

# In These Pages

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by James Kurth

A hundred years ago, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a commonplace among the political, social, and intellectual elites of the United States that America had been decisively shaped by its British origins. The British settlers in North America, the place of the American colonies within the British empire, and the revolution of those colonies against that empire had created a distinctive people, which Tocqueville had called “the Anglo-Americans.”<sup>1</sup> This distinctive people in turn had created a distinctive political and social system, i.e., “democracy in America.”

Of course, by the early 1900s, vast numbers of non-British immigrants had transformed an Anglo-American population into a multiethnic one or, as we would say today, into a multicultural society. But anyone could see and say that America—with its English language, common-law tradition, Protestant religion, free-enterprise economy, and Anglo-American upper and middle classes—was really a new variation

on old British themes. Moreover, American political leaders, most notably President Theodore Roosevelt, were setting the United States on a course heading toward world power, power that would first emulate and then surpass that of the British Empire. The principle instruments in the rise of the new American world power would be the same as those that had been central in the rise of the British world power in previous centuries: commercial enterprise and naval mastery. It seemed only a matter of time until the British and Anglo-American peoples together would lead, shape, and order the entire world.

A hundred years later, the conventional wisdom is very different. The commonplace understanding about the distinctive British origins and Anglo-American nature of the United States has largely disappeared. One reason is that the old understanding was incompatible with the new realities and ideologies of our own time, particularly multiculturalism and globalization.

First, the United States is now not only a multicultural society (as it was a century ago), but it is also dominated by a multicultural elite,

<sup>1</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. I (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945 [1835]), chapters II–III.

most of which promotes a multicultural ideology. Discussion of the distinctively British origins or Anglo-American nature of the United States now seems to be not only politically incorrect, but practically irrelevant or obsolete. This has been the attitude of most reviewers of Samuel Huntington's new book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, the first portion of which is devoted to making the case for the continuing value and importance of America's "Anglo-Protestant culture."<sup>2</sup> These reviewers have either vehemently denied or utterly ignored this part of Huntington's argument.

Second, the United States and especially its elites now promote a grand project of globalization, but it is a kind of globalization that entails American values. The American elites consequently want to portray American values as global or universal ones. As Michael Mandelbaum has written "peace, democracy, and free markets" are "the ideas that conquered the world."<sup>3</sup> Again, discussion of the distinctively British origins and Anglo-American nature of American values and ideas is not only politically incorrect, but positively disruptive of the U.S. globalization project and its universalist pretense. It is natural, therefore, that Huntington has described these globalist and universalist elites as being

<sup>2</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

"cosmopolitan" rather than patriotic, and that in turn his reviewers—most of them clearly members of a cosmopolitan elite—have vehemently criticized him.<sup>4</sup>

### **The British and Anglo-American Origins of U.S. Identity and Foreign Policy**

This issue of *Orbis* undertakes an examination, really an excavation, of the British foundations of the United States and of the U.S. role in the world. As we shall see from our ensemble of five articles on this topic, the ideas and practices of Britain and the British empire produced a distinctive Anglo-American identity in the colonial and revolutionary eras. They also produced distinctive Anglo-American ideas about international relations and about America's special place among the nations. Although formed more than two centuries ago, the Anglo-American identity and ideas continue to shape U.S. foreign policies today, right down to the way that the George W. Bush administration conceived of America's role in the world and the way it went to war in Iraq.

Walter McDougall shows that specific features of the eighteenth-century British empire—particularly its encouragement of expansive activity by entrepreneurial individuals—were reproduced within the American colonies. When, in the late 1760s, the imperial authorities in London

<sup>4</sup>I have reviewed Huntington's book in my "The Late American Nation," *The National Interest*, Fall 2004.

abruptly changed course and put restrictions on the expansive and entrepreneurial projects of the colonists, Americans at first resisted and then, with the War of Independence, sought to continue their British-like imperial activities by separating themselves from the old British empire and establishing a new American empire of their own.

Jonathan Clark, a British historian teaching in America, analyzes the peculiar, even exceptional, definition of liberty in colonial and revolutionary America, which was very much a product of the religious conflicts and theological disputes that were so prevalent in Britain and the British colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The particular concept of liberty that prevailed in the United States after the Revolution was grounded in a particular version of Protestantism—one that was fundamentalist and evangelical. Clark concludes with the important, and controversial, assertion that the fundamentalist and evangelical concept of liberty has continued to drive U.S. foreign policy, especially the policy of the Bush administration.

In contrast, David Hendrickson sees the founders of the revolutionary era and the framers of the Constitution as having very informed and sophisticated understandings of the nature of international relations and the United States' role in the world. These statesmen sought to continue the best of the old British concepts and practices in international relations, while adapting them to fit American reali-

ties and interests. The Constitution itself was an exercise in simultaneously solving two different and difficult problems in international relations: it was both a "peace pact" among the contending American states and the construction of a greater American state that would be able to contend with the great powers of Europe. Hendrickson argues that the framers' thoughtful understandings about international relations should continue to guide U.S. foreign policy today, and that the policies of the Bush administration wrongly departed from this wise American tradition.

J. G. A. Pocock, a distinguished British historian of political thought who also has taught for many years in America, reviews the contending ideas about republic and empire, liberty and authority, that were prevalent in Britain and America during the colonial and revolutionary eras. He shows how, with the Revolution and the founding, America took a fundamentally different path from Britain as it developed its own version of British ideas. Indeed, it was the very American insistence upon getting to the foundations, or fundamentals, of these ideas that made the path of the United States so different from the paths of Britain and other nations.

Carl Hodge views both British and American history from a Canadian vantage point, which affords special insights and understandings. Hodge shows the great similarities and continuities between the earlier British role in the world,

particularly in world order, and the contemporary American role. For both Britain and America, the achievement of international leadership and the establishment of an imperial order were driven by real economic and security needs. Hodge's approving portrayal of an American empire greatly contrasts, therefore, with the account given by Clark, who sees the contemporary U.S. drive toward empire as the natural outgrowth of America's fundamentalist and evangelical ideas, rather than of its economic and security interests. Hodge's account also contrasts with that of Hendrickson, who sees the contemporary U.S. drive toward empire to be a departure from the natural and traditional way the United States has conducted its international relations.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, this ensemble of five articles demonstrates that the British origins and the Anglo-American nature of the United States not only decisively shaped America and its world role in the past, but that they continue to shape America's relations with the world today. The United States is certainly no longer an Anglo-American nation in regard

<sup>5</sup>Yet another, and very different, explanation for the Bush administration's drive toward empire has been given by Claes Ryn, "The Ideology of American Empire," *Orbis*, Summer 2003. Ryn points to "a large number of American political intellectuals" and their "neo-Jacobin ideology." As his term suggests, he sees these intellectuals and their ideology to be largely alien to American traditions. Also see Neta Crawford, "The Road to Global Empire: The Logic of U.S. Foreign Policy Post-9/11," *Orbis*, Fall 2004.

to its demography, the physical origins of its population. But it has been, is now, and perhaps ever shall be an Anglo-American nation in regard to its international behavior, the way that it thinks about and relates to the rest of the world.

Since the real America has always been an Anglo-America, it is appropriate that our frontispiece for this issue of *Orbis* depicts the first flag shared by all thirteen united British-American colonies. Created in 1775 and known as the Grand Union flag, it nicely combined the thirteen stripes for the American colonies with the British Union Jack, which in turn combined the English cross of St. George (also representing the Anglican church) and the Scottish cross of St. Andrew (also representing the Presbyterian church). This flag remains as accurate a representation of the identity and foreign policy of the United States as that other flag that we call the Stars and Stripes.

### **Intelligence, Images, and U.S. Foreign Policy**

Our other articles address some of the crucial issues arising out of the continuing U.S. effort to establish a world order, an effort made particularly urgent and difficult by the threat from transnational networks of Islamic terrorists. Some of these issues involve the U.S. intelligence agencies and how they gather and analyze intelligence. Others involve the "failed states," "arc of chaos," and areas of anarchy that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of its many client

Marxist regimes in the Middle East and in Africa.

Everyone agrees that good intelligence collection and analysis is essential for our security, but there is very little agreement about what this means in practice. We therefore present two articles that demonstrate how intelligence analysis is always shaped and distorted by preexisting conceptual frameworks. Richards Heuer, who has had a distinguished career as an intelligence analyst with the CIA, diagnoses the limits and distortions that arise within an intelligence organization and offers thoughtful and practical advice on how to improve the analysis. Peter Neumann and M. L. R. Smith, two British specialists in intelligence, similarly diagnose the limits and distortions that result from the wider public discourse within the political and academic arenas—with both liberals and conservatives committing their own distinctive errors. Related to the public discourse are the photographs that often dominate the media's presentation of foreign affairs in the information age. David Perlmutter, an established expert in photojournalism, dissects several cases of famous photographs and argues that political leadership is the decisive factor determining the photographs' impact on foreign policy.

### **From a Marxist Order to an American Order in the Middle East and Africa?**

Frederic Pryor provides a systematic and comparative analysis

of the economic factors involved in the fall of the Marxist regimes that existed during that long era lasting from the Russian Revolution until the collapse of the Soviet Union and most of its client regimes in the 1990s. He shows that these regimes varied enormously in regard to their political and economic strengths and weaknesses, concluding that they fell not as a result of their economic failures (their economic performance was often equal to that of the non-Marxist regimes in the same region). Rather, it was usually the result of their political weaknesses, which often (particularly in Africa) dated to their origin and had been masked by their being propped up by Soviet aid.

So the United States is now faced with a vast expanse of anarchy and chaos, the perfect breeding ground for transnational networks of Islamic terrorists. Two of our articles, each written by an experienced practitioner in the U.S. government, present analyses and recommendations about how the United States might improve security and bring about some degree of order in particular regions. Thomas Lynch, a colonel in the U.S. Army, argues for an expanded NATO role in the greater Middle East. This is obviously a controversial proposition, but Lynch shows that NATO's history offers an encouraging precedent. Out of a major NATO crisis in the 1960s came what was known as the Harmel Commission, which developed a creative, coherent, and very successful NATO policy toward Eastern Europe. Lynch believes that an analogous process

could make for a successful NATO policy toward the greater Middle East. Gregory Joachim, a security-assistance officer in the Department of State, argues for a more systematic and coherent U.S. aid program for the security forces of African states. He is mindful, however, of the failures of such U.S. efforts in the 1960s and '70s, which neglected the local people and ended up supporting brutal and corrupt forces. Consistent attention to popular needs, to "human security," can bring about real progress against terrorism and toward development in Africa.

### **A Tale of Two Empires**

Our two review essays also connect with some of the imperial themes of this issue. John Hillen discusses several of the many recent books dealing with the question of an American empire, but he goes beyond these with his own account of the practicalities (and impracticalities) that will beset any American

effort to create an empire in the real world.

Vladislav Zubok considers the recent literature dealing with what happens after the collapse of an empire, i.e., the Soviet one. The Soviet empire had an ambivalent relation to the Russian nation (some Russians dominated the empire, but the empire also dominated Russia), but Russia has also always had an ambivalent relation to the West. The collapse of the Soviet empire was followed by the collapse of the Western fantasy within Russia. For the first time in almost a hundred years, Russians are largely left alone to be themselves. But as Zubok shows, in the Russia of today there is no consensus about what this means, and so we have an endless quest for Russia's identity. Perhaps the people of another great nation that has transformed itself into a great empire should reflect about what can happen when an empire collapses, but the nation that had created it is no longer there.

