

## CHAPTER 4

# HISTORY, POWER AND THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES RULING CLASS

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A career, often much of a person's life, is but a short moment in the life of a field, even in so young a one as sociocultural anthropology. For many who took up anthropology at the height of the Vietnam War, their world was turned upside down, and not once, but twice in less than a decade. Eric Wolf (1969: 251) had told them that if anthropologists want to resolve the impasse in which they find themselves, then 'we must find ways of educating ourselves in the realities of power.' They can do that, he said, if we 'engage ourselves in the systematic writing of a history of the modern world in which we spell out the processes of power which created the present-day cultural systems and linkages between them.' It happened, though, that those who heeded the call of Wolf, among others, to resist empire and seek justice as their vocation turned about face to take up the intricacies of symbolic meaning in everyday life as beguilingly put about by Clifford Geertz, among others. Instead of Karl Marx, Max Weber was split in two. His pursuit of the organisation of power and domination (e.g. Weber 1927 [1924]) as advocated by Wolf and others was marginalised, while his focus on the local meanings motivating social behaviour (e.g. 1952 [1904–05]) took pride of place as the new disciplinary centre. Michel Foucault, arriving only a year or two after Geertz, put power and behaviour back together again, but confined his history to the study of concepts that oriented the formation of modern subjects via institutional interaction (e.g. Foucault 1977). Thus,

the battlements that Wolf urged anthropologists to scale receded from view, leaving in the foreground the human subject.

If anthropologists decide once more to follow Wolf's injunction, then of the many questions that can be asked of the history of the United States, especially in these times, one stands out. That is, how did a 'new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal', become one of the most economically unequal nations on earth and such a threat to peace, equality and liberty throughout the world?

To take this question seriously does not only help restore Wolf's injunction to its proper place. As well, it can help account for why that injunction ceased to be compelling for so many in the discipline, who, as described in Part I of this volume, concerned themselves increasingly with expressive individuals. This chapter, then, echoes the orientation of the volume as a whole. That is, it looks back to the past because that can help us to understand how we arrived at the discipline's present, uncertain state, an understanding that can in turn help us to build a better anthropology in the future.

The looking backward that I undertake in this chapter is, obviously, very different from what is in Part I, for it is concerned with the long-gone history of a country rather than the relatively recent history of an academic discipline, especially as it appeared in that country. I suggest that they are linked, however. This is because a national history helps bring into relief assumptions about that country's past that are likely to be important for two reasons. One is that those assumptions form part of the self-conception of the anthropologists who lived and worked there in the second half of the twentieth century, who were likely to come from those sectors of society for which those assumptions were important. The other is that those assumptions provide a sense, however tacit, of what is desirable in society and how possible it is to achieve it.

A significant feature of those assumptions is that the history of the United States shows it to be an exceptional settler society, peopled by those seeking freedom from the oppression of the Old Country, whichever it happened to be. This national self-conception was intensified by the rhetoric of the Cold War and pervaded the air of those who grew up in White, middle-class households in the 1950s and 1960s. It is expressed in Thanksgiving Day, which commemorates the Pilgrims who fled religious persecution in England and settled in what is now Massachusetts. It is memorialised in the Statue of Liberty, which commemorates the millions of people from Eastern and Southern Europe who, in the decades around 1900, migrated to the United States for the same reason that the Pilgrims did much earlier, to build a better life for themselves in the New World. At the foot of the statue is a plaque with 'The new colossus', a sonnet by Emma Lazarus (1883). It ends:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

That idea is apparent as well in American attention to the frontier, found in things ranging from the work of Frederick Jackson Turner (esp. 1893) to the Western movies of John Ford (e.g. 1939) and Howard Hawks (e.g. 1948).

This powerful tale of a country built by people seeking to live free and honest lives, liberated from repression, is told and re-told as the history of the United States, one that makes the value of expressive individualism seem natural. In this tale, America is truly exceptional. It is, Ronald Reagan (1984) told us, the 'shining city on a hill' that exemplifies and proves the truth of individualism. However, as I shall show in this chapter, those Americans who, however unthinkingly, took their country's success as warrant for assuming individualism's strengths and virtues misperceived

their own past. Because they misperceive it, they need to reconsider what many seem to see as the self-evident virtues of a world of expressive, autonomous individuals and of a discipline that seeks, and celebrates, the signs of such individuals.

### CLASS ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES

I cast this history, and my attempt to answer the question of how that new nation ended up as it did, in terms of the systemic forces and processes that are the realm of class. This is the approach that Wolf favoured, but after the Vietnam War it too became a decidedly minority tradition.

Among those of an earlier generation, it was left up to W. Lloyd Warner, an anthropologist equally at home in sociology, to sort out social stratification in the US. His result was a structure composed of disparate income categories, effectively moneyed status groups, among whom some element of interest of self-election counted for 'class-like' attitudes (Warner 1960 [1949]). Warner's model retains its relevance today among non-Marxists and naïve opportunity theorists, even as it evokes manifest dissatisfaction from those who imagine that the struggle over the social surplus is the basis for class distinction.

Yet in the large projects that he directed, concerned with the African-American community of South Side Chicago (see Drake and Clayton 1945) and with industrial conflict in a New England shoemaking district (Warner 1947), Warner and his co-workers are refreshingly free of the voluntarist class taxonomy that became attached to his name. For them, classes are the product of implicit opposition with other classes, and their positions in productive and occupational hierarchies are the keys to their composition, even if racism placed all Southside Chicago African Americans into a subaltern status that separated Black and White class structures (Drake and

Clayton 1945; Warner funded the research for this: see O'Connor 2001: 89–93).

Anthropologists forgot this side to Warner's work, or relegated it to the sociological canon. Instead, by the onset of the Vietnam years they adopted an evolutionist political economy (e.g. Devore and Lee 1968), perhaps best symbolised by that witty staple of introductory anthropology courses, Marshall Sahlins's 'Poor man, rich man, big man, chief' (1963). However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s attention had turned to patterns of 'invidious distinctions', social stratification typologies that mixed Marx and Weber in mapping the ways that discriminatory categories were deployed to reward some and deprive others of money, power and prestige (Berreman 1972). Raymond Smith (1984) reported that the class concept was indispensable and used widely in anthropological work on postcolonial and neocolonial settings, but his review essay highlighted no work since Warner that used it in the study of the United States (save Goldschmidt 1950, 1955). The attentions of anthropologists working in the United States remained on the community status structures of small towns and the declassed poor in big cities.

Anthropologists of the United States turned their attentions more easily to the study of elites than to classes. It was as if social class were a descriptive category of no particular force, while an elite, even when described as a sub-set of a given class, was a self-conscious, self-organised group that did something. To borrow a turn of phrase from Fred Block (1977), the ruling class did not rule: its elite did. Because of his work on the US rich and his convening of a School of American Research seminar on elites in 1979, George Marcus encouraged at least some anthropologists to see the study of elites as a way to analyse the governance of a wide range of society's institutions, and this made his own view of elites noteworthy.

For Marcus, elites consist of exclusive status groups that seek to shape and govern institutions under what Malinowski might have called a

social charter that embodies their ideals and interests. Though elites are related to and may emerge from specific classes, Marcus (e.g. 1983a) believed that the two could be considered distinct social categories for the purposes of research, even if elites create a class effect in the popular imagination as rich families tend to become old-money dynasties. Marcus (1983b) focused on how rich US families since the nineteenth century had created legal and organisational means for the aggregation and preservation of their wealth. In the process of their self-fashioning as prudent fiduciaries of their own interests, they succeeded in persuading the public of their abilities as fiduciaries for society at large (1983b: 250). In Marcus's words, 'the fiduciary duty that for so long has been conceived as a crucial feature in the preservation of upper-class social organization ... has justified the upper class in a public role of leadership through service' (1983b: 252; for a fine intensive study using his theoretical tools, see Marcus and Hall 1992).

Marcus's careful analytical disentanglement of elites and classes may have been insightful, but it did not stimulate researchers either to follow his lead with US elites or to undertake the anthropological analysis of the US ruling class. To be sure, others have taken up class analysis in their US anthropological work. Certainly the work of a quartet of Marxist feminists, Ida Susser (e.g. 1982), Karen Brodtkin (e.g. 1987), Louise Lamphere (e.g. 1987) and June Nash (e.g. 1989), deserve special mention for their advocacy of class analysis as central to the US anthropological mission (for a review of later work, see Maskovsky 2013; see also Maskovsky and Susser, this volume). Yet their careful attention represents a minority view, as other anthropologists have preferred to take a more totalising view that stresses the probing of populations like the poor and focusing on the impact of cultural techniques of rule.

Thus, the task that Wolf said that we should undertake remains undone. My object here is to help carry out that task, by using social-scientific and historical analysis to offer an account of how the US ruling class emerged and what their victory in the decades around 1900

foreshadowed for life in the United States today. Doing so helps answer the question Wolf enjoined us to address, how the practices of power have shaped the development of the present day. As I also said, however, doing so helps reveal the omissions and unspoken assumptions in common American self-conceptions. That helps us to understand the ground from which American social and cultural anthropology spring and hence the reasons for its orientations over the past few decades.

### FRAMING THE NARRATIVE OF US RULING CLASS RISE

One must begin with a key admission: part of the story of the rise of a US ruling class is surely that the country was not quite what Abraham Lincoln and popular self-conception imagined it to be. Its very Constitution had sanctioned chattel slavery, and via the three-fifths rule rewarded slave power with disproportionate electoral and political power. Economic inequality existed from the time of the first American Revolution, but with the first stirrings of industrialisation and the expansion of international trade in the forty years before the Civil War, inequality had already begun to accelerate (Williamson and Lindert 1980: 5).

The defeat of the Southern slavocracy and the opening of the nation to more free-wheeling capitalist development may indeed have constituted, as the great Progressive historians Charles and Mary Beard (1930 [1927]) argued more than 80 years ago, the 'second American revolution'. Yet this was no bourgeois revolution in the European sense, wherein an ascendant producer class sweeps out a ruling class and its associated precapitalist mode of production. The Southern planters were no less capitalists than the Northerners who purchased and exported their cotton, as they had once imported and sold the South slaves. Moreover, this second American revolution was conservative from the outset. As W.E.B Du Bois (2007 [1935]) observed, the revolutionary potential offered by half a million liberated and

armed Black workers at the end of the Civil War was suppressed by Northern capitalists, who wanted to subject propertied Southern Whites to their grand machine of continental and imperial capitalism and subjugate newly liberated Southern Blacks as captive and cheap labour.

The Civil War, in other words, might have been the beginning of a second popular American Revolution, but it did not turn out that way. The ultimate failure of Radical Reconstruction and the hand-over of the South in 1876 to the Southern White 'redeemers', whose political power was once more inflated by the presence of five million increasingly re-enslaved and disfranchised African Americans, was, I believe, a signal event in a different kind of revolution. In their disappointment at the outcome, the Beards and Du Bois all but announced it: the second American revolution was in fact a revolution from above.

The concept of revolution from above has found its way into the margins of several different literatures. For instance, scholars influenced by Leon Trotsky have deployed it to contrast proletarian revolutions with the Stalin-imposed state seizures of power throughout Eastern Europe after the Second World War (see, e.g., Deutscher 1967 [1949]: 554) and the Fascist revolutions in Italy and Germany that sought to suppress proletarian and socialist uprisings (e.g. Moore 1966: 433–52; see also Skocpol and Trimberger 1994; Trimberger 1978). In the United States, that revolution from above was waged, successfully, between 1876 and 1900 by an ascendant ruling class that had no time for the frontier and the self-reliant individuals who were supposed to populate it. Instead, they amassed capital at a world-record rate, refashioned the multi-layered US state apparatus into an instrument of violent repression and, together with their own private armies, suppressed civil unrest with a force exceeded among its international peers only by the Czar of all the Russias. Fearful of labour and civil unrest and bent on creating a diminished, formal democracy, they sought, with some success, to limit suffrage to the few: the male, the native, the truly White and the propertied.



Empire was also crucial in their ascent to full state power. After completing the conquest of indigenous peoples that stood in the way of fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's dream of an 'empire of liberty', and desirous of new markets and military influence abroad, by the time of President William McKinley in 1898 the United States embarked upon imperialism. The country had what the Secretary of State, John Hay, called a 'splendid little war', and acquired Puerto Rico and the Philippines, as well as residual rights over Cuba. This was in addition to the annexation of Hawaii and the take-over of Pacific Islands that were vital to projecting sea power. By the turn of the century, large US corporations and banks were making huge investments in Latin America, but most especially in Mexico: by 1910, 43 per cent of Mexican property, including its oil and mineral resources, was owned by US companies (LaFeber 1993: 68–89, 196, 221–22).

Before developing these arguments, I want to explain why I use 'ruling class' and 'revolution from above'. Regarding the former, I argue that other expressions (e.g. 'elite', 'upper class', 'plutocracy') may be more widely used, but that they do not do justice to the processes and events that concern me. So, one can imagine elites as one or more sub-sets within a class, or imagine an upper class or a plutocracy as being without sovereign power. I prefer the idea of a ruling class to point to two things. The first of these is that this class was born of combat at the point of production, and that even its growing financial sector was directly involved in structuring the workplace, co-ordinating the war on labour and ensuring the production of the surplus. The second is that this class achieved both federal and state power over the course of its ascendancy after the Civil War. After the national railroad strike of 1877 it became more solidary, developed a leadership and offered a consistent ideology that supported its economic mission and interests (Beckert 2001).

I believe, then, that the concept of revolution from above is necessary to describe what happened. A vigorous, powerful ruling class moved from

exercising influence to direct control of the development of federal and state governments. This resulted in a unitary regime that allied with big business, most particularly monopoly interests, and that suppressed dissent, as well as exercising direct control over the development of US foreign policy and its growing military posture. From the election of McKinley in 1896 until the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, regardless of which political party was in power, members of the ruling class occupied all or most of the key seats in Presidential cabinets, including State, Treasury, War, Navy and Attorney General, they occupied significant numbers of seats in the Congress and in state legislatures and frequently were state governors.

In short, in the quarter century following the end of Reconstruction, the United States ruling class had become a class for itself, one intent on preventing class formation among middle- and working-class strata. Their revolution turned the state from an observer of the nation's political economy and night watchman of last resort into a conduit for the expansion of class power. Federal and state governments became the violent enforcers of corporate rule, the aggressive prosecutors of dissent and the determined jailers of individuals and groups that threatened the new regime of state-complicit capitalism. In contrast to those who hold that its federal structure and complex divisions of powers meant that the United States was a weak state at that time, I argue that perhaps the most interesting thing about the revolution from above is the degree to which the ascendant US ruling class at the end of the nineteenth century was successful in accomplishing such a high level of unitary rule, from federal to state and local jurisdictions.

#### FOMENTING A REGIME

US historians continue to re-work the hypothesis that the United States was uniquely constituted, its history and trajectory fundamentally unlike other great Northern powers in its espousal of individual liberty, its

Lockean embrace of property and its lack of a feudal aristocracy; that shining city on a hill. Since Alexis de Tocqueville and, later, Louis Hartz, these have been taken to mean that the United States has not suffered from entrenched and aggravated class antagonisms (see Beckert 2001: 10). US citizens, in other words, were all a little petty bourgeois. Some progressive historians, using the concept of settler colonialism, have begun to make headway in revising those rather matter-of-fact, uncritical accounts of the bloody pursuit of continental empire, by refocusing on the nation as a developing capitalist country (see Sklar 1992). However, there is still much work to be done on the first two hundred years of US history.

The idea of American exceptionalism is not at all dead (see Adas 2001). As revised by Sven Beckert (2001: 302), exceptionalism means that the US lacked the intermediate classes that were tied to early-modern European states, such as the military, clergy, state bureaucrats and intellectuals. These strata were exactly those that Antonio Gramsci (1971) saw as European parasites that were missing in the United States, an absence that accounts for the unmediated potential of the ascendant ruling class to gain power. Because it lacked estates and bureaucrats, the United States has escaped scrutiny as a developmental state propelled forward by a revolution from above, of the sort that characterised its competitors Germany and Japan.<sup>1</sup>

If state power is to be judged by its efficacy, however, then the United States, triggered by the imperatives of the Civil War, had become a powerful state by war's end. The Union had fielded an army of two million soldiers (the South another million), larger than any previous army in modern history. The Union had spent a billion dollars on the war, another record, and had financed the expenditures with money from foreign creditors on the basis of a fiat currency backed by its full faith and credit (Friedman and Schwartz 1963: 66–76). In 1869, Congress authorised the repayment of federal debt at parity and in gold, a tremendous lift for creditors whose loans had been denominated in paper greenbacks, the value of which had been ravaged by wartime inflation.

With the slave states gone, the Republican administration, like their German and Japanese counterparts and like even later developers such as Italy and Russia, turned the government to the task of national economic development. The federal government and the states gave 325 million acres of Western lands to railroading firms, an area equivalent to the states of New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas combined (Boyer and Morais 1955: 22; Phillips 2002: 32–34). They supported the settlement of the Western lands with the Homestead Act of 1862, and with the Morrill Act of 1862 they underwrote the national development of higher education and applied scientific research. With the South gone, they raised the tariff and, last but not least, Lincoln, acting as commander in chief, suspended the writ of habeas corpus, reserving to the federal government the right to imprison anyone indefinitely without needing to show cause, a suspension that continued throughout Reconstruction in the Southern states (McPherson 1988: 287–99, 436, 442–53, 560). As Michael Mann (1993: 486) has argued, the Civil War ‘abruptly reversed’ the course of what had once been ‘the weakest state in the Western world’, forging ‘a Yankee Leviathan’ that over the war years created not only a national finance system, but also a finance capital class to run it.

The federal government retained its enhanced coercive powers by its military occupation of the Southern states during Reconstruction and by conducting continuous war against indigenous tribes in the West. At the behest of the ruling class, almost exclusively urban-dwellers, it constructed military bases near major US cities and deployed federal troops to break up strikes and put down civil unrest: 100,000 people served in state militias in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, deployed from scores of newly built urban armouries (Beckert 2001: 296–97; Fogelson 1989: 41–42, 76–78, 216–17). When militia members turned out to be increasingly unwilling to take up arms against their fellow citizens, states created para-military forces. Those were the state police, called ‘Cossacks’ and ‘Hussars’ by workers, and they were deployed to break up strikes and enforce lockouts at the

discretion of the governors.

To the forces of the federal government and the states, corporations added their own. These included the Pinkerton private army, of some 30,000, railroad police that executed law and order along the rail lines and, in Pennsylvania, 'Coal and Iron Police'. The Pinkertons and the Coal and Iron Police were often deputised by governors, sheriffs and the courts to carry out actions that included enforcing injunctions against labour. This resort to force ties the United States aptly to comparisons with more authoritarian rather than more democratic forms of rule, also something it shared with Bismarckian Germany and Meiji Japan.

The result of the activities of these forces was a level of death and injury without peer among the industrial and industrialising nations of the time. Far from tolerating dissent, militias were called out to suppress labour or civil disorder 300 times between 1877 and 1903 and other police actions were undertaken another 150 times against striking workers (Cooper 1980: 3–13; Montgomery 1993: 95; somewhat controversially, Goldstein 2010). It was the most violent labour history of any industrialised or industrialising country during the nineteenth century (Foner 1998: 116; Taft and Ross 1969: 19; see also Lears 2009: 14), and the militarisation of society, so true of Germany and Japan as well, was a dominant theme. The federal government and the states united with the corporations to break national rail strikes in 1877, 1886 and 1893, and a major steel strike in 1892, though unions and workers were more successful in firm-by-firm strikes or in local industrial-district strikes where community support, often organised by women working outside the plants and out of homes, was crucial to victory. Indeed, Mann (1993: 86) argues that the United States had a higher rate of domestic militarism than Germany, Great Britain, France and Austria. He is also rather explicit in faulting American historians and the American political stratum for overlooking the violent extremism of the capitalist class, which has, he (1993: 647) argues, 'has been appallingly repressed in American political and academic memories'.

The judiciary acted in virtual synchrony with the desires of capital and the coercive intents of the federal and state governments. State laws protecting labour were overturned by state courts on 60 separate occasions between 1872 and 1900; the protections of the 'due process' clause of the Fourteenth Amendment were withdrawn from African Americans in the South and given to corporations; the anti-monopoly sanctions of the 1890 Sherman Anti-Trust Act were applied by federal courts to unions rather than to firms (Foner 1998: 122–24; Mann 1993: 645; Montgomery 1993: 97). It was a time when one of the Robber Barons, Jay Gould, could say, as he broke the Knights of Labor in the national railroad strike of 1886, that he could hire half the working class to kill the other half (Fraser 2005: 175). He and many of the other Robber Barons tried to do just that.

While most historical accounts acknowledge the successful suborning of the Congress and state legislatures through corruption, it is important to keep in mind that the corruption of the judiciary also facilitated the take-over of the state by the ruling class (Perrow 2002: 143–56). Even without overt corruption, by the turn of the century, as Justice Brandeis admonished his profession, 'the law' had become corporate law, and at all but the lowest levels, judges in state and federal courts overwhelmingly were former corporate lawyers (Urofsky 2009). Bribes or no, there is little evidence that donning the robes of office altered their basic views.

To return to our basic question, then, the evidence supports the conclusion that the US state, taken as a whole, was strong enough for the purposes to which it was put. Thus, the argument that the US had a weak state, crucial for the idea of US exceptionalism and the associated individualism, finds little support. And the blunt face of state power was state and state-sanctioned violence practised upon its citizens, Black, Brown, Yellow, Red and radical, a violence greater than that found in comparable countries in the second half of the nineteenth century. This fact, ironically, is the United States' one great exception, but it is an exceptional legacy of

subjugation rather than of liberty.

In the course of implementing its revolution from above, the ascendant ruling class took over the Republican Party and made it a party of rule (Foner 1998: 584). From the Civil War until the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, a total of 52 years, only one Democrat, Grover Cleveland, served as President; even Wilson's election was something of a fluke, because the Republican Party was split between Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. Cleveland was less an anomaly than his being a Democrat in a Republican era might suggest: he was a man with friends in high places and a former governor of New York; his campaigns were financed by J.P. Morgan and he served as an attorney in the Morgan law firm between his two Presidential terms (Fraser 2005: 175). Cleveland is not the only sign of the link between government and big business, for it is apparent in the US Senate in the 1890s. That body was composed of 'Standard Oil Senators, sugar trust Senators, iron and steel Senators and railroad Senators, men known for their business affiliations rather than for their states' (Morrison et al. 1980: 152).

Universal manhood suffrage in the United States is often cited in exceptionalist accounts as a reason why militant working-class movements were stronger in Europe than here. Yet the effective rescinding of Black suffrage encouraged campaigns nation-wide to deny the vote to others, and certainly it blocked women's suffrage until after the First World War.<sup>2</sup> Those campaigns, along with the smashing of William Jennings Bryan's 1896 Populist and Democratic campaign by big-money support for William McKinley, succeeded: voter participation declined steadily after Bryan's defeat, not an incidental factor in the retention of Republican control over the national government until the New Deal (Du Bois 2007 [1935]: 513; Keyssar 2000: 105–71). The one great contingent event of the period, the anarchist assassination of McKinley, unexpectedly opened the door to the patrician reformism of Theodore Roosevelt, and so accelerated US imperial expansion.

## THE VICISSITUDES OF THE ASCENDANT US RULING CLASS

Who was in this US ruling class when it ascended to state mastery following the Civil War? First, they were young, often in their teens and twenties during the Civil War, which put them in the prime of life during the Gilded Age. Second, they were an amalgam of old and new, parvenus and those with old money and high social status, forging themselves into a class via their wars with workers and the faux Darwinian wars among themselves. As this suggests, many did not start from scratch. As Kevin Phillips (2002: 23) points out, economic growth before the Civil War was robust enough to create a significant concentration of wealth and economic inequality. It is important to stress, however, that there is little warrant for seeing the pre-War rich as a ruling class, for they were divided North and South. Those in the North were oriented toward the capital-state desires of the Hamiltonians, descended into the Whigs, while those in the South were the political descendants of the Jeffersonians, whose concern for limited government suited the dominant slaveholders, as it helped them to protect their capital in slaves. As well, there had been growth in industry and finance, facilitated by the spread of the railways, and those involved in it were able to corrupt state legislatures. Moreover, the federal government had been unstable since the Missouri Compromise, over slavery, and was subject to strong popular political uprisings, so that the growing financial and industrial sectors were not able to control it.

Whatever their pre-War origins, however, the synergies among a growing inland empire, industry and the Civil War changed the basis of the wealth of the emerging capitalists and enabled them to accumulate capital at rates almost unimaginable by earlier standards. The Civil War had been bad for Northern merchants, as their cotton and other commodity trading with the South and with Europe was curtailed by the Union naval blockade of



Southern ports. However, it was good for industry and finance. The federal budget ballooned with orders for war materiel; huge federal debt issues were floated through fledgling Wall Street investment banks. As well, the War and Reconstruction nullified the political power of Southern capitalists and left the field to Northerners. This domination by the North lasted until the Compromise of 1876 ended Reconstruction, the Beards' second American Revolution that opened the doors to industrial capitalism (their analysis is echoed by, e.g., Moore 1966: 111–15; see also Brands 2010: 3–65; Josephson 1962 [1934]: 55–66).

The result was that American capitalism was re-formed. The industrial–financial fraction grew wealthier and more powerful. Soon it was all but united by 'Morganisation', the spread of major trusts that consolidated into monopolistic holdings what had hitherto been relatively small companies (see Fraser 2005: 164, 171, 248–49, 299). It consolidated its power in the victorious Republican Party (Beckert 2001: 12, 151). When the South was let back in the Union after Reconstruction, it was on Northern industrial–Republican terms, and the Southern ruling class, which had been the wealthiest in the country (Rothman 2005: 71), was deprived of its massive capital in slaves.

Many of this rapidly emerging class were new to wealth, having arisen from modest backgrounds. Andrew Carnegie was the son of poor Scottish immigrants and John D. Rockefeller's father was an itinerant confidence man (Chernow 1998: 3–14; Nasaw 2006: 24–53). The backgrounds of the great railroaders were modest too: Jim Fisk's father was an itinerant tin peddler, Collis Huntington and Charles Crocker both started out as itinerant peddlers, Jay Gould was the son of a poor farmer in upstate New York. Certainly there were others whose rise was less spectacular. Leland Stanford, for instance, was governor of California before he made his railroad fortune and E.H. Harriman, though from poor beginnings, had scrambled up from stock runner to wealthy broker before making big money as a speculator in railroad stocks and stock pools (Josephson 1962 [1934]: 59–

63, 81–89).

Scions of older rich families found their way into the midst of the nouveau riche, or were recruited for their political clout. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge became a director of the newly organised General Electric by the end of the century, while Charles Frances Adams, Jr, diplomat, son and grandson of presidents, became president of the Union Pacific. J.P. Morgan's father, originally a wealthy Boston banker who had moved his offices to London before the Civil War, sent his son to Europe for education and a succession of banking apprenticeships that provided him with vital knowledge and contacts for his career to come (Lears 2009: 222).

Certainly these capitalists engineered enormous industrial production, as the United States passed Britain as an industrial power before the end of the nineteenth century (Kennedy 1987). Their version of capitalism sought wealth through the exploitation of labour, but also established market monopolies to heighten their returns: as Rockefeller, Carnegie and the master monopoly-maker J.P. Morgan understood, the prize was monopoly rent. Also, as I described above, these monopolists practised a very political capitalism, a sort that Weber and Marx recognised clearly. Like their German and Japanese counterparts, and like capitalists in the second tier of late developers such as Italy and Russia, they were taken as partners by states and acted as denizens par excellence of Fernand Braudel's (1982: 455–57, 532–37) capitalist 'counting-house', where business was conducted best in the quiet reaches of executive suites, gentlemen's clubs and investment banks. There they could practice with impunity the arts of the 'deal', such as the crafting of cartels and the manipulation of stocks, and indeed of the stock market itself.

By 1907, J.P. Morgan, known as the Bismarck of railroads, had reduced over 200 railroads to six, only bringing down the wrath of Theodore Roosevelt when he merged two Western monopsonists into one. Louis Brandeis (1995 [1914]: 17) reported that by 1912 there were just two national

banking syndicates: Morgan's and Rockefeller's. During the recovery from the Depression that began in 1893, 9,000 firms were bought out and merged into 445, most of which controlled markets in league with one or two competitors (LaFeber 1993: 185).

The labour processes of the new ruling class were crude. Mostly they just drove their workers hard, a fact they tried to obscure by touting Frederick Winslow Taylor's crackpot theories of scientific management. Their stance toward workers was alternately hostile, fearful and condescending. Andrew Carnegie, for instance, paid what he had to pay his workers that they might have the strength to return to work the next day, but no more. He cloaked his obsession with profit in his self-serving theory of the 'gospel of wealth'. According to that gospel, moguls such as Carnegie organise the advance of the human community, and thus earn the right to decide what to do with its surplus. Giving it to workers is pointless, for if they get more than what they need to subsist, they will only waste it on petty improvements that can never match the lasting contribution that a wise king could make if he had all that money. According to Carnegie (quoted in Nasaw 2006: 523), sharing his profits with his workers was neither

justifiable or wise, because there are higher uses for surplus wealth than adding petty sums to the earnings of the masses. Trifling sums given to each every week or month — and the sums would be trifling indeed — would be frittered away, nine times out of ten, in things which pertain to the body and not to the spirit; upon richer food and drink, better clothing, more extravagant living, which are beneficial neither to rich nor poor. These are things external and of the flesh; they do not minister to the higher, the divine, part of man.

And so Carnegie took upon himself the task of confiscating as much of the surplus as he could, in order to accomplish a more divine purpose

through philanthropy. With luck or with good timing, Carnegie left the US for his estate in Scotland on the eve of the strike against Carnegie Steel in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892. So, it was his partner, Henry Clay Frick, who broke the strike with Pinkerton guards and the Pennsylvania state militia, and finally with federal troops. The result was 16 dead and hundreds wounded, not to mention the thousands put permanently out of work by scab labour (Brody 1969: 50–59).

The number of millionaires, many of them by now anonymous, continued to grow. An estimated 1,400 in 1880 grew to 4,500 in 1900, to 7,000 in 1914 and to 10,000 in 1920 (Phillips 2002: 32, 39, 49, 55–57). Many, including Carnegie, the Rockefellers, the Swifts and the Armours, moved themselves and their families to New York City, and their firms' incorporation papers to New Jersey and Delaware (Beckert 2001: 239, 242, 333).

#### PLAYING THE GREAT GAME OF EMPIRE

I have shown how an ascendant US ruling class achieved political as well as economic dominance at the end of the nineteenth century, and I have argued that, in comparison to what occurred in other late-developing countries, its rise was exceptional only with regard to the unprecedented amount of violence it used to achieve that dominance. I turn finally to the role of empire in the revolution from above in the United States.

That role was substantial, for the pursuit of empire was a powerful stimulant to centralised, anti-democratic rule in the US, as it was in two contemporary late-developing countries, Germany and Japan. As the Beards (1930 [1927]: 480) rather artfully point out, all of the interests associated with imperialism were 'centering in the captain's quarters in the upper sphere of politics'. As they suggest, imperialism was not only an attribute of an

international struggle for power, it also transformed the US state. It concentrated power in the Executive and saw prominent members of the ruling class move directly into key government posts. It transformed nationalism and national chauvinism into racism; it justified the seizure of extraordinary coercive powers at home as well as abroad, while expanding the state's capacity for continuous violence. As Du Bois argued, the effective re-enslavement of African Americans in the US, and the racism that accompanied this betrayal, made it easier for the country to undertake imperial missions to subjugate other peoples of colour. Blocking the path to racial equality world-wide, 'stands the South with flaming sword' (Du Bois 2007 [1935]: 578).

In the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States, as in Germany and Japan, imperialism was seen as necessary for beating rivals and achieving world dominance. 'And so it has come to pass that in a few short months we have become a world power', President McKinley beamed in September of 1899, after the US seizure of the Philippines had been ratified by treaty (LaFeber 1993: 178). Imperialism was also a crucial component of modern revolutions from above, in the US and elsewhere. Eric Hobsbawm (1987: 67) writes that

the belief that the 'overproduction' of the Great Depression of the 1890s could be solved by a vast export drive was widespread, and the crux of the global economic situation was that a number of developing economies simultaneously felt the same need for new markets.

For the US ruling class, then, imperialism was viewed as an economic necessity. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge put it clearly:

We must have new markets unless we would be visited by declines in wages and by great industrial disturbances, of which signs have not been lacking. The old theory of

competing merely by the price of the product is no longer practical ... a navy, coaling stations and ports in the east ... have become essential conditions in our time (quoted in LaFeber 1993: 28–29; ellipses are LaFeber's).

And so it was. The output of America's industrial 'great leap forward' had exceeded domestic demand. The result was the recessions of 1873–1879 and 1882–1885 and the depression of 1893–1904, as well as intense labour resistance. Carnegie succeeded where many of his competitors did not, by cutting wages, firing workers and 'running hard', as he put it. That meant pushing production upwards and making markets by any means, including price-slashing, dumping and bribery. The impact on Carnegie's workers was devastating: in the seven years following his victory in the Homestead strike in 1892, the value of goods shipped from Carnegie mills increased by 226 per cent, while the proportion of revenues paid out in wages declined 67 per cent (Nasaw 2006: 522).

Given that the United States enjoyed its role as the great anti-imperial scold, the territory it gained after the Spanish–American War of 1898 was a rhetorical embarrassment, and the gains were explained away as 'accidental empire'. However, it was not much of an accident. The Assistant Secretary of the Navy under McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, ordered US warships into positions well suited for attacking the Spanish in Manila Bay, did so before the outbreak of hostilities with Spain and did so with the tacit permission of the President. After the annihilation of the Spanish fleet, McKinley was determined to keep the Philippines, and sent 30,000 troops there (the total reached 120,000 over the course of the three-year rebellion) to subdue a popular liberation struggle that swelled even as the United States was ratifying the Spanish–American treaty that made the territory a US possession (Hobsbawm 1987: 62–67, 314–16, 320; Kennedy 1987: 224–32, 250–52).

The suppression of that rebellion was not pretty and it was tinged

with the light of the South's flaming sword. For the US troops, it was another American adventure to make the world safe for White men. As Stefan Kinzer (2006) describes, America's soldiers wrote to their kin that they were going to finish off the Filipinos in the same way that they had finished off so many American Indians, and described those Filipinos with the same racist epithets that they used for American Blacks. The troops' superiors, both shocked by the ferocity of the Philippine resistance and by the travesty of their own inadequate tactics, unleashed punitive campaigns on whole communities in revenge for what they considered vicious local attacks. After the killing of 54 American soldiers at a village called Balangiga on the island of Samar in September of 1901, Colonel Jacob Smith, a veteran of the Army massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee, was told to undertake a revenge raid on the island. Smith ordered his men to kill everyone over the age of ten: 'I want no prisoners.... I want you to kill and burn. The more you kill and the more you burn, the better you will please me' (quoted in Kinzer 2006: 53). Pacification of the islands in the three-year rebellion cost 200,000 Filipinos and 2,000 Americans their lives (LaFeber 1993: 165).

For Theodore Roosevelt, the Philippines was a war prize finally taken from the native barbarians by force, and if White men could be said to be 'morally bound to abandon' the islands, then 'we were also morally bound to abandon Arizona to the Apaches' (quoted in LaFeber 1993: 179-80). In 1907, Roosevelt sent a massive naval squadron, the Great White Fleet, on a world tour, to show competitors what they would have to confront if they displeased the United States (Kennedy 1987: 247).

US intervention and imperial expansion abroad had the domestic effect of enhancing the Executive's control of the federal government, and this in turn strengthened ruling class control over the Executive. Neither McKinley nor Theodore Roosevelt were keen on congressional interference in foreign affairs, and with the connivance of a fellow imperialist, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, they resorted to Executive agreements with foreign powers which did not require congressional approval. Furthermore, they

chose people from the senior ranks of the large corporations, and their associated law firms and banks, to be US ambassadors abroad and to lead the Departments of State, War, Navy and the Treasury (LaFeber 1993: 132–38; Mann 1993: 417–19).

Thus it is that, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a new US ruling class came of age and took control of state and society.

## CONCLUSION

With more than a century of hindsight, it is apparent that the past was prologue. After half a century of competition, conflict and two World Wars, two other late-developing countries, Germany and Japan, were defeated. The conqueror, the United States, along with its allies, substantially reordered the societies of the defeated, weakening the old regimes that had been dominated by those countries' upper classes and that had brought them to grief. For the United States, on the other hand, victory in those wars ushered in a Golden Age. By the end of the Second World War, its own regime, dominated by its own upper class, emerged unscathed. Indeed, the conflicts had, if anything, made it stronger than before, for its great corporations produced, at great profit, the war machine necessary for victory in Europe and the Pacific. It had withstood the modest reformism of Franklin Roosevelt, and resolved to restore absolute rule after VJ Day.

Today, many in the US talk a great deal about economic inequality, but the problem of power that made it so predominant a feature of US society remains in the main, as Eric Wolf noted long ago, ignored. Wolf's remonstrance with the profession has produced, at most, a minority trend in a field dominated by the meta-theories of structuralism, poststructuralism and finally postmodernism. This is unfortunate, for two reasons.



The first reason is concerned with what anthropologists commonly say about themselves. They say that they are, and ought to be, reflexive. However, as Sabina Stan suggests in her chapter in this volume, that reflexivity often ignores the social context of the production of anthropological knowledge. For American anthropologists at least, that context includes what they know of the United States and its history, knowledge that often enough goes without saying. That knowledge is likely to affect what they see as likely and possible in the world, and hence affect how they see the world that they study. The history that I have provided in this chapter helps clarify and qualify what American anthropologists are likely to know of their own country, and so aids that reflexivity.

This looking backward is prologue to the second reason that our failure to heed Wolf's injunction is unfortunate. As noted in Part I of this volume, if anthropologists are to do more than fill the shelves of their own cabinets of curiosities, they need a place on which to stand. That is because it is only such a place that affords them a perspective with which to make sense of the world that they study and seek to understand. Wolf's concern with power, and especially with the processes that shape and link social and cultural institutions and systems, provides such a perspective, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter.

So, while the study of power has been largely absent in the years since Wolf urged us to pursue it, it should not be absent in the future.

## NOTES

- 1 Although I allude to it from time to time, for reasons of space I am unable to develop a complementary part of my analysis. That involves reframing the rise of the US ruling class in the late nineteenth century as similar to what happened in other late-developing nations such as

Germany and Japan, with whom the United States engaged in fierce economic and political competition at the end of that century.

- 2 The desire to keep African-Americans from voting also involved Southern Democrats in invoking states' rights on women's suffrage, a position that wartime President Woodrow Wilson in 1918 finally found inconvenient (Keyssar 2000: 210–18).

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