

The Abandonment of the West

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The Abandonment of the West

THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA IN
AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

MICHAEL KIMMAGE

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to Ema and Maya
the north, south, east and west of my compass



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Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America.

—AUGIE MARCH IN SAUL BELLOW'S
THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH, 1953

Introduction

*Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
A fifth shall close the dawn with the day
Time's noblest offspring is the last.*

—GEORGE BERKELEY, “VERSES ON THE PROSPECT OF
PLANTING ARTS AND LEARNING IN AMERICA,” 1728

SEPTEMBER 14, A Friday, had been declared the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. One day later, a council of war met in Camp David's main building, Laurel Lodge. Everyone present knew that Afghanistan would soon be invaded. That evening, George W. Bush's national security advisor Condoleezza Rice sang “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” and “For You, O Lord, Are Faithful to Us” to the piano accompaniment of Attorney General John Ashcroft. Before dinner Rice had voiced the words of a prayer: “We have seen the face of evil but we are not afraid,” she promised. That Saturday night, with New York's World Trade Center a hole in the ground, its remains still smoking, the future took on an apocalyptic hue. The face of evil had shown itself just three days earlier when the nation was struck by a phased terrorist attack. Thousands of Americans had been killed at work, on the way to work, at leisure, in uniform, not in uniform, indoors and on the street.

Throughout the autumn of 2001, that September attack had the feel of a prelude, the opening salvo of a strenuous and terrible new era.¹

Landing on the White House lawn on Sunday, September 16, President Bush walked over impromptu to the waiting reporters. “This crusade, this war on terrorism, is going to take a while,” he cautioned them. “War on terrorism” would stick as a description of American grand strategy after September 11. The word *crusade* had another effect. Within the White House, the discontent registered immediately. “After advisors explained it to him,” journalist Peter Baker wrote about this vivid turn of phrase, “Bush never again used the word [*crusade*] to describe the war on terror, but the onetime unscripted utterance proved a defining moment to many Muslims for years.” On September 17, in the apologetic mode, the president visited the Islamic Center of Washington. He assured his audience that the United States was not about to embark on a crusade. Casually and spontaneously spoken, the president’s wording had evoked all the wrong historical analogies.²

Prior to September 11, however, the United States had amassed a rich history of foreign-policy crusades. Quite possibly, President Bush had been spontaneously alluding to them in his comments to the press. The motif of crusading predates the American republic, recalling the European image of a New World. Christopher Columbus had the zeal of the Crusaders behind him, although he did not point his ships eastward toward Jerusalem or set forth to retake the Holy Land. Columbus went off in the opposite direction—to the West. When he encountered land and people there, he comprehended them through the prism of conversion and conquest. Later, countless paintings, murals and sculptures depicted him with a sword in one hand and a cross in the other. Conquistadors and other explorers followed in his wake, faithful knights making the world’s known geography amenable to European dominion. The European settlement of the Americas had many of the hallmarks of a crusade, of a holy war.

Europe’s crusades shaded into American ones. If England’s Puritans could not physically retake Jerusalem, they could at least plant a new Jerusalem on the Atlantic seaboard. The Puritan experiment in New

England was no pacifist exemption to the bloody rule of crusading, all cross and no sword. Without Muslims to contest for their divine Israel, the Puritans faced Native Americans, Quakers, Catholics and other apostates. Those whom they could not convert they were ready, if necessary, to expel or to kill for the true faith. The eighteenth-century American republic jettisoned many of the old Catholic and Protestant furies, but it did not give up on crusades. According to one of the city's designers, the layout of downtown Washington is meant to depict "a crusader's shield, emblazoned with a cross." The westward thrust of Manifest Destiny was not precisely a crusade, though in its invocation of providence and usurpation of others' land it had echoes. As the Crusades had been for the actual Crusaders, Manifest Destiny was for the geopolitics—the territorial annexation, willed, sanctioned and called for by God.³

The twentieth century appealed most directly to Americans' crusading instinct. The enemies were legion, and at the beginning of the century the United States had a world-class economy, a world-class navy and much unrealized world-class potential. In a standard trope, the historian Anthony Hopkins denotes the "crusading foreign policy" shared by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Looking back on the event that lifted him from Midwestern obscurity to the front lines of international affairs, Harry Truman called World War I "that first crusade." The president who sent him into war, Woodrow Wilson, would surely have agreed. Righteousness was as much Wilson's cause in entering the war as was a cessation of hostilities or the protection of American commercial interests. The Paris Wilson visited in 1919 might have become a new Jerusalem had it not been so stubborn about remaining Paris. London was similarly stubborn about remaining London. Neither imperial capital was eager to make the world safe for democracy—that was not their preferred crusade. But across the Atlantic, Americans were so fond of crusading that they could even do so in the name of peace. Recalling the horrors of World War I, pacifists launched the wonderfully named No Foreign War Crusade in 1937.⁴

The second crusade for Truman and his generation was the Second World War. A war so brutal had to be fought with the fervor of a

crusade. Because of Hitler, millions of midcentury crusaders gathered on the British Isles. With the D-Day invasion, they threw themselves on Hitler's French citadel. The general who made the agonizing decision about when to launch the invasion, Dwight Eisenhower, mostly avoided grandiloquence. Yet he titled his 1948 memoir of the war *Crusade in Europe*, which was made into a twenty-three-part television documentary of the same name. By 1948, the third crusade was the Cold War, with Truman a blunt-spoken crusader against Soviet and Chinese communism. Only by delineating a war of good against evil, a clash of the god-fearing and the godless titans, could Truman convince the parsimonious American taxpayer to fund the struggle against communism. In his 1952 speech to the Republican nominating convention, Eisenhower declared that "I will lead this crusade"—against communism. Between 1947 and 2005, Eisenhower's friend, the Reverend Billy Graham, in whose presence George W. Bush was born again, led 417 complementary religious crusades in 185 countries. In 2001, Billy Graham was also compelled to change his language. His spokesperson, Melany Ethridge, explained that after September 11 "there was increased consciousness other faiths in the U.S. would find the term 'crusader' offensive." Billy Graham repurposed his crusades into missions.⁵

AN AMERICAN CRUSADE is an appropriation of a medieval European motif, however inaccurate, artificial or absurd the appropriation may be. An American crusade presumes Western Europe as the touchstone of history and of American foreign policy. Before the founding of the republic, educated Americans—educated British subjects living in the colonies, that is—studied the European past as the history that was truly history. When Americans first had a country of their own, history meant the history of classical antiquity, the history of Europe's beginnings. After that, it was the history of medieval, Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment Europe. For the Founders, the United States was more vividly European before it was ever palpably American.

Even the most blatant American gesture of separation from Europe was a European act. The Revolution was fought and the republic

founded in a fit of neoclassicism, which provided the founding generation with an inherited political culture neither exclusively British nor exclusively Protestant. The liberty of Periclean Athens could be combined with Ciceronian virtue and tempered with the restraint of Cincinnatus, the Roman who had given up power to return nobly to his farm. A classical education revealed the forces that had corrupted the Roman Republic and the decadence that had weakened the Roman Empire. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and John Adams could plausibly be portrayed as Roman statesmen. *Publius*, the Latin word for “the people,” was the pseudonymous author of the *Federalist Papers*, and George Washington was celebrated for reflecting the best of the classical spirit, for being the picture of civic virtue, a modern soldier and statesman with an ancient Roman’s appetite for restraint and limits. The retired George Washington at Mount Vernon—followed by the retired Eisenhower at his Gettysburg farm—was the American Cincinnatus par excellence. An avatar of ancient philosophy in the revolutionary imagination, Washington governed himself so that his fellow citizens might succeed at the tortuous task of self-government, one of the most powerful myths of origin for the American republic. The Italian sculptor Antonio Canova, selected by Thomas Jefferson, fashioned a statue of George Washington in Roman garb drafting his farewell address. The statue was unveiled in 1821 and destroyed in a fire a decade later, yet Washington as noble Roman is an enduring image.⁶

From the very beginning, an imagined classical past shaped Americans’ understanding of international affairs. The eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth was a cautionary example for the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. It was the wrong republic, deficient in executive power and insufficiently ancient perhaps. Far more thrilling was the French Revolution, which might release republican virtue throughout a monarchical and corrupt Europe. The Franco-American intermediary was the Marquis de Lafayette, a hero of the American Revolution who went on to participate in the French Revolution as well. When the Bastille was stormed in July 1789, the key to the prison, as

potent a symbol of liberty as there is in modern history, ended up with Lafayette. He then entrusted the key to another lion of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine, so that it might be transported to George Washington, the first president of France's sister republic. In summer 1790, Washington received the key, which can still be viewed on the first floor of his Mount Vernon home. The timing of Lafayette's gift is important: after 1790, the Terror and the arrival of an Emperor Napoleon tarnished the republican bona fides of the French Revolution for many Americans. The prison of European politics had been unlocked. Classical virtue had been summoned and a French republic proclaimed, but in Europe the house of liberty would be long in the making.

After the loss of France to military despotism, after the French monarchy was restored and then rebelled against, ancient liberty could still stir in Europe. Nineteenth-century Greece's independence from centuries of Ottoman rule described a marvelous horizon for democratic Europe. For many in America, it was a sentimental milestone on the Euro-American path to liberty, a departure and a return, if only the Asiatic overlords on the Bosphorus could be cast aside. Just as Americans could be latter-day Greeks, Greeks could be present-day Americans. The Greek Revolution that began in 1821 garnered American support because Greece was Greece, a colony of the American mind and therefore deserving of America's diplomatic support. In an 1824 poem titled "The Vision of Liberty," Henry Ware rhapsodized about a Greece that was coming to life—"Oh Greece, reviving Greece! Thy name / Kindles the scholar's and the patriot's flame." Channeling the "Greek fever" of the American 1820s, Edward Everett, a pastor and politician and secretary of state from 1852 to 1853, contemplated "the great and glorious part which this country [the United States] is to act, in the political regeneration of the world." (It was Edward Everett who, trying to recapture the glories of the Pericles funeral oration, gave the longer, less memorable speech at Gettysburg in November 1863.) What the American scholar knew from Greek letters, the American patriot would defend in the arena of international affairs, regenerating the world. Ideally, the scholar and the patriot were the same person.⁷

For the engaged scholar, an imported Europe was ubiquitous in the antebellum republic. Set-piece American architecture had long been Palladian, based on the works of the Italian architect Andrea Palladio. His 1570 volume, *Four Books on Architecture*, was a popular pattern book in the early republic, and Palladian motifs were especially beloved in the American South. They graced Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. They set the tone for the White House itself, which was designed by a practitioner of Irish Palladianism, James Hoban. From roughly 1820 to 1850, a Greek revival in American architecture—simultaneously elite and popular—spread across New England, upstate New York and the Midwest. In 1830, Asher Benjamin's book *The Practical House Carpenter* showed how Greek architectural styles could be fashioned. John Francis Rague, another architectural star of the Greek revival, helped design the philhellenic campus of the University of Wisconsin at Madison and was responsible for the Old State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois. Not far from the frontier, Rague erected a Greek venue for American politics. In 1858, Abraham Lincoln announced his candidacy in this temple. In 2007, Barack Obama did the same.⁸

The versifying Edward Everett helped to found the Boston Athenaeum in 1807. Everett hoped Boston would be the Athens of America. Perhaps in 1807 it already was. A library and place for learned discussion, the Boston Athenaeum was among the first of many institutions intended to harmonize the European past with the American future. In this vein, several great art collections, much more European than American in content, were made available to the public after the Civil War. They were as much civic statements as aesthetic monuments, and they came to define the cities that built them: the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1870), the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1870), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1876) and the Art Institute of Chicago (1879). Scholarly institutions followed suit: the Archaeological Institute of America (1879) and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1891). The ruthlessly neoclassical American School of Architecture was founded in 1894. Meanwhile, on the American stage, Shakespeare was everywhere, his characters speaking

easily in the local accent. Shakespeare's plays taught European history to those Americans for whom a college education was inaccessible. Shakespeare did this for the young Abraham Lincoln and many others. History, political philosophy, architecture, theater and music consciously and subconsciously situated the American republic in a preexisting European narrative.⁹

The scholar and the patriot were meant to walk hand in hand. Their partnership was vividly depicted in an 1860 mural in a staircase of the House of Representatives chamber painted by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, the child of German liberals who had fled to the United States. Titled *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, the painting portrays a motley crew of American types rushing toward California's golden light. (Leutze's iconic 1852 painting *Washington Crosses the Delaware* is also in the US Capitol.) Leutze's 1860 mural, a visualization of a 1728 poem by George Berkeley, philosopher, bishop and British man of letters, came from Berkeley's "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America." A year after writing the poem, Berkeley visited the Americas himself, hoping to plant arts and learning there. Berkeley wanted to found a college on St. Kitts in the British Virgin Islands. The college never got off the ground, but the intention behind it yielded some enduring lines of poetry:

*The rise of empire and arts
 Not such as Europe needs in her decay;
 Such as she had when fresh and young,
 When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
 By future poets shall be sung.
 Westward the course of empire takes its way;
 The first four acts already past,
 A fifth shall close the dawn with the day
 Time's noblest offspring is the last.*

EMPIRE AND ARTS did not signify military power for Berkeley. Those who attached his name to the University of California in 1866 were

not commemorating the soldiers of empire. But there it is: empire running its centuries-long course, from Athens to Rome to Paris to London to the New World. Empire *and* arts were to grace this New World. They were due to arrive in Berkeley, California, in 1866. Not just in learning and arts would the American republic crown itself with the laurels of the West. By the 1860s, Bishop Berkeley's poem was honored on a university campus and in the American legislature. Thus did the scholar and the patriot walk hand in hand.

BERKELEY'S POEM UNITED Europe and the Americas in a single geographical motion. *Westward* the course of empire takes its way. In the English language, *west* is a point on the compass and a signifier of evening. *Vespers* is a related word. In Latin, *occident* also means "setting sun," as does the German word *Abendland*, "land of evening." In Russian, *vostok* and *zapad*, "east" and "west," likewise suggest rising and falling. The sun starts the day in Asia—the East, the Orient, *das Morgenland*—and finishes in Europe or farther to the west. In English, Latin, German and Russian, the decline of the West is foreordained by the sun's oscillations from east to west, by its daily fall into the West. The West is the empire upon which the sun is always setting.

Geopolitical meaning came slowly to the West. Athens saw in itself a West opposed to the despotic Persian East. This was followed by the Western half of the Roman Empire positioned against the empire's eastern half and then the territories that would become Charlemagne's Europe (parts of today's France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Italy). *The West* could also connote Latin Christianity—the Protestant and Catholic territories—as opposed to those of the Eastern Orthodox churches. After the Eastern half of the Roman Empire and its capital Constantinople fell to the Ottomans in 1453, the West might also have been Christian Europe versus the East of Islam, Christendom in the West and an Islamic Caliphate in the East. In the recurring idea of the West, power, belief and geography have tended to bend in the same direction, linking religion and politics to the four points of the world map.

Over the centuries, the geopolitical West has taken on multiple shapes. The age of exploration broadened many of the original East-West divides, serving to globalize them. Whatever the rivalries among the European empires, whatever their religious and political differences, they could still amalgamate into the West vis-à-vis the foreign domains of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Mention of “our western world” dates back to 1601, and in 1839 a distinction was drawn between “India and the western nations.” Symbolically, at least, World War I was fought along an East-West axis, a clash of authoritarian (Prussian) East and liberty-loving (Franco-Anglo-American) West, despite the war’s many and shifting European fronts. East and West were to be found within and outside of Europe. In 1914, the Ottoman Empire, the German *Kaiserreich* and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were arrayed, according to the London *Times*, “against the Western Powers and Russia.” Presumably for the *Times*, Russia stood outside the Western powers in more than just geography.¹⁰

World War I, World War II and the Cold War were all wars of East against West. In a 1938 thriller about the worsening international situation, *Cause for Alarm*, Eric Ambler wrote that “the Nazis and the Fascisti . . . agreed to pursue a united front to the Western powers.” The Soviet Union was not among the Western powers in 1938, but the United States was, and once again Germany was antagonizing the West from the center of Europe. Between 1941 and 1945, the Soviet Union fell awkwardly alongside the Western powers, replicating the World War I partnerships. The Cold War, however, was in every respect an East-West conflict, synthesizing and combining all the previous conflicts of East and West: Athens versus Persia; Western versus Eastern halves of the Roman Empire; Western Church versus Eastern Church; Christendom versus Islam; the empires of the West versus the Asian East; the democratic Western powers versus their enemies in World War I; and the democratic West versus the Nazis and the Fascisti. When China joined the ranks of the communist countries in 1949, the perfection of the East as a despotic foil to the democratic and anticommunist West was complete.¹¹

After many tribulations, the West triumphed in November 1989. It did not so much defeat as overtake the communist East. The bedraggled, denim-clad citizens of East Germany voyaged westward over the Berlin Wall. The force was no longer there to restrain them. They, too, wanted to be in and of the West, as did many of their counterparts in the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the West was austere alone in victory, far better positioned than it had been in 1918 or 1945. In 1918 and 1945, the enemies of the West had not been subdued. Interwar Germany and the Soviet Union were still poised to wreak havoc, whereas both the West and the Western model were victorious in 1991. The political economy and culture of the West were all there was, or so it could seem to Westerners in the rush of victory. The task of the 1990s, then, was to export the winning model across Europe and around the world. One might worry about Western hegemony or Western triumphalism in the 1990s, but the strengths of the Western enterprise were obvious. They had found their confirmation in the objective weaknesses of a humiliated communist East.

The geopolitical West having prevailed, the Cold War crusade was finally over. So why, if the crusading West signaled success, did George W. Bush recoil in embarrassment from using the word *crusade* in September 2001? Why did he not stick with a phrase that had caused no controversy when Eisenhower labeled World War II a crusade in Europe? "I will lead this crusade" against the Soviet Union, Eisenhower had declared to thunderous applause and to no recorded outrage or criticism. If anything, a crusade against an Islamist menace made more historical and ideological sense than a crusade against National Socialism or a crusade against Bolshevism. There is something odd about a crusade *in* Europe, because the original Crusades had taken Europeans to the Middle East. Their wars had been waged to regain Jerusalem for the West and to spread Christianity. Was President Bush not at war with Islamist extremism after September 11? Was this extremism not a threat to the West? These queries lead to another more ironic question about President Bush and crusades. Why, after tactfully retracting the word *crusade*, did he join forces with Great Britain

and a handful of other European powers for an invasion of the Middle East—in effect doing what the first Crusaders had done between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries? To its critics in Europe, the United States and the Middle East, the Iraq War was a mad crusade launched by “Chief Crusader Bush,” as Osama bin Laden referred to the American president in a September 2001 interview.¹²

There is an answer to the question of why a crusade and, by extension, why a lyrical image of the West did not figure in George W. Bush’s response to September 11. Something had changed in American thinking about the world, in American society and in American foreign policy since the days of Eisenhower. Put differently, George W. Bush did not respond to the provocation of September 11 as his own father might have. A World War II veteran, George Bush Sr. had been educated at a Western-oriented Yale, class of ’40. After college, he enlisted in the Cold War contest of East against West. In 2001, George Bush Sr. might have been more at ease with the us–them rhetoric than his son seemed to be. The elder Bush might have prioritized the diplomatic relationship with Western Europe as the greatest good of American foreign policy. Since World War II, Western Europe and the United States together constituted the West, and in Western Europe skepticism about the invasion of Iraq ran high. George Bush Sr. might have been less certain that the Western political model—democracy—was applicable outside of Europe. He might have banked on the long-term and limited attractions of this model rather than on the project of exporting Western-style democracy at the barrel of a gun. On the basis of these attractions, he might have been prone to contain the threat of Islamist terrorism rather than to attempt its eradication through war, as his son would try to do in Afghanistan and Iraq: to defend the West rather than to march at the head of it. With the actual Iraq War of 2003, George W. Bush found the most bellicose way possible of not mounting a crusade.

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE WEST answers the question of what changed from the crusades of Wilson, Truman and Eisenhower to the anti-

crusade or the un-crusade of George W. Bush. It does so through the examination of foreign policy, culture and ideas. It is a history of the West within American foreign policy, a West that is not exactly a cultural affinity or a strategic posture but some complicated, fluid combination of these two things. Cultural affinities vis-à-vis the West can suggest or negate certain strategic positions. Cultural tendencies can augment internationalism or isolationism. Likewise, strategic or military success could consolidate a cultural affinity for the West, as did World War II, and strategic or military failure could disrupt the cultural attachment to the West, as did the Vietnam War. To gain a clear understanding of the West in American foreign policy, its rise and fall must be charted across multiple worlds. One is the world of those who make foreign policy, the world of presidents, legislators and senior diplomats. Another is that of the university, of the figures who set curricula, who instruct students in the books they should love and the books they should deplore and who teach those who will one day make and explain foreign policy. The biggest world related to the West is that of the general public, the polity that contends daily with the vexed questions of American identity and the polity that through elections sets the course of American foreign policy. Identity and policy constitute two open questions that are deeply and permanently intermingled.

The Abandonment of the West begins well before Eisenhower's crusade in Europe. Though it can be traced back to the American Revolution, the concept of *the West* became key to foreign policy around the time of World War I. Confusingly, the West is a place, an idea, a value—or places, ideas and values. In addition to the geopolitical definitions already provided, *the West* can indicate a range of cultural and philosophical constellations. Many of them are mutually contradictory. An incomplete list would include the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome, Christendom, the culture of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the separation of church and state, the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment, the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a coded term for white supremacy, European and American imperialism, the spirit of

democracy, the rule of law, the practice of social democracy, the practice of capitalism, the preoccupation with rights and eventually with human rights, and the transatlantic merger of ideas and culture since 1945. Even in the hands of a single author or politician, *the West* can be a comically imprecise term of art. Perhaps the label is so ubiquitous in the discussion of history, politics, culture, art, literature, philosophy and international affairs because it is so obligingly imprecise.

Any history of the United States and the West must take these ambiguities into account. They dominate the debates and disagreements over the West: the precious West of Eisenhower versus the disturbing West of his contemporary W. E. B. Du Bois, the luminous West of John F. Kennedy versus the menacing West of his critic Noam Chomsky, the liberating West of Ronald Reagan versus the colonizing West of his critic Edward Said. The West lives most fully in the never-ending battles over what it is, what it means, what it has been. In this book, the West is many things: Winston Churchill's civilization-saving Anglo-American alliance, Truman's wall against communist tyranny, the object of antiwar fury at the time of the Vietnam War, the object of desire in street protests in communist East Berlin and Warsaw and Prague in 1989, the arduous day-to-day work of self-government, the diplomatic efforts to institutionalize peace and cooperation, and the application of military force and covert action in the name of liberty. The West can be all of these things, and more. Even a pared-down definition of the West contains multitudes. Yet in the telling of its story, *The Abandonment of the West* follows one particular definition of the West in American foreign policy. This is the West embedded in a Euro-American narrative of self-government and liberty, a history of liberty, a project of building liberty, a future-oriented heritage of liberty. *The Abandonment of the West* documents this narrative as well as the conflicts and disagreements over Western liberty, over narratives that equate the West with liberty and narratives that equate the West with racism and imperialism.

Accenting liberty and self-government as it does, *The Abandonment of the West* grounds the West of American foreign policy in the En-

lightenment. The Enlightenment had its centers in England, Scotland, France, the German lands and the American colonies, from Königsberg in Europe's East to Philadelphia in the American colonies. The United States is a country carved from the stone of Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment ideals of liberty, self-government and reason were incorporated into the US Constitution. More than anyone, Thomas Jefferson forged the bond between the Enlightenment and the main lines of American foreign policy. In much of what he did, he anticipated what would come to be known over time as the West. Jefferson did this best in the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these Truths to be self-evident," runs his incantation, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Equality is a given, a gift of the Creator. Rights are native and therefore inalienable, and they cannot be made alien. The word *life* pushes Jefferson's sentence open, while *liberty* is its three-syllable keystone, holding up the philosophical architecture. The *pursuit of happiness* comes as its unexpected climax, a happiness to be pursued as one might pursue the truth in a scientific experiment, and happiness as a right endowed by the benevolent Creator. For Jefferson, the opposite of independence was the hierarchy, the disempowerment, the falsehoods, the blasphemy and the terrors of despotism, or Oriental despotism, as he might have put it.

In the no-longer-dependent country, the Declaration's author went on to become the second secretary of state and then president. Sketching his Enlightenment faith in progress in a 1795 letter, Jefferson wrote "that this ball of liberty, I believe most piously, is now so well in motion that it will roll round the globe, at least the enlightened part of it, for light & liberty go together." The American Revolution had been made for export, for politics around the globe, despite the early republic's many weaknesses, its stubborn provincialism and its place on the distant periphery of international power politics.¹³

Thomas Jefferson offers one further clue to the history of the West in American foreign policy. The epitaph on his tombstone lists three

distinct accomplishments. By Jefferson's decree, it reads: "Author of the Declaration of Independence and of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom & Father of the University of Virginia." The Declaration of Independence was penned by a compiler of statutes, which had been woven into Virginia and US law. Philosophical and statutory liberty demanded an institutional vehicle which (according to Jefferson's tombstone) was not the State Department, not the Supreme Court and not the presidency. Political office was glaringly omitted from his stylized self-remembrance. Liberty's vehicle was the new country's first secular university, the University of Virginia, designed with Palladian flair by Jefferson himself. To found a great university, to guide it, to send out from its gates generations of able students may well be a power more extensive and more consequential than the bounded powers of the American presidency. In this linkage between learning and liberty and between politics and ideas, Jefferson was prescient. His contribution to the West in American foreign policy would prove crucial, a virtuous circle of Enlightenment thought and action, and universities (of many kinds) would never cease to have a decisive impact on American foreign policy.

The Abandonment of the West, having defined the West as a transatlantic idea of liberty, traces this Enlightenment idea through two forms and through a drama in four acts. The forms are messianic and military, on the one hand, and legalistic and multilateral, on the other. With Jefferson, liberty could adopt both forms. The Declaration of Independence, in which the "we" is humanity itself and the cause is revolution, is a joyfully messianic document. It boldly decrees that the future United States would be an extraordinary nation destined to play a world-changing role in international affairs. This was not a military proposition for Jefferson. Nor could it have been, given the early republic's precarious strategic situation. Nevertheless, the United States would actively roll the ball of liberty around the world. In this reading, the United States would lead the West because American democracy was the very soul of Western liberty, not the form of government of a nation among nations. Almost every president since Jefferson has been

touched in one way or another by the messianic fires of American liberty, and in the twentieth century by the fires of Western liberty.

Idealistic as its wording is, the Declaration of Independence would have been a Jeffersonian fantasy without the US Constitution and related statutes in which liberty was put into practice. The Constitution's legalistic, compromise-centered idea of liberty is the foundation for American self-government and for a distinctively American notion of international order. Through diplomacy, the United States would try to instill greater deliberation, conciliation and cooperation in international relations. This strain of Western liberty follows an argument of John Stuart Mill that "there is not a more accurate test of the progress of civilization than the progress of the power of co-operation." Walter Bagehot, another great nineteenth-century British liberal thinker—much admired by Woodrow Wilson—stated that "progress of *man* requires the co-operation of *men* for its development." An ideal-typical expression of this vision came from the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*:

If one follows the influence of Greek history on the construction of and misconstruction of the Roman state which swallowed up the Greek, then the Roman influence on the barbarians who in turn destroyed it, and so on down to our own times; if one adds episodes from the national histories of other peoples insofar as they are known from the history of the enlightened nations, one will discover a regular progress in the constitution of states on our continent [Europe] (which will probably give law, eventually, to all others).

What separates Kant's barbarians from the enlightened is law, the state and an advanced government. In Kant's view, the Romans had construed their state from Greek history at the beginning of the Western narrative. True to his philosophy, Kant does not propose war, spheres of influence, the balance of power or *Realpolitik* as the rhythm of international politics but rather the spread of the Enlightenment itself. This equation of Greco-Roman or Western civilization with

legalized cooperation, an increase in the number of enlightened nations and the spread of international law has been among the most durable impulses in American foreign policy. Many American presidents saw in the twentieth-century United States the Kantian superstate of the modern era, the law-giving guarantor of a *pax americana*.¹⁴

Since the 1890s, the messianic and the legalistic strains of Western liberty have combined and collided in American foreign policy. The most eagerly messianic presidents were John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, though Ronald Reagan started no major war during his presidency and found a way to conduct arms control and other negotiations with the despised Soviets. JFK, LBJ and George W. Bush all indulged in high-level military adventures, wars of choice or wars dictated by a love of liberty. Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman were messianic-legalistic, balancing military ventures with the furtherance of international order and the construction of multilateral arrangements and institutions. They saw the United States as democratic juggernaut and peace-oriented mediator alike. Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, George Bush Sr. and Barack Obama toned down the messianism of the other presidents, pulling back at times from international activism, seeking order in tandem with liberty and usually with one or several inherited wars raging in the background. George W. Bush campaigned in 2000 on a platform of greater foreign-policy humility, on the avoidance of nation building, on a seeming realism, only to take up the program of democratizing the Middle East in 2003 and of “ending tyranny in our world,” as he put it in his expansive Second Inaugural Address of 2005. He campaigned as one kind of president and governed as another.

The non-crusade of the Iraq War underscores a final definition of the West in American foreign policy. To exist as a foreign-policy principle, the West needs to be invoked. It must be part of the conversation and part of the story, either as hero or as villain. Though Jefferson did not write or speak about the West as such, he inhabited an intellectual

and political culture that was so European that there was no real need to identify a West. This was no longer the case for “the Western Powers” in World War I: they shared the stage with other powers and with other civilizations, of which there was greater and greater knowledge in Europe and the United States. From that point forward, invocations of the West were consequential. The presidents who spoke most often and most glowingly about the West were the Cold War presidents, from Truman to Reagan. After Bush Sr., the transatlantic West was immensely powerful, but the West as a concept, a term and a phrase was fading away. En route to becoming an intellectual artifact of an earlier era, it was losing its coherence, which (putting it mildly) had never been absolute. With the Cold War over and economic interdependence increasing, *the global* started to take precedence over *the Western*. On the Left, the West had mostly negative overtones in the 1990s. It was the shield and crest of empire and white supremacy, while the Right was divided in its commitment to the West. Some, like George W. Bush, wished to make all the world democratic—North, South, East and West. Other conservatives affirmed an American nationalism; a republic, not an empire; a faltering American republic that need to be sheltered from the cold winds of globalization. This republic would be shaped by the racial and religious exclusions that the nationalist Right associated with the West, and its standard-bearer in the 2016 election altogether abandoned the Jeffersonian West of liberty, multilateralism and law in favor of an ethno-religious-nationalist West. From the 1990s onward, *the West* went from a unifying idea to an idea that was either divisive or disappearing.

THE STORY OF the West in American foreign policy is a four-act drama. At every stage, the drama reflects the connection Jefferson established between the Declaration of Independence and the University of Virginia, between idea and foreign policy, foreign policy and idea. A precis of this four-act drama goes as follows. From 1893 to 1963, the West was an ascendant cause in American intellectual life and in American foreign policy, and a frequently invoked cause. Elements of this cause

were assembled in the 1890s, by which time American membership in the West had been achieved. Asserting American leadership of the West—not just membership—was difficult and, in a sense, accidental. It took two world wars for American leadership of the West to make sense. Such is the lesson of Act One: Woodrow Wilson failed to bring his vision of liberty to Europe. Likewise, he failed to convince his fellow Americans that American leadership of the West was in their own national interest. After Wilson, the interwar presidents observed the encroachment of fascism and communism in Europe until Franklin Roosevelt could stand by no longer. Never did the fortunes of European or Euro-American or Western liberty seem darker than in the 1930s. Never were Europe and the United States more violently at odds than during the Second World War.

Act Two covers the 1920s and 1930s. At its heart, the West was a development outside of Washington, DC, outside the White House and outside the State Department. The First World War prompted the creation of Western Civilization programs, starting at Columbia University. These programs permeated academic culture, training students' eyes on the great books of Europe and instilling in many of them a sense of cultural kinship with Europe. This secondary story of the 1920s and 1930s, the proverbial high-water mark of American isolationism, contributed to the rise of an American-led West in the 1940s and 1950s. For the United States, this ascent meant a massive commitment to European security, substantial financial assistance and an involvement in the building up of transnational institutions for and within Europe, a thoroughly messianic-legalistic mix. (One of these American-supported innovations in Europe, the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951, would grow into the European Union.) Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy waxed lyrical about the West. JFK had been educated in Western culture at Choate and at Harvard, class of 1940. JFK gave his effective, effervescent speech about transatlantic liberty in West Berlin in 1963, the same year the University of Chicago historian William McNeill published his academic blockbuster *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*. For decades,

McNeill's was the standard volume on international history at American universities, its title indicative of a certain mood in American academia and in American foreign policy.

In *The Abandonment of the West*, 1963 is the turning point. The 1960s—Act Three—witnessed transformative changes across American political culture. A shift that long predated the decade was the realization that the European settlement of the Americas was not merely an extension of European history but an interaction. So too was all of American history an interaction between the European and the non-European. From 1619 onward, this interaction entailed the enslavement of Africans and their forced migration to the American colonies and later to the United States. Similarly, the Native Americans Columbus encountered in 1492 did not trace their ancestry back to Greece and Rome, or their religion back to Jerusalem. As the historian Thomas Borstelmann writes, “Natives of three continents—Europe, Africa and North America—gathered in the land that became the United States, later to be joined by immigrants from Asia . . . slavery and westward expansion wove together issues of race relations and foreign relations from the very beginning of American history.” These are not twentieth-century facts, and they were not discovered in the 1960s. Their revelation had been the life work of the historian and intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois (born in 1868), among many others. Yet the recognition of a wider America in the midst of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the decolonization of Asia, Africa and the Middle East redrew American culture and American intellectual culture—not to mention American foreign policy. Starting in the 1970s, universities fostered a reconceptualization of American history and politics. Ties between the West and white supremacy, and between the West and empire, often invisible to those enamored of Western liberty, became the subject of essays, books and college courses. In academia, the summa of these inquiries into the misdeeds of the West was a 1978 book, *Orientalism*, written by the Columbia professor Edward Said.

Simultaneously, in the 1960s and 1970s, a new kind of American conservatism was being born. It was not critical of the West, but its

adherents were almost as worried by the peril of American liberalism as they were by the peril of Soviet communism. The initial rise of the West had been a bipartisan project, culturally traditionalist in part (implicitly Judeo-Christian) and politically progressive in part (broadly supportive of the welfare state). Western liberty and Euro-American cooperation were Eisenhower's bequest to the Republican Party, an internationalist approach steeped in the rhetoric of the West. The hero of D-Day, Eisenhower had gone from leading the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the White House, where he continued the foreign-policy work of his Democratic predecessors, FDR and Truman. This was too conciliatory an approach for the conservative movement of the 1960s. In a despairing book, the conservative intellectual James Burnham decried the enemies within, the liberals who could not see beyond their imprudent optimism (in Burnham's view), who disdained the heritage of the West and who had more appreciation for decolonizing countries and for nonwhite minorities than for those who stood at the center of the West. Burnham's book had a striking title when it came out in 1964: at that moment of enormous American power and Western European recovery, Burnham released *The Suicide of the West*. He had written the prototype for scores of later conservative polemics.

Act Four is an exercise in irony. It could be pegged as the ultimate triumph of the West, as the Cold War concluded on such Western terms. On the American side, the West had a vigorous champion in Ronald Reagan. Even among Democrats, "Reaganesque" would remain a term of foreign-policy praise for decades, seemingly the foundation for an assertive post-Cold War American strategy. This was on the surface. Beneath the surface was ever greater polarization, a split between internationalist and nationalist visions within the Republican Party coupled with a Left-Right divide known as the culture wars. There were endless disputes about the kind of nation the United States should be, disputes about what should be taught in schools and universities and disputes about the legacy of the West in American life. James Burnham's conservative distrust of liberals continued apace, as