

last fifty years, as a school of philosophy it stands to make a real impact in the contemporary 'story of ideas.' Those same historical factors that permitted pragmatism's reemergence (according to Menand, the end of the Cold War, democratization, and globalization) have given a new impetus to the field of international education. Let us hope that in true pragmatic fashion we have the ability to both 'think' and 'do.'

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*First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power*

Warren Zimmermann

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. (576 pages)

A century ago, Americans across the country—rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural—engaged in a grassroots debate over whether their country should acquire colonies and become a global power on the European model. Warren Zimmermann's book examines American imperialism in this age, weighs its positives and negatives, and suggests that this history has relevance for our own age in which "American empire" is again controversial.

The study centers on the "fathers of modern American imperialism" (p. 8): John Hay, Captain Alfred T. Mahan, Elihu Root, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Theodore Roosevelt. Together, these men theorized and executed a strategy of naval building and territorial acquisition that thrust American power southward into Latin America and westward into Asia. Between 1898 and 1903 the United States acquired a formal empire consisting of Guam, Hawaii, Midway, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Samoa, and signed protectorate treaties with Cuba and Panama. It established coaling ports for naval and merchant vessels across the Pacific and in the Caribbean Sea. The Panama Canal, Roosevelt's proudest accomplishment, would link both halves of the country's new transoceanic sphere of influence.

Zimmermann's book begins with a description of the careers and "elements of character" (p. 14) of its five central protagonists. They are all

presented as men of their time. The author casts them as neither particularly heroic nor demonic in their use of power. They brought energy and vision to their desire to project American influence abroad, but they also displayed beliefs in racial inequality, shared by most whites of their day, and seemed deaf to those who opposed American hegemony. The chapters on each of these men are filled with colorful details: John Hay's poetry-writing, his depression, and his affair with the wife of Henry Cabot Lodge; Mahan's arrogance and single-minded devotion to a global vision for an American Navy and naval strategy; Root's valedictory address concluding that "educated men were only conservative when educated incompletely and narrowly"; Lodge's passion for American history, manifested in his 26 books, although his history classes at Harvard shrunk to an enrollment of three; Roosevelt's asthma, obsessive self-improvement, and mythologizing of the West. Zimmermann has a flare for keeping a reader's attention.

The book then traces the birth of and subsequent controversy over American imperialism. This section provides a well-written synthesis of the push to war against Spain, followed by America's rapid military successes and acquisition of new territories. Overjoyed at the presumed benefits of war, Roosevelt said "we have scored the first great triumph in what will be a world movement" (p. 275). Anti-imperialists, however, rallied in opposition to a "great triumph" that would cost so much in blood and treasure. Zimmermann's chapter on the imperial debate that crystallized around America's brutal occupation of the Philippines provides a lucid summary of positions on both sides. In the end, the expansionists prevailed, building a sphere of influence in the Caribbean and across the Pacific. They set a course for an "American Century."

The final, and in some ways most interesting, chapter of the book discusses this "American Century." Noting that we still live in the shadow of empire, Zimmermann seeks to evaluate the complex legacy of these years of empire-building. The five who helped build American power saw themselves as the principle advocates of a globally-minded policy, champions of an expansive and large-minded vision that benefited the nation and uplifted the world. The fact that many people at home and abroad came to disparage their international vision as "imperialism" may challenge readers to reflect on these two words—internationalism and imperialism—and on their historical contexts and meanings.

Research scholars who specialize in this era will find little that is

unfamiliar in this broad history, crafted for a popular audience. It is researched in printed sources, and much of the narrative synthesizes the standard historical accounts of the past two generations. It is neither triumphal nor particularly critical in overall tone. Written by a veteran diplomat, its interpretation is middle-of-the-road (one might say, diplomatic). As is the pattern in popular histories, it emphasizes the role of individuals rather than of broader forces. To be sure, Zimmermann acknowledges the empire-building roles played by large business interests, by sensationalizing media, by new technologies, by elites eager to take their place on a global stage. Still, the subtitle, “how five Americans made their country a world power,” suggests a great-man interpretation of history that has gone out of fashion in the academy, even as it has been embraced by trade publishers.

All in all, however, the lively style and thoughtful discussion of the ambiguous roots of America’s global preeminence make this book a worthwhile read for anyone with an interest in international affairs. A kind of imperial chic has come into America’s political mood just now. Well-publicized books by Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace*, and Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, suggest that American empire in the twenty-first century might be necessary, possible, and beneficial; both see empire as an essentially benign, modernizing project. The title of Zimmermann’s book seems also to endorse such a pro-imperial view, but the narrative itself offers a more nuanced message. Although Zimmermann argues that a small group of turn-of-the-century Americans had the confidence to assert their country’s power to rule others, by force if necessary, he also explores why the business of direct rule provoked such opposition. Lofty ideals may have helped promote American imperialism, but they also threw it into question.

Zimmermann endorses William James’s view of the War of 1898: “We gave the fighting instinct and the passion of mastery their outing” assuming that “we could resume our permanent ideals and character when the fighting fit was done.” Instead, the fighting fit of imperialism, he (with James) believes, changed America and left a mixed legacy. In Zimmermann’s view, it called forth greater national confidence and solidified a claim of high purpose; it also exaggerated the value of war, gave a disproportionate power to the executive branch of government, and purveyed assumptions that America was both omniscient and superior to other nations. Imperialism was grounded in claims of advancing both

human rights and stability, but human rights often lost out when these two goals turned out to be mutually conflicting.

Zimmermann ends his book by noting what he thinks is a recent erosion of American power and a declining political will to sustain the American Century. Doubtless, he might now re-write his last section. In any case, readers engaged in the new twenty-first-century discussions of American power and empire may find useful historical background in his interpretation of the so-called “first great triumph,” one century ago.

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