

No one embraced that legacy more ardently than did Henry Cabot Lodge, perhaps the most controversial choice for inclusion in this study. A teenager during the Civil War and Reconstruction as well as a scion of one of America's leading families in one of its leading commercial states, Lodge accepted Daniel Webster's words "Liberty and Union now and forever" as articles of faith.<sup>35</sup> As an adult he bestowed upon the American empire the same sanctity. During his lengthy public career Lodge played a defining role in the successes and failures of the ambitious international agendas pursued by Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. Yet Lodge charted a course independent of each of them. He exercised his power from Congress.

Lodge was as complex as he was powerful, as intellectual as he was political. He represents the conventional "realist" perspective on

America's empire and its relationship to the global constellation of great powers. His reasons for supporting the aggressive policies of McKinley and Roosevelt in the 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century and then fiercely opposing the Versailles Treaty provide an insightful perspective on the yin and the yang of America's global ascendancy even as they illuminate the conflicting points of view on the use of force as an instrument to spread "the American Dream." In the end Lodge's defeat of Wilson resulted in the antithesis of his prescriptions. America's interwar "Empire without Tears" arose from a foundation of trade, loans, missionaries, and movie moguls. This "Awkward Dominion" did not last.<sup>36</sup>

John Foster Dulles, caricatured as the Cold War zealot who combined Wilson's crusading moralism with Lodge's faith in force, was personally and politically affected by the battle over Versailles. Born in 1888, Dulles grew up under the watchful eye of his grandfather, John Watson Foster, Benjamin Harrison's secretary of state. His other grandfather was a missionary in Asia, and his father was a Presbyterian minister and intellectual. This ancestry had consequences. Although a Republican, Dulles was attracted to Wilsonianism, and in the run-up to World War II he wrote a damning indictment of the traditional European empires. *War, Peace, and Change* is one of the most eloquent and thoughtful expressions of American anticolonialism and global progressivism written in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

After the onset of the Cold War, however, Dulles became identified with the very empires from which he distanced America. No less critical of the British and the French, and fearing their follies would cost the "Free World" hearts, minds, territories, and resources, he advocated that the United States wrest from its allies their stewardship of former and even current possessions. Some historians argue that Cold War America accepted an "Empire by Invitation." Dulles did not wait to be invited. According to his weltanschauung, as the defender of the Free World America was and had to be an Empire for Liberty.<sup>38</sup>

The final chapter focuses on Paul Wolfowitz. A college and then graduate student during the turbulent era of the Vietnam War, from an intellectual standpoint Wolfowitz personifies the most salient factors driving America's contemporary global posture. He began his Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago intending to study political

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theory with Leo Strauss. He ended up studying strategic theory with Albert Wohlstetter.

The two scholars contributed to an idiosyncratic worldview that reflects and influences America's present idiosyncratic empire. Strauss, whose "disciples" have been labeled the "key ideologists of empire," aroused Wolfowitz's impulse to export liberty and democracy; Wohlstetter impressed upon him that the dangers inherent in the anarchic international environment require the willingness to use force to ensure security, without which there can be neither liberty nor democracy. These absolutist convictions propelled Wolfowitz's rise through the ranks of America's national security establishment. While still in his thirties he served as the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff for Ronald Reagan. As undersecretary of defense for policy during the administration George H. W. Bush, he became the trusted lieutenant of then-secretary of defense Dick Cheney. For George W. Bush he was the deputy secretary of defense and a chief architect of the 2003 Iraq War. During these years Wolfowitz, in his dual capacity as government official and public intellectual, progressively extended the concept of an Empire for Liberty to its logical conclusion. By doing so, he exposed America and the world to the flaws in that logic.<sup>39</sup>