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A "POLYGONAL" RELATIONSHIP: THEODORE ROOSEVELT, THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

As Eric Hobsbawm recounts in his classic work, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914*, the final decades of the nineteenth century and the initial decades of the twentieth century were years of enormous change and activity across the globe. It was the apogee of imperialism for the West; mass, or at least more broadly based, democracy emerged in many countries; total wealth increased dramatically; technological changes greatly reduced travel times and facilitated rapid, even instantaneous, communication between states and continents, which, in turn, allowed the spread of mass culture in a way the world had never seen before.[1] At the center of these events were the great powers of Europe—in particular Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary—and the United States. Indeed, the interaction between Europe's great powers and the United States drove much of the political, economic, cultural, and technological ferment that culminated in the First World War. No American played a more important role in this process than Theodore Roosevelt, and this special issue is devoted to exploring key facets of TR's, and by extension his country's, relationship with Europe.

Henry Pringle once wrote that Roosevelt was "polygonal."[2] He meant that TR was a complicated individual—charismatic yet divisive, brilliant but occasionally myopic, and a moralist who nevertheless could be ruthlessly pragmatic—who elicited dramatically different reactions in observers. The same could be said about Roosevelt and his relationship with Europe, and this is reflected in the scholarship, which is voluminous and increasingly varied. For decades, historians mostly focused upon high politics and bilateral relationships (and such studies continue to emerge).[3] Recently, however, the scope has broadened considerably, as scholars have begun to assess the manner in which cultural and intellectual exchange, not to mention immigration, shaped transatlantic relations during TR's era.[4] They have also begun to acknowledge that he was able to look beyond his country's relationship with individual nations to conceptualize Europe as a whole.[5] This evolution has opened new avenues of research and enriched our understanding of the transatlantic relationship and the part TR played in shaping it.

Several overarching themes formed the context for Roosevelt's relationship with Europe. One was the growing importance of the United States in international politics. TR's influence in transatlantic relations was made possible by the emergence of his country as a political and economic power during the Gilded Age, the years during which his worldview was formed. Like many Americans during this era, he developed

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an intense nationalism; he preferred the term "Americanism," as Michael Cullinane notes in his essay. TR's boisterous and at times bellicose nationalism was intensified by shame that his father had chosen not to fight in the Civil War, as well as by desire to compensate for his wealthy upbringing in Manhattan. This nationalism served as the foundation for a belief, developed during the 1890s in cooperation with confidantes such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Alfred Thayer Mahan, that the United States was destined to play a special role in shaping world events. This conviction was bolstered by the emergence of the United States as a colonial power in 1898, with the acquisition of Hawaii and, after victory in the Spanish-American War, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Influenced to a considerable degree by European, and especially British, imperialism, TR believed that the United States had a right and a duty to bring civilization to the people in the new colonial possessions of the United States.[6]

Roosevelt also began to advocate a more active role in great power politics that would, to an extent, begin to overturn the traditions established by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson of nonentanglement in European affairs and no permanent alliances. This included not only a closer relationship with Britain and a role in maintaining the European balance of power, as Kenneth Weisbrode notes in his essay, but also a predominant role in Latin America. Formalizing this new approach to the country's neighbors to the South—and preventing interference by European powers—was the purpose of his Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904.[7]

To an extent, TR's countrymen embraced, or at least did not oppose, this increased involvement in world politics. A second theme in TR's relationship with Europe, then, was the influence of public opinion and domestic politics on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, there was widespread support for the Spanish-American War and for annexation of Spain's colonial possessions, with the partial exception of the Philippines, which was war-torn and far from the Western Hemisphere. The political controversies provoked by the Philippine War, which President Roosevelt scrambled to settle, helped to explain the waning of enthusiasm for the colonial mission over the next decade. And while most Americans were eager to prevent further European meddling in Latin America, they were also ambivalent about the United States taking sole responsibility for maintaining political and economic stability in the region, much to Roosevelt's dismay. The prospect of a closer relationship with Britain was also met with mixed reactions. Many members of the Eastern elite supported closer ties, but the broader public tended toward indifference or even hostility, especially in the German and Irish-American communities.[8] These cleavages in public attitudes toward Europe continued with varying levels of intensity until the eve of U.S. entry into World War I, at which point there emerged broad support for entry, though exceptions remained among some ethnic communities and committed noninterventionists.[9]

Many Europeans were also confused about the evolution of America's role in world politics and its attitude toward the Old World. As Ernest May noted, until the late 1880s, Washington was treated as a second-tier power and only during the final decade of the century did most European nations upgrade their diplomatic legations to embassies.[10] Such changes were necessary to deal with a nation that was becoming more assertive. For instance, even as Britain began to pursue a rapprochement with its erstwhile colonial possession, it frequently found itself at odds with American policymakers—in their essay, Simon Rofe and Alan Tomlinson aptly characterize this as a

period of "competitive cooperation"—regarding Venezuela in 1895–1896 and 1902–1903; a boundary dispute over Alaska until 1903; and a dispute over fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland until 1909. Germany found itself the target of even greater suspicion, as it emerged in the view of many Americans as the single biggest threat to U.S. predominance in the Caribbean region and would remain so until the end of World War I.[11]

U.S. public opinion was also vexing for many European policymakers. The landscape was particularly difficult for them to read due to the nature of the American political system, with its staunch partisanship and powerful popular press, and because of the presence of sizable ethnic communities that, at times, conflicted with other trends in public sentiment. Hence, British officials undertook frequent, albeit cautious, exercises in public diplomacy that were well received among many members of the elite in places such as New York City; Boston; and Washington, DC—and encouraged by TR when he was president—even as German and Irish-Americans remained hostile, and many other Americans retained ambivalence about their former colonial masters. As one diplomat in Washington, DC, wrote to London, "It must always be remembered that Americans are sensitive about us to a curious degree, and we should not run the risk of seeming to court them unduly."[12] German officials also found the complexity of U.S. public opinion, and its influence on policymaking, daunting. Not surprisingly, their occasional forays into public diplomacy were often unsuccessful. For instance, the gift of a statute of Frederick the Great to the city of Washington, DC, in 1902, which should have been uncontroversial, provoked passionate protestations from some members of Congress, who argued that a European autocrat had no place in the streets of the capitol of the world's oldest democracy.[13]

The challenges and opportunities presented by an increasingly powerful United States can be seen in the reactions of Europeans, which were multifaceted and even contradictory. As Séverine Antigone Marin highlights in her essay, European commentators often sought to use fear of the "American danger" to mobilize the public to support domestic manufacturers. However, warnings about the new power across the Atlantic did not necessarily resonate with public opinion in most European countries, especially when contrasted with fear of the "yellow peril" allegedly posed by Japan and China. This was due not only to the fact, as Marin points out, that few Europeans viewed the United States as a genuine strategic threat, but also because of the many ties that linked the United States and Europe.

These cultural, linguistic, and historical connections constitute a third theme of TR's relationship with Europe. Indeed, Roosevelt's own life, in many ways, embodied this set of connections. Descended from Dutch immigrants, Roosevelt enjoyed an extended stay as a boy in Dresden and developed a lifelong appreciation for German cultural and intellectual life.[14] He later developed a sophisticated grasp of ethnic politics based on almost two decades spent in New York politics. He also developed friendships with a number of European diplomats who spent time in Washington, DC, including Hermann Speck von Sternburg, Cecil Arthur Spring Rice, and Jean Jules Jusserand. As Rofe and Tomlinson demonstrate, the links that TR and other Americans developed with Europe increased in importance at the turn of the twentieth century as publics on both sides of the Atlantic, given the reduction in travel times and increased speed of communication, were able to follow news and cultural trends with increasing ease. This process enabled what the

English journalist W. T. Stead called, with some hyperbole, "the Americanization of the world." As Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes have recounted, as the end of the nineteenth century approached, a flood of American cultural exports to Europe thrilled consumers and, at times, frightened members of the economic and political elites.[15]

The overarching themes that formed the backdrop to Roosevelt's relationship with Europe—the emergence of his country as a great power; the influence of public opinion; and the cultural, linguistic, and historical ties that bound the United States and Europe—played a prominent role in the final great foreign policy episode in his career: World War I. In spite of the manifold transatlantic connections, Americans were not eager to intervene when war erupted in August 1914. Even Roosevelt, who privately advocated a robust response to Germany's invasion of Belgium, was equivocal in his earliest public statements (though by late 1914 he had begun, at first almost alone, to advocate military preparedness).[16] This was due, in part, to the fact that President Woodrow Wilson, Congress, and the public seemed unwilling to contemplate the possibility of participation in the conflict. Democrats famously campaigned in 1916 for Wilson's reelection with the slogan "He Kept Us out of War." However, by the time that Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in early 1917 in order to prevent American shipping to Britain, U.S. public opinion had shifted to support for war. American entry was crucial in the defeat of Germany on the Western front and the end of the war.[17]

The vital role played by the United States in defeating Germany seemed to vindicate TR's early calls for preparedness, making possible his return to a leading role in the Republican Party, despite lingering suspicion over his 1912 Progressive Party campaign, which had split the Republicans and enabled Wilson's victory. The war and its aftermath briefly positioned TR as a leading contender for the White House and revitalized his public standing.[18] Roosevelt's popularity also crested in Europe where, as Cullinane notes, based in part on the role he played in preparing his country for intervention in the war, along with his criticism of aspects of the Treaty of Versailles, his death in early 1919 was widely mourned. This transatlantic consensus on the former president in the final years of his life and in the wake of his passing was surely fitting for the man who, more than any other, laid the foundations for the modern U.S.-European relationship.

NOTES

[1]Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994). See also Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: a Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), esp. 710–43.

[2]Henry Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931), vii.

[3]Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956); Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1896–1914* (London: Scribner, 1969); Raymond E. Esthus, *Theodore Roosevelt and the International Rivalries* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1970); Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: a Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); Nancy Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams: German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). A special issue of *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 19 (Dec. 2008), featured several essays on TR and Europe.

[4]Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American*

Domesticity, 1865–1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Donna Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[5]Hans Krabbendam and John M. Thompson, eds., *America's Transatlantic Turn: Theodore Roosevelt and the "Discovery" of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6.

[6]Paul A. Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History* 88 (Mar. 2002): 1315–53. On TR's imperialism, see David Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); Frank Ninkovich, "Theodore Roosevelt: Civilization as Ideology," *Diplomatic History* 10 (Summer 1986): 221–45; Thomas Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

[7]Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*; Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement*; William Tilchin, *Theodore Roosevelt and the British Empire: A Study in Presidential Statecraft* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Dexter Perkins, *The Monroe Doctrine: 1867–1907* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1966); Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011); Simon Rofe, "Europe as the Nexus of Theodore Roosevelt's International Strategy" in *America's Transatlantic Turn*, eds. Krabbendam and Thompson, 179–96.

[8]John M. Thompson, "Rethinking the Roosevelt Corollary: TR and the Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomacy and Statecraft,* forthcoming, Dec. 2015; Thompson, "Constraint and Opportunity: Theodore Roosevelt, Transatlantic Relations and Domestic Politics" in *America's Transatlantic Turn*, eds. Krabbendam and Thompson, 51–64.

[9]John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson* (London: Routledge, 2002), 141–60.

[10]Ernest R. May, *Imperial Power: the Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), 3–5.

[11]Perkins, *the Great Rapprochement*, 13–30, 162–71, 187–92, 257–58; Richard D. Challener, *Admirals, Generals, and American Foreign Policy, 1898–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 1973), 28–29.

[12]Sir Henry Mortimer Durand to Lord Lansdowne, Apr. 22, 1905, Foreign Office, General Correspondence before 1906, United States (FO 5 2579), National Archives, London.

[13]The episode can be followed in the Political Archives of the German Foreign Office, Abteilung IA, May–Dec., 1902, R 17333, Lesesaal, Auswärtiges Amt, Kurstraße 36, Berlin,

[14]Edward P. Kohn, "Pride and Prejudice: Theodore Roosevelt's Boyhood Contact with Europe" in *America's Transatlantic Turn*, eds. Krabbendam and Thompson, 22–25.

[15]Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: the Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 97–119.

[16]William Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility: The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1961), 473–74.

[17]Phillips Payson O'Brien, "The American Press, Public, and the Reaction to the Outbreak of the First World War," *Diplomatic History* 37 (June 2013): 446–75.

[18]John M. Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 330.