

other peoples. We were already far down the road of believing we were not an empire and viscerally resenting any suggestion that we were an empire. And already far down the road, as Professor Arthur K. Weinberg pointed out many years ago, of assuming that our right to security transcended the traditional right to defend what we had, and had become the right to perfect security in any imaginable future contingency. We began to define security as the natural right to empire.

There was another cost. Americans became so habituated to empire as the price of freedom that they demanded ever more freedom and ever more empire. Andrew Jackson was at once a prime mover and the symbol of the new enthusiasm for the imperial way of life. More freedom at home and more expansion elsewhere. People like the Cherokees who could create and sustain a representative government within fixed spatial limits were clearly backward — and so a threat to The American Way. Move them out and force them to adapt to surplus space. People like the inhabitants of the northern half of Mexico, who used surplus space to relax and live a balanced and ecologically responsible life, were backward for another reason. They did not exploit the surplus space. So move them out or aside. And all the while other Americans — the merchants, the shippers, the sealers, the whalers and the Navy — were busy defining the ocean itself as another frontier to be penetrated, controlled and exploited.

The empire was free and hence it was not an empire. A small but perceptive number of Americans — we can symbolize them in John Quincy Adams and John Calhoun — knew better and were more honest. Adams knew that freeing the Cherokees from their limits in Georgia, or freeing the northern half of Mexico made a mockery of freedom. And he, along with Calhoun, knew chattel slavery was the bedrock definition of empire — and both of them were willing to face those truths.

They were ready to accept the consequences of their knowledge of history. Calhoun was willing to risk the danger inherent in defining freedom in terms of slavery. Adams was willing to challenge Madison's theory and risk the ability of Americans to sustain freedom and republican government in a limited space.

On balance, and granted that the weighing of these matters is a dicey business, I think Adams had the best of it. He concluded, after much thought, that if you called Calhoun's bluff — meaning let the slave states go — the free states would win. Adams in effect said to Calhoun: "You cannot make it on slavery. You need us, and you will have to free them. When you understand that we will be here to work it out together." Calhoun accepted the challenge: both men introduced amendments to the Constitution to legitimize secession.

Even if they had lived, they had no chance. Long before they died, a lawyer in Illinois had made it clear he was going to resolve the dilemma inherent in empire as the price of freedom. Abraham Lincoln, the crossroads lawyer who moved on to bank retainers from corporations in Chicago, was more than a bit like Jefferson. He wanted it every which way. Honor his forefathers and make his fame by transcending — replacing — the Founding Fathers. Tough-minded about restricting the expansion of slavery to destroy slavery and naïve enough to think he could bluff the sons of Taylor and Calhoun.

Many people make much of Lincoln's sniping at the Mexican War. They revel in his ploy to trap President James Polk in a debate about where and when and under what circumstances blood was spilled. But they never tell us simply and directly that Lincoln accepted the imperial fruits of that war and concerned himself with the division of the spoils. If we go by the evidence, then we must conclude Lincoln opposed the war of conquest against Mexico only as a tactical maneuver to further his own grandiose ambition.

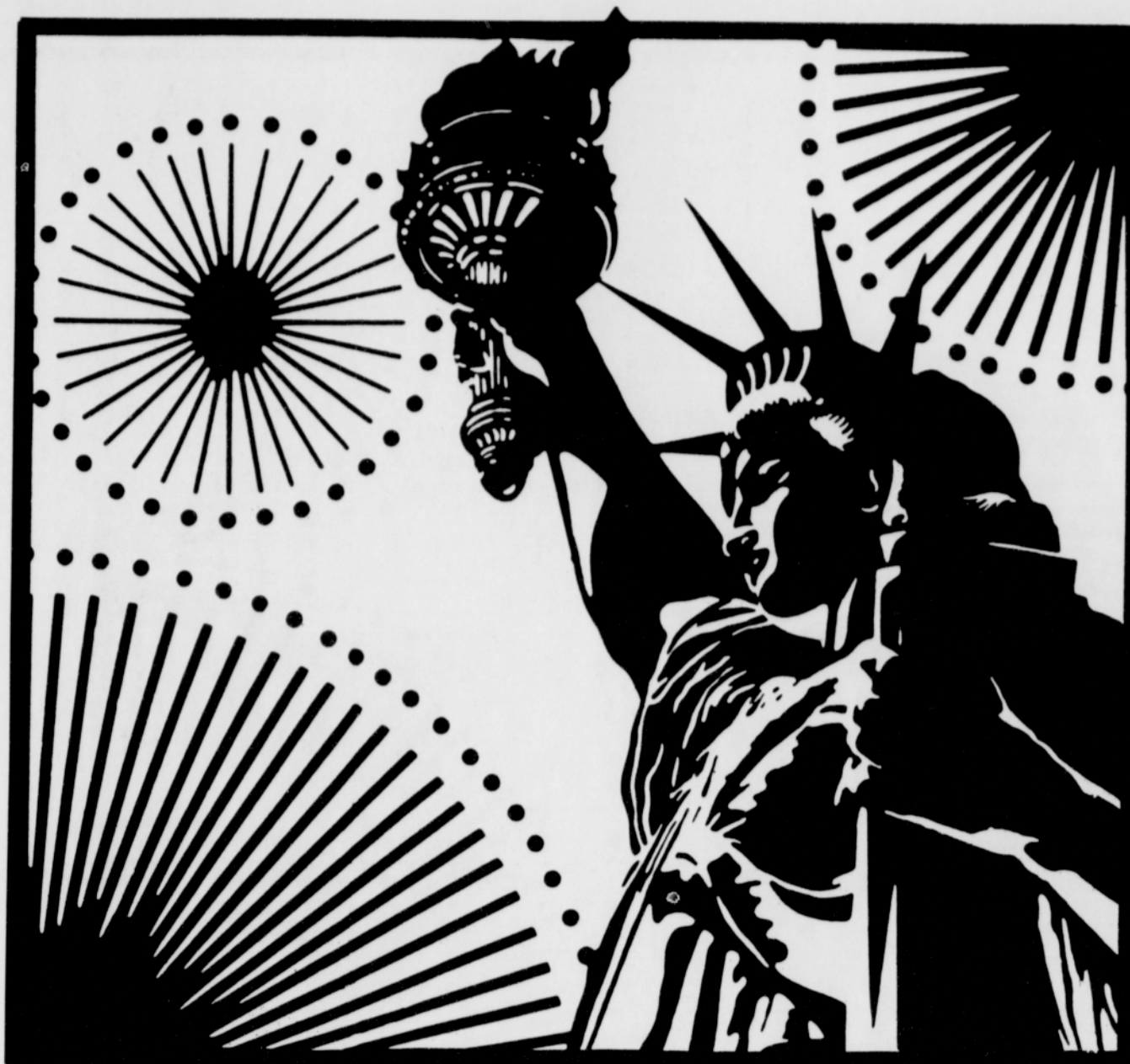
In and of itself, ambition is not a damning characteristic. That is to say, it is rather like sex. What matters is the intensity and focus of the ambition and the means accepted as legitimate to realize the objective. Lincoln left many tracks in the dust, the mud and the snow. A fair number of those foxy marks were designed to confuse or mislead various people without exposing himself to the charge of being formally dishonest. Lincoln took great care to say what he meant, even if he phrased it in ways that could be misunderstood. But he was clear enough during three crucial moments of his career.

First as a young man entering politics; second during his long campaign for the Presidency; and third while he was so largely silent between his election and his inauguration. When he launched his public life in those lectures before the Young Man's Christian Association in the late 1830s, he was youthfully candid. He said explicitly that he was out to transcend the Founding Fathers and in the process give Truth to the world. Then, during the 1850s, he announced and regularly repeated his strategy: deny the South the right to expand. That would at once destroy slavery and give the North control of the empire.

Finally, in those fateful winter months of 1860-1861, he several times offered two cryptic comments. Asked constantly what he intended to do, he replied that anyone who read him carefully would know the answer. And, in reply to suggestions that he should negotiate, he said there would be a "tug" — a sharp, short confrontation — and then it would be over and done.

Lincoln was not transcending the Founding Fathers. Unlike John Quincy Adams, he did not think freedom could survive in three-quarters, or even half a continent. He was saying only that it was necessary to push the proposition that empire was the price of freedom to its ultimate conclusion. "It will become all one thing or another."

Yet Lincoln was engaged in the long process of making a Faustian bargain with the Devil. A few historians and other commentators have seen that theme at the center of a more limited stage, say the life of Daniel Webster, but none except Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville have ever interpreted our national life in that framework. So we should salute Lincoln for the right reasons. He knowingly sat down to cut the deck with the Devil. He bet our history, indeed our truth, on winning quickly and easily. There will be a tug and then it will be over.



But the Confederacy did truly believe in the right to go to hell in its own way. And so Lincoln had to pay the price. Nobody has told that part of the story as simply, or as ruthlessly, as Russell F. Weigley in his study, *The American Way of War*. Lincoln very quickly realized that the Devil would collect his due. Failing to win quickly, Lincoln had no choice but to annihilate the enemy. And the doctrine of unconditional surrender inevitably led to occupation and colonial rule. The price of freedom, as defined by Americans, was indeed empire.

For at least two generations thereafter, the price of freedom for the North and the West was paid by the South — black as well as white. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was not wrong when he cried out in 1936 that the South — one-third of the nation — was significantly poorer than the rest of the country. There is a great irony in all the contemporary talk and concern about the vast global discrepancy between the rich North and the poor South. One might think Americans would have a particularly keen understanding of that truth. But empire as a way of life has never been noted for developing empathy with its victims.

There is also a fine irony in the way the great war for American freedom led on to ever more empire. And it is fitting that Lincoln provides us with an insight into the dynamics of that process. He knew, by December 1862, that the gamble on a quick victory had been lost. He had to have money and men in large quantities. He therefore appealed to the imperial tradition. Speaking to the agricultural majority, he wasted no euphemisms. He told them they had to stay the course because it was not enough to have access to the world via New York and San Francisco. It was necessary to control New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico.

No one will ever know how many volunteers that speech produced, but that is not the issue at hand. The document does tell us how Lincoln's mind was working at a time of serious if not extreme difficulty, and it therefore suggests — given Lincoln's astute sense of politics — that we ought to keep our historical eye on those farmers he was addressing in such a candidly imperial language.

The significance of Lincoln's appeal to Western farmers to fight for imperial objectives upsets historians of every political persuasion. Radicals resist the notion that ordinary folk support imperialism. Conservatives cannot easily come to terms with the reality that empire is related to liberty as they define it. And liberals long to resolve the dilemma by defining empire as global freedom and welfare.

Despite that tide of wisdom, I suggest the farmers of the 19th century provide us revealing illustrations of the dynamic evolution of our imperial way of life. They began by defining empire as ever more free or cheap land and concluded by demanding strong government action to help them penetrate and hold foreign markets. All in the name of freedom and security. That process is worth examining closely because it

reveals a great deal about our American outlook as it developed in the 20th century. As we do so, keep in mind the observations of three quite different people who lived and studied in the West.

The first is Senator Albert Beveridge, a progressive politician from the Ohio River Valley: "Never forget that we are the only people on earth whose farmers buy the adjoining farm before they need it. We are of the blood which furnishes the world with its Daniel Boones, its Francis Drakes, its Cecil Rhodes."

The second is from Wright Morris, a writer who has revealed much of the soul of the Missouri River Valley in his novels: "The prevailing tendency of the American mind (is) to take to the woods."

The third is from Carl L. Becker, one of America's most insightful (if currently neglected) historians. People who open and settle the frontiers, he noted, "must always be transforming the world into their ideal of it." The mind of such a people "is too sure of itself to be at home with ideas of uncertain pressure. Knowing it is right, it wishes only to go ahead. Satisfied with certain conventional premises, it hastens on to the obvious conclusion."

Long before the end of the Civil War, the conventional premises involved the need for surplus space and resources to sustain economic well-being and political democracy. There were people who went west to commune with Nature *a la* Thoreau, and others who did so to explore the possibility of an agrarian-based communitarianism or socialism. And it can be argued that in the beginning a sizable number of people who went west — perhaps for a brief moment a majority — sought nothing more than a modestly better life as members of small, local communities.

But once they moved beyond the subsistence level of farming, they found themselves in a highly competitive, surplus-producing marketplace economy that increasingly operated as part of a world system. Of necessity if not by choice, they became business people (business families) ever more concerned with markets for their surpluses, and with more land and better machines. And, by the end of the 1870s, they were keenly aware that foreign countries along with other groups in the domestic economy, exercised considerable control in and over those markets.

Clearly enough, the farmers wanted to regulate the banks, railroads and other large corporations and to reform the domestic political system; but they wanted to do that while at the same time saving the Cubans and generally deploying American power to help the world break free from autocratic European power and be tutored in the American Way. There is no inherent or logical connection between being a domestic reformer and an anti-imperialist. Militant populists like Tom Watson of Georgia and Sockless Jerry Simpson of Kansas established that point long before Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson.

Or listen to Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota: "Our form of government is adapted to civilized men everywhere.... Great as we are, we are yet in the day of small things.... (Our) destiny is to grasp the commerce of all the seas and sway the scepter of the world." That sounds more like Dean Acheson asserting some fifty years later that only the United States had the power to grab hold of History and make it conform. Or hear Henry Demarest Lloyd, another late-19th century reformer: "If nobody can lick us, we need not be afraid to play the just and generous big brother among nations." That was the only way "to fulfill our mission to defend and extend liberty."

Nobody knows, or will ever know, what form the vigorous expansionism of the agricultural majority would have taken if William Jennings Bryan (or another agrarian leader) had won one or more of the elections of 1892, 1896 and 1900. But we do know what most of them did in response to the actions of their opponents, and that does not suggest they would have mounted a frontal assault of the imperial way of life. They supported the annexation of Hawaii, demanded a tough line against Great Britain during the Venezuelan boundary crisis, agitated militantly for intervention in Cuba, and cheered Admiral George Dewey's victory in the Philippines. As for Bryan, he shifted back and forth between reform at home and educating the Mexicans and other Latin Americans without dropping a note or mixing a metaphor.

The agricultural spokesmen were defeated by urban commercial, financial and industrial leaders who accepted the importance of overseas markets and resources. Indeed,





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