

The shortcoming of the book is that the author has tried to do too much in too few pages. This results in a superficial treatment of everything. Too often Currie presents Debs' views without attempting to explain, in any depth, why the Socialist leader held these views or why his position changed over a period of years. For example, in four short paragraphs Currie chronicles Debs' transition from a conservative trade unionist opposed to the use of the strike and boycott to a labor leader who conceded that such weapons were a necessary part of labor's arsenal (pp. 20-21). Yet Currie offers no insights as to why this important change took place in Debs' thinking. Surely readers could expect any addition to the mountain of published material on Debs to offer more than an uninspired repetition of well known facts. Currie's excuse is that it was not his intention "to assess the sources of Debs's ideas, for to do so would necessitate another book-length study" (p. 10). While this may be true, a simple cataloging of Debs' views seems pointless. It would have been better if Currie had selected a single theme (Debs and the labor movement, Debs and industrial unionism) and developed it at length.

Finally, Currie's assertion that the "fundamental principles behind Debsian Socialism and Americanism are the same, for both profess a belief in equality, individual freedom and democracy" (p. 9) defines both concepts so broadly as to rob them of all meaning.

*Indiana University, Bloomington*

Errol W. Stevens

*Ambiguous Imperialism: American Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics at the Turn of the Century.* By Göran Rystad. (Stockholm, Sweden: Esselte Studium, 1975. Pp. 365. Tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, Sw. Crs 58:.)

In this volume Göran Rystad examines American politics from adoption of the peace treaty of 1899, which concluded the Spanish American War and in which the United States acquired a small colonial empire, through the presidential election of 1900, when imperialism occupied a prominent place in political rhetoric. He seeks to determine if foreign policy was the foremost issue in this election, what effect foreign affairs had on politics, and what impact politics

had on foreign policy. He gives special attention to politics in Indiana, a state which at that time was pivotal in the national election.

The book is a detailed, at times almost tedious, examination of politicians and politicking, state party conventions and platforms, leading to the national conventions and the presidential contest between William Jennings Bryan and William McKinley. The author shows that imperialism—and politics—was indeed ambiguous and confusing. People supported or opposed imperialism for many reasons, and conflicts often developed within the parties. Democrats in one state sometimes sounded like Republicans in another. Although the Democratic party attacked imperialism as the “paramount issue” in the campaign, Bryan did not propose immediate relinquishment of the Philippine Islands or Puerto Rico, and in parts of the country he scarcely mentioned foreign policy. Because of Bryan’s endorsement of free coinage of silver, some dedicated anti-imperialists ended up voting for the other party. The Republican party supported recent American expansion (Republicans would not concede that it was imperialism), but many campaigners preferred to stress economic issues and Bryan’s stand on currency. Partly because of these confused circumstances, partly perhaps because of a narrow vision of foreign policy, Americans decided to vote on grounds more familiar than imperialism. The contest of 1900, concludes the author, “was more an election for prosperity and against change than a referendum of the new foreign policy” (p. 309).

Rystad has produced a useful volume. There are a few problems of style. Writing is occasionally repetitious; sentences frequently are cumbersome; here and there a word is not used properly—problems doubtless fostered by the difficulty of translation. The introduction and first chapter provide excellent summaries of reasons for and interpretations of American expansion. The author maintains admirable objectivity and carefully avoids conclusions not supported by fact. His research is impressive and illustrates the tiresome digging needed for many topics in American history. Rystad has undertaken the difficult task of determining attitudes at a time when there was little in the way of opinion surveys. He examined several manuscript collections and scholarly or semipopular journals; research in newspapers was massive. As a result one finds a great deal

about attitudes of politicians, newsmen, and leaders from other segments of society—no complete coverage of public opinion but probably the best that could be done. Readers interested in Indiana will enjoy the attention given that state and the generous mention of counties, small towns, and newspapers with which they might identify.

This book does not determine if Americans in 1900 supported imperialism, but it does suggest some meaningful generalizations about politics and diplomacy. Faced with an issue even as important as imperialism, the people were less concerned with foreign affairs than with domestic issues which affected their immediate interests. Politicians did not hesitate to use foreign policy as a political device to be trumpeted or left alone as the situation seemed to indicate. However uncertain the decision in 1900, so the author concludes, imperialism had attracted so much attention, left so much doubt, that the government was in no mood to embark on future colonialist ventures.

*Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo*      Ross Gregory

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### Papers of Aaron Burr Desired

The New-York Historical Society would appreciate any information concerning letters to or from Aaron Burr or any documents written by Burr. Such materials will be included in a definitive microfilm edition of Burr papers to be published by the society. Please send any information to Mary-Jo Kline, Editor, The Papers of Aaron Burr, New-York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, New York, New York 10024.

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