

William A. Williams' *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* (1969).

Contemporary attitudes lead the author to conclude that the Gilded Age was a period of transition between noninvolvement and involvement in world affairs. He admits America's preoccupation with internal developments and its neglect of external affairs but maintains that a dynamic foreign policy began to appear. The public's ambivalent attitudes reflected in his book warrant this conclusion. Ideas do not change suddenly; instead old and new overlap during an intermediate period. Thus, Plesur has thoughtfully, although not substantially, qualified the traditional view of foreign affairs during the Gilded Age.

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US Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s. By David Healy. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970. Pp. ix, 315. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$10.95.)

David Healy has produced a reasonable, believable account of American foreign policy in the 1890s, a task so difficult that few historians have come close to accomplishing it. The remarkably strident language and ruffian behavior of the period has sometimes embarrassed its students or inspired them excessively. Now and then the historian feels the need to apologize, calling the imperialistic age an aberration, a single wayward step off the high road of American history. For those preferring another sort of generalization, the period is described as a treasure trove of proofs and precedents. Numerous special causes have been advanced, then ardently defended against other, equally narrow interpretations. Some authors say that economic greed controls history, perfect examples being the war with Spain and the conquest of the Philippines. These same events are also said to illustrate the destructive energy of America's moralistic tradition, the power of the press, or the ever volatile condition of democratic life. According to other writers the true cause of American imperialism was racism, or Social Darwinism, or assorted psychic phenomena left over from the Civil War or produced by the internal discontents of the 1890s.

Healy argues with none of these interpretations. For him all have some validity; for history is complex, and seven volunteers, converging on a recruiting office, might be propelled by an equal number of reasons. Chapter length studies of James Harrison Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root, Charles Denby, Charles A. Conant, and others show how a common policy—in this case a war of

conquest—can result from pride, fear, desire for financial profits, self-righteousness, boredom, insecurity, pugnacity, and other instincts, often quite tangled in a single personality.

While Healy does not attack previous efforts to explain why the United States fought Spain, he treats them as justifications (some shabbier than others) instead of causes; thus, all lose some importance. The American people went to war and absorbed an empire simply because they wanted to. Label it a physical urge, an animal instinct, or “nervous intoxication,” as Healy does on page 236. This, at least, is the implication of a work wherein primitive urges are never successfully concealed by those who publicly proclaim that war is necessary for reasons of commerce, security, national unity, biology, progress, or Christianity.

Free of both political biases and computerized statistics, the book must depend—and most successfully so—upon its author’s comprehensive mastery of his period and of a prose style which is clear, at times witty, and thoroughly civilized.

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The Higher Realism of Woodrow Wilson and Other Essays. By Arthur S. Link. With a Foreword by Dewey W. Grantham. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971. Pp. xxii, 425. Frontispiece, notes, tables, figure, index. \$12.95.)

This volume possesses three merits. It authoritatively delineates Woodrow Wilson’s career, effectively elucidates some intricacies of American progressivism, and conveniently collects twenty-four major essays and papers of a distinguished historian. These articles demonstrate both Wilson’s and Link’s development; yet, they are characterized by an implicit continuity and coherence. What accounts for this unity is Link’s plenary assertion that Wilson represented “the apogee, of the Calvinistic tradition among all statesman of the modern epoch” (p. 4).

A surging sense of duty and destiny were not all that a passionate faith caused. Wilson’s Presbyterian inheritance instilled devotion to ordered, representative government, recognition of God’s sovereignty over the historical process, and repudiation of a hierarchic society based upon birth or wealth. Calvinism, according to Link, “was one of the main causes . . . of equalitarian democracy” (p. 16) in the United States and was for Wilson the animating source for the certitude that all men had an inherent capacity for self-government. What is not directly attributable to Presbyterianism, in Link’s judgment, is the enlivened Christian social conscience distinguish-