

“Recognition of Cuban Independence”: Henry Adams and Empire Building

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The many and diverse non-fiction writings of Henry Adams (1838-1918)—political essays, historical works, private correspondence, including his semi-autobiographical *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918)—cover the whole of American history.¹ In these writings, we can find a personal narrative on major issues that the US faced as a nation from its founding to the start of World War I. This article will explore Adams’ stance on the subject of empire building based upon a report he prepared on behalf of Senator James Donald Cameron (1833-1918) of Pennsylvania, entitled “Recognition of Cuban Independence” (1896), to try and justify the right of intervention of the US in the cause of Cuban independence. Centered on two major arguments, national interest and the existence of a state of belligerence between the insurgents and the central government in Madrid, the document in question, which has not been subject to any major scholarly examination, embodies many of the principles Adams felt should have guided American foreign policy.² Moreover, it brings to light the extent to which Adams was a firm believer in the “manifest destiny” of the US to help Latin American colonies break away from European powers within the framework of the Monroe Doctrine, “that altogether new and wholly American system,” as he describes it in the report.³ As someone deeply connected with the structures of power that controlled the American state, Adams has often been branded as an imperialist—or at least a reluctant imperialist—on account of his association with John Hay, Secretary of State to both William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, but to what extent he truly believed empire building was a valid proposition for the extension of US power to other regions of the globe remains to be determined.⁴ “Recognition of Cuban Independence” may help us answer this question, considering that US imperialism has always implied “a complex and interdependent relationship with hegemonic as well as counterhegemonic modalities of coercion and resistance.”⁵ As has been noted by Ellen Meiksins Wood, American imperialism has been of a different kind in the sense that it has relied on the nation-state to create the conditions for global capitalism to freely operate, often involving the use of US military might to enforce the rules it established for governing the world economy. It is what she designates as a “capitalist empire.”⁶

Part One—The Cameron Report

“Recognition of Cuban Independence” was submitted to the US Senate during the 54th Congress, 2nd Session. Dated December 21, 1896, it was penned following the

refusal on the part of Spain to accept the mediation of the US between herself and the Cuban insurgents who had declared their independence on February 24, 1895. So as to substantiate its position, Congress asked the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to submit a report detailing all cases of peoples who became independent by right of revolt or insurrection in the current century. A Resolution was passed by the Senate that same year requesting the President “to interpose his friendly offices with the Spanish Government for the recognition of the independence of Cuba.”⁷ Based on an earlier resolution, from the time of President Ulysses S. Grant and following the first uprising against Spanish rule on October 10, 1868, the US representative in Madrid attempted to mediate the independence of the island. However, both resolutions had gone unheeded in the Spanish capital.

Although no specific reference to the writer of “Recognition” is made in its official version, its authorship has never been contested. In *The Education*, Adams, who was president of the American Historical Association (1893-1894) and a personal friend of senator James Donald Cameron, does not mention that he had prepared the report on behalf of the senator. However, in the correspondence exchanged between himself and the senator’s wife, Elizabeth Sherman Cameron, in the midst of President McKinley’s hesitation to declare war on Spain over the *USS Maine* explosion, Adams refers to the authorship of the report.⁸ In that letter Adams writes: “...and the scene is a singular contrast to that of the last winter I was here, and the moment, two years ago, when I was writing that famous Cameron Report which is now the law of America, – or would have been if everyone had not been afraid of it.”⁹ Elsewhere, he credits Elizabeth Cameron as his ‘collaborator’ in the writing of the report, describing the document in question as “our prodigious Cameron Reports” in one instance and “our Cuban Report” in another.¹⁰

As one of the keenest nineteenth-century political observers and commentators on US foreign affairs, Adams had been following affairs in Cuba since his first visit to the island in March 1888, with Theodore F. Dwight, travel companion and librarian of the State Department. Twenty years had passed since the first uprising against colonial Spain, but in the letters Adams wrote during his two-week stay on the island, a kind of “Paradise,” as he puts it, there are no references to the periodic insurgency that had plagued the island for decades. What stands out in Adams’ correspondence is an obvious fondness for everything he saw and experienced. Adams fell immediately in love with the people of Cuba, the vegetation, the architecture, the food, neither the squalor, the fleas or the heat bothered him. During a bullfight at Vedado, he was both enthralled by the spectacle itself and a female spectator in full Andalusian attire, who “reduced [him] to a pitiable state of imbecile adoration.”¹¹ While Adams’ fondness for the island was pervasive throughout his trip notes, there were moments where he alluded to the “atmosphere of ruin” in Cuba, including the pervasiveness of “[p]overty” and “brigands”.¹²

Adams visited Cuba a second time, in February of 1893, with William Hallett Phillips, a Washington lawyer and close associate. During this sojourn, he wrote

three letters, once again, all of a general nature, showing no particular concern for political affairs in the Caribbean island. Adams returned to Cuba the year after, this time with his friend Clarence King (1842-1901), first director of the US Geological Survey. In this third trip, from February to April 1894, he came into contact with the revolutionary activity taking place on the island, but once more his letters lacked detail about the political situation in Cuba. Adams made various allusions to King “geologizing,” references to the countryside, the scenery, the people, the local women, and the occasional cultural disparagement, such as describing Havana as a “vile hole.”¹³ This does not mean that Adams found Cuba unpleasant; quite the contrary, he described the island to his long-time English friend Charles Milnes Gaskell in these terms: “A good, rotten tropical Spanish island, like Cuba, with no roads and no drainage, but plenty of bananas and brigands, never bores me.”¹⁴ The letters written during his fourth and final trip to Cuba, in early 1895, however, are more political in nature, no doubt because rebel activity against Spanish rule had reignited on the island in February 1895. In one of these letters, Adams compared the thriving economy of Mexico with the ruinous social and political conditions he can observe on the island (Adams was travelling from Tampico, Mexico, to Puerto Rico, with a stopover in Cuba), remarking at one point: “Sugar and tobacco have gone to the dogs, along with wheat and cotton. Cuba is hopeless bankrupt, and more discontent than ever.”¹⁵ In another letter, he manifests his dislike for the presence of too many Americans on the island, suspecting that they are there for ulterior motives, confessing: “To me they look hungrier and more like buzzards and vultures than ever; as though their struggle for life were becoming severe.”¹⁶ A few years on, he was able to write retrospectively in *The Education* that Cuban society, with its “decaying fabric,” had little to teach him, but that while there he could not help being contaminated by the spirit of revolution.¹⁷

Following his final sojourn in Cuba, Adams took on a more active interest in the island’s affairs, allowing his “Cuban friends,” the representatives of the island’s revolutionaries in the US capital, to congregate at his home in Lafayette Square. There, he received Gonzalo Quesada (1868-1915), the Cuban *chargé d’affaires* in Washington, General Calixto Garcia (1839-1898), from the National Assembly of Cuba, and other members of the Cuban junta in the US capital at the time.¹⁸ Lobbying behind closed doors for the island’s independence, Adams remarks in a letter to Mrs. Cameron, his personal confidante:

I am kept here by Cuba, which I appear to be running, for the faculty of bungling is the only faculty a legislative body possesses in foreign affairs. Of course my share in it is totally behind the scenes.... So please do not allude to my doings either in letter or conversation. The President is bitterly hostile to every instinct of old-fashioned freedom, and nothing can be done till the great Trusts come over to our side.¹⁹

A few years on and Adams was still deeply committed to Cuban affairs, telling Mrs. Cameron: “My machine just now is busy running Cuba. My house is more than ever a Cuban headquarters, and between one and another conspirator I look benignant and talk mild platitude...”²⁰ Edward Chalfant, in the last of his three-volume biography of Adams characterizes the activities he engaged in at the time on behalf of the Cuban insurgents as the “Henry Adams Conspiracy,” counting among its active members Elizabeth Cameron, Donald Cameron, William H. Phillips, and quite possibly Tom Lee.²¹ Chalfant points out that Cuban delegates were not part of the “conspiracy,” and that it must have come as a big surprise to them to find out about “Recognition” through a piece of news in the *Washington Evening Star*, in its February 10, 1896 edition, which read: “More About Cuba: Mr. Cameron’s Resolution for Recognition of independence.”²²

Economic ties between the US and Cuba had been strengthened after the abolition of slavery on the island on October 7, 1886, but it was only in the late 1880s that American capital started to flow into Cuba in ever significant amounts. From that point onwards, Cuba’s economy became vulnerable to the whims of supply and demand of the American market. It “stood or fell,” as Eric Hobsbawm writes, “by the price of sugar and the willingness of the USA to import it...”²³ Estimates of the total amount of US investments on the island at the time of the crisis between Spain and its Caribbean possession vary from \$20,000,000 to \$50,000,000.²⁴ There were, thus, different interests at play in the US regarding Cuba, individuals with personal agendas or undisclosed motives for either supporting the *status quo* there or else advocating an end to Spanish colonialism. The majority of Americans, however, were genuinely in favor of a *Cuba libre*, expressing their backing for the cause of independence through petitions, financial contributions and newspaper letters. “To describe these activities as tantamount to jingoism and a desire for war or to view them as solely the result of propaganda and machinations of the Cuban *Junta*, the ‘yellow press,’ and the expansionist forces in the United States, is,” according to pioneering labour historian, Philip S. Foner, “to denigrate the American people.”²⁵

No one was better qualified to furnish the necessary historical background to substantiate congressional policy on Cuba than the historian Henry Adams, whose major historical work, the nine-volume *History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889-1891), dealt precisely with the diplomatic affairs of the young nation with France and Spain during the period 1801-1817. “Recognition” reads like a chapter of a history book. It follows the style, conventions and tone of his *History of the United States*, covering the administrations of the third and fourth presidents of the United States. In the three-paragraph introduction to his “historical summary,” Adams outlines the purpose of the report, given that in its 1895 session, Congress had vowed to mediate the dispute over Cuba’s independence and, thus far, Spain had refused to negotiate or propose a solution to the problem with the insurgents on the island. Therefore, Adams

writes, it was time for Congress to decide what to do “with proper regard to the customs and usages of nations.”²⁶

Adams’ report for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations is predicated on the notion that insurrection and intervention are recognized rights of peoples, because in each case where there was a revolt or insurrection, there was also a foreign intervention. That being the case, it remained to be determined, as Adams points out, in what circumstances nations could exercise their rights and use force when the issue at stake was independence. Hence, Adams covers the political, diplomatic, and military affairs that led to insurrections and/or outside interventions in different parts of the world to justify US support for Cuba’s independence throughout the “Recognition.” Europe is the first of these sections, where Adams discusses the independence of Greece (1821-1827), Belgium (1830), Poland (1831), Hungary (1849), the States of the Church (1850), and the territories which belonged to the Ottoman Empire (1878), followed by sections on Asia, America (1822-1823), the United States and Mexico (1861-1866), and finally Cuba.

In his report, Adams differentiates between four precedents—and concomitant foreign interventions—that led to the emergence of new nationalities on the European continent: Greece, which became independent from the Turks in 1827, Belgium, which gained independence from Holland in 1830, Poland, which freed itself from Russia in 1831, and Hungary, which acquired its own statehood in 1849 when it succeeded in separating itself from Austria, as well as other types of interventions in Europe which resulted either from the disintegration of “ancient empires” or the reunification of “new systems.”²⁷ Within the former, Adams grouped together Turkey, Spain, and the Church States, whereas in the latter, Adams includes Germany, Russia and Italy. He also alludes to the intervention in Spain by France (1823), in Portugal by England (1827 and 1836), in Piedmont and Naples by the Holy Alliance (1821), leaving out various other instances that occurred since 1848, “the enumeration” of which “would be long and difficult.”²⁸

In the largest section of the report, “America, 1822-23”, Adams details the circumstances that allowed Mexico, Venezuela, Chile and Argentina to secure their independence from Spain, following the overthrow of the Bourbons from the Spanish throne by Napoleon I. Undoubtedly the most important part of the report, in it Adams discusses the precepts of the Monroe Doctrine, that wholly new system of foreign relations which this American president had inaugurated. Adams starts off by pointing out that Europeans had always been reluctant and even unwilling to adhere to strict neutrality as far as affairs in the New World were concerned. Americans, on the other hand, since the presidency of George Washington, had pursued such policies, first with the Neutrality Act of 1794 and then with its revised and updated version of April 20, 1818. According to Adams, US administrations had always proceeded with the utmost care on the subject of the independence of Spain’s New World colonies, having always acted in concert with Great Britain, given that the Holy Alliance member-countries, always strongly against the independence

movements in that part of the globe, tended to side with Spain.

The final section of "Recognition," covering affairs in Cuba, is the key section in the report which Adams encapsulates in this phrase: "The Government of the United States had always regarded Cuba as within the sphere of its most active and serious interest."²⁹ The focus on Cuba was so intense that affairs on the Caribbean island had always been regarded as an issue of national interest, in much the same way as those related to the contiguous territories brought piecemeal into the Union. Denoting tension between purported neutrality and the right of intervention, that is leaving the former Spanish colonies "independent" or else regarding them as a matter of "national interest" within a sphere of influence, Adams provides an overview of the historical developments that brought the US and Cuba to this stage in their relations. He stated that over the last seventy years, more precisely since Colombia and Mexico had tried to meddle in the affairs of Cuba by invading it (1825), the US had always maintained that it had the right of intervention in the affairs of the island. Moreover, US administrations had acted with a friendly disposition to Spain and shown the utmost self-control in the aftermath of the two major insurrections that had taken place on the island in 1868 and 1895. In October 1868, when the first rebellion broke out in Cuba, President Ulysses S. Grant had asked the US representative in Madrid to mediate the eventual independence of the island, but the Spanish government would have none of it. The details of his initiative served as the basis of the Senate Resolution passed during the 1895 session, "a patient delay unexampled in history," requesting the President "to interpose his friendly offices with the Spanish Government for the recognition of the independence of Cuba."³⁰ Then as now, Adams is adamant that Cuba is within the sphere of influence of the US: "This right of intervention in matters relating to the external relations of Cuba, asserted and exercised seventy years ago, has been asserted and exercised at every crisis in which the island has been involved."³¹

Several options were on the table for the Cleveland administration as far as ending Spain's colonial rule over the island: intervention, which meant annexation, purchase of the island, or else the recognition of a state of belligerence between the insurgents and the mother country, which could effectively pave the way to independence.³² Fearing that the recognition of the belligerence between the parties would jeopardize American business interests on the island and choosing to ignore the innumerable petitions which had been sent to Congress in its 54th session on September 1895, President Grover Cleveland declared US neutrality as far as Cuban affairs were concerned in his last message to Congress, on December 7, 1896. His declaration of neutrality is unequivocal, but it contains a veiled threat should Spain trample on US interests in Cuba: "...an obligation to the sovereignty of Spain will be superseded by higher obligations, which we can hardly hesitate to recognize and discharge."³³

Adams disapproved of President Cleveland's proclamation of US neutrality and believed the time had come for the US to take decisive action on the subject

of Cuba’s independence, stating in “Recognition”: “the inability of Spain to deal successfully with the insurrection has become manifest, and it is demonstrated that the sovereignty is extinct in Cuba for all purposes of its rightful existence...”³⁴ In order to substantiate his claim, Adams points out the conditions that justify the recognition of the island’s status as an independent nation, namely, the fact that insurgents had formed a government, written a constitution, elected a president, and introduced a number of different measures, some of a military nature, others of an administrative and diplomatic tenor, to set up a properly functioning state. All of this represented much more, in his view, than Colombia had put in place when President Monroe acknowledged its independence in 1822. Thus, American diplomacy having always been “mild and forbearing,” whereas that of Europe was invariably “harsh and oppressive,” the only question that remained to be addressed by Congress as time had run out, Adams concludes, was simply the “mode” of intervention.³⁵

Part Two—The Monroe Doctrine and the Cameron Report

The tenor of Adams’ words in “Recognition” points to the centrality of the Monroe Doctrine in American foreign policy. Indeed, the Monroe Doctrine functioned as a *modus operandi* in international affairs capable of rivaling the European nations treaties of Vienna, of Paris and of the Holy Alliance (Adams dates the beginning of the modern international system to 1815, to the signature of the above-mentioned treaties).³⁶ In the realm of foreign relations, Europe’s own system, Adams holds in “Recognition,” can only be met “by creating an American law of practice of intervention exclusive of the Europeans within the range of its influence.”³⁷ In other words, the US should have the capacity to act within its area of influence, and nations which the US had recognized as independent stood, therefore, outside the realm of European dominance. Anything contrary to this, Adams implies, should be deemed as unfriendly by the US government. When President James Monroe issued his grand political declaration, used to protect American interests since 1822-1823, Adams observes: “[w]ith boldness which still startles and perplexes the world, he lopped off one great branch of European intervention and empire and created a new system of international relations.”³⁸ The system included, as he writes, “all South America, except the Guianas [*sic*] all Central America, except the British colony of Honduras, and the two black Republics of Spanish Santo Domingo and Haiti in the Antilles.”³⁹ Adams’ words are devoid of ambiguities as to the significance of Monroe’s declaration for US diplomacy since that time, most notably when he records that the latter two “have since claimed [1822-1823], and in most cases have received admission [into this new system].”⁴⁰

Delivered to Congress by President James Monroe in his Annual Message on December 2, 1823, the Monroe Doctrine was a reaction of the US government to Prince Metternich’s Holy Alliance, whose reactionary politics US administrations disapproved. The Doctrine aimed to prevent European nations from expanding

and/or consolidating their power over their New World possessions, giving tacit approval to the possibility of rebellious colonies freeing themselves from their European colonizers. It promised US support to those who had already become independent and backing to those who wished to do so. This meant that the original American project of revolution could be applied to the whole continent, with the US guiding and fostering the birth of new nations in Central and South America and indirectly assuming the role of guardian and protector of the Americas. Scholar of American imperialism, David Slater, argues that the Monroe Doctrine represented the beginning of a policy of containment for the Americas on the part of the US and that central to this theory of containment was the idea that that part of the globe was in need of order, progress, and the spread of civilization, under US leadership.⁴¹ Indeed, since the turn towards the Monroe Doctrine, the US has exerted its economic and political influence over the affairs of the Americas through the use of military force “if not (or not always) for the purpose of colonization, then certainly to ensure compliant regimes.”⁴²

Additionally, it should be borne in mind that the Monroe Doctrine and the spheres of influence that underlay it had an economic basis to it, in the sense that it sought to guarantee that the US could trade freely with the nations that constituted the Western Hemisphere. A feature of US foreign relations since President Washington’s time had been protectionism and neutrality, to which the country’s political and economic leadership had always been disposed through high tariffs on imports. High tariffs benefited American industry, keeping out the foreign competition, with American consumers being thus at the mercy of industrialists, and consequently having to pay more for goods domestically produced. Adams’ understanding of the relationship between Europe’s colonial powers and the US follows an economic logic, too, even though in his *History*, the US embodies the principles of free trade, whereas the UK stands for a closed, self-contained market operating within mercantilist principles. For Adams, the relationship girding the Monroe Doctrine and the spheres of influence associated with it is established at the level of economic processes, though, historically, there was always much reluctance within the US political and economic leadership to support free trade. As Giovanni Arrighi, a renowned sociologist and economist, notes, suggesting a possible disconnect between government policy and economic processes, from its inception the US has been good at “keeping the doors of the domestic market closed to foreign productions but open to foreign capital, labor and enterprise...”⁴³

Although Adams defended the spheres-of-influence framework for the Americas in “Recognition,” details about the relationship between the US and the nations of Central and South America were not provided in this framework. Always an advocate of free trade in his works, a case in point being his essay “British Finance in 1816,” written shortly after his return to the US in the aftermath of the Civil War and published in the *North American Review*, we can only infer that the possibility of trading freely with newly independent Latin American nations is what

Adams had in mind, with US merchants having unimpeded access to their markets.

It should also be borne in mind that the Monroe Doctrine had been formulated to a large extent by Adams' grandfather, John Quincy Adams, “son of the last President—Federalist” while Secretary of State (1817-1825), and later on as President (1825-1829).⁴⁴ While “Recognition” itself makes no mention of his name, it unequivocally evidences the centrality of the doctrine in terms of America's foreign policy from the time (March 8, 1822) when Monroe sent a message to Congress “recommending the recognition of all the revolted colonies of Spain—Mexico, Colombia, Cuba and Buenos Ayres,” in effect creating “a new law,” and a “de facto right of recognition.”⁴⁵ Adams finds it hard to understand, therefore, why Spain's former Latin American colonies should have failed to endorse the cause of Cuban independence when they themselves had benefited from Monroe's *fiat* and the support offered to their cause by the American public at the time of their independence. In one instance in his correspondence, for example, he lamented the fact that South American republics did not fully endorse the Monroe Doctrine, were afraid of it, even, and unable to see its scope:

How like dead weights we poor mortals are! For eighty years our ablest men—Jefferson, J. Q. Adams, Clay, and nearly all the rest, down to Blaine, have toiled to build up an alliance with the Spanish American Republics to support the Monroe Doctrine and protect U.S. from England and Spain; suddenly, at the first strain, the Spanish Americans desert their own kith and kin; fly back to Spain; throw us into the arms of England, and force us into the position of a domineering tyrant.⁴⁶

Adams' friend Clarence King, Director of the US Geological Survey from 1879-1881, in an opinion piece written for *The Forum* the year they had visited the island together, titled “Shall Cuba Be Free,” concurred that the Monroe Doctrine should be applied in the case of Cuba: “With all possible decorum, with a politeness above criticism, with a firmness wholly irresistible, we should assist Spain out of Cuba and out of the hemisphere as effectually as Lincoln and Seward did the French invaders of Mexico in the ‘sixties.”⁴⁷ The Doctrine was invoked by President Cleveland as recently as July 20, 1895, through his Secretary of State, Richard Olney, when a note was sent to the government of Great Britain which stated that the US was entitled to voice its opinion concerning the establishment of boundaries between Venezuela and British Guiana.⁴⁸ Commenting to Mrs. Cameron on the fact that Quesada had been in touch with the Spanish republics to gain their support for the cause of Cuba's independence and that they had simply backed off, afraid of what that might occasion, Adams remarked to her in one of his missives: “The story Quesada told me was to me intensely interesting, not because it was dramatic, but because it was the burial service of *my*—or rather my grandfather's—doctrine

of foreign relations, and the scheme which may be behind our Cuban Report and the Senate Resolutions..."⁴⁹ Again, Adams provides no details as to what the influence gained over Cuba entailed once its right to self-determination was asserted and its colonial status terminated. What is clear from his correspondence is that he strongly disapproved of European colonialism and favored the policy his grandfather had designed for Monroe, declaring to a friend in one of his letters: "...I rather hope to see my grandfather's work completed, and America really independent of Europe, even in Canada."⁵⁰

Part Three—Adams, Empire, and the Imperialist / Anti-Imperialist Debate

Adams' ideas on the subject of empire were put to the test in the immediate aftermath of the conflict with Spain over Cuba. Following the debacle associated with the sinking of *USS Maine*, which had entered the harbor of Havana on January 25, 1898 with the aim of protecting American citizens and interests on the island, the debate between imperialists and anti-imperialists reached unprecedented highs. Among politically-minded Americans two opposing views emerged centered on the advantages or disadvantages of overseas possessions, or empire. The term "empire" is complex and presents definitional difficulties, but following Paul James and Tom Nairn, it is understood here as polities that "extend relations of power across territorial spaces over which they have no prior or given legal sovereignty, and where, in one or more of the domains of economics, politics, and culture, they gain some measure of extensive hegemony over those spaces for the purpose of extracting or accruing value."⁵¹ As observed by Susan Gillman, "[t]he single question posed most frequently about US empire is astonishingly crude: for or against? Are you an imperial believer? Reluctant advocate or equally reluctant skeptic? Outright critic?" This is a question which scholars of empire ask themselves and one which Adams certainly posed as well. He, too, struggled with similar interrogations as illustrated in the observations he makes on the pros and cons of empire to his many correspondents, and which make it difficult to assign him to the imperial or anti-imperial camp.⁵²

On one side of the debate stood the anti-imperialists, those who opposed the expansionist turn in American politics on the grounds that it contradicted the long-held US position on the right of peoples to self-determination and nationhood. They were against the possession of overseas colonies, disagreeing with strategies that aimed to expand America's power and presence in faraway regions of the globe. Their opponents, the imperialists, favored the annexation of territories, the control of trade routes and markets, as well as the maintenance of the gold standard and a high tariff to protect American industry. They were, as Philip S. Foner puts it, "increasingly concerned as they saw the hoped-for markets passing into the full possession of foreign rivals."⁵³

Central to the debate between imperialists and anti-imperialists was the question whether the possession of overseas colonies corresponded to a foreign

policy shift from the desire for territorial growth that had marked in earlier times US continental expansion onto contiguous lands—something akin to the “Internal Colonialism” associated with the Louisiana Purchase, the addition of the Mexican and Oregon territories, or even the Indian lands which had been occupied piecemeal and eventually incorporated into the national domain—to one of economic and political supremacy outside US borders.⁵⁴ As a reaction to the declaration of war on Spain over the *USS Maine* affair, the American Anti-Imperialist League (1898-1921) was created on June 15, 1898. Its members, politically conservative, aimed to lobby the US government against the idea of the country becoming a colonial power, claiming that “the subjugation of any people is ‘criminal aggression’ and open disloyalty to the distinctive principles of our Government.”⁵⁵ Presided over by the German *émigré* Carl Schurz, newspaper editor and political reformer, the League boasted a membership of notable supporters such as Charles Francis Adams Jr. (Adams’ older brother), Ambrose Bierce, Andrew Carnegie, John Dewey, William Sumner, Samuel Gompers, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Carl Schurz, Mark Twain, and many others. As classical liberals, they were imbued with the political values of republicanism, favoring free trade and the gold standard as well as limited forms of government.

Despite sharing many of the ideas of the anti-imperialists, Adams never joined the League, nor did he seem to have had much respect for its members, as he remarks in one of his letters:

A party made up of cranks like Carnegie, mugwumps like my brother Charles, malcontents like Eugene Hale and Tom Reed, scoundrels like John McLean, blatherskites like Bryan, and rank-and-file of southern democrats, is mighty amusing, but my representative in it is my brother Brooks. I am pure and simple an anarchist, and run a machine of my own.⁵⁶

Adams well understood what moved these individuals, candidly confessing in his correspondence: “The anti-imperialists are perfectly right in what they see and fear, but one can’t grow young again by merely refusing to walk. I fear that the American calf is now too old to get much more nourishment from sucking the dry teats of the British cow.”⁵⁷ He was discerning enough to know, as it is something inherent to the logic of capital accumulation, that if the economic interests of the US were to be safeguarded, the country had no option but to compete for commercial outlets and trade routes with the major industrial powers of the day. The domestic market of the US had become saturated and new business channels had to be found for the surplus production of its industry and agriculture. As Hobsbawm observes, with the US national market and territory already consolidated in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the country was “forced to follow the fashion” and secure overseas colonies for itself.⁵⁸ Industrial nations had to expand overseas and explore

economic opportunities as colonies provided “suitable bases or jumping off points for regional business penetration.”⁵⁹ In fact, between 1876 and 1915, which Hobsbawm designates as an age of empire, approximately one quarter of the world’s land surface was divided up between Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and the US, who carved out roughly 100,000 square miles of Spain’s ailing colonial empire.⁶⁰

With the exception of the aftermath of the conflict with Spain over Cuba, the US had refused the idea of empire in the form of colonies, the traditional form of imperialism, rejecting the role of colonial master with subject countries. Instead, it has opted for what Ellen Meiksins Wood terms as “new imperialism” or “capitalist imperialism,” a new phase in the evolution of empire characterized by “the predominance of economic as distinct from direct ‘extra-economic’—political, military, judicial—coercion.”⁶¹ In her view, “new imperialism” corresponded to a fresh phase of capitalism, which precipitated the division of the world among the major capitalist powers, with the concomitant distribution and/or redistribution of overseas territories as colonies or areas of influence.⁶² American literary scholar Daniel L. Manheim contends that together with his brother Brooks, Adams was particularly worried about the economic supremacy of the US, viewing “western imperialism in the light of economic growth for his country.”⁶³ The process involved creating a favorable environment for trade and commerce in the Caribbean, with Europe and America respecting each other’s areas of influence. As Adams puts it in *The Education*, for the benefit of the parties concerned, the US “would sooner or later have to police those islands, not against Europe, but for Europe, and America too.”⁶⁴ In other words, both Europe and the US stood to gain from respecting each other’s areas of commercial influence, but should there be a need to assert its power over a certain region of the globe, the US would not hesitate to remove obstacles to its economic supremacy.

Adams’ avowed anti-imperialism is present in *Memoirs of Marau Taarua, Last Queen of Tabiti* (1893), which the author of “Recognition” had written following his travels in the South Pacific in the early 1890s.⁶⁵ Through the voice of Arii Taimai—the daughter of the last queen of Tahiti—Adams offers a critique of European imperialism by illustrating the complications European contact had wrought on the lives of Tahitians. In it, Adams writes, “The Europeans came, and not only upset all their moral ideas, but also their whole political system.”⁶⁶ Adams’ abhorrence of European imperialism has been acknowledged by William Merrill Decker in connection with the same narrative, who observed that “[t]o impeach the motives and methods of European imperialism was nothing new for the historian who had studied the arrogant, acquisitive, ethnocentric character of British and French foreign policy.”⁶⁷ Moreover, as Manheim has noted, Adams recounts the story of Arii Taimai from the point of view of both the colonized and the colonizer as he “attempted to begin to resolve his own fundamentally divided allegiances.”⁶⁸ In effect, in the story of Arii, Adams engages with the colonized peoples of the world, taking

on a perspective wholly alien to those in his country infused with imperialist ideas.

Part Four—Hay, Adams, and Empire Building

One of Adams' closest friends was John Hay, Secretary of State to William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. The two had been close friends since the Civil War years, when Hay was Private Secretary to President Lincoln and Adams, in a similar role, to his father, Charles Francis Adams, during the time he headed the American legation in London.⁶⁹ The correspondence between the two clearly shows that they exchanged views on all the major affairs facing the country during their regular “talks-while-walking” in the US capital and depended on each other for informed intelligence.⁷⁰ For instance, when the Cuban revolutionaries declared their independence on February 24, 1895, Adams expressed his sense of joy to Hay, writing: “Come and revolute Cuba. We are going to have a gay old circus. Unluckily, my relations with Dupuy are not so friendly that I cannot openly embrace his enemies.”⁷¹ In fact, shortly after Hay's appointment as Secretary of State, in September 1898, the possibility of Adams being appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom surfaced, no doubt at the suggestion of the former, but it was met with McKinley's opposition.⁷² At the time he was writing his report for Senator Cameron, Adams tells his friend: “That we must recognize the independence of Cuba, next winter, is, I think as nearly inevitable as any matter of future policy can be.”⁷³ He is adamant that the US must do something for the island, which may even include some sort of financial compensation for Spain.

Under McKinley, Hay would be instrumental in the implementation of the “Open Door Policy,” a US government strategy designed to guarantee that China would remain open to American businessmen and missionaries, in the words of Hobsbawm, the US “had as much right to booty as earlier imperialists.”⁷⁴ It is difficult to determine the extent to which Adams may have helped in the definition of its premises, but Hay's gratitude to Adams for his expert knowledge of foreign affairs is evident, for example, in a note sent by Hay from the State Department on March 21, 1899: “If we should not meet again, I want to say how deeply I am in your debt...”⁷⁵ John Carlos Rowe contends that Adams played a central role in US foreign policy when Hay was in charge of the State Department, rejecting the idea that both were “reluctant” supporters of an American empire.⁷⁶ Moreover, he maintains that Adams' personal narrative continues to be read by successive generations of Americans within the canon of American letters precisely because of what “it continues to do on behalf of an imperialist ideology.”⁷⁷

Manheim distances himself from Rowe and those scholars who simply wish “to uncover Adams' views on an empire for the United States.”⁷⁸ Remarking that at times Adams seems to endorse full-heartedly imperial policies and at others he simply wishes to give voice to the opinions of different people, he suggests that “Adams may have carried within him a number of conflicting views.”⁷⁹ Manheim's argument is centered on the ambivalence, uncertainty, and ambiguity evident in

many of Adams' letters and illustrated by the nuances of his political views depending on the correspondent involved. Admittedly, Adams' letters pose a particular problem of authority as Joanne Jacobson has pointed out, a "tension between private and public discourse" in what can and cannot be revealed.⁸⁰ Despite his denial that he had nothing to do with Hay's politics, at one point in *The Education*, Adams expressed an unequivocal admiration for Hay's China policy, remarking in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion that "[n]othing so meteoric had ever been done in American diplomacy."⁸¹

Always suspicious of the impact of money on politics, Adams was afraid that once independent Cuba might fall into the hands of international financiers, New York bankers and gold bugs. As Cuban delegates in Washington pressured the US government for recognition of the status of a belligerent territory, Adams voiced to his brother Brooks his concern that "[t]he gold-bugs have resumed their sway, with their nerves a good deal shaken, but their tempers or their sense unimproved.... Once more we are under the whip of the bankers. Even on Cuba, where popular feeling was far stronger than in Venezuela, we are beaten and hopeless."⁸² His observations apropos of the "gold bugs" are an incisive critique of late nineteenth-century transnational capitalism of the type the Rothschilds embodied, whom he thought held indebted governments in their hands, confessing in one instance: "my chief desire in the Cuban matter is to strike at the Paris Jews and their whole political machine."⁸³ In the so-called "age of the Rothschilds," the period when British finance dominated the world economy—roughly from end of the Civil War to the Great Depression—the city of London and its financial institutions were under the grip of this family.⁸⁴ The period was characterized by a surplus of capital in the UK which ended up being lent to the US, contributing, in the words of Chalfant, to "the dominance of English moneyed interests in the world's economy..."⁸⁵ Unlike traditional forms of imperialism characterized by subjugation through the use of force and direct rule, capitalist imperialism uses economic tools to exert its control over citizens and nations. As observed by Wood, "the weapon of debt" was "the principal instrument of the new imperialism."⁸⁶

For Adams, the "Jew question," and the financial control of markets by international bankers like the Rothschilds was one and the same. As Hobsbawm notes, the anti-Semitism witnessed in the more advanced economies of Europe and in the US targeted individuals who were bankers or entrepreneurs, as well as Jewish people believed to be responsible for the excesses of capitalism amongst the "little men."⁸⁷ It is a well-known fact that the Panic of 1893 strongly impacted the finances of the Adams family, and it may have compounded Henry's "anti-banker, anti-capitalist, anti-Rothchild, and anti-English furies."⁸⁸ In fact, it may have added, in Paul A. Bové's view, to Adams' "cynical condescension" for the key issues facing America at the time, one of which was imperialism (and certainly not issues related to pre-occupations about America's "little men," Indigenous, or Black populations, for that matter).⁸⁹

Following the sinking of the *USS Maine*, Adams fretted about British economic and financial supremacy, engaging in a process of, borrowing Meiksin Wood's words, resistance to the “empire of capital”: “For two years, the Cuban business drove me wild, because other people stupidly and brutally and willfully refused to listen to its vital warnings.... I never was afraid of a Spanish war. I'm not afraid of it now.... What I do fear is British finance.”⁹⁰ Considering Adams' knowledge of financial matters, he was undoubtedly familiar with capital flows involving the UK and the US. It is estimated that in the period 1850-1914 the volume of long-term loans and foreign investment made to the US by the UK was in the neighborhood of 3 billion US dollars, whereas the net payments of the US to Britain in the same period (interest and dividends) amounted to 5.8 billion US dollars. The result of this was a rise in US foreign debt from 200 million US dollars in 1843 to 3,700 billion US dollars in 1914.⁹¹

But it was not just British finance and the ‘Rothschildesque’ structure of *haute finance* associated with Imperial Britain that Adams detested. On innumerable occasions in his correspondence, Adams forcefully demonstrates his disdain for foreign policy driven by the interests of American businessmen and capital, concomitantly criticizing American capitalism for its pernicious effects on the country's body politic while, at the same time, defending US policies from European detractors. This is best demonstrated when Adams tells his friend Lucy Baxter at one point “[w]e are not only going to free Cuba, but we are going to put her beyond the reach of Havemeyers and the exploitation of New York capitalists.”⁹² A strong criticism of McKinley's foreign policy can be detected in a letter written to his younger brother Brooks, where American business is equated with an octopus:

The octopus is stretching its tentacles everywhere, quite blindly, like octopuses or octopodes elsewhere, but with an accurate sense of touch. As for traditions, constitution, principles, past professions and all that, the devil has put them back into his pocket for another thousand years. By common agreement, we all admit that the old slate must be washed off clean. We all admit that we cant [*sic*] help it if the world does tip over. We are only glad that we are on top.⁹³

Adams disliked the sentiment of anti-Americanism which he perceived among Europeans, as the country's drive for overseas markets in what has been described as an “age of surplus” could only be achieved at their expense.⁹⁴ He remarks to Anne Palmer Fell, a friend of his late wife: “One and all, they dread and detest us. We are sapping their vitals, and they have got to make some stupendous effort to save themselves.”⁹⁵ More to the point on the subject of empire building, Adams indicates in the closing chapters of *The Education* that he had had nothing to do with Hay's politics, whether domestic or foreign. But at the same time, he also acknowledges

that the political activity of the Adams' family over the last 150 years was finally paying off: Britain had fallen into the arms of America and the country itself had embarked on a true policy of empire building thanks to Hay's work.⁹⁶ A letter written to Mrs. Cameron the day after the signing of the Treaty of Paris over the Cuban conflict seems to confirm his astonishment regarding the scope of Hay's imperialist policies:

Those who trembled and ran away two years ago, are now lightly taking risks and asserting rights that turn me pea green. Only yesterday, Hay swallowed, without a tremor, two or three continents, and told two or three Kaisers to go hang. Tomorrow the country would scream with delight at a war with Europe; and it is not one but a dozen questions that threaten to gratify the public in that respect.⁹⁷

Adams' letters show a man desirous of peace with the Iberian nation, whose sole wish was "to keep Spain on her legs long enough to make peace after the shock of losing Cuba."⁹⁸ He states to his brother Brooks: "I want peace. I want it quick.... I want it in order to recover our true American policy, which Congress has abandoned and which McKinley has betrayed.... I want it to save Cuba from the sugar-planters and the syndicates whose cards McKinley will play, and who are worse than Spain."⁹⁹ After Admiral Dewey's victory over the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, Adams had no qualms in telling Hay what he thought the terms of the peace deal should be:

"For instance, I would propose an armistice based on liberal terms like these: Spain recognizes the independence of Cuba. She grants complete autonomy to Porto Rico, on the lines of Canadian self-government [*sic*], and the entire withdrawal of her military and naval occupation, with admission of the formal guaranty of the United States for the performance of the contract. The United States shall withdraw her forces from the Philippines, on condition of retaining a harbor of convenient use for a coaling station. In consideration of these concessions, the United States will not exact a war indemnity."¹⁰⁰

These terms, Adams adds, "ought to imply of necessity the annexation of Hawaii and the purchase of St. Thomas."¹⁰¹ In a letter headed with the words "Read and Destroy," Hay writes back, saying that his peace plan was "almost verbatim" that of his friend, and that the major obstacle would be the Senate (the treaty was narrowly approved because of the opposition of the anti-imperialists).¹⁰² Again, denoting a slight variation in the content of his letters depending on the

correspondent, with a subtle allusion to the anti-imperialists, Adams observes to Mrs. Cameron: “On the whole McKinley has done my work well, both in Cuba, in Hawaii and here. I believe the field is swept clean of our old opponents.”¹⁰³

Despite thinking that McKinley was “the tool and creature of America’s capitalists,” Adams is satisfied that the peace treaty with Spain proposed by the president’s commissioner in the Paris negotiations included the independence of Cuba.¹⁰⁴ The Treaty of Paris was ratified by the Senate on February 6, 1899, with Cuba only becoming formally an independent nation a few years later on May 20, 1902. As a result, the island would remain under US control, a situation which was far from desirable for its citizens, for it meant that, as Chalfant remarks, “U.S. military occupation of Cuba and Cuban independence were equivalents.”¹⁰⁵

By the early 1900s, Adams had opted for a more distanced position regarding the expansionist policies of McKinley’s administration and his Secretary of State: “Having made my great success on Cuba, I have dismissed my Cuban conspirators to their various functions in fortune-making, and content myself, like the Pope, with giving everybody my blessing.”¹⁰⁶ As we read the closing chapters of *The Education*, we see that Adams is convinced the policies of the McKinley administration were being dictated not by national interest—the rationale behind the Monroe Doctrine—but by the interests of American capital. Just like Mark Twain, an avowed anti-imperialist, Adams is suspicious of “The Blessings-of-Civilization Trust,” whose business plan was to spread civilization and progress throughout the world. In an essay entitled “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” published in the February 1901 issue of the *North American Review*, Twain had sarcastically described the scramble for empire nations such as Germany, England, France, Russia, and now the US as “a game,” stating that their true intentions were simply disguised by the khaki color of their troops’ uniforms.¹⁰⁷

Conclusions

The American Congress took no action in response to the report put forward by the Committee on Foreign Relations of which Senator Cameron was a member. President Grover Cleveland opposed the joint resolution it recommended, whereby the US should recognize the independence of Cuba, as well as the offer made so as to mediate the conflict between the insurgents and the central government in Madrid. Consequently, the committee decided against bringing it to the floor of the Senate for debate. The report’s conclusion read as follows:

The practice of Europe in regard to intervention, as in the instances cited, has been almost invariably harsh and oppressive. The practice of the United States has been almost invariably mild and forbearing. Among the precedents which have been so numerously cited here there can be no doubt as to the choice. The most moderate is the best. Among these, the attitude taken by

President Monroe in 1822 is the only attitude which can properly be regarded as obligatory for a similar situation today. The course pursued by the United States in the recognition of Colombia is the only course which Congress can consistently adopt.

The senate committee recommend a joint resolution with amendments to read as follows:

“Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the independence of the Republic of Cuba be, and the same is hereby, acknowledged by the United States of America.”

*“Be it further resolved, That the United States will use its friendly office with the Government of Spain to bring to a close the war between Spain and the Republic of Cuba.”*¹⁰⁸

On February 15, 1898, the explosion on board the *USS Maine* altered the course of diplomatic relations between the US and Spain. It rendered the content of “Recognition” largely ineffectual as President McKinley chose to declare war on Spain in his message to Congress on April 11, 1898.

Adams’ report lacks detail about what holding on to a “sphere of influence” entailed for the US, either economically or geopolitically, but it remains an important document to understand the role that he thought his country should play among the imperial powers of the day. It underscores the fact that Adams was no mere observer of the process of Cuban independence—much less an advocate of empire building in the sense of dominance over or annexation of territories in far-away places—bringing to light the extent to which he believed the Monroe Doctrine was still a valid proposition to justify US policy for the Americas. The Report also illustrates Adams’ commitment to the principle of self-determination, sanctioning the emergence of an independent Cuba free from Spanish colonialism and the nefarious impact of American capital.

Adams witnessed the discontinuities between past and present that occurred in the US body politic due to empire building leading him to question US expansionism in the form of colonies in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America. Unlike members of the American Anti-Imperialist League, who feared the integration of the Filipinos into the nation’s racial and political make-up, there is no hint in Adams’ letters on the subject of Cuba’s independence to suggest that he considered Cubans unfit for government or that supporting their cause for independence represented a threat to the integrity of the US body politic. In fact, his correspondence is devoid of any particular anxiety concerning the disordering effects resulting from the incorporation of alien populations into the US political na-

tion, which Amy Kaplan has aptly termed “the anarchy of empire.”¹⁰⁹ “Recognition” may contribute to the “expanded canon for empire studies” that Susan Gillman has alluded to, “drawing on the same history of additions and revisions to other, allied disciplines...”¹¹⁰ Moreover, it may help us to unmask “the culture of disavowal” present in the study of empire to which she has alluded, stressing yet again, the fact that the subject has been to some extent neglected in US history and historiography.¹¹¹

Adams was not unfamiliar with the plight of European powers, most notably Spain, whose empire was falling apart as a result of the disruptions occasioned by late-nineteenth-century capitalism, remarking to William Hallett Phillips, one of his many correspondents: “My heart bleeds for the Spaniards whom I like more than any other people in Europe; but poor D. Quixote! He is very dangerous in a world of shopkeepers, and can neither run a hotel nor meet his notes. His only chance is that the whole concern will go to pieces with him.”¹¹² Although always fearful about the impact of financial capitalism and corporate power on the political life of his country, Adams’ concerns were primarily geopolitical, which is to say, with US control over its strategic areas of influence. In the era of empire when all major industrial powers were engaged in carving up the world into formal or informal colonies, Adams compels us to think about the repercussions of global capitalism as they relate to the control of overseas markets and/or territories, confirming the idea that commercial expansionism was indeed at the heart of US imperialism.

Adams considered the outcome of the Cuban question a personal victory, as we can infer from his words to Mrs. Cameron written on December 4, 1898: “I’ve won all my stakes. The Spaniards are almost out of Cuba, and are totally out of Porto [*viz*] Rico. Our country has asserted its right and power even more emphatically than I tried to assert it.”¹¹³ He understood that the US was engaged in a global competition for economic and political influence from which it could not withdraw and that the country had to assert a position of strength among the concert of nations of the day commensurate with the wealth its economy had been generating since the end of Reconstruction. Throughout his lifetime, Adams never quite knew which vocational avenue to take, but he was certainly imbued with, in the words of Merrill Decker, “a desire that his country prosper materially and expand into a world presence.”¹¹⁴ The fact that the US came out victorious from the struggle for global markets in the wake of the military conflict with Spain was no doubt a vindication of the ideas of those who favoured imperialist policies with a colonial bend. The voices of those like Adams, who defended US intervention in the cause of Cuban independence but objected to empire building under the dictates of American capital, would continue to emerge sporadically in US political discourse only to remind Americans that they, too, had started off their political life as citizens aspiring in principle to a free republic precisely by having rejected the very notion of subjugation to an imperial power.

 NOTES

¹ Much has been written on whether *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918) can be considered autobiography proper, as scholars have attempted to separate the historical Adams from Henry, the main protagonist of the work in question. For example, Donald Yacovone's "Tricksterism, Anti-Semitism, and White Supremacy in *The Education of Henry Adams: A Centennial Reassessment*" (*Left History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Inquiry and Debate* 23, no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 2020), 60-87) underscored the subversive nature of *The Education*, "the most dangerous book of the fin de siècle," arguing that it is neither autobiography nor history, but rather a "trickster novel," whose main character is intrinsically racist and anti-Semitic (61-2). Paul A. Bové's "Giving Thought to America: Intellect and 'The Education of Henry Adams'" (*Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 1 (1996), 80-108) also does not seem to wish to take Adams at his word, especially when it comes to describing himself simply as a "conservative critic of modern capital," preferring to see Adams as an "oppositional intellectual," someone committed to bringing about societal change through his agency (104). While not dismissing entirely the fictive elements present in *The Education*, I share Brooks D. Simpson's view that Adams' personal (and partial) account of his life and times is "part personal recollection, part polemic, and part philosophy," as illustrated in his *The Political Education of Henry Adams* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1996), x.

² Adams' main biographers, Edward Chalfant and Ernest Samuels, briefly examine "Recognition of Cuban Independence" in their studies. Ernest Samuels, *Henry Adams—The Major Phase* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), 171-2 dedicates two pages to the report in the third volume of his biography of Adams, highlighting the international precedents for acknowledging Cuba's declaration of independence. Edward Chalfant, *Improvement of the World: A Biography of Henry Adams* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chooses to comment more extensively on the report in the notes to the chapter he titles "Vision and Revolution." In it, he addresses the significance of "Recognition" in terms of Spain-Cuba-US relations, stressing the fact that the recognition of Cuba's independence on the part of the US would be tantamount to "a political counterstroke against Europe which would help solve the problem of financial dominance of the United States by European capitalists" (577-8, n. 73). The single most important reference to "Recognition" I have encountered is Philip S. Foner's *The Spanish Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1898 Vol. 1* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 185-6, which discusses the report in the context of the debate surrounding the Senate resolutions aimed at recognizing the state of belligerence between the Cuban insurgents and the Spanish authorities, though without any indication as to its author.

³ Henry Adams, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Recognition of Cuban Independence," 54th Congress, 2nd Session, 1896, S. Rep. 1160, 16. Together with

the main twenty-five pages of the report, some “Additional Views” were filed in the Congressional Archives in support of the document. These consist of three pages of text, to which were appended a number of documents: Appendix No.1, a nineteen-page Senate Report from the year 1859 on the subject of Cuba; Appendix No. 2, a nine-page speech dated February 11, 1859 by Senator Benjamin of Louisiana; Appendix No. 3, 42 pages of materials provided on December 7, 1895 to the US government by a representative of the Cuban independence movement; and Appendix No. 4, a “President’s Message” from President Grover Cleveland. I wish to thank Dr. Alfred D. Boll, of the US diplomatic service, for his invaluable help in tracing the original report in the Library of Congress.

⁴ The scholarly literature on whether Adams may be regarded as an imperialist or anti-imperialist is varied and extensive. For instance, Garry Wills, *Henry Adams and the Making of America* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 2 labeled Adams as a “proto-imperialist”; R.P. Blackmur, *Henry Adams* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 120 referred to Adams as an imperialist, but only in the Caribbean; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 91 described Adams as a member of the “small imperialist elite” which included his brother Brooks Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, John Hay, and Albert J. Beveridge; Harold Kaplan, *Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 64 characterizes Adams as someone whose beliefs were informed among others by such notions as “Empire” and “world order.” In contrast, Michael O’ Brien, *Henry Adams and the Southern Question* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 11 has observed that Adams displayed a “skeptical commitment” to the imperialist policies of William McKinley and John Hay; both Ernest Samuels and William Decker, *The Literary Vocation of Henry Adams* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 13, 239 describe Adams as an anti-imperialist; William Appleman Williams, “Thoughts on Rereading Henry Adams” (*The Journal of American History*, vol. 68, no. 1 (June, 1981), 7-15), 14 observes that Adams had his reservations about empire-building; while James P. Young, *Henry Adams: The Historian as Political Theorist* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 116 has noted that Adams was an anti-imperialist who worked hard for Cuba’s independence, strongly opposing the annexation of the Philippines.

⁵ Donald E. Pease, “New Perspectives on US Cultural and Imperialism,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 23; George Lipsitz’s *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) owes much to the debates generated by the work of such Americanists as Donald Pease, Amy Kaplan, and Emory Elliot, among others, who have been responsible for a paradigm shift in the study of America. This shift, as Lipsitz himself writes, involved a consciousness of “what we want to retain from the past and what we want to discard” (xvi).

⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), x.

⁷ Henry Adams, "Recognition of Cuban Independence," Senate Report, no. 1160 (December 21, 1896), 23.

⁸ The correspondence between Adams and Elizabeth Cameron was quite intense in the 1890s. It certainly suggests that they discussed Cuban affairs extensively, but it is highly unlikely she might have played an active role in the composition of the report itself. She was simply one of the many interlocutors Adams exchanged opinions with on the subject of Cuba. After his wife, Marion Hooper, committed suicide on December 6, 1885, Adams grew quite attached to Elizabeth, as his letters from the South Seas (Hawaii, Samoa, Tahiti, Fiji, Australia, Ceylon, Bali) attest. In 1900, he asked her to destroy their correspondence, which she failed to do. In 1915, however, he asked her to edit it, so as to give future readers a glimpse of Washington life as they had known it (*cf.* Decker, 96).

⁹ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, November 29, 1898, in *Letters of Henry Adams*, ed. J.C. Levenson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, and Viola Winner, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982-1988), 4:625. Adams is referring to the Treaty of Paris, the truce signed between the United States and Spain the day before, November 28. Adams thinks that the Spanish colonies are to blame for their own problems, since they broke the agreement they had with the US.

¹⁰ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, April 13, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:563, and November 29, 1898, 4:626, respectively. In the first instance, the phrase runs as follows: "Ah! I've been thinking so long of this crisis, and I have cast up so many columns and figures, not to speak of our prodigious Cameron Reports of the Senate Committee, on which, as far as I can see, the President and Congress have taken their stand. After all, it was you and I who did all the fighting against the odds when that hangman dog of an Olney went back on himself and us." On April 4, 1896, Secretary of State Olney had sent a note to the Spanish government informing it that President Cleveland would be willing to help in the Cuban Civil War, thus confirming US neutrality in the conflict. The Spanish government refused this offer of assistance. In the second instance, further down in the same letter, Adams refers to the report as "our Cuban Report."

¹¹ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, March 7, 1888, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 3:103.

¹² Henry Adams, Sunday, March 4, 1888, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 3:108.

¹³ Elizabeth Cameron to Henry Adams, February 10, 1894, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:160.

¹⁴ Henry Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, April 28, 1894, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:184.

¹⁵ Henry Adams to John Hay, January 27, 1895, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:251. In another letter, Adams writes that, politically, Cuban affairs are comparable to Turkey's, a "deadlock" situation between Congress and the President (Henry Adams to Sir Robert Cunliffe, November, 26, 1895, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:343).

¹⁶ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, January 21, 1895, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:250.

¹⁷ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, ed. Ernest Samuels and Jayne N. Samuels (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1039.

¹⁸ In another letter to his younger brother, dated February 18, 1896, still apropos of Cuba, Adams observes: “No new acquaintance—except Cuban conspirators—has turned up” (*The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:375). We know that José Martí, the renowned Cuban author and hero of the revolution had visited Philadelphia, Chicago, Key West, and Tampa so as to raise funds for the insurgents, his efforts being hampered by the onset of the 1893 financial crisis (Foner, *The Spanish Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, xxv).

¹⁹ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, February 7, 1896, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:368.

²⁰ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, January 15, 1899, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:662. Reference is made to the visit of Quesada and Calixto Garcia in an earlier letter; Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, November 29, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:626.

²¹ Chalfant, *Improvement of the World*, 108.

²² Chalfant, 108.

²³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 73.

²⁴ Foner, *The Spanish Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, 188.

²⁵ Foner, 176.

²⁶ Adams, “Recognition,” 1.

²⁷ Adams, “Recognition,” 10.

²⁸ Adams, “Recognition,” 10.

²⁹ Adams, “Recognition,” 23.

³⁰ Adams, “Recognition,” 23.

³¹ Adams, “Recognition,” 23.

³² Foner, 203.

³³ Grover Cleveland, *State of the Union Address* (December 7, 1896). <https://www.inoplease.com/primary-sources/government/presidential-speeches/state-union-address-grover-cleveland-december-7-1896>.

³⁴ Adams, “Recognition,” 23-4.

³⁵ Adams, “Recognition,” 24.

³⁶ The language of the historian is present throughout the document. Throughout the report, Adams repeatedly uses the expression “American system” when referring to the Monroe Doctrine, which is the designation he also uses in his *History*. As pointed out by Chalfant, the so-called “American system” corresponded to US control over the Western Hemisphere which aimed to prevent Europe from meddling in the affairs of New World nations (577, n. 73). Daniel L. Manheim, “The Voice of Aii Taimai: Henry Adams and the Challenge of Empire” (*Biography* 22, no. 2

(1999), 227 maintains that Adams' and Hay's "Atlantic system" entailed cooperation across the Atlantic divide. This idea is shared by James P. Young when he writes that Adams "wanted an 'Atlantic system,' ranging from the Rockies to the Elbe, with an Anglo-American rapprochement at the center" (115). The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine was detailed in this president's Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1904. In general terms, it stated that the United States would use its "international police power" to settle disputes between Latin American countries and European powers, thus justifying US intervention in any conflict in the Western Hemisphere which it deemed important. Simply put, it adapted America's foreign policy to the new geopolitical realities of the early 20th century.

³⁷ Adams, "Recognition," 16.

³⁸ Adams, "Recognition," 16. Adams quotes from President Monroe's annual message of December 2, 1823, where this new policy for the Americas was first detailed: "With the Governments who have declared their independence, and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States."

³⁹ Adams, "Recognition," 23.

⁴⁰ Adams, "Recognition," 23.

⁴¹ David Slater, "Locating the American Century: Themes for Post-Colonial Perspective," in *The American Century—Consensus and Coercion in the Projection of American Power*, edited by David Slater and Peter J. Taylor (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 24.

⁴² Wood, *Empire Capital*, 128.

⁴³ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of our Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 62.

⁴⁴ Henry Adams, *History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Earl N. Harbert (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 1277.

⁴⁵ Adams, "Recognition," 15.

⁴⁶ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, November 29, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:626.

⁴⁷ Clarence King, "Shall Cuba Be Free?," *The Forum* (September 1895), 65.

⁴⁸ Chalfant, 105.

⁴⁹ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, November 29, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:626.

⁵⁰ Henry Adams to Lucy Baxter, March 15, 1897, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:60.

⁵¹ Paul James and Tom Nairn, eds., "Globalizing Empires: A Critical Introduction," xxiii. In *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (2001), Lipsitz maintains that no discipline is better suited to address the questions raised by globalizing processes than American Studies now that the nation is no longer a viable political entity in the

study of national culture. Lipsitz thinks the “idea of America,” which is the result of the social movements that took place in the country in the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s over questions of identity, culture and power, is fast disappearing. For him, “the field of American Studies has become home to some of the most original, insightful, and generative contemporary research” (34).

⁵² Susan Gillman, “The New, Newst Thing: Have American Studies Gone Imperial?” (*American Literary History* 17, no. 1 (2005), 196-214, 202, 209) observes that the books under review in her essay question traditional periodization of US empire studies (continental expansion under the dictates of Manifest Destiny of the 1830s and 1840s and overseas territorial annexation after Spanish-American war of 1898). She proposes instead a revision of the old “coordinates” of time and space, as well as the integration of the study US empire within the analytical framework of other empires for the purpose of comparison, i.e., a history of US empire that effectively compares.

⁵³ Foner, *The Spanish Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, xi. It has been argued that the anti-imperialists suffered from cultural anxiety, fears about identity, belonging and miscegenation. See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1981), 271. As John Carlos Rowe observes in *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), “anti-imperialism and isolationism in the United States often explicitly relied on internal hierarchies of race, gender and class...” (7). Although Adams had written on the subject of Anglo-Saxonism in the 1870s while teaching history at Harvard, his academic interest then was centered on trying to prove that the “germ” of American democratic institutions could be found in the *hundreds*, or district law-courts, of seventh-century Anglo-Saxons. See Henry Adams, “The Anglo-Saxon Courts of Law,” in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905 [1876]), 1-64.

⁵⁴ Although the Louisiana purchase raised all sorts of constitutional issues regarding the treaty-making power of the President, on one point, Adams writes in his *History of the United States*, both the Senate and the House concurred: “the United States government had the power to acquire new territory either by conquest or by treaty; the only difference of opinion regarded the disposition of this territory after it was acquired” (378). Adams agrees, siding with his grandfather, J. Q. Adams, the moderate Federalist Senator from Massachusetts, whose position on the issue was that Louisiana could eventually join the Union as a state. Jefferson’s Republicans, in contrast, considered that the new territory could only be held as a colony, the difference between the policy of “assimilation” of the latter as opposed to that of “empire” of the former (Adams, *History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson*, 379).

⁵⁵ Carl Schurz, “Platform of the American Anti-Imperialist League,” in *Speeches, Correspondence, and Political Papers of Carl Schurz*, vol. 6, edited by Frederic Bancroft (New

York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 77.

⁵⁶ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, January 15, 1899, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:662.

⁵⁷ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, November 29, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:627.

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 67.

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm, 67.

⁶⁰ Hobsbawm, 59.

⁶¹ Wood, *Empire of Capital*, 4.

⁶² Wood argues that globalization is an updated form of “capitalist imperialism” in that it needs “local states to act as conduits for capitalist imperatives” (154). She points out a paradox that has emerged of late: “the more purely economic empire has become, the more the nation state has proliferated” (154). That is to say, capitalist imperialism relies on the nation-state to create the mechanisms for it to operate without hindrances, disagreeing with those who hold that the nation state is in decline in our globalized age, such as Hardt and Negri (xi, 6).

⁶³ Manheim, “The Voice of Arii Taimai”, 222. Confirmed in letter to Brooks Adams, November 3, 1901, where Adams writes: “It is resources—coal, iron, copper, wheat, that force markets, and will force them over all the navies and artilleries of the world” (*The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:306).

⁶⁴ Adams, *The Education*, 1052.

⁶⁵ Adams wrote a first version of the narrative which he titled *Memoirs of Marau Taaroa, Last Queen of Tahiti* (1893), which he then revised and enlarged as *Memoirs of Arii Taimai* (1901). Marau Taaroa was Adams’ hostess during his visit to Tahiti; Arii Taimai, her mother, had asked Adams to write the clan’s memoir, the history of the Tevas, the island’s most powerful clan.

⁶⁶ Henry Adams, *Memoirs of Arii Taimai* (Ridgewood, New Jersey: The Gregg Press, 1968 [1901]), 138. I agree with Manheim that Adams shared with his oldest brother Charles anti-imperialist ideas despite what he says in some letters to Hay and his younger brother Brooks. Rowe simply places Adams in the imperialist camp of Hay and Brooks, as I have mentioned. The issue is more nuanced, as I see it.

⁶⁷ Decker, *The Literary Vocation of Henry Adams*, 230.

⁶⁸ Manheim, 211.

⁶⁹ Adams fits the role of what John Seelye, *War Games: Richard Harding Davis and the New Imperialism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002) designates as “LaFeber’s geopoliticians,” that is to say, “those intellectuals who influenced the American policy makers responsible for creating the new empire” (Gillman, “The New, Newst Thing”, 205). The reference here is to a key 1963 study by Walter LaFeber entitled *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*.

⁷⁰ Chalfant, 163.

⁷¹ Henry Adams to John Hay, November 14, 1895, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:342. Adams knew personally Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, the Spanish ambassador to the

United States. Receiving the Cuban insurgents at his home put him in an uncomfortable position.

⁷² A dispatch from Philadelphia, dated September 27, 1898, and published in the London *Times* the following day, gave that as certain. The choice of ambassadorship, though, fell on Joseph Choate. Adams seems to have entertained this possibility, as one of his letters evidences: "Poor Hay wants help terribly, and, if he called on me, I should no doubt be obliged to do whatever he wished;" (Henry Adams to Charles Milnes Gaskell, October 4, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:616). It is worth remembering that Hay held the post of ambassador to the United Kingdom when William McKinley asked him to become his Secretary of State. After McKinley's assassination, Hay continued to hold the post, now under Theodore Roosevelt.

⁷³ Henry Adams to John Hay, October 28, 1896, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:437.

⁷⁴ Hobsbawm, 281.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Chalfant, *Improvement of the World*, 168. Chalfant maintains that from the Panic of 1893 to 1901, a period within which Adams travelled extensively, he had in fact been "an active but very invisible politician" (218).

⁷⁶ Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism*, 176.

⁷⁷ Rowe, 167.

⁷⁸ Manheim, "The Voice of Ariei Taimai", 213.

⁷⁹ Manheim, 214.

⁸⁰ Joanne Jacobson, *Authority and Alliance in the Letters of Henry Adams* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 11.

⁸¹ Adams, *The Education*, 1078.

⁸² Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, January 31, 1896, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:365.

⁸³ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, October 19, 1896, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:432.

⁸⁴ Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, 173.

⁸⁵ Chalfant, 100.

⁸⁶ Wood, *Empire of Capital*, 12, 131.

⁸⁷ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, 158.

⁸⁸ Chalfant, 141.

⁸⁹ Bové, "Giving Thought to America," 89. As I see it, Adams' anti-Semitism derives from his perception that capital markets were in the hands of Jews and that this was detrimental to the functioning of a well-regulated body politic. In this sense, I agree with Chalfant when he writes that Adams was simply "anti-capitalist, anti-banker, and anti-Rothchild" (145). Adams' often evasive and generalizing comments about Jews in his correspondence, an example being his observations surrounding the Dreyfuss affair, complicate our understanding of his ideas, though, as has been pointed out by Yacovone. His anti-Semitism, shared by other members of his family, past and present, friends included, was not limited to the period post Panic of 1893, going back in time to the 1870s, when he edited the *North American Review* (69-70).

⁹⁰ Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, April 2, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:556-7.

⁹¹ J.A. Knapp, "Capital Exports and Growth," *Economic Journal* 67, no. 267 (September, 1957), 433, qtd. in Arrighi, 278.

⁹² Henry Adams to Lucy Baxter, January 13, 1897, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:449.

⁹³ Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, February 7, 1900, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:88.

⁹⁴ For an analysis of the idea that the late nineteenth century corresponded to an "age of surplus" in America, see James Livingstone, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (1997), 66. Livingstone uses the expression "age of surplus" to describe America's overabundance of products and capital in the closing years of the nineteenth century and concomitant need to find new markets to allocate this excess of commodities and funds.

⁹⁵ Henry Adams to Anne Palmer Fell, March 25, 1901, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:223. In a letter to Hay written the following year, Adams leaves no doubts as to his views on the growth of American power *vis-à-vis* Europe: "On the whole I have seldom known a quieter Europe. Apparently, the lid is at last screwed down. Practically there is no longer any backing against the American regime. Europe is sold ahead" (Henry Adams to John Hay, July 26, 1902, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:396).

⁹⁶ Failing, in my view, to differentiate between Adams' avowed anti-colonialism and supposed imperialism, Rowe remarks: "the philosophical and scientific speculations, the literary self-doubts and relativisms of *The Education* have at least one purpose the mystification and disguise of his otherwise reasonably consistent commitment in these years to the neoimperialist foreign policies endorsed by John Hay" (18). See John Carlos Rowe, "Introduction," *New Essays on The Education of Henry Adams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 1-22).

⁹⁷ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, December 11, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:625.

⁹⁸ Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, June 11, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:598.

⁹⁹ Henry Adams to Brooks Adams, June 11, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:599.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Adams to John Hay, May 26, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:594. In a letter written from Paris a few days before, following the destruction of the Spanish fleet in the Philippines, the level of sway Adams held over Hay is clear: "As soon as I can get my teeth sharpened, and a new false set made, I shall come over to take care of you. Diplomacy must soon begin to count heavily in the scrimmage" (Henry Adams to John Hay, May 17, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:590).

¹⁰¹ Henry Adams to John Hay, May 26, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:592.

¹⁰² Henry Adams to John Hay, May 27, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:592.

¹⁰³ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, December 11, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:632. The Treaty of Paris was ratified by the Senate in a 57-27 vote. Under its terms, the US gained possession of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and for \$20 million dollars, of the Philippines.

¹⁰⁴ Chalfant, *Improvement of the World*, 155.

¹⁰⁵ Chalfant, 167.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Adams to Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, February 1, 1900, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 5:82.

¹⁰⁷ Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” (*The North America Review* 172, no. 532 (February, 1901, 161-176), 176. Twain laments the fact that the US was partaking in this “European Plan,” offering civilization and progress to conquered Filipinos in exchange for empire.

¹⁰⁸ Adams, “Recognition,” 24-5.

¹⁰⁹ Amy Kaplan, 11. Kaplan and others have been instrumental in drawing attention to the absence of empire in the study of America. Since then scholarly interest in the subject has surged considerably. Susan Gillman, in a review of three books published on the topic titled “The New, Newest Thing: Have American Studies Gone Imperial,” discussed the latest developments triggered by what she calls “the newest US imperial venture,” namely, the occupation of Iraq (196). She points out that the books in question may indicate two things simultaneously: the end of a period of interest in the study of empire, and at the same time the emergence of new research paths and opportunities surrounding the topic. She thinks these books contribute to the mapping of “the main moves, terminologies, and innovations in US empire studies, post-1998 [the Centennial of the Spanish-American War]” (196).

¹¹⁰ Gillman, “The New, Newest Thing”, 198.

¹¹¹ Gillman, 198.

¹¹² Henry Adams to William Hallett Phillips, July 26, 1896, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:401.

¹¹³ Henry Adams to Elizabeth Cameron, December 14, 1898, *The Letters of Henry Adams*, 4:638.

¹¹⁴ Decker, *The Literary Vocation of Henry Adams*, 6.