Two Wars, Rome and America

Kristofer Allerfeldt
k.m.allerfeldt@exeter.ac.uk

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol60/iss60/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
There was a literary coincidence of the New World and Rome in 1776. In the year that Thomas Jefferson declared all men created equal, Edward Gibbon published the first volume of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. While the parliamentarian Gibbon personally disapproved of the rebellious actions of the colonists, that coincidence has continued ever since with the US self-consciously drawing on the example of ancient Rome—the single great republican example in history.

The symbols, language, values, metaphors and architecture of Rome are visible in America from the Great Seal of the United States with its Romanesque eagle and quotation from Virgil to the name, structure and architecture of the upper house of Congress. In their revolutionary fight, American patriots took Roman names—Publius, Cincinnatus, Brutus—and had themselves depicted in heroic Romanesque poses, in Roman garb. Many of the original state buildings were, and would remain, Roman in inspiration. In these heady days of revolution there was even talk of the Potomac being renamed the Tiber.

Nevertheless the examples, metaphors and parables were problematic in the American context. Rome as a model civilization was a dual edged sword. On the one hand Roman civilization was the very model of, and for, American democracy. Patrician Rome had overthrown the tyrannical government of its early Etruscan kings and reached a durable compromise with the city state’s Plebeians. They had gone on to establish a successful republic in which the Senators,
Consuls, Tribunes and other officials all had specific and circumscribed powers and held office for specified times.

In the American imagination, for over 500 years the Roman Republic was the very essence of the stable state, governed by obedience to the rule of law. This engendered a stability, predictability and organization that enabled a practical, disciplined people to expand their territory, economy and military prowess to guide and dominate first the Italian peninsula and then the Mediterranean world and beyond.

On the other hand when that stability (and the Republic) came to an end under the Caesars, Rome spawned a civilization that was a metaphor for corruption, nepotism, waste, decadence, greed and cruelty. What was more, as if to drive home the lessons of the dangers of such a civilization, Americans were reared on stories of how the empire slowly splintered, decayed and crumbled, imploding and declining as a result of the overstretched demands made on the periphery by an unproductive center.

The all-important instinct for law became secondary to that for survival. In this allegory, the Senate and other officers became little more than rubber stamps for the often perverted, if not demented, imperial will. Permanently fighting off barbarian invasions and indulging in dynastic civil wars reduced the ability of the empire to sustain itself. Challengers swiftly moved in on the ever-diminishing prizes of the rotting empire. What was more, as the empire’s boundaries contracted, so did its revenue base.

At the same time accustomed to luxurious and indolent living, dependent on sycophancy for promotion, tolerant of corruption, the Romans themselves became soft and ineffectual. Instead of being the dominant power, they became increasingly reliant on foreigners to provide for their
needs—from defense to food production. All these images contributed sharp lessons for a nascent republic which modeled itself on the glories of Rome.

By the dawn of the 20th century, many of these images were coming under increasing scrutiny, and it is with this re-examination that this paper is concerned. It will examine the use of the experiences of one civilization to guide, legitimate and bolster another in a period of conflict and flux. Using the Spanish American War and the First World War as points of reference, this study will demonstrate some of the ways in which the parable of Rome was utilized by Americans of differing political persuasions and ethnic groupings in the time of, and about, the two wars that shaped modern America. It will seek to show how the fate of Rome could be used to argue for or against a whole variety of viewpoints.

In the brief period of these two wars, Ancient, Republican, Imperial, and Catholic Rome was at once common currency, intellectual justification and historical object lesson. Perceived as a curiously malleable yet ubiquitous and universally understood metaphor, it could demonstrate where America came from, as well as where it should, or should not, go.

The Eternal City showed both the impermanence of earthy power and the everlasting influence of virtue. Rome could be used to support or oppose the idea of the United States as an empire. Images of the fate of Rome could be used to bolster or attack the idea of a more interventionist foreign policy. It could show where the nation’s destiny lay.

On the other hand it could be used as a powerful tool for simple wartime propaganda. Reference to Rome could be used to cast light on the American Republic’s cultural, religious, and economic heritage. During these conflicts the allegory of Rome—its rise, its glory, its demise, its legacy—would be used by figures as diverse as Theodore Roosevelt,
Kaiser Wilhelm II, Leo Tolstoy, Lenin, and Woodrow Wilson, among many others.

To the Young Turks of Progressivism, America’s duty in opposing the Spanish domination of Cuba was tied in with the ideal of civilization. Their motivation was a complex admixture of bravado, duty, aggression and humanitarianism. Rome was pivotal in their justifications and explanations of their position. They believed that in many ways America was destined to take on the civilizing mantle of Britain, whose legitimacy they saw as descending from Roman virtues.

Henry Adams had seen this as early as 1860. As he stared over the ruins of Ancient Rome on his Grand Tour of Europe, he mused—“Rome was actual; it was England; it was going to be America.” His more darkly inclined but more overtly imperialistic younger brother, Brooks, would later echo his thoughts as he put forward a progressive re-interpretation of British liberalism that justified America’s burgeoning overseas empire as being based on a healthy combination of “Pax Romana, civil law and free trade.”

Others saw the US trajectory into empire as guided by simple greed. The moralizing Democratic opponent to McKinley (William Jennings Bryan) saw the imperial urge as more reminiscent of the causes of Rome’s final decay than its glorious legacy. Bryan saw both Rome and America as “haughty oligarchies...of about 2,000 people who owned the civilized world...[in which] public spirit was dead...and the commonwealth was a plutocracy.”

In this even Henry Adams agreed. He saw the speculation and greed that to many had driven the quest for empire as being characterized by the rising importance of Wall Street. He saw this speculative mania as similar to “Rome, under Diocletian;” but unlike Rome under that reforming emperor, America was “witnessing the anarchy, conscious of the
compulsion, [was] eager for the solution, [but was] unable to conceive whence the next impulse was to come or how it was to act. Avarice, corruption, indolence, cruelty, love of luxury and selfishness were all condemned as aspects of American industrial society as well as causes of Rome’s decline.

Figures as diverse as Theodore Roosevelt and Leo Tolstoy would draw the comparison and predict disaster. Money appeared to dominate politics with the result that the public figures of the time were seen as ineffectual at best and, as a norm, corrupt and self-serving. The art historian, scholar and editor, Charles Eliot Norton, summed up the relationship when he compared the “pure and innocent age of the Presidencies of Monroe and John Quincy Adams” to the Gilded Age, which he saw as similar to the times from Augustus to Nero.

In this turbulent time, such figures as the last Censor and notorious lickspittle, Lucius Munatius Plancus, characterized the politics of Rome. Norton saw the unprincipled kowtowing of politicians as enabling the stranglehold of “bastard imperialism” on the democratic institutions of both republics.

Running in tandem with the suspicion that imperialists were motivated by corruption and greed was the fear that objection to overseas expansion was actually the seed from which the American Republic had blossomed.

The incorporation of the Thirteen Colonies into the British Empire without sufficient rights had sparked the Patriots’ revolt. In American mythology, it was the continuation of the spirit of the Roman regicides. How could Americans seek to inflict the same tyranny on the Philippines and other South Sea islands? To anti-expansionists, such as Bryan or Andrew Carnegie, not only had McKinley led the nation into
an acquisitive war, he was leading the nation in the crushing of a colonial uprising with 65,000 US troops enforcing the military rule over another people.\(^7\)

He was portrayed as breaking with American tradition, and, worse still, threatening hallowed American institutions. The New York Times was by no means alone when it asked how great a calamity it would be if Mr. McKinley really should trample on those precious charters of our liberties and delude or compel us into a mad love of war and insidiously lead us to put the gilded trappings of imperialism above the writ of *habeus corpus*; the baubles of an Emperor above trial by jury.\(^8\)

In editorials, cartoons and articles, once again the Roman metaphor came into play.\(^9\) Literally the most concrete example of this debate came when an arch, modeled on the triumphal arch of the Roman emperor Trajan, was erected in New York’s Madison Square to celebrate Admiral Dewey’s heroic victory at Manila Bay.

Suitably, at this, the tail end of the Gilded Age, the imitation arch was made of plywood, plaster and concrete rather than marble and it was removed within five years. It is perhaps worth noting that in Manila itself there were more lastingly, more obviously and more “concretely” imperial monuments, not least the redesigning of the state buildings of Manila in the neo-Romanesque style by the then current darling of American civic architecture, Daniel Burnham.\(^10\)

Nevertheless, opponents of expansion saw the flimsy New York structure as the most blatant example of the abandoning of republican virtues by the Republican administration, and most particularly the president, William McKinley, and they decided to use the arch itself to demonstrate this. On the evening of the October 20, 1900, a searchlight was used to
project the slogan “We Want No President Emperor” onto the arch itself.

Unfortunately, the prank misfired. The shape of the arch and the distance between it and the searchlight meant that rather than displaying the scathingly obvious message intended, confused New Yorkers simply saw the message—“We Want No President.”

Ironically, it was the unfortunate McKinley’s running mate in the 1900 election who perhaps used the Roman metaphor most successfully. Like many of his generation, Theodore Roosevelt saw it as a part of America’s duty to impose civilization on those benighted areas of the world. The aboriginal populations of these new territories were at best “little better than barbarians” and could be “near the bottom of the human series.”

Roosevelt saw a great mission in the war which “has extended the boundaries of civilization at the expense of barbarism and savagery” and that such action had been “for centuries one of the most potent factors in the progress of humanity.” As a part of his belief in the “strenuous life”—loosely, the improvement of the self by active engagement to the limits of the individual’s ability—Roosevelt took a Lamarckian view of civilization, in which nations, like races or even individuals, could better themselves by effort of the will.

As he said in the wake of the conflict with Spain: “Greatness means strife for nation and man alike...greatness is the fruit of toil and sacrifice and high courage.” In the absence of this belligerent drive for betterment, they could, and would, also decline.

Like many of his American contemporaries, Roosevelt felt that Spain was a nation that had lost its drive. Spain was a nation in decline. Like other nations in a similar situation—
such as China or Turkey—they should make way for the rising nations, which included Japan, Germany and the United States. The reasons for that decline were diverse, but to many influential Americans, some of the most important causes could be clarified with reference to the fall of Rome.

Roosevelt himself argued that the collapse of Rome began with the incorporation of foreign auxiliaries into the legions. This indicated the failing fighting spirit of the Romans themselves. When these troops were then given citizenship for their service, the rot was destined to spread through the entirety of Roman society.¹⁵

Roosevelt argued that this lack of “strenuousness” in declining civilizations manifested itself in a variety of ways, mostly in a “general softening of fiber, the selfishness, the luxury, the relaxation of standards.” Drawing on a variation of prevalent theories of “race suicide”—in which race theorists reasoned that the higher races simply refused to compete in the “warfare of the cradle” and limited their own reproduction, thus allowing themselves to be submerged by a tide of inferior, often darker skinned, peoples in their own country—he also detected a declining birth rate among the higher civilizations after they had reached their peak.

To Roosevelt, this trend was most obvious in the “Hellenistic civilizations after the death of Alexander [and]...the Roman world during the first century or two of the empire.” He also saw, in his own time, “the decline in the birth rate...as the chief cause as well as the symptom of what is evil in the nations I have mentioned,” namely Great Britain, Australia, France, Germany, and Scandinavia. By contrast, in a rather solipsistic leap, he maintained that the rising birth rate in “Italy and Spain” was indicative, not of purity of their high purpose, but the result of the inferior, undemanding, unbridled, nature of their already spent societies.¹⁶
While no doubt agreeing with many of his findings, one of Roosevelt’s closest and best known correspondents had his own theories to explain the rise and fall of civilizations and nations: Henry Cabot Lodge, the self-consciously patrician son of two of the most blue-blooded of Boston families. Lodge, this polymath, aspiring politician, saw himself above all as an expert on foreign affairs—a position he later grew to fill—and perhaps as a result took a close interest in historical precedents for the fate of civilizations.

Lodge felt that Rome’s demise had been the result of another, albeit related, set of coincidences. Lodge had a keen interest in the immigration debates of the time, like Roosevelt. Like his friend, he maintained that the influx of Barbarians and their subsequent absorption into the citizenry had irrevocably destabilized Rome, but in common with many native-born Protestant Americans, he felt that there was an external element which acted as a vital catalyst to the eventual destructive power of these incomers—Christianity.

He was not alone in this assessment. Over a century before, Edward Gibbon had argued that when Constantine had his vision at the Milvian Bridge and converted to Christianity in 312, he had started a process which was for centuries to come to condemn Europe to live under an ever more hidebound, emasculated, cruel, yet despotic and corrupt Roman Catholic church.

Gibbon, the apostate Roman Catholic, saw “the new religion [of Constantine as one in which] ministers superseded the exercise of reason, resolved every question by an article of faith, and condemned the infidel to the eternal flame.” His decision to make Christianity the official religion of the Empire meant that “the Roman world was [to be] oppressed by a new species of tyranny.”17
Constantly re-enforcing this link, in the later sections of his massive work, Gibbon keeps returning to the resurgence of Rome under Julian. Julian was the emperor who tried, in the long term, unsuccessfully to re-introduce the “Old Gods.” Gibbon comments on how under Julian their enemies faced a re-vivified Rome and were once again suitably, albeit briefly, awed by Roman military might.

Lodge cannot have overlooked this central and constant theme and its implications when he later wrote to Roosevelt arguing that “I read over a few years ago the new edition of Gibbon which was edited by [John Bagnell] Bury, pre-eminently a representative of the scientific school and was astonished to find how little there was that even a scholar like Bury could find to correct. In all the great essentials Gibbon is as right now as he was when he wrote.”

Another, New York patrician—and a correspondent of both Roosevelt and Lodge—the race theorist, conservationist, and amateur historian, Madison Grant, added fresh interpretations to the argument. When, on the verge of joining the Great War, Grant published his best-selling account of the racial pseudo-history of the world, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), he revisited, publicized, and elaborated on many of the themes which had interested and inspired Lodge and Roosevelt nearly two decades earlier.

Grant saw the unquestioning acceptance of the Catholic tenets of Christianity as stultifying and debilitating for the Roman Empire. He saw this influence as most apparent in the Latin countries of Europe. In particular, he agreed with Lodge in his celebration of paganism. But there were differences. Where Lodge had seen the evolution of races in Europe as dependent on biology, with historical intervention subsumed to “germ plasm” (genetic material), in relation to the “Mediterraneans” Grant put forward a less hierarchical view.
Grant agreed with Lodge in his assessment of the negative effects of Catholicism as being most evident since the Dark Ages through the "elimination of brains in France, Spain and Italy." Some of this he puts down to an innate racial inferiority, but again, he sees the insidious effect of the dead hand of the Catholic Church, enforcing celibacy on many of the most able and ambitious in the leading Catholic nations.

The thrust of Grant's argument harked back even more strongly to the Adams brothers, and Lodge's and Roosevelt's vision of the natural right of America to control, educate, and enlighten those less fortunate than themselves in empire. Ironically it drew legitimacy through the celebration of the demise of the Roman Empire rather than its glories.

Grant argued that far from destroying a glittering civilization, the Barbarian invasions had actually re-invigorated Europe through destroying the sham, moribund, and decadent Roman Empire. In his vision of the collapse of Rome, the Teutons, or Nordics—as Grant called the Germanic tribes—were a virile, democratic, independent, but potentially destructive force.

Unwilling to live under the corrupt and decadent regime that was the later Roman Empire, the tribes had first defeated the Roman legions sent to subjugate them and then moved south from their dark forest strongholds to nibble away at the fringes of the empire until they were powerful enough to take the capital itself. To Grant and other Nordic supremacists it was this unquenchable democratic urge which had fed the American break from the British Empire.

America was not alone in using long dead opponents of the Roman Empire as symbols of nationhood. In France, the heroism of ancient Gaul was made into a cult of Caesar's opponent, Vercingetorix. In the recently independent
Belgium—itself named after one of the Gallic tribes—Ambiorix held a similar position. Britain had Boudicca, but it was the German, Arminius who was the most important national figure.

Arminius, or Hermann, as he came to be known, was a vital figurehead for newly unified Germany. His victory over Varus in the Teutoburg in 9 AD not only cost the Romans 20,000 legionaries, but it also made certain that the Rhine became the northern boundary of the Roman empire, thus establishing a long lived pedigree for a true and individually German heritage.

The cult of Arminius was a model for nationalistic plays, novels, music, and opera throughout the German-speaking world. Across the Atlantic in 1840, a fraternal society called the Order of the Sons of Hermann (Der Orden Der Hermann’s Sohne) was founded to be an American-Teutonic organization, looking after the interests of German-speakers in all regions of the Republic. Dedicated not only to the protection of German immigrant interests, it also took on a mission to promote American-German relations and to induce pride in the German culture and heritage.

By 1895, the American Sons of Hermann was an organization some 30,000 strong with 381 lodges in 16 states. It is indicative of the success of the fraternity that in the 1890s the Sons of Hermann raised $30,000 to erect a copy of the huge Arminius statue in Teutoburg. The American copy would stand over 100 feet high in New Ulm, Minnesota, and was considered by many German-Americans to rival the Statue of Liberty in both its scale and political significance.

Here was a statue that physically demonstrated that the descendents of the tribes of the Teutonic forests, with their iconoclastic belief in individual democracy, were at least as great an influence on the development of American liberty.
as the French Revolutionary leaders or, for that matter, the Pilgrim Fathers.²²

At least a part of this patriotic drive was inspired by the nature of American society at the time of the conflict with Spain. The 1890s had seen a massive growth in immigration from southern and eastern regions of Europe which was beginning to dwarf the flow of those migrating from the more traditional regions of the Old World—Britain, Scandinavia, and, most importantly in this case, Germany.

Fear of this “new” immigration blurred the boundaries between the national origins of the existing population. It allowed the Germans and Scandinavians in particular to define and picture themselves as “Old Stock” American. Since many of these new immigrants were either Catholic or Orthodox, the metaphor of Rome was used in yet another capacity.

Extending the idea of Catholic decadence and its detrimental effect on the spirit of Europe, the emerging Germanophile lobby extended the influence of the Germanic tribes and saw their overwhelming drive for democratic individualism in the Reformation. To Nordic-supremacists it was hardly surprising that the Reformation, as with the other attack on Roman domination, originated in “the Germanic soul [as a revolt] against un-Germanic spiritual tyranny.”²³

When the Germanic soul’s restlessness led to the invasion of France in August 1914, many in America sought to disassociate themselves from the virtues they had previously praised. The dog-eat-dog individualism that had proved so iconoclastic, refreshing, and re-vivifying in both Alaric’s sack of Rome and Luther’s attack on Papal authority, was no longer viewed as the source of Western Europe’s supremacy or of its virtues.
Germany’s trampling of Belgian neutrality; accusations of atrocities, and use of terror weapons were played up by effective allied propaganda in America. The Barbarian was no longer the savior of European civilization; instead, by late March 1917, with the German re-introduction of unrestricted U-boat activity and the discovery of the Zimmermann Telegram, many Americans showed less sympathy for the Teutonic slant in this view.

An indication of the shift is shown in an editorial in the New York Times which condemned German “cruelty, hatred and spite.” It referred to the German army as the “new barbarians,” motivated by visions of plunder, and compared them to those who had “induced the Dark Ages.” It went on to explain that

...in the presence of the attempt to punish the French people by making Northern France uninhabitable, it is plain that there is no reason and there is no escape from the conclusion that the men who ravaged those departments and who announce their intention of obliterating life from the other departments as they retire to the frontier are activated by precisely the same motives as those who swept down from the northern forests upon the dying Roman Empire.24

As the most powerful neutral power—in terms of industrial and economic capacity, as well as manpower—even before the outbreak of war, it was apparent that America would be the most important battleground for the propaganda struggle that was bound to accompany the fighting.25

Both sides sought historical justifications, and the legacy of the collapse of the Roman Empire formed a jumping off point for these historiographical fancies. The “Teuton” argument was summed up in the reasoning of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who felt that Germany had a civilizing mission in the war.
In line with the theories of Houston Stuart Chamberlain and other Volk militants, Wilhelm saw the coming struggle as the means by which European order would be restored and the threat of Slavic and Asiatic domination would be removed.26

Teutonic apologists claimed this *Pax Germannica* would replace the *Pax Britannica*. Germany would reform and lead the restored Roman Empire which would emerge as the Germanic powers tamed the “race chaos” that had held Europe in its grip since the Dark Ages.27

Others saw it differently. Claiming that Germany started the war, during the period of US neutrality, an Entente representative argued that “The war in Europe is merely a repetition in the present instance of all the wars of the past in which the Germanic peoples, whether known as Germans, or as the barbarians beyond the pale of Empire, have taken part.”28

Once America entered the War, the Anglo-Saxon argument relied less on the inheritance of the golden age of Roman unity and more on the democratic-individualistic principles that had heretofore been credited to the Nordic tribes as a whole in their conquest of tyrannical Rome. While many race theorists, including Madison Grant, claimed that both the Great War and the sack of Rome were the result of the creative/warlike nature of all the Teuton tribes, others separated the branches of the Nordic family.

In a version of history that paid more attention to the wartime climate of super-patriotism, the Anglo-Saxon side of the family had abandoned the tribal militarism of their Nordic roots that had come to dominate the German side. They opted instead for a Whiggish interpretation which was, through evolution and conciliation, striving towards democracy.
They played up the Barbarians iconoclasm and made less of their violence. The progress of this vision of civilization since the fall of Rome relied on a common British-US history in which, from Runnymede to Lexington, “whether in England or America, the struggle [of the English-speaking people]...has always been toward the same goal—personal liberty for all from autocratic rule.”

The super-patriotism did not stop with the Armistice. While much of the anti-German sentiment dissipated once the treaty was signed with America’s “allies” in July 1919, the fear that civilization was under threat remained. The Roman analogy was used once more, this time with reference to Lenin’s regime in Moscow. Again, the metaphor was employed by both supporters and opponents of the Bolsheviks.

To Lenin’s adherents, there was a regime in place that represented a real alternative to the capitalist/liberal institutions—however unstable and isolated. Bolshevik Moscow continued the Orthodox/Tsarist habit of styling itself the “Third Rome,” while devoting itself to a new god, a new empire, and new disciples around the world.

In keeping with this status, Lenin’s regime took to broadcasting dire warnings about the fate of capitalism heading towards a collapse as epic as that of Rome. The message was taken up and relayed by “reds” around the world. Soviet historians and their sympathizers put forward a class-based interpretation of Rome’s demise. They saw the collapse as resulting from such things as the debilitating civil strife from the third century onward being a result of peasant and slave discontent at the “embourgeoisment” of Roman society.

In America, radicals told large audiences that capitalism was teetering and collapse was imminent, and they were not
only preaching to the choir. Anti-establishment figures such as Spartacus became rallying points in popular songs, on the stage, on the radio and in literature. An example of this phenomenon can be seen when a “Classical Club” in Boston showed a documentary film on the slave leader in January 1924. It attracted 2,000 or so people.\(^{32}\)

However, the vast bulk of Americans saw the Russian revolutionaries as new barbarians. It was yet another instance of the inherent barbarity of the Slavic race coming out in the revolt of the “under-races.” The reds were unmoved by the constraints of religion, tradition or culture. They had no interest in democracy. To their opponents they merely sought plunder and power and not only in Russia, but also in Bela Kun’s Hungary and wherever else they could install their “governments.”

As the New York Times put it, “the Roman Empire and its civilization were destroyed by barbarian hordes coming from the East and it is from the east again that comes the wind which threatens again to destroy the work of four centuries” of democratization.\(^{33}\) Many Americans see themselves as living with that threat in the present day.

So what does this use of Rome as a metaphor actually tell us and do we still use it? Even in our age in which knowledge of the classics is a rarity, Rome can still be used for ideological arguments. Plus ça change? Well, actually quite a lot. The way in which Rome is used today is totally different, although the message remains fundamentally the same. Is it possible to see Barack Obama or John McCain—or rather their speech writers—using the example of Trajan or even Constantine, in the way in which Theodore Roosevelt or even Woodrow Wilson might have done? It is unlikely. But this is perhaps more to do with their audience than their message.
Nevertheless, the Roman parable is still malleable and ubiquitous. It can still be all things to all people: molded to suit the argument, but interpretation is the key. Where a slide from Roman imperialism to Roman Catholicism, avoiding a “Dark Age,” may make a suitable message in a European Union which is seeking further unity, such an interpretation does not have the same resonance with the opponents of President Bush’s “War on Terror.” To them, the decline and fall of Rome is all too visceral a parable of imperial overstretch to ignore in a nation that winces each time the body bags return from Iraq.

In the America of 2008, as Niall Fergusson has eloquently pointed out, Empire is the elephant in the room and for as long as that is the case, Rome will be a potent symbol of America’s future and a valuable tool for interpreting its past.

Endnotes


For a good, brief overview of the situation in the Philippines and its reception in America, up to and including the position in 1900, see Noel Jacob Kent, *America in 1900* (Armonk, New York, 2002) pp.147-155.

Editorial in the *New York Times* September 17, 1900.

For good examples of these commentaries see *New York Times*, March 30, 1898 or *The Verdict*, Nov. 6, 1899.


See the *New York Times*, Oct. 21, 1900.

Taken from “The Native Peoples of the Philippines” *Report of the Philippine Commission to the President January 31, 1900* vol. I (Washington, DC, 1901) pp.11-12.


18 Henry Cabot Lodge to Theodore Roosevelt, January 10, 1913 cited in Henry Cabot Lodge, Selections From the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884-1918 vol. II (New York, 1925) p.432.


22 For details see the New York Times May 19, 1895.

23 Most of the Teutonic/Nordic/Ayran supremacists included some form of eulogy to the German origins of the Reformation. This explanation is taken from Houston Stuart Chamberlain, The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century (rev.ed. London, 1912), p.513.


26 See New York Times June 28, 1915. This topic is discussed and the Kaiser’s relationship with Chamberlain analyzed in
most biographies of Wilhelm. One of the best analysis of this relationship can be found in Lamar Cecil, *Wilhelm II: Emperor and Exile, 1900-1941* (Chapel Hill, 1996) pp.55-58. For a discussion of the background to this Volk Militancy see George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Rev.ed. Chicago, 1974) pp. 73-90.

27 The best examples of Germany’s war motivation being an effort to preserve white supremacy are to be found in Hugo Münsterberg, *The War and America* (New York, 1914).

28 For details of the idea of the Great War as a “Crusade” – from a British, French, Russian and German perspective – see Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice and the Great War* (Chicago, 2004).


31 Although written by a refugee from Bolshevism, probably the most influential contemporary Marxist analysis of the fall of Rome can be found in Michael Ivanovich Rostovzev, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1926).
