

which has turned attention away from the economy and back toward the seemingly simpler idea of “the market.” Like economies, however, markets must be made. They are produced not by the natural working of self-interest but by the complex organization of desire, agency, price, ownership, and dispossession. Economics (especially in a wider sense of the term, encompassing fields such as accounting and management) helps to produce these arrangements, by providing instruments of calculation and other necessary equipment (Callon 1998), just as it helped to produce the economy. However, while the idea of the economy refers to a specific territory, usually the nation-state, the market has no particular spatial connotation. It can refer to the trading floor of a futures exchange or a transnational network. Unlike the economy, therefore, it does not invoke the role of the state, as the power that governs economic space and defines its task as the management and growth of the economy and the nurturing and regulation of economic actors. The regulation of markets and the forming and governing of market agencies is dispersed at numerous levels.

The idea of the economy survives today as much as a political concept as an object of economic theory. A sign taped to the wall in the Democratic Party campaign headquarters for the 1992 U.S. presidential election proclaimed, “It’s the economy, stupid!” Placed there, it is said, as a reminder of where the campaign should keep its focus, it reminds us today of the work that is done to make the existence of the economy appear obvious and its truths uncontested. It also should remind us that the goal of fixing what the

economy refers to has remained surprisingly resilient. While the field of cultural studies (American and otherwise) has paid much attention to other organizing concepts, such as nation, class, gender, society, and of course culture itself, it has often left the idea of the economy untouched. There have been a number of interesting studies of different “representations” of the economy. These usually assume, however, that the economy itself remains as a kind of underlying material reality, somehow independent of the intellectual equipment and machinery of representation with which it is set up and managed. In the same way, academic economics is often criticized for misrepresenting the “true nature” of the economy. The task now is to account for the great success of economics and related forms of expertise in helping to make the economy in the first place.

## 25

### Empire

#### Shelley Streeby

In the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, it was often observed that the word “empire” was becoming increasingly popular as a way to describe the current form of U.S. power in the world. Many commentators noted that while the meanings of the word had previously been overwhelmingly negative, a host of best-selling books, policy statements, newspaper editorials, and other sources promoted the idea of an

American empire. One example among many was Vice President Dick Cheney's 2003 Christmas card, which contained the following quotation, attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

As Cheney's citation of Franklin suggests, this embrace of the word "empire" was not really a new phenomenon. Even though the United States established its political independence from the British empire by winning the Revolutionary War, understandings of empire as necessarily tyrannical and as an Old World vice competed with arguments about the possible virtues of U.S. empire. As historian Richard Van Alstyne pointed out in his 1960 study *The Rising American Empire* (a title which, as he noted, "comes straight from George Washington"), many of the founders were invested in the idea of an American "imperium—a dominion, state, or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power" (1). Such ideas were strengthened by the notion that civilization was moving westward, and that the United States would be the next (and perhaps last) great incarnation of civilization. The idea of a U.S. empire was also partly driven by fears of the other empires—British, French, and Spanish—that claimed vast territorial possessions in North America. In competition with these powerful imperial states, U.S. policymakers often claimed, in spite of the much longer presence of indigenous peoples, a natural right to the continent based on geographical factors as well as the migrations of U.S. settlers.

Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase of 1803, which massively increased the size of the United States, went a long way toward realizing those continental ambitions. And Jefferson's statement that U.S. territorial expansion enlarged the space of freedom and enabled an "empire for liberty" has been echoed by many subsequent empire-builders. But the founders' readings in republican political theory also provoked debates about whether a great extent of territory might endanger a republic and ultimately lead to its downfall. Some versions of republicanism (notably those influenced by Montesquieu) warned that the pursuit of empire threatened a republic with corruption and decline through overextension and by engendering luxury, incorporating alien peoples, and promoting the maintenance of standing armies. Such fears are displayed in Thomas Cole's famous set of paintings called *The Course of Empire* (1833–66), which represent what he and many others imagined as the five stages of empire: the Savage State, the Arcadian or Pastoral State, Consummation, Destruction, and Desolation (A. Miller 1993). While Jefferson and the U.S. empire-builders who followed him hoped that exceptional American conditions would prevent the United States from sharing the fate of other empires, the darker strains of republican theory continued to provide resources for those who wanted to argue against the nation's imperial ambitions.

Comparisons to other empires and questions about the annexation of new lands also provoked both pro- and antiwar arguments during the U.S.-Mexico War (1846–48). Along with the more familiar allusions to

the Roman empire, Spain and England increasingly became important reference points for such comparisons. On the one hand, U.S. Americans sometimes imagined themselves as the heirs to the Spanish empire in the New World. The popularity of W. H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* during the 1840s inspired many soldiers and commentators to imagine that U.S. armed forces were retracing the steps of the Spanish invaders as they marched on Mexico City during the war. On the other hand, such a comparison was potentially disturbing because of the Black Legend: the idea that the Spanish conquest of the New World was uniquely bloody and vicious. And although the Black Legend positioned the British colonists as more enlightened and humane than the Spanish, mid-nineteenth-century events in India and Ireland also made the British empire a potentially unsettling point of comparison. In a powerful antiwar speech delivered in 1847, for instance, Boston Unitarian clergyman Theodore Parker (1863/1973, 26) compared the U.S. invasion of Mexico to England's "butchering" of Sikhs in India and seizure of lands in Ireland. Debates over the imperial annexation of new territories also raised divisive questions about the incorporation of heterogeneous elements—notably Catholics and nonwhite people—into the nation, as well as about the extension of slavery. During these years the issues of empire and slavery became fatally conjoined; soon after the United States increased its size at the expense of Mexico after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, this conjunction would culminate in the U.S. Civil War.

While commentators such as Parker opposed the U.S.-Mexico War by calling the nation an empire and invoking pessimistic comparisons to other empires both classical and contemporaneous, many who supported the war tried to sidestep such comparisons by using other words to describe U.S. expansion. One especially influential formulation was coined in 1845 by *Democratic Review* editor John O'Sullivan, who argued that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions" (quoted in Horsman 1981, 219). The concept of Manifest Destiny derived in part from earlier ideas about the Puritan settlers as God's chosen people, who were working out their destiny in the Promised Land. It also built on eighteenth-century Lockean arguments that possession of land was justified by use, as well as the Jeffersonian notion that the extension of agrarian democracy was coterminous with the extension of freedom. The use of the concept of Manifest Destiny instead of "empire" gave divine sanction to U.S. expansion and implied that it was a natural and nonviolent process. This concept even influenced subsequent scholarship by twentieth-century researchers, who tended to distinguish continental expansion from imperialism, thereby disconnecting earlier moments of U.S. empire-building from later imperial conflicts, such as those of the 1890s.

In much of that scholarship, U.S. wars in the Caribbean and the Pacific during and after the 1890s were regarded as part of an aberrant period in which the nation uncharacteristically acted as an empire.

This disavowal was coincident with the coinage, around 1860 according to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, of the word “imperialism,” which has very different connotations than the much older word “empire.” In its earliest and subsequent usages, imperialism was often associated with “arbitrary” or “despotic” rule, as well as the “advocacy of imperial interests,” including “trading interests and investments.” The *OED* even states: “In the United States, imperialism is similarly applied to the new policy of extending the rule of the American people over foreign countries, and of acquiring and holding distant dependencies, in the way in which colonies and dependencies are held by European states.” That the *OED* writers, who compiled their definitions in the early twentieth century, would see U.S. imperialism as a “new policy” shows the pervasiveness of the idea that U.S. empire-building before the 1890s did not count as imperialism.

The definition of a “new” U.S. imperialism included three key elements. First, it depended upon the identification of similarities between U.S. imperialism and the various European imperialisms that were in their heyday during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although many advocates of the Spanish-American War (1898) argued, especially early on, that U.S. forces were liberators rather than conquerors, comparisons to European-style imperialisms became more difficult to dismiss as the United States turned from warring with Spain to warring with Filipinos, Cubans, and others who sought independence. Second, the concept of a new U.S. empire (LaFeber 1963)

was based on an understanding of imperialism as necessarily involving the extension of rule over “distant places,” particularly places located overseas. Third, this new definition emphasized the pursuit of commercial “interests and investments,” as well as the establishment of military bases, in addition to or instead of the formal annexation of new lands.

Of course, none of these elements was particularly new. During the U.S.-Mexico War, antiwar activists pressed the comparison to the British and Spanish empires; the United States had long had an interest in trying to take over or control “distant places,” such as the islands in the Caribbean; and the notion of a commercial empire extends back to the early days of the United States and was strongly articulated by Abraham Lincoln’s secretary of state, William Steward, among others. While it is true that after the 1890s the nation tended to back away from the previous pattern of annexing new territories and making them into states, this development was more of an innovation in the administration of empire than an absolute break with the past. But by viewing late-nineteenth-century U.S. imperialism as a new development, and by distinguishing continental expansionism from overseas imperialism, U.S. commentators promoted the notion that the pursuit of empire was an exceptional episode in U.S. history, rather than the norm.

This view of the 1890s as an aberration is especially ironic given the extent of the U.S. military presence and the reach of U.S. commercial imperialism in the decades that followed the 1890s. In his 1904 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, for instance, Theodore Roo-

sevelt stated that “chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilization, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere . . . may force the U.S., however reluctantly . . . to the exercise of an international police power” (quoted in Stephanson 1995, 107). This understanding of the United States as a police force devoted to the defense of civilization would be used to justify multiple interventions in Latin America and elsewhere, from the early twentieth century to the present. Indeed, although Theodore Roosevelt has often been contrasted with Woodrow Wilson, largely because of Roosevelt’s frank endorsement of empire-building and Wilson’s emphasis on creating international institutions, the two shared a vision of the United States as a sort of “world cop” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 177). Although Wilson was ostensibly devoted to preserving peace and Roosevelt was committed to the war of civilization against savagery, Wilson was also determined to establish governments he approved of in strategically important locations, and so sent U.S. troops to Russia, Mexico, Haiti, Central America, and the Dominican Republic. Perhaps Wilson’s most important contribution to the empire question was his idealistic, Jeffersonian recasting of U.S. imperialism as the protection and extension of universal values; his declaration, in 1917, that the nation was devoted to “making the world safe for democracy” has often been echoed by more recent empire-builders.

After World War II, U.S. military involvement in other parts of the world, especially Asia, was often

said to be motivated by the need to contain communism and to counter Soviet expansion. According to many Cold War thinkers, it was the Soviet Union, and not the United States, that was imperialist; this logic suggested that an aggressive U.S. military policy was a defensive response to the threat that communist expansion posed to capitalist democracies. Within such binary schemas, the United States was cast in the role of the defender of freedom and liberty, and therefore its interventions around the world were not viewed by U.S. policymakers as imperialist. This helps to explain why, during the Cold War years, so many historians, literary critics, and other American studies scholars maintained that the United States was not and had never been an empire, except perhaps for that brief period during and after the Spanish-American War. Scholars such as diplomatic historian William Appleman Williams, who argued that empire had been a “way of life” from the beginning of the nation, were definitely in the minority during the Cold War years.

The question of empire was posed anew during the Vietnam War and particularly in educational activists’ battles for ethnic studies during the 1960s and 1970s. Social movements pressing for justice, including the antiwar movement and the movements of people of color working both outside and inside the academy, helped to make U.S. empire an issue in revisionist scholarly work of the Vietnam War era and after. We could go back even further, of course, and find critical work on U.S. imperialism, often linked to the collective endeavors of social movements and to interdisciplinary concerns, in the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois,

Americo Paredes, C. L. R. James, Ricardo Flores Magón, Lucy Parsons, and many others. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the literatures and theories of decolonization, work on internal colonialism in U.S. ethnic studies (especially Native American studies and Chicano studies), as well as the impact of postcolonial studies, all helped to make U.S. empire visible as a problem. When we define American studies in terms of programs and institutions, we need to recognize how it emerged as a post–World War II form of area studies that had ties on some campuses to the CIA, the Cold War national security state, and the imperatives of U.S. empire. But we should also attend to what George Lipsitz (2001, 27) has called “the other American studies, the organic grassroots theorizing about culture and power that has informed cultural practice, social movements, and academic work for many years.”

From that perspective, the influential 1993 anthology *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, is best understood as an important contribution to ongoing debates within American studies and cultural studies, not as an origin point for work on U.S. empire. The book grew out of a 1991 conference that was organized, according to Pease (1993, 22), “in the shadow of three macropolitical events—the end of the cold war, the Persian Gulf War, and the Columbus quincentennial.” Each of these events, which involved multiple imperial histories, generated public debates that helped to shape the conversation about empire in American studies. Many of the essays in the volume linked recent episodes of U.S. empire-building to longer histories of imperialism,

and several extended insights from contemporary cultural studies research (Ashcroft et al. 1989; Gilroy 1987, 1993). Michael Rogin, for instance, explored how political spectacles of covert operations in popular culture contributed to an amnesia about U.S. empire. And in her introductory essay, Kaplan (1993, 5) similarly focused on imperial amnesia as she argued that “imperialism has been simultaneously formative and disavowed in the foundational discourses of American Studies.” She thereby helped to inspire a large body of new work on forgotten histories of U.S. imperialism.

While many American studies scholars responded to this call by focusing on imperial amnesia and hoping that the naming of the empire would help to challenge it, public policymakers and popular pundits were busy remembering and championing that history, although often in highly selective and misleading ways (Kaplan 2002). This does not mean that the idea of an empire was universally acknowledged and endorsed. Even within the administration of George W. Bush, there is still some discomfort with the word “empire”: when reporters asked Dick Cheney about his Christmas card, he denied that the United States was really an empire and jokingly blamed his wife Lynne for choosing Franklin’s quotation. It is certainly true, however, that naming and exposing the empire does not automatically undermine its power, especially at a moment when U.S. empire is being identified, once again, with “universal” values such as democracy and freedom. As Kaplan (2004, 6) suggests, an American studies critique of U.S. empire must in-

volve not only “disinterring the buried history of imperialism,” but also “debating its meanings and lessons for the present” and showing “how U.S. interventions have worked from the perspective of comparative imperialisms, in relation to other historical changes and movements across the globe.”

26

## Environment

Vermonja R. Alston

In its broadest sense, the term “environment” indexes contested terrains located at the intersections of political, social, cultural, and ecological economies. In its narrowest sense, it refers to the place of nature in human history. In each of these usages, representations of the natural world are understood as having decisive force in shaping environmental policy and the environmental imagination. Conservation politics were inspired by interpretations of particular places as untouched by the industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century, while much contemporary ecocriticism has continued the mainstream preoccupation with wilderness traditions, pastoralism, and the Romantic impulse of nature writing. Environmental justice activists and some ecofeminists have questioned these preoccupations, as have indigenous and post-colonial writers and scholars across the Americas who point out that imaginative writing about “nature” has a long tradition among colonial settlers attempting to

mythologize and indigenize their relationships to place. This polyphony of competing voices and genealogies may be best understood as an interplay among many environmentalisms.

In his *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1983, 219, 223) notes that “[n]ature is perhaps the most complex word in the language . . . Nature has meant the ‘countryside’, the ‘unspoiled places’, plants and creatures other than man . . . nature is what man has not made.” At the heart of this conception of nature lies the sense that there exists inherent, universal, and primary law beyond the corrupt societies of “man.” While “environment” is not one of Williams’s keywords, “ecology” does make an appearance, even though the term was not common in the English language until the middle of the twentieth century. Ecology, defined as the “study of the relations of plants and animals with each other and their habitat,” replaced environment, a word in use since the early nineteenth century but derived from the mid-fourteenth-century borrowing from Old French, *environ*, meaning to surround or enclose (111). In American cultural studies, “environment” has undergone a renewal among scholars and activists, owing in part to resistance to the bracketing of “nature” and “wilderness” as privileged sites of national identity, and its acceptance as a shorthand for research on ecosystems and diverse environmental movements. Curiously, even as the term “ecology” is used less often, it has been condensed to a prefix in the names of social and intellectual movements, notably ecocriticism and ecofeminism.