



ISSN: 1309 4173 (Online) 1309 - 4688 (Print)
Volume 4 Issue 3, p. 113-136, October 2012

**Marked Out by the Will of Heaven to Sway the Destinies of Half the
Globe:” The Peculiar Imperialism of the United States and Russia¹**
*“Tanrı Tarafından Dünyanın Yarısının Kaderini Tayin İçin Belirlenenler:” Amerika
Birleşik Devletleri ve Rusya’nın Sıradışı Sömürgecilikleri*

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Abstract

It is argued in this paper that during the era of global imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while nations like Great Britain, France, and other European powers were amassing far-flung overseas empires, the United States and Russia engaged in a different form of imperialism. In the United States, what has traditionally been characterized as “frontier expansion,” and not as “imperialism,” has more recently been re-cast. Scholarship, especially since 1980, has characterized U.S. expansion from the initial 13 colonies on the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific coast explicitly as imperialistic. Similarly, recent scholarship on Russian expansion has also questioned both pre-revolutionary and Soviet claims that this also was not imperialistic. What scholars have not addressed are the parallels between American and Russian expansionist regimes with a view to characterizing how overland imperialism was different in its motivations and outcomes from the more traditional overseas imperialism engaged in by other contemporary expansionist powers. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Key Words: *United States, Russia, imperialism, over-land empire, over-seas empire*

Öz

Bu makale küresel sömürgecilik dönemi olarak bilinen 18. ve 19. yüzyıl’da İngiltere, Fransa ve diğer Avrupa güçleri geniş deniz aşırı imparatorluklar kurarken Amerika Birleşik Devletleri ve Rusya’nın sıradışı bir sömürgeciliğe giriştikleri tezini savunmaktadır. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’nde geleneksel olarak “sömürgecilik”

¹ Initial work on this project began as the result of an appointment through the Fulbright Scholars Program as the Nikolay V. Sivichev Distinguished Professor of American Studies at Moscow State University in 2007. I owe much to my hosts, Professors Irina Khruleva, Yuri Rogoulev, and Constantine Beloruchev for their hospitality and to my seminar students with whom I discussed many of the ideas presented here. Several colleagues at the University of Texas – Pan American – Professors Penelope Adair, David Carlson, Amy Hay, Kristine Wirts, and Tamer Balci – have also been generous in sharing their time and thoughts. Aspects of the discussion presented here will appear late in 2012 as chapter 1 in Eva-Marie Stolberg, ed., *“Rivals of the Twentieth Century”: USSR and USA. Two Geopolitical Powers in Competition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang).

değil de "sınır genişletme" olarak adlandırılan sınıflandırma yakın zamanda yeniden tanımlanmıştır. Özellikle 1980'den sonraki araştırmalar ABD'nin ilk kuruluşunu teşkil eden Atlantik Okyanusu kıyısındaki 13 koloniden Pasifik Okyanusu kıyılarına kadar yayılmasını açıkça sömürgecilik olarak nitelendirmektedirler. Benzer şekilde yakın dönemde Rus yayılcılığı üzerine yapılan araştırmalar gerek Rusya devrimi öncesinde gerekse Sovyet Rusya döneminde Rus yayılcılığının sömürgecilik olmadığı iddialarını sorgulamaktadırlar. Araştırmacıların üzerinde durmadığı önemli bir konu Amerikan ve Rus yayılcı rejimleri arasındaki benzerlikler ve bu kara sömürgeciliği türünün amaçları ve sonuçları itibarıyla diğer yayılcı güçlerin uyguladığı geleneksel deniz aşırı sömürgecilikten farklılıklarıdır. Bu makale literatürdeki bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD, Rusya, sömürgecilik, kara imparatorluğu, deniz aşırı imparatorluğu

In 1834, Alexis de Tocqueville chose to end Book One of his "Democracy in America" with a peculiar observation and prediction. The observation, one that would have sounded presumptuous to the world even a century later, was as follows: "There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans." And the prediction, which would have sounded fresh and ominous at the end of World War II, was that "Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe."²

Tocqueville's estimate came quite close to the mark—certainly by the mid-twentieth century Russia and the U.S. each swayed the destinies of half the globe. What could have led to such an early, and apparently prophetic, observation on the part of a visionary European political thinker? What Tocqueville observed and what shaped his prediction was that during the nineteenth century, Russia and the United States were each, in somewhat different ways, establishing and internalizing what U.S. historian Walter Nugent calls "Habits of Empire."³

Of course the United States and Russia were not alone in forging empires during the nineteenth century. Imperialism may well have been the single universal enterprise that embroiled the entire Western World during the period from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries.⁴ England, France, Holland, and many other Western nations imbibed equally in forming habits of empire during those years. But it was not empire *per se* that set Russia and the United States careening on a course toward global competition, but the specifics of their particular, and peculiar, form of imperialism that did the trick.

Before embarking on a comparative exploration of Russia's and the United States' expansive ventures in imperialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a thorny problem of terminology must first be laid to rest. If what happened in Russia and the United

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), I:434.

³ See Walter T. K. Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

⁴ This certainly is the opinion put forth by Emmanuel Wallerstein in his classic three volume summary of world systems. See Emmanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); *The Modern World-System, vol. II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); *The Modern World-System, vol. III: The Second Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840's* (New York: Academic Press, 1989); and *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

States can be credited to “habits of empire,” we must first establish that each was, in fact, engaged in imperialism.

In Russia’s case, this appears to be a fairly simple task. Beginning with the inauguration of Ivan IV in 1547, each monarch of Russia assumed the title Tsar, to which Peter I appended the title “Emperor of all the Russias” in 1721.⁵ Logically, then, if there was an emperor, there must have been an imperium. But calling itself an empire did not necessarily make it one. As Ronald Grigor Suny has pointed out, there is a significant discrepancy between formal definitions of imperialism and historical conditions in Tsarist Russia. Suny cites Michael Doyle’s definition of imperialism as “a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society.” Given this definition, Russia during the Tsarist era cannot be classified historically as an imperialist power because, according to Suny, most of the peoples over whom Russia exerted control cannot be characterized as political societies.⁶ In order to fit Russia into the larger conversation about empires and imperialism in the early modern age, Suny draws upon other theorists, notably John A. Armstrong and Mark R. Beissinger to arrive at a workable “ideal type”:

...empire is a composite state structure in which the metropole is distinct in some way from the periphery and the relationship between the two is conceived or perceived by metropolitan or peripheral actors as one of justifiable or unjustifiable inequity, subordination, and/or exploitation.⁷

Under this definition, Suny is satisfied that Tsarist Russia can justifiably be called an “empire” and its behavior as imperialism.

But does even this definition, broadened as it is, implicate the United States in imperialistic behavior during the nineteenth century? Nugent notes that “Americans have been reluctant, as many have pointed out, to own up that theirs is an imperial nation,” and until the 1980s it was traditional for historians to deny this categorically.⁸ James A. Field, for example, noted in 1978 that all extant scholarship agreed that imperialism did not exist in the American republic until the very end of the nineteenth century when there was a clear shift from internal expansion to external imperialism.⁹ But this perception (and state of denial) is historiographical, not historical. Traditional views concerning U.S. expansion before the twentieth century found expression and attained formalization in Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” In this classic

⁵ Robin Milner-Gulland engages in an interesting etymological discussion of the term Tsar (царь) as well as its formal adoption by Ivan IV. He also discusses Peter I’s incorporation of the formal title of Emperor (Император) in 1721. See Robin. Milner-Gulland, *The Russians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 71-73; 3.

⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, ‘National’ Identity, and Theories of Empire,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, 23-66 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24-25.

⁷ Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 26.

⁸ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 316.

⁹ A contention he does not dispute, though he rails at what in his judgment are the over-simplified explanations for the phenomenon. See James A. Field, “American Imperialism: The Worst Chapter in Almost Any Book,” *The American Historical Review* 83 (1978): 644-668. This is also discussed at some length in Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2006), 199-203.

telling of the American saga, the North American continent provided a vast cache of “free land” for a transplanted European population that undermined inherited habits of identity and authority, replacing them with new individualistic and democratic ones. A “pioneering” process taking place in waves between the onset of European settlement and the end of the nineteenth century gradually filled in the empty space that had characterized North America and gave rise to an altogether new and entirely unique American nation.¹⁰

While this Turnerian paradigm had its critics from the outset, few actually questioned the “free land” and “pioneering” aspects of Turner’s characterization.¹¹ However in 1980, diplomatic historian William Appleman Williams sounded a clarion call for a new departure. In the pages of *The Nation* magazine and in more extended book form later in the year, Williams challenged this benign characterization of American expansion, identifying “empire” instead of “pioneering” as the American “Way of Life.”¹² In that same year, Richard Drinnon wrote the damning manifesto *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*, which received a lot of attention but highly mixed reviews.¹³ Unaware of Williams’ manifesto but certainly influenced by Drinnon’s, eight years later, Patricia Nelson Limerick moved the matter of internal imperialism onto center stage. Abandoning such masking expressions as “pioneering,” “westering,” and “opening the frontier,” Limerick identified this process for what it, in fact, really was—conquest—giving rise to a new, post-Turnerian perspective on early U.S. history.¹⁴ Following up on this new paradigm, Nugent recently declared with no hesitation “The expansion of the United States was imperialistic.”¹⁵

Following through, then, it appears that the case can be made for discussing Russia and the United States as being empires among empires during that time when Emmanuel Wallerstein characterizes the world system as coming into being through the consolidation of global capitalist structures, specifically the period between 1730 and the end of the nineteenth

¹⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1893.

¹¹ For early commentaries and criticisms of Turner’s thesis, see George Rogers Taylor, *The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History* (rev. ed. Boston: Heath, 1956).

¹² See William Appleman Williams, “Empire as a Way of Life,” *The Nation* 231 (1980): 104-119; *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts about an Alternative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹³ Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

¹⁴ Limerick’s critique of the “Turner Thesis” forms the body of Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988). An excellent overview of the new, post-Turnerian scholarship on U.S. expansion can be found in Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991) and in William Cronon, Georges Miles, and Jay Gitlin, eds., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992). Limerick has since expanded on her critique and responded to her various critics in Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: Norton, 2000). Concerning Limerick’s ignorance of Williams’ earlier work, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, “Dilemmas in Forgiveness: William Appleman Williams and Western American History,” *Diplomatic History* 25 (2001): 293-300.

¹⁵ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 319, n. 1; 236.

century.¹⁶ But what sets the United States' and Russia's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperialism apart from that of the other colonizing powers is that theirs were over-land, as opposed to over-seas enterprises. As James Forsyth observes, Russia's expansion into Asia "was not dependent upon fleets of sailing-ships plying long distances across the ocean, but on an advance overland,"¹⁷ a case that William Cronon and countless others have equally made for the United States.¹⁸ For want of a better word, the United States and Russia were frontier states and created frontier empires.¹⁹

Virtually all modern nations started out as frontier empires of a sort. Examples like France under Louis XI and England under Henry VII and their various successors and emulators illustrate this point.²⁰ But these enterprises were carried out in a physical, political, and social space in which the dimensions for potential expansion were limited. Dominic Lieven notes that mountains, in particular, helped to prevent Western Europe from consolidating into an expansive unified state during the early modern era, while its island status played a similar role in limiting the contiguous territorial expansion of Britain.²¹ And, as Napoleon learned, even if topographical constraints could be overcome, neighboring states might well collaborate to form blocking coalitions and thereby prevent the formation of a super-state.²² Making note of these phenomena, Tocqueville observed, "All other nations seem to have nearly reached their natural limits, and they have only to maintain their power." Such was not the case, however, with the United States and Russia. Tocqueville continues, "but these are still in the act of growth... these alone are proceeding with ease and celerity along the path to which no limit can be perceived."²³

¹⁶ Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, vol. III*. It is worth noting that in his recent analysis, Charles S. Maier agrees that the United States is an "empire among empires" but denies that this was the case prior to the very late nineteenth century, arguing that during its period of continental expansion because, to his mind, the original inhabitants were stateless nomads or semi-nomads, its behavior did not constitute imperialism as such. See Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 26; 89. Recasting the definition of imperialism along the lines recommended by Suny effectively addresses this technicality.

¹⁷ James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

¹⁸ See, for example, William Cronon, "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, ed. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, 3-27 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).

¹⁹ While relenting on the absolute excision of the word "frontier" from scholarly discourse, Patricia Limerick continues to promote "great caution" when employing it (see Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century," in *The Frontier in American Culture an Exhibition at the Newberry Library, August 26, 1994-January 7, 1995*, ed. Richard White, 67-102 (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1994), 78. As should be clear, the term is not employed here in the orthodox Turnerian fashion but simply as a convenient and less awkward alternative to such constructions as "contiguous empire" or "over-land empire".

²⁰ Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out," 27.

²¹ Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 205-206.

²² See Michael Rowe, *Collaboration and Resistance in Napoleonic Europe: State-Formation in an Age of Upheaval, C. 1800-1815* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

²³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I, 434.

In addition, while European metropolises engaged in the process of nation-building generally incorporated peripheral contiguous peoples who were relatively similar to themselves in terms of economic and social organization, technological sophistication, and population density, the United States and Russia faced a dizzying variety of racially, culturally, and linguistically differentiated peoples on their immediate borders. Citing a classic Russian chronicle, Robin Milner-Gulland identifies at least fifteen distinct “nationalities” of hunter/gatherer and pastoral peoples on the immediate frontier of agricultural Russia during its initial period of expansion, a number that would expand exponentially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as its frontiers moved ever farther eastward and southward.²⁴ And it is a commonplace in the United States that its western frontiers were occupied by five hundred distinctive indigenous “nations” ranging from totally nomadic groups in the desert Great Basin to highly urbanized societies in the greater Southwest and the Eastern Seaboard.²⁵ Like their western European counterparts, both the United States and Russia intended to incorporate these varying peoples into an emergent national amalgam (or claimed to at any rate), but this often faced heavy resistance from both the conquered and the conquerors, and it is highly questionable to what extent that was actually achieved.²⁶ As Suny points out, “some populations able to distinguish themselves (or having been distinguished by others) who then resisted assimilation into the ruling nationality, became defined as a ‘minority’, and ended up in a colonial relationship with the metropolitan nation. In these cases ‘nation-making’ laid bare the underlying imperialism of the state.”²⁷ To the extent that subject peoples avoided or successfully resisted incorporation, then, the United States and Russia remained contiguous empires rather than fully articulated nation-states.²⁸

Though both may be described as engaging in imperialism, another immediate problem with tracing parallels between contiguous expansion in Russia and the United States remains: these processes appear to have taken place over vastly different expanses of time. If, like Milner-Gulland, we are to trace the territorial expansion of the Russian peoples back to the ninth century, parallels might be difficult to draw. Joseph L. Wieczynski, however, identifies the greatest structural parallels between the U.S. and Russian frontier experiences as

²⁴ Milner-Gulland, *The Russians*, 45. For the later period see Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia* and Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²⁵ See Alvin M. Josephy, *500 Nations: An Illustrated History of North American Indians* (London: Pimlico, 2005).

²⁶ The Russian efforts along these lines are discussed at length in Lieven, *Empire* and the efforts undertaken by the United States are outlined in Nugent, *Habits of Empire*. It is arguable that Russia was the more successful of the two at incorporating frontier populations, a point made by Crews in *Prophet and Tsar*, but the recent history of Russian relations with former subject peoples like the Georgians and Chechens render this problematic in the long run.

²⁷ Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 27-28.

²⁸ The absence of coherent nation-state status in the United States prior to the late nineteenth century forms the core of Fareed Zakaria’s argument; see Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Ronald Suny takes up the same question vis-à-vis Russia in “The Empire Strikes Out” and Geoffrey Hosking concludes of Russia that “a fractured and underdeveloped nationhood has been their principal historical burden.” Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), xx.

occupying the years between the late ninth century and mid-thirteenth century on the Russian side and the late eighteenth through late nineteenth centuries on the U.S. side,²⁹ but this structural comparison is predicated upon a Turnerian construction of the “frontier” concept. Shifting to a conquest-oriented, post-Turnerian position brings to the fore questions of time depth and the aptness of U.S. and Russian contiguous imperialism for comparison.

As to a continuous process in Russia dating from the ninth century, Wieczynski himself noted that the Mongol conquest of the Kievan Rus marked a precipitous break in Russian expansion and consolidation efforts until the reigns of Ivan III and Ivan IV.³⁰ But like the efforts of their late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Western European contemporaries, the “gathering of Russian lands” that took place under Ivan III and Ivan IV was more a case of nation-building than actual outward colonization: essentially the task that befell the Muscovite princes from the breaking of the “Mongol Yoke” through the “Time of Troubles” was recovering and consolidating the older Kievan and Novgorodan Russian heartland and creating defensible perimeters for it. And while Ivan IV did break new ground in promoting the Stroganov family’s venture to colonize Western Siberia in the 1550s, little came of this or similar adventures in imperialism until the following century.³¹ This point is made abundantly clear in the Russian language itself. As noted by Milner-Gulland, the term by which Russians referred to themselves prior to the seventeenth century was Rus, indicating continuity in self-identification reaching back to at least the ninth century. This term refers to “the essential Russia, the Russia that for better or worse lives in its people’s hearts, irrespective of the great moments of change that have punctuated its historical destiny.”³² In other words, prior to the eighteenth century, Russians referred to themselves as all of a piece, a single people, irrespective of one-time tribal or other differences. In the mid- to late-sixteenth century, the word “Rossiya” began to appear and, during the reign of Peter the Great, this became the customary term for referring to the Russian state. This was, according to Milner-Gulland, “an essentially bookish form, promulgated by a government keen to draw attention to new political realities...”³³ This corresponds in both time and symbolic meaning with Peter’s 1721 decision to adopt the title “Emperor of all the Russias,” a clear departure from an organic to a synthetic conceptualization of the Russian nation.

As for the Americans, Nugent suggests that U.S. imperialism can be traced from 1782, when boundary negotiations between Great Britain and the fledgling American Confederation reached their critical stage.³⁴ But it should be noted that colonists in British North America were engaged in contiguous territorial aggrandizement from the earliest days of settlement: by the mid-1670s outposts along the westernmost fringes of the chartered colonies had become commonplace. As in Russian Siberia, much of this settlement was sporadic and highly contested, but provides clear indication of what the future would hold.³⁵

²⁹ See Joseph L. Wieczynski, “The Frontier in Early Russian History,” *Russian Review* 31 (1972): 110-116; “Toward a Frontier Theory of Early Russian History,” *Russian Review* 33 (1974): 284-295.

³⁰ Wieczynski, “Toward a Frontier Theory of Early Russian History,” 288-289.

³¹ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 29-31.

³² Milner-Gulland, *The Russians*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁴ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 3-6.

³⁵ The best overview of seventeenth-century frontier development may be found in Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (3rd ed., New York: Macmillan

Though exact chronological points of demarcation for Russian and U.S. frontier imperialism cannot be firmly fixed, it nonetheless appears that both are vaguely traceable to at least the same two centuries. But what processes were involved in the acquisition, conquest, and then consolidation of over-land contiguous frontier empires? Nugent identifies five distinct processes that the United States employed that were repeated over and over again as colonization moved westward, establishing and institutionalizing the “habits of empire.”³⁶ This five-step approach, while certainly over-simplifying what were extremely complicated processes, nonetheless provides a very useful framework for understanding both how empire was formed and how it became a habit. Nugent’s five processes are:

1. *acquiring or asserting sovereignty over the adjacent territory;*
2. *dealing with the indigenous inhabitants;*
3. *establishing policies for distributing lands to forthcoming pioneers from the metropolitan core;*
4. *identifying significant numbers of individuals from the metropolitan core to become pioneers and incentivizing their movement into the new territories;*
5. *crafting and instilling an overarching ideology to render all the other actions not only as inevitable but as fundamentally desirable and morally sound.*³⁷

Of these, Nugent notes, “None was fully planned, certainly not by a single prophet, philosopher, or politician” but “together, combined over several decades to produce the result.”³⁸

In his study, Nugent provides a clear historical narrative of how these steps were carried out and the ways in which new parts of the frontier empire were grafted on. These will be summarized here. In addition, works of several scholars concerning Russian frontier expansion will also be summarized in parallel with the processes in the United States in order to illustrate how this peculiar form of imperialism worked in both realms.³⁹

In traditional historiography the acquisition of sovereignty over frontier territories was entirely straightforward for both the U.S. and Russia and entirely incomparable between the two. As noted, in the Turnerian paradigm westward expansion was an organic phenomenon engineered by the pioneers themselves in response to the irresistible pull exerted by the vacuum of vacant lands, a contention that even Turner’s critics seldom questioned. While in Russia’s case, all matters of sovereignty were dictated by an all-powerful, autocratic Tsar and

1967), 35-79. This section was abbreviated to some extent in the most recent edition: Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (6th ed. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001).

³⁶ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 221.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 221-222.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

³⁹ I acknowledge some similarities to Odd Arne Westad’s prizewinning argument in *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), however both the ideological and comparative approach differ significantly, though the two arguments may be seen as complementary.

imposed by overwhelming force of arms. The essential truth of this contrast was apparent long before Turner ever formalized it. Tocqueville himself made it clear:

*The American struggles against the obstacles that nature opposes to him, the adversaries of the Russian are men. The former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its arms. The conquests of the American are therefore gained by the plowshare; those of the Russian by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude.*⁴⁰

But to what extent is this essential truth historically accurate?

Nugent lays bare the fundamental inaccuracy of this traditional perception of U.S. expansion. Over the first two hundred pages of his book, Nugent details how, “by treaty, purchase, filibuster, or outright war, based in curious mixes of luck, chicanery, single-mindedness, ideology, aggression, or fecundity” the government of the United States was able to assert a sovereign claim to much of North America in the face of at least equally legitimate claims on the part of a wide variety of other claimants, including, coincidentally, Russia herself.⁴¹ Even in those cases where “pioneers” seemed to lead the way, in Russia’s former territory of Oregon for example, there was a good deal of government intrigue involved in the settlers’ assertion of sovereignty.⁴² And in Spain’s and later Mexico’s territories, the use of the sword followed hard upon when the plowshare failed to do its work.⁴³ Meanwhile, from the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 through what Elliott West calls the “Last Indian War”—the Nez Perce War of 1877—untold numbers of skirmishes, massacres, and full-scale battles were waged by both federal and state militia troops against the indigenous population, often leading to unscrupulous and even outright fraudulent treaties that dispossessed millions of Indian people.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I:434.

⁴¹ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 221.

⁴² Though Nugent covers the diplomatic chicanery employed by federal authorities in actually acquiring Oregon after years of co-occupation with Great Britain, he fails to cover the role of these authorities in setting up the diplomatic crisis in the first place. See Christopher L. Miller, *Prophetic Worlds: Indians and Whites on the Columbia Plateau* (2nd ed., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 98-102; 142, n.25. The complicated nature of intersecting diplomatic concerns relating to the entire far west forms Chapter 18 in Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 701-743 and clearly illustrates the imperial quality of those concerns.

⁴³ On the use of force in Spanish Florida see Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 93-129. Nugent treats the use of federal force in Texas and the wider Spanish Southwest on pages 130-156 and 187-220 respectively. This is also discussed in Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 701-791.

⁴⁴ Elliott West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Though West characterizes this as the “Last Indian War,” the iconic ending of the military struggle between the United States and the indigenous population was the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890; see Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) and Robert M. Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963). War between federal troops and Apache Indians in the Southwest continued into the 1890s; see

This rather puts to rest Tocqueville's benign construction of U.S. expansion, but what of his characterization of this process on Russia's frontiers. Interestingly, traditional Russian historiography treats its frontier expansion as a process directly parallel to Turner's treatment of U.S. expansion. In his classic *History of Russia (Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen)*, Russian historian Sergeĭ Mikhaĭlovich Solov'ev struggled to find a way to describe his view of Russia's frontier expansion and finally used a trick of Slavic linguistics to make his point. In talking about occupying the frontier, Solov'ev affixed the suffix "sia" to the word "kolonizovat" rendering the active verb meaning "to colonize" into a passive form. As interpreted by Mark Bassin, this essentially translates to something like "the frontiers colonized themselves," though Russian linguist Marina Zakharova renders it more straightforwardly as "colonization happened," linguistically parallel to "it rained" or any other natural, passive phenomenon.⁴⁵

Soviet era historians did not categorically disagree with this assessment. Summarizing Soviet writing on the subject, James Forsyth characterizes Soviet treatment of Siberia's annexation as "'the logical continuation of a natural historical process', and Siberia itself 'a natural extension' of the territory of the Russian state and 'an organic part' of it."⁴⁶ Even recent writings by émigré and non-Russian analysts support this viewpoint. Speaking of the settlement of Siberia and the Far East, Geoffrey Hosking observes, "This process, though it had the support of the government, was accomplished without its direct intervention. The impulse came from hunters, trappers and traders, interested in expanding the fur trade, and from that semi-nomadic breed of Russians, the Cossacks."⁴⁷ In other words, the work of "pioneers."

As with the Turnerian framing of U.S. expansion, we should not be too blithe in our acceptance of this passive interpretation of Russian territorial aggrandizement, but it would appear that we must also soften the sort of hard-core line that Tocqueville bequeathed to us. While Forsyth makes it abundantly clear that in both Western and Eastern Siberia atrocities against the native people were common and led to the same sort of demographic disaster that characterized Native American life on the U.S. frontier, it would appear that, as in the United States, the assertion of sovereignty by the state was the same sort of mixed bag of "treaty, purchase, filibuster, or outright war".⁴⁸

Nugent dismisses the process of dealing with the indigenous population in the imperial U.S. west with characteristic bluntness: "Obviously the previous occupants had to go, and over

Dan Thrapp, *The Conquest of Apacheria* (5th ed., Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1988). A classic accounting of the process of Indian dispossession in early America is Wilbur R. Jacobs, *Dispossessing the American Indian; Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (New York: Scribner, 1972). For a more recent and comprehensive overview of Native American history vis-à-vis Anglo-American expansion, see Robert Venables, *American Indian History: Five Centuries of Conflict & Coexistence* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2004).

⁴⁵ Mark Bassin, "Turner, Solov'ev, and the 'Frontier Hypothesis': The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces," *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993), 499, n. 77; Marina Zakharova, Personal Correspondence, July 13, 2010.

⁴⁶ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 47.

⁴⁷ Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 11.

⁴⁸ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 161-162; Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 221.

time, the Indians went.”⁴⁹ Over several pages that follow, he recounts in summary form exactly how the native population was “reduced, removed, repelled, or reconcentrated” leading to their near extinction during the first decade of the twentieth century and their current status as “just another ethnic minority.”⁵⁰ As noted above, James Forsyth makes a similar observation with regard to the native populations on Russia’s eastern frontiers and Ronald Suny sketches efforts on the part of Russian imperial officials to “russify” native populations on the eastern and southern frontiers in order to pacify them and to solidify a national Russian identity.⁵¹ But while critics of both U.S. and Russian treatment of indigenous frontier populations are justified in their characterizations of brutality tintured by indifference, the true nature of relations between these fledgling empires and the peoples they overran is more complicated than these summaries warrant and, like the complicated nature of territorial acquisition itself, was important to both Russia’s and the United States’ future role in the world.

On the topic of imperialism in general, British revisionist scholar Ronald Robinson observed “The power of Europe was always relative to the countervailing strength of national or protonational organization on the peripheries...”. In other words, the establishment of authority by imperializing powers over imperialized populations was never a one-way process, but involved negotiation between the parties. Hence, as Robinson concludes, “...empires had to be founded to a greater or lesser extent on indigenous organizations and built out of local resources in the countries imperialized.”⁵²

It is clear that this general rule applied as well to the Russian and U.S. over-land empires as it did to the British colonial system in Africa and elsewhere that Robinson initially studied. Insofar as the U.S. is concerned, I gave that full consideration in 1993, concluding:

*Robinson's so-called 'exocentric' theory of imperialism is much more consistent with the realities ethnohistory has revealed concerning pre-and protohistoric Indian society and what we are learning about European collaborators like William Johnson and Pierre Chouteau. Rather than requiring Indians to be timeless, primitive, and parochial, Robinson's theory permits them to be what archaeology shows them to have been: historical, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan agents in the process of North American development. Europeans, too, emerge as more complex and believable actors in North American history.*⁵³

This also lines up with what much of the current literature suggests about Russia’s relations with aboriginal peoples. Forsyth spends considerable time describing the complicated relations that existed between Russian imperial agents and a variety of Samoyed, Buryat, Yakut, and Chukchi peoples in greater Siberia, relations that he suggests were similar to those constructed by Europeans in the New World and that involved a high degree of native

⁴⁹ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 221.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 222-230.

⁵¹ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 161-162; Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 50-53.

⁵² Ronald Robinson, “The Excentric Idea of Imperialism, with or Without Empire,” in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel, 267-289 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 271.

⁵³ Christopher L. Miller, “Indian Patriotism, Warriors vs. Negotiators,” *American Indian Quarterly* 17 (1993): 327.

collaboration in the actual day-to-day affairs of the empire.⁵⁴ Suny traces the same phenomenon in the Caucasus, pointing out the high degree to which the local Georgian and Armenian elites collaborated with Russian officials.⁵⁵ And a recent colorful analysis of the so-called “Great Game” between Russia and Great Britain in Central Asia charts clearly the ways in which shifting collaborations with locals complicated diplomacy and often led to disaster for the colonizing nations.⁵⁶

But while the “changing relativities,” in Robinson’s words, in the U.S. and Russian over-land empires resembled those in the over-seas empires of the Western European powers, the fact that these relations were being conducted on the frontiers of the colonizing nations rather than at some distance, made these collaborations both more intimate and more complicated. Paraphrasing V. I. Shunkov, D. N. Collins observes that while Siberia might correctly be referred to as a Russian colony, “this hardly meant that it was a colony in the sense that Spain’s Central American possessions were colonies. The contiguity of Russia and Siberia meant that the peoples had rubbed shoulders over a long period.”⁵⁷ Collins disagrees with Shunkov’s perception, asserting “Quite how this signifies that Siberia was any less a colony of Russia than, for instance, Mexico was of Spain, it is difficult to see. Spaniards settled in Mexico very early and ‘rubbed shoulders’ with the indigenous Mexican Indians for centuries.”⁵⁸ But this fails to take into consideration the fact that Siberia and eventually much of the Caucasus region and Central Asia were grafted onto the mainland nation of Russia itself, a feat that no amount of geographical legerdemain could do for Mexico and Spain. Similarly, all of the territory in North America that was acquired by the United States eventually was incorporated into the metropole itself, though, as noted above, never completely or perfectly in either Russia’s or the United States’ case.⁵⁹ This has led to the patterns of internal colonialism noted by Suny, which in both Russia and the United States is simply dismissed as a “minority” problem.⁶⁰ As Limerick observes, “the workings of conquest tied these diverse groups into the same story. Happy or not, minorities and majorities occupied a common ground.”⁶¹ Such is the legacy of frontier empire-building and a fundamental failure in nation-building.

As Nugent notes in his third point, putting lands cleared of indigenous claims into the hands of settlers was a major preoccupation for the U.S. government throughout the era of frontier expansion. So, too, for the Russians. This, too, sets U.S. and Russian imperialism apart

⁵⁴ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 41-42.

⁵⁵ See Ronald Grigor Suny, “Russian Rule and Caucasian Society in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: The Georgian Nobility and the Armenian Bourgeoisie, 1801-1856,” *Nationalities Papers* 7 (1979): 53-78. See also Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁵⁶ See Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994).

⁵⁷ D. N. Collins, “Russia’s Conquest of Siberia: Evolving Russian and Soviet Historical Interpretations,” *European Studies Review* 12 (1982): 24-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁹ As noted by Benedict Anderson, discounting Northern Ireland, the only case in which an overseas colony was ever incorporated into its metropole was the legal grafting of Algeria onto France, an experiment that ended dreadfully in the Algerian war. Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 109-111.

⁶⁰ Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 27-28; 56.

⁶¹ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 27.

from that of other imperializing nations. Generally speaking, Russian historian D. Saturin was correct in noting that only small numbers of Western Europeans ever ventured to their overseas empires “as officials, bankers, manufacturers and merchants and, after acquiring vast fortunes and princely pensions, they return to their northern home.”⁶² As to the methods for creating land-distribution policies, this by default fell to legislative action in the United States and crown action in Russia. Even before the ratification of the federal Constitution in the United States, the Confederation Congress passed an ordinance in 1785 dictating how public lands were to be measured and distributed, a precedent that would be followed throughout the period of westward imperialism.⁶³ This would entail the direct sale of federally-owned lands to the public, either by way of large land-development companies or, increasingly after 1830, to individual farmers themselves.⁶⁴ While in Russia, in both the central steppes and in more distant Siberia, grants like that awarded to the Stroganovs by Ivan IV were common.⁶⁵ Geoffrey Hosking notes that members of the nobility often received gifts of land from the Tsar, who needed “their support and official service.”⁶⁶ However, it is worth noting that, as Milner-Gulland observes, the image of an all-powerful tsar is a misleading one and that the mutual dependency implied by Hosking was pervasive and influential in terms of royal land distribution policies.⁶⁷ It is also notable that Russia frequently allowed indigenous elites to maintain their private lands, removing these from any redistributive scheme.⁶⁸ It should also be noted that while land distribution policy in the United States was determined largely by elected officials, land distributions were often no more democratic nor equitable than those in Russia: throughout the nineteenth century, huge blocks of the U.S. public domain were either granted outright or sold for a fraction of their value to large corporations to support the private construction of canals, railroads, and other enterprises.⁶⁹

Despite strongly institutionalized systems for distributing lands, neither the U.S. nor the Russian frontier empires could maintain absolute controls on how lands were parceled, developed, or even whether their use advanced the more general interests of the nation at large. In the United States, the practice of squatting on public lands—that is, occupying the public domain without license or permission from the government—was so common as to constitute a

⁶² Quoted in N. Khalfin, *Russia's Policy in Central Asia, 1857-1868* (London: Central Asian Research Center, 1964), 80.

⁶³ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 230. For a more comprehensive overview of U.S. public land policy, see Vernon Carstensen, *The Public Lands; Studies in the History of the Public Domain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963) and Paul W. Gates, *Public Land Policies: Management and Disposal* (New York: Arno Press, 1979).

⁶⁴ See Mark T. Kanazawa, “Possession Is Nine Points of the Law: The Political Economy of Early Public Land Disposal,” *Explorations in Economic History* 33 (1996): 227-249.

⁶⁵ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 30.

⁶⁶ Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 162-164.

⁶⁷ Milner-Gulland, *The Russians*, 73-74.

⁶⁸ Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 41.

⁶⁹ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 231. For federal canal contributions see John Bell Rae, “Federal Land Grants in Aid of Canals,” *The Journal of Economic History* 4 (1944): 167-177 and for railroads see Lloyd Mercer, *Railroads and Land Grant Policy: A Study in Government Intervention* (Washington, DC: Beard Books, 2002). The best overall review of the impact of railroads on American economics is Robert Fogel. *Railroads and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).

significant problem in terms of public policy.⁷⁰ Similarly, D. N. Collins notes that on the Russian frontiers “free peasant settlement did occur. Often peasants who arrived in a region before the long arm of Moscow or St Petersburg clutched at them were fleeing from oppression, economic or religious.”⁷¹

In general, identifying pioneers and incentivizing their movement into new territories did not constitute a significant problem for either Russia or the U.S. during their frontier imperialism endeavors. Nugent notes that between immigration and natural reproduction, the population in the U.S. metropole rose so sharply during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that there was little need for federal authorities to incentivize westward migration. “Prior to 1860,” Nugent reports, “the U.S. population grew by about one-third every decade, and from then until 1920 by about one-fourth” with the result that the population count in the nation rose from 4 million in 1790 to 63 million a century later. As he points out, were such growth rates still in place today, it would create “an insupportable catastrophe” but in the era of contiguous imperialism, “it provided the people to fill the immense and resource-laden spaces of Transappalachia, Louisiana, and the rest.”⁷²

Russian population growth did not equal that of the United States during these years, but did not trail by much. Glenn E. Curtis reports that during the nineteenth century, Russian population doubled, making it second only to the United States in terms of population increase.⁷³ Moreover, many of the territories acquired by Russia were far more densely inhabited than those which came under U.S. occupation and some of these populations, the Cossacks in particular, were quickly grafted onto the rising Russian horde.⁷⁴

One major distinction in this category of empire-building, however, must be noted. While Turnerian theory posits a “safety valve” function for the U.S. western frontier—that it provided, in Turner’s words, “sanative influences” that tended to draw off the potentially disaffected elements in society and thereby eliminate (or at least postpone) large-scale class-based or other conflicts⁷⁵—with the exception of Native Americans, at no time in the nation’s era of internal imperialism did the government engage in wholesale banishment of perceived

⁷⁰ See Anon, “The American Squatter and Federal Land Policy,” *Journal of the West* 14 (1975): 72-83 and George Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands, from 1840 to 1862: From Pre-Emption to Homestead* (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1917).

⁷¹ Collins *Russia's Conquest of Siberia*, 36.

⁷² Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 234.

⁷³ Glenn E. Curtis, *Russia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996) <http://countrystudies.us/russia/> (accessed August 30, 2012).

⁷⁴ Forsyth notes that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the number of native Siberians absorbed into the empire’s population was about equal to the number of ethnic Russians in the region: approximately 150,000 to 200,000 of each. And while in proportion the number of ethnic Russians grew faster than that of natives, the populations of both, and especially of those born of intergroup sexual contacts—marital or otherwise—continued to rise. Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 100-103. And Suny emphasizes Russia’s “peculiar logic of empire-building” that entailed “‘Nationalizing’, homogenizing policies, integrating disparate peoples into a common ‘Russian’ community.” Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 41.

⁷⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt, 1920), 275. For critical commentary on Turner’s position, see Ellen von Nardroff, “The American Frontier as a Safety Valve: The Life, Death, Reincarnation, and Justification of a Theory,” *Agricultural History* 36 (1962): 123-142.

“undesirables.”⁷⁶ In Russia, on the other hand, banishment played a major role in “identifying” pioneers and “incentivizing” their movement. Forsyth notes the huge number of “convicted criminals, political prisoners and prisoners-of-war” who were transported to Siberia.⁷⁷ A great many more were forced into military service in the Caucasus region; one U.S. magazine noted in 1853 that “poets who have made verses on liberty, wear a common uniform in the Caucasus”, including the “Russian Byron” Alexander Pushkin.⁷⁸ And Nicholas B. Breyfogle has published a number of studies of Russian religious exiles sent to the frontier.⁷⁹

The correlation between Russian and U.S. frontier imperialism and population growth did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. Writing from exile in Pennsylvania in 1828, German political philosopher Friederich List concluded that “Russia and the United States in one hundred years will be the two most populous empires on earth. Each will have as many inhabitants as currently all states of Europe combined.”⁸⁰

This leaves only Nugent’s fifth point to address in comparative perspective. Perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of the Turnerian construction of U.S. history—and, quite probably the reason why Turner’s thesis remained so popular for so long—is its core myth of “American exceptionalism.” As Barbara Bush and a great many others have emphasized, it is this exceptionalist conceit that lies at the core of U.S. ideological claims of moral preeminence in the world.⁸¹ It existed in nascent form as a sense of superiority on the part of colonial era Anglo Saxons over disease-weakened Native Americans and then grew as, step by step, their Americanized descendants conquered new territories. By the 1840s it had become ingrained as not only natural and desirable, but inevitable—as the nation’s Manifest Destiny.⁸² But a post-Turnerian scheme of historical analysis fundamentally denies both the naturalness and the inevitability of this phenomenon, though not the correlation between the perception of exceptionalism and the so-called “frontier experience.” Nugent, for example, points directly to this notion of exceptionalism as having been both a product of and a motive for the establishment of the U.S. over-land empire, emphasizing, however, that it was a synthetic product of an active American imagination rather than a natural phenomenon.⁸³ And,

⁷⁶ Though clearly many such groups responded to both official and unofficial pressures by banishing themselves. The most notable case of this would have to be that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), who migrated en-mass between 1846 and 1868. See Wallace Earl Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1992) and William Slaughter and Michael Landon, *Trail of Hope: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997).

⁷⁷ Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia*, 43-44.

⁷⁸ Anon, “Russia and Her Serfs,” *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Fashion*, April 1, 1853, 500.

⁷⁹ See Nicholas B. Breyfogle, “Building Doukhoboriii: Religious Culture, Social Identity and Russian Colonization in Transcaucasia, 1845-1895,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27 (1995): 24-51; “Caught in the Crossfire? Russian Sectarrians in the Caucasian Theater of War, 1853-56 and 1877-78,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (2001): 713-750; and *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ Quoted in Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107.

⁸¹ Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 148-149.

⁸² Nugent *Habits of Empire*, 234-236.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

interestingly enough, engagement in a similar process of over-land imperialism led to similar perceptions of exceptionalism in Russia as well.

Two common elements undergird U.S. and Russian conceptions of exceptionalism: an inherent sense of superiority over the peoples occupying the contiguous regions to be incorporated into their over-land empires and a sense of inferiority with respect to the imperializing powers in Western Europe. The dynamic tension between these emotionally-laden perceptions drove the imaginations of Russians and Americans into inventing exceptionalist rationalizations for empire that justified, legitimated, and cast as inevitable their ever outward thrust of contiguous imperialism and, as Bush suggests, launched them on that course toward global domination that Tocqueville had predicted.

It is easy to forget after more than two hundred years that the United States was the first post-colonial nation and experienced the same uncertainties and questions of legitimacy faced by post-colonies over many generations world-wide.⁸⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset pointed directly to this insecurity as being fundamental to the construction of U.S. nationhood by its first generation of cultural and political leaders: they tried to “overcome their own feeling of cultural inferiority by rejecting the premises of ‘culture’ in the more developed countries and lauding the values in their own culture on some other grounds.”⁸⁵ One of the firmest grounds on which to premise an oppositional post-colonial U.S. cultural identity was the categorical rejection of colonialism as a legitimate force in the world. “American exceptionalism was rearticulated as inherently anti-imperialist, in opposition to old European empires,” Barbara Bush explains, “the USA was exemplary, a model and a superior point of reference for the rest of the world.”⁸⁶ Thus any expansion in which the U.S. might engage had to be predicated upon defense against Old World imperialism and liberation from it. In a construction expressive of his and his generation’s towering gift for ideological oxymorons, Thomas Jefferson coined the mission for the U.S. as constructing an “empire for liberty.”⁸⁷

Jefferson himself made the defensive nature of this envisioned empire quite clear. Writing to George Rogers Clark late in 1780, Jefferson declared that territorial expansion was

⁸⁴ This was articulated most clearly by Seymour Martin Lipset in his prescient *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979). More recently, it forms the core of Sam Haynes’s argument in *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010.) This claim of post-colonial status for the U.S. is highly contested. For a discussion of this, see Michelle Burnham, “The Periphery Within: Internal Colonialism and the Rhetoric of U.S. Nation Building,” in *Messy Beginnings; Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 139-140. I hope to demonstrate, however, that U.S. over-land imperialism was as much a product of post-colonial insecurity as is the bravado of street gangs in post-colonial South Africa or the Dominican Republic (see Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, eds., *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ Lipset, *The First New Nation*, 68.

⁸⁶ Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 148. This point forms the core of the argument I put forth in “Adopting the ‘Other’: A Peculiar U.S. Orientalism in the Response to the Circassian War, 1838-1859,” *History Studies* Special Issue, 2011, 189-204.

⁸⁷ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, xiii.

necessary in order to create a barrier to the dangerous extension of foreign empires.⁸⁸ By 1830 this view had become official U.S. policy. For example, in 1824 the Quartermaster General's Office warned that foreign empires sought to conspire with "wild and disaffected" Indians, forming a threat "more formidable to us than any force which Europe combined could oppose to us."⁸⁹ A year later, Senator Thomas Hart Benton warned that "The European Legimitates hold everything American in contempt and detestation" and that national expansion was the only defense, a position backed up by expert testimony from prominent frontiersmen and officially embraced by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun in 1829.⁹⁰ By 1835, this call for defensive imperialism had reached a fever pitch and become deeply ingrained in popular consciousness: for example, two prominent opinion leaders, Lyman Beecher and Samuel F. B. Morse, each published extensive and best-selling treatises on the defensive necessity for over-land imperialism.⁹¹

At the same time, it was also necessary to liberate those who were oppressed by such foreign empires or to render immunity to those who might become victims of such oppression by liberating them from the ignorance and destitution that would be exploited by opportunistic imperialists. Both Beecher and Morse made this point, as did a great many other propagandists for overnight contiguous imperialism.

Nugent summarizes this entire ideological construction with characteristic clarity and bluntness:

*Expansion resonated with the people. It meant progress, national glory, and successful stewardship all rolled into one. White Americans were certain that they had the right and duty to take land because they would make it more productive than native peoples, or Spaniards, or Mexicans, had done. They believed they had a right and duty to acquire territory because it would eventually become states coequal with the original thirteen, and thus provide free and democratic institutions, the blessings of liberty, to ever more people. They were convinced, too, that they had a right to defend themselves against outside opponents, even when 'defend' crossed over into 'push back'.*⁹²

⁸⁸ Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, December 25, 1780 in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 4:237-238.

⁸⁹ T. S. Jessup, U.S. quartermaster general, to Senator John Floyd, 6 April 1824, 18th Cong., 1st sess. Senate Document 56.

⁹⁰ Thomas Hart Benton, "Address before Congress, January 3, 1825," in U.S. Congress, *Abridgment of Debates of Congress from 1789 to 1856*, 8:197; Joshua Pilcher to J. H. Eaton, secretary of war, undated, and Jedediah S. Smith, David E. Jackson, and William L. Sublette to J. H. Eaton, secretary of war, 29 October 1830, Senate Document 39, 21st Cong., 2nd sess.; John C. Calhoun, secretary of war, to House Committee on Military Affairs, 29 December 1829, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 2:33-34.

⁹¹ Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1835); Samuel F. B. Morse, *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States: The Numbers of Brutus* (New York: Chapin, 1835). It should be noted that Beecher's work was almost immediately republished in New York and went through three editions within a year, while Morse's work went through six editions in the same year.

⁹² Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, 234.

As noted, we can point to similar ideological constructions being erected in Russia as it went about its own project of over-land imperialism. Dominic Lieven points to the “stewardship” role in Russian expansion, pointing out that “In the Russian new world too, colonization was justified as the development of regions previously unexploited or ‘wasted’ by nomadic herders” and “the slothful Asiatic converted to industriousness.”⁹³ Also the defensive nature of Russian expansionism was always at the forefront. From the time of Ivan IV, shoring up perimeters was seen as essential for defending against neighboring Poland, Lithuania, China, Turkey, Persia, and the largely unorganized Turkic and Tatar raiders along thousands of miles of borderland.⁹⁴ And as Peter Hopkirk makes clear, most of Russia’s conquest of Central Asia was seen in juxtaposition with British imperial expansion north and west of India.⁹⁵ Such behavior led foreign policy analyst Matthew Rendall to conclude that “defensive realism” was the prime motivator for Russia’s actions throughout the nineteenth century, though it is open to question how “realistic” this defensiveness actually was.⁹⁶

What is clear is that irrespective of diplomatic realities, Russians saw themselves as vulnerable and, like those in the U.S., perceived this vulnerability in light of their own inferiority to the Western European empires. Lieven points out that sensitive Russians were convinced that Europe “looked down its nose at Russia,” quoting Lord Curzon’s quip that Russia’s conquest of Central Asia was “‘a conquest of orientals by orientals.’”⁹⁷ Dostoevsky noted this in his “Writer’s Diary” in January 1881, saying “This shame that Europe will consider us Asians has been hanging over us for almost two centuries now” and advocating that “[w]e must cast aside this servile fear that Europe will call us Asiatic barbarians.”⁹⁸ And, as in the U.S., the best way to accomplish this was through decidedly non-European imperialism: “In Europe we are hangers-on and slaves, while in Asia we shall be the masters.” “For, in truth, Asia for us is that same America which we still have not discovered. With our push toward Asia we will have a renewed upsurge of spirit and strength.”⁹⁹

Thus were the five processes identified by Nugent involved in the creation of an over-land empire enacted in the United States and Russia. Over the course of several centuries, each became a dominant force exercising near-absolute power over expanses of real estate that, as we have seen, boggled the minds of even such advanced nineteenth-century thinkers as Tocqueville and List. And in the process, each came to define itself as exceptional in the world, standing in opposition to the over-seas empires established by Western Europe. Like the stereotyped bully in the schoolyard, each disguised its sense of insecurity and inferiority by asserting a self-justified aggressiveness, and in the process, both engaged in a similar and peculiar, if unacknowledged, form of imperialism. In this process, and through this process,

⁹³ Lieven, *Empire*, 217.

⁹⁴ Geoffrey Hosking identifies such defensive strategy as the first and most significant cause for Russian territorial expansion; see Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*, 39-41.

⁹⁵ See Hopkirk *The Great Game*.

⁹⁶ Matthew Rendall, “Defensive Realism and the Concert of Europe,” *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): 523-540.

⁹⁷ Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, 219.

⁹⁸ Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Geok-Tepe. What Does Asia Mean to Us?” in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 2:1369.

⁹⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Questions and Answers” in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 2 1374; 1373.

each appeared to have been, even if only in its own imagination, “marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.”¹⁰⁰

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¹⁰⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I:434.

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