

**JAMES R. FLYNN**

**WHERE HAVE ALL  
THE LIBERALS  
GONE?**



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## Where Have All the Liberals Gone?

For thirty years, James R. Flynn has been the most respected critic of the notion that the IQ gap between black and white Americans is genetic in origin. In this controversial new book, Flynn turns his eye to politics, offering an alternative to the vision of American society popularized by Herrnstein and Murray in *The Bell Curve*.

*Where Have All the Liberals Gone?* addresses everyone – liberal or conservative – who wants “something better than a foreign policy that provokes disgust, domestic politics with neither vision nor the resources to promote the common good, and a foolish relativism that reduces all ideals to the lowest common denominator.”

Flynn believes that only Social Democracy can realize the Jeffersonian ideal on which America was founded. He rearms American idealism with new ideas – and examines topics ranging from the true state of black America, the case for affirmative action, the folly of the Iraq invasion, to the liberal failure of will. He concludes with a powerful defense of humane ideals and human autonomy.

JAMES R. FLYNN is Professor Emeritus at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and a recipient of the University's Gold Medal for Distinguished Career Research. In 2007, the International Society for Intelligence Research named him its Distinguished Contributor of the Year.



Where Have All the  
Liberals Gone?  
*Race, Class, and Ideals in  
America*

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JAMES R. FLYNN



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In memoriam:

Don Anderson

If Jefferson was wrong, America was wrong.

(James Parton, 1874)

I don't see color.

(Beatrice Hugerley, black member of the  
Congress of Racial Equality, 1961)

We now hear that she [Spain] is well rid of her colonies  
and that, if she will devote her energies to her internal  
development . . . she may be regenerated.

(William Graham Sumner, 1899)

Here I stand.

(Martin Luther, at the Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521)



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# Prologue

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The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
(William Butler Yeats, 1920)

As the title of this book indicates, I believe that what passes for public debate in America is barren because of the failure of will and a poverty of ideals among American liberals. I am not a liberal but a Social Democrat. However, if there is to be any hope of a Social Democratic America there must first be a liberal America, so our fates are conjoined. The spokespeople for conservatism are articulate and spirited. But much of their success is due to the fact that liberals have been so feeble in criticizing their agenda and suggesting real alternatives. No one ever won a political debate by endless repetition of the refrain “but everything is going wrong.”

I believe that the entire center of American politics, both Republicans and Democrats, has lost touch with reality and the ideals on which the Republic was founded. Debate on race, class, foreign policy, how to safeguard Israel, how to live a good life, is obscured as if some great dark cloud of self-imposed censorship had descended on our minds. And yet, America has a great political tradition given definitive expression by our patron saint, Thomas Jefferson. Perhaps the first step toward clarity is to recall what America was supposed to be all about.

I will offer an account of the Jeffersonian tradition from the perspective of the Social Democratic left. When I propose alternatives to current American policies, the substance of these will reflect

Democratic Socialism. However, I hope that readers from any part of the political spectrum will find some profit herein. For example, most conservatives will reject my views on affirmative action, the welfare state, and even what I make of the Jeffersonian tradition. But I see no reason they should not resonate with my views about what is going on in black America, US foreign policy, and thinking about morality.

I will discuss four things as preeminent in terms of blighting what the American experiment was all about: **race**, particularly the fact that black Americans are handicapped by their skin color even in an era of declining prejudice; **class**, particularly the notion that it has become correlated with genes and that a large number of Americans are trapped in a marginalized underclass; **military power** driven by moral arrogance, so that America becomes a cause of despair (rather than hope) for the rest of the world; **morality** clouded by confusion, so that Americans lose sight of what it is to be fully human.

The list could be extended to include other things, environmental degradation, water scarcity, too much sugar in the tomato sauce, but I lack the expertise to say anything helpful about these. Surely, even in this age of prophets of doom, four disasters lurking on the horizon are enough for one book.

Given the centrality of America on the world scene, others have an interest in its fate. English readers in particular should identify with these themes. Their John Locke was the philosophical father of Jefferson and his ideals, they have a black minority, the development of an underclass is supposed to be their fate as well, their government seems obsessed with being an accessory to American foreign policy, and these are prey to similar moral confusions.

The Jeffersonian ideal constitutes the closest thing America has to a public philosophy, that is, a shared set of values that bind its people together. Part I consists of an introductory chapter in which I will describe what we are in danger of losing. It talks about Jefferson, the problems he foresaw, the problems he did not, and a

few of those who have walked in his moral and political footsteps, some of them sadly taking wrong turns. The remainder of the book is divided into three parts, dealing respectively with black America, trends in American society and foreign policy, and fundamental moral issues. That is a wider range of topics than convention dictates. But I have never cared much about convention because it makes you a slave of your time rather than its master.

To justify the topics that dominate various chapters:

- 1 Most whites and many blacks lack a clear vision of the greatest problem that confronts American society, at least in terms of social justice, that is, the state of black America;
- 2 No one can discuss this problem without a frank and open discussion of the contention that American blacks, on average, have inferior genes for intelligence;
- 3 The case for affirmative action has never been properly put;
- 4 We must acknowledge the debt owed to *The Bell Curve* for making us rethink how we can achieve the American dream;
- 5 Whether we can salvage something from the dangerous mess that is American foreign policy;
- 6 The absence of what should be the principal issue of American politics, namely, the shift of resources away from military spending toward social purposes;
- 7 Overcoming moral confusion, particularly notions such as that we can give no reasoned defense of certain ideals versus others, and that we are creatures of circumstance that cannot be judged for what we do.

I make no apology for including some moral philosophy. Poverty of thinking about ethics can do as much to distract us from good living as the material poverty that makes keeping our bodies alive an all-consuming task. When people think their ideals are mere preferences or no more worthy of regard than any other, it saps their moral idealism. When they lose sight of what it is to be a responsible moral agent, it weakens the judgments they pass on themselves and

others. The warning by Yeats issued in 1920, the danger that the best will lack all conviction, has if anything greater relevance today than it did three generations ago. The chapters on morality are the foundation on which all else rests. I suspect that they will be particularly interesting to those who, like myself, were students of Leo Strauss.

References to *The Bell Curve* will be conspicuous because it is the most impressive work to present a picture of America that contrasts with my own. I will criticize the “meritocracy thesis” (in chapter 5), which, to my mind, is the most troubling of its contents. I know of no one else who has done so. *The Bell Curve* was not about race, but since it was about America it could not ignore race. I think some readers will appreciate the alternative view I offer.

This book is particularly for the young. I suspect that most of them want something better than a foreign and military policy that provokes disgust, a domestic politics with neither the vision nor the resources to provide for the common good, and a foolish moral relativism that reduces all ideals to the lowest common denominator. My message is this: your idealism will fade unless a life of political activism is accompanied by a life of the mind. The problems herein are those I could not get out of my mind during sixty-two years of political activism. Perhaps an old agitator can keep those whose youthfully ardent desire for social justice has flared into existence from having to reinvent the wheel.

Well, then, we begin a journey that tries to answer a question that dominates everything else: does American idealism have a future? Particularly the kind of idealism that has characterized the American left. Can men and women enlist in its ranks bathed in the bright light of everything reason has to say about the contemporary world?

PART I

St. Thomas Jefferson



# 1      Something beautiful is vanished

---

But when the dream departs  
It takes something from our hearts  
Something beautiful is vanished  
And it never comes again  
(Richard Henry Stoddard, 1825–1903)

At the end of *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein and Murray attempt to square their view of America with that of Thomas Jefferson. Their endeavors come as no surprise. In 1776, Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and penned these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” In doing so, he struck a chord that has reverberated throughout American history. Virtually every major political actor on the American scene has quoted Jefferson’s words and claimed to be a Jeffersonian, no matter how vigorously they disputed what his legacy entails.

But words can be mere words. If Americans have taken Jefferson seriously, we would expect to find some at least who have risked much to stand by his ideals. We would also expect periodic warnings about policies and developments that might prevent their realization in practice. Jefferson and his successors compiled a list of threats with imperialism, class, intolerance, and race most prominent. I have selected four giants to develop these themes. Their lives and thoughts are worth recounting for another reason: faced with a

**Box 1**

Some may find my sketch of American political history more than a little idiosyncratic. I had a kindred experience as a young lecturer at Wisconsin State. While sitting in a reading room, I found myself surrounded. Through one wall came the voice of a colleague and friend (we were friends for the time being although he said that, eventually, I would have to be eliminated). He was a member of the John Birch Society and was reading from a text he had written for the high schools. Through the other wall came a patriotic song sung by a girls' choir as if providing a musical accompaniment. With so little time, he could only note the most important events of American history, such as the founding of the first college fraternity and the frustration of two American boys having to fight in Korea under "a strange blue flag" (that of the United Nations). I have always hoped to buy a copy but fear it was never published.

dismal present, it is good to call to mind just what wonderful people the American political tradition has produced (see Box 1).

Only Jefferson himself invites us to examine the philosophical foundation of egalitarian ideals and to underline the fact that fervor is often a function of why we believe in something. However, William Graham Sumner will prove useful on imperialism, Eugene Victor Debs on class, and Carey Estes Kefauver on civil liberties. Kefauver also exemplifies how a principled man of great courage can be blind about the gulf between black and white.

## Jefferson and God

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) said that his ethical premises were self-evident. He did not mean to imply that no justifying argument lay behind them, but rather that the argument was so obviously valid that no rational person would reject it. The question of whether he was more influenced by Locke or Lord Kames (who was himself a



Lockean) is irrelevant in that the liberal thinkers of the time all shared much the same notions.

They appealed to the concept of man as he came unsullied from nature. At that point, convention (what man does to himself) had not distorted nature's handiwork. People were obviously equal at birth, helpless needy creatures, and dependent on their parents whom nature had endowed with a parental instinct as a sign that they were obliged to care for their children. None was born with a visible title to preferment, no child was born with a scepter in his hand, and all had free will, signs that the divine right of kings was bankrupt and that men were meant to freely consent to whatever government they chose.

All men have an instinct for self-preservation, a sign that the lives of all were precious and that murder and suicide were wrong. No one can contract to be a slave because that gives to another a power you do not yourself possess, namely, the right to take your life when you wish. Nature did not present the earth divided up by property boundaries, so property was to be acquired by mixing one's labor with it. All of these arguments are in Locke's early unpublished work on the *Laws of Nature*, circa 1660, and Kant repeated many of them in Jefferson's own day (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, AK, 420-468; Locke, 1954).

Lying behind this view of nature was the hand of God. In his old age, Jefferson wrote a treatise on Christianity designed to extract the true teachings of Christ from the rubbish in which they were buried (Matthews, 1984). All of Christ's teachings tend towards the happiness of man and they are summarized in the Sermon on the Mount. True Christianity involves only three propositions:

- 1 that there is only one God, and he all perfect
- 2 that there is a future state of rewards and punishments
- 3 that to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself is the sum of religion.

The aging Jefferson took great satisfaction that his fellow Americans shared his reverence for the ethical foundations of the Republic's political ideals. In 1824, two years before his death, he

wrote: "Nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man" (Hofstadter, 1962, p. 43).

## An ideal in search of a foundation

But when belief in God departs, the foundations collapse. As early as the 1850s, Mill composed his brilliant essay on *Nature*, published posthumously in 1874. Although his target is Locke what he says applies equally to Jefferson. Jefferson rejected the divinity of Christ but never doubted that Christ was God's exemplar as to how to live. He knew what he was expected to find in nature: benevolence and that the meek were as precious as the most high. His ethical ideals served as a sieve that filtered out the cruel face of nature and left a benevolent residue.

Mill was an atheist and looked at nature with an unprejudiced eye. As he says, only someone with a pre-existing humane ethic could overlook its brutality with whole cities buried by earthquakes and people stricken by meaningless diseases. An ethics truly derived from nature would make us worse than the Borgias. He goes on to ask, what do we mean by nature anyway? If we mean the whole of nature as governed by laws, every human act is good: the laws of biology are just as much obeyed when you poison someone as when you feed the needy. If you mean nature as untouched by human beings, every human act is bad: every time I exhale I alter the composition of the atmosphere in my immediate vicinity. Both conclusions are equally absurd (Mill, 1958).

With the original foundation of our ideals swept away, what is left? It has taken a long time for the rootlessness of ethics to dominate the popular consciousness but, except for the believers, the process is now complete. Allan Bloom's (1987) account of his students applies to my own: The self-evidence of humane moral principles has been replaced by a lazy set of "self-evident" notions clustering around the concept of cultural relativism. No one can defend his or her ideals as more rational than any others, so all ideals

and the people who hold them are equal and all should be allowed to live as they please without censure. Bloom asks them about Hitler's ideals and female circumcision. I prod them on an equally sensitive point. Most liberal-minded students in New Zealand believe that the indigenous Polynesians (the Maori) have been badly treated. I ask them whether it is legitimate for us to cross cultural lines and accuse Maori of sexism (most tribes do not allow women to speak at public meetings). And if that is not legitimate, is it not wrong for Maori to accuse white New Zealanders of injustice.

It may be said that as long as there is a popular ideology that supports a belief in equality and liberty, that is enough, no matter how muddled it may be. But the current ideology suffers from two defects. First, it is so contradictory that no intelligent person, certainly no one like Jefferson, can take it seriously. It winnows out the best, namely, those with any critical intelligence, and when they see through it, they have nothing. Second, it destroys passionate dedication to ideals. Passion requires believing that certain ideals are better than all others, not that all ideals are equally arbitrary. The tolerance that arises from a muddled cultural relativism is not a passionate attachment to civil liberties and a willingness to die in a ditch for them. It is a tepid thing, based on the reduction of all ideals to mere preferences in life style, culminating in the absurd admonition of "don't be judgmental."

Nietzsche accuses modern intellectuals of "soul superstition." He ridicules those who do not believe in God but cling to a morality that makes sense only for believers. Love for mankind in general makes some sort of sense if everyone has a soul dear to God, but love of mankind without this is simply stupidity and brutishness. How could anyone love ordinary people, with their pettiness, ignorance, dearth of anything interesting to say or do, without some concept to sanctify them? Nietzsche tells us that we should ask ourselves whether we would *really* be committed to egalitarian ideals were our minds not infected by a disreputable metaphysical residue. It is a fair question.

In Part IV, I will explore three alternatives. First, the possibility that I have been unfair to the current ideology, which has its roots in thinkers as distinguished as William James and Ruth Benedict. Perhaps “relativism” makes more sense as a foundation for the good life than first appears. Second, the solution of the followers of Leo Strauss. They see relativism as the chief enemy of all that is good and have designed an elaborate and subtle strategy to contain it. Finding these two options vulnerable, inevitably I will suggest my own solution. This consists of openly accepting the truth of ethical skepticism and seeing what justification of our ideals remains.

### Jefferson on entangling alliances

Untroubled by philosophical doubt, Jefferson believed that the principal threats to his ideals were political and social. He addressed the problems of American foreign policy and, thanks to his preeminence, everyone from isolationists to internationalists has tried to hitch Jefferson to their star (Peterson, 1998, pp. 266–271, 345, 416, 437–439, 448–452).

This is absurd, because broad ideals like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness cannot dictate foreign policy without being adapted to the political realities of the day and this last puts so heavy a weight in the scale that it transforms everything. Humane ideals certainly dictate that foreign policy cannot be amoral, as even my old professor Hans Morgenthau, the paradigm political realist, used to acknowledge (see *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*: 1946). But what they imply alters dramatically as we go from Jefferson’s day, where the problem was to save the fledgling Republic from extinction by some great power, to our day, where the problem is how a nation of predominate power can do good rather than harm to the global community.

When Jefferson gave advice about the conduct of foreign policy, he always emphasized America’s peculiar advantage. Its separation from the nations of Europe by oceans allowed America to live

in peace, just so long as it was not foolish enough to gratuitously involve itself in their quarrels by making “entangling alliances.” From his addresses and letters, there emerge three great objectives.

*(1) The preservation of the Republic*

War beyond the water is universal and must be kept out of our island. We must not pursue fantastic honor, unallied to virtue or happiness, or be swayed by angry passions. Leave Europeans to act out their follies and crimes among themselves. However, this did not forbid political realism. Jefferson wanted to buy the Louisiana territory from France to open up land for farmers. But he stressed that its peaceful acquisition had become urgent because it had passed from Spain into the hands of France. Spain was too weak to have aggressive aims. France was a great power and a common border would inevitably lead to war.

*(2) The eventual pacification of the world*

Jefferson thought that the main contribution America could make was to hope that its example might edify the nations of Europe and mitigate their war-like tendencies. One nation at least could be seen to have a “Quaker” foreign policy of good will toward all. The principles of humanity, the precepts of the gospel, and the general wish of the American people dictate friendship to all nations.

*(3) “Regime change” or the spread of Republican government*

Jefferson hoped that all nations would eventually enjoy Republican government and its blessings. Given America’s peripheral position and influence, this had to be pursued indirectly. America must not waste the energies of its people in war and destruction, even in support of principles that excite its admiration. To take sides in Europe, even with those who claim to champion Republican

principles, is to become entangled with nations who will have many other interests different from ours (Cunningham, 1987, pp. 259–264; Matthews, 1984).

Jefferson stated objectives to which all Americans pay homage. But all with any sense will recognize that his policy of “isolation” was dictated by circumstances that have altered. What separates American policy from Jefferson today is a failure to match his political realism. I will argue that our cardinal error is to put his third objective ahead of his second, that is, to put regime change ahead of pacifying the global society. I claim no knowledge of what priorities Jefferson himself would have set were he transported 200 years from his time into ours. As Philip Wylie once said, there is more debate about what Jefferson would have thought about interstate commerce than a sane man can stand.

### Jefferson and class: the earth belongs to the living

In January 1790, Jefferson gave Madison a fascinating paper. It stated a general principle that, like the rights of man, had universal application. The earth belongs always to the living in the sense that one generation cannot compromise the autonomy or freedom of the next. He had before his eyes the corrupt way in which property was distributed in royal France: lands given to the nobility, churches, and universities in perpetuity; hereditary offices, authorities, and titles; and monopolies in commerce, the arts, and the sciences. Such a system can be overturned at any time.

America was fortunate to lack such a feudal past. Nonetheless it was subject to the same principle: “The portion [of the earth] occupied by any individual ceases to be his when he himself ceases to be, and reverts to the society.” He has no *natural right* (italics Jefferson’s) to dictate who inherits it. Society may adopt rules of inheritance, allowing property to go to the wife, children, or creditors. But these laws like all others (including constitutions) are subject to amend-

ment and revision. At this point, Jefferson goes a bit berserk using actuarial tables. A man aged 24 has a life expectancy of 55 years, and therefore can lease his lands for no more than 31 years, a man of 54 for no more than one year. Jefferson calculated that a generation's span was nineteen years and argued that no government should incur a debt that could not be repaid within that time. The arithmetic makes sense: a child had less than a 50/50 chance of reaching maturity but someone who did could expect another thirty-one years (Washington, 1861).

Jefferson thought of taxes as something that privileged classes used to burden ordinary people. Further, the bulk of taxpayers of his day were small farmers whose income came from their own toil. In a letter to James Milligan in April 1816, he says that it would be unjust to take the fruits of someone's labor, or what someone has inherited from a parent's labor, and transfer that wealth to another person less skilled and industrious. However, he recognizes that an individual's wealth can become "overgrown" to the point that this is a danger to the state and recommends new laws of inheritance as a corrective: they would compel equal inheritance by all heirs (Hofstadter, 1962, p. 37). While this might be a corrective for property in land, it would do little to disperse other forms of wealth less important in Jefferson's day, that is, a radically unequal distribution of wealth in terms of cash and stock.

Against Jefferson's egalitarianism, it has been stressed that while he claimed he had always supported universal manhood suffrage, his 1776 draft of a constitution of Virginia included a property requirement. But he also proposed that every mature free male be granted 50 acres of land, thus making suffrage virtually universal (Hofstadter, 1962, p. 31). This brings us to the heart of Jefferson's egalitarianism: he wanted a society in which everyone was a free man, that is, owned sufficient land to be autonomous and provide a good life. But he could not imagine how this would be possible for anyone but a farmer who owned his own farm. Merchants were money obsessed and corrupt. Wage workers were at the mercy of

their employers and could only hope to better themselves by becoming employers who reduced others to dependence. Like everyone in his time, he merely accepted that life was to some degree a lottery: disease carried off infants and indeed those of all ages; accidents crippled; harvests failed. The concept of the welfare state simply did not have currency in his day (Cunningham, 1987).

Jefferson's own Presidency had a supreme irony. His embargo act attempted to maintain neutrality between France and Britain by curtailing imports from both. This forced America to attempt to be self-sufficient for manufactured goods. It spurred the kind of economic development that was fatal for Jefferson's ideal of a farming society with industry at a minimum. He had no solution to the problem of how a good society could be maintained as the labor force contained fewer and fewer who had the capacity to be free (farmers) and more and more who were crippled and deformed by their dependency (wage workers).

Sooner or later, the problem of how wage workers could approximate the autonomy, security of tenure, and dignity of farmers had to be faced. The obvious solutions were strong trade unions, popular control of the government, and the welfare state. As Jefferson's America faded, Debs and Social Democracy were waiting in the wings.

## Jefferson on Native Americans and blacks

In his second inaugural address to Congress on March 4, 1805, Jefferson included a long passage that set out his views on America's "aboriginal inhabitants." They were endowed with the same rights of man as Europeans, the same faculties, and had an ardent love of liberty. But now they were being overwhelmed by a flood of white population.

Jefferson, and in this he was of course correct, could not see how they could survive unless they compromised their cultures to learn agriculture and the domestic arts and advanced under the rule



of reason. His administration had liberally supplied them with implements and instruction but had met “powerful obstacles.” Jefferson never wavered from his views on “Indians” expressed in 1780 in reply to Buffon’s case for their innate inferiority. He says the Spanish only observed the Indians of South America after they had been degraded by ten generations of slavery. If they had studied the Indians of North America they would have seen “they were formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the ‘Homo sapiens Europaeus’.” He challenged anyone to find a speech by Logan, a Mingo chief, inferior to any delivered by Demosthenes or Cicero (Cunningham, 1987, pp. 276–277; Matthews, 1984, pp. 54–57).

Jefferson’s views on blacks were: that the opinion that they are inferior in reason is one he endorses as a suspicion only; that it cannot be justified without “many observations” (he welcomed contrary evidence throughout his life); that blacks are equal in that they possess a moral sense and qualify for the rights of man; and that slavery is wrong. His first draft of the Declaration of Independence contained the following: “[The king] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery . . . determined to keep open a market where *Men* should be bought and sold.” Jefferson was angry that he was forced to delete this passage. He had to face the fact that most Americans were unwilling to divest themselves of their slaves (Matthews, 1984, pp. 66–67).

Jefferson has been indicted for not freeing his own slaves. This overlooks the barriers Southern states had erected. Virginia law stated that if slaves were freed, anyone who found them could take possession. Jefferson was not willing to see his slaves fall into the hands of someone less benevolent. He would have to pay to transport them outside the boundaries of the South, and provide each with ample funds to get established, and even this would not ensure their survival given what they would face in eighteenth-century America. Jefferson was crippled by his own generosity. He borrowed funds to give to

beggars and, in his last years, suffered from underwriting the note of a neighbor in need. Still in debt, he managed to free a few slaves upon his death (Hofstadter, 1962, p. 22; Matthews, 1984, pp. 67-68).

## Sumner and the Spanish-American War

Fourteen years after Jefferson's death, William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) was born. As he watched America evolve from a rural into an industrialized society and from a small isolated nation into a world power, he became alarmed.

Sumner is remembered as America's leading Social Darwinist and her first Professor of Sociology. But his greatest contribution was a prescient analysis of how imperialism might corrupt America, although whether or not the disease would overwhelm the patient was in doubt for almost a century. The era of isolationism from 1918 to 1940 showed that some at least were resistant. Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia presented challenges that virtually coerced America into the role of a dominant global power between 1940 and the end of the Cold War in 1987. Those forty-seven years taught her bad habits. Today, the departures from America's traditional ideals Sumner lamented are no longer even seen for what they are. They enjoy bi-partisan support as if they were a rational policy of national security.

On January 16, 1899, Sumner (1899) delivered a speech to the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Yale University. He spoke about the Spanish-American War, which he called "The conquest of the United States by Spain." Sumner meant of course that while America had won the test of arms, Spain had won the battle of ideas. He advised the citizens of the Republic to think carefully about jettisoning America's traditional regard for liberty and self-government in favor of the imperialist mentality of Spain. If only someone of similar stature had delivered a similar address prior to America's invasion of Iraq. Sumner's points are of such obvious relevance that little comment is needed to render them contemporary.

*Manipulation of public opinion*

“It was necessary to make appeals to the public . . . [and] such appeals were found in sensational assertions which we had no means to verify, in phrases of alleged patriotism, in statements which we now know to have been entirely untrue.” In one respect, deception fell short of that perpetrated before Iraq. The American public was given the impression that the sinking of the US battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor was due to a Spanish mine when in fact it was either an accident or done by the Cuban rebels acting as agents provocateurs. But it was at least possible to suspect Spain at the time. The Bush administration managed to convince a majority of Americans that Saddam Hussein had destroyed the Twin Towers even though it knew that those who had done so were his sworn enemies. That the administration did this by indirection does not mitigate the fact that they fostered the misapprehension and took no effective steps to correct it.

*Unexpected consequences*

“A statesman could not be expected to know in advance that we should come out of the war with the Philippines on our hands, but it belongs to his education to warn him that a policy of adventure and of gratuitous enterprise would be sure to entail embarrassments of some kind.” Applied to Iraq, Sumner’s comments are too kind. The fact that Hussein’s Sunni supporters would fight rather than be subjected to Shiite domination was only too predictable.

*Taking control*

“It is impossible to improvise a colonial system . . . It depends on a large body of trained men, acting under traditions which have become well established, and with a firm esprit de corps.” We have lamented our failure to bring order out of the chaos of post-invasion Iraq as if it were a mere failure to plan, to anticipate, to prepare a detailed blueprint as

to how to get the electricity running. Nation building where there is no national identity (as there was in post-war Germany and Japan) is an almost impossible task without tyranny. But even a chance of success would have required the creation of a cadre with years of training and experience (to be gained where?) behind them.

*Reassurance that one's objectives are not imperialistic*

“Senator Foraker has told us that we are not to keep the Philippines longer than is necessary to teach the people self-government.” In Iraq we are not even willing to give an assurance that we mean to withdraw our troops. Our bases seem designed to be permanent and we will probably have to be forced to withdraw them because of the political instability or violence they engender.

*American exceptionalism*

“There is not a nation which does not talk about its civilizing mission just as grandly as we do. The English . . . talk least about it, but the Phariseism with which they correct and instruct other peoples has made them hated all over the globe.” Also: “We assume that what we like and practice, and what we think better, must come as a welcome blessing to Filipinos. This is grossly and obviously untrue. They hate our ways. They are hostile to our ideas. Our religion, language, institutions and manners offended them . . . The most important thing we shall inherit from the Spaniards will be the task of suppressing rebellions.” Enough said.

*Temptations of empire*

“[Spain] saw her resources spent on interests that were foreign to her, but she could talk about an empire on which the sun never set and boast of her colonies, her gold mines, her fleets and armies and debts. She had glory and pride, mixed, of course, with defeat and disaster,