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## The Most Important History: *The American Historical Review* and Our English Past

THE WEBSITE OF THE *American Historical Review* announces that:

The *AHR* does not stand at the top of a pyramid of scholarly prestige, automatically to be tried first by an ambitious author before he moves on to a 'lesser' journal. Rather, the *AHR* . . . is concerned with large, persistent themes and genuine, broadly interesting innovation; it is a vehicle for general scholarly communication or for specialized studies that transcend the normal boundaries or expectations of their fields. It therefore stands as testimony, however fragmented and isolated the various fields of history sometimes seem, to the essential unity of the profession.<sup>1</sup>

The editors of the *AHR* of course protest too much: from a bureaucratic and institutional point of view we all know that an ambitious author with hiring or tenure committees to impress will do far better to publish in the *AHR* than in most other journals. At the same time, it is true that the *AHR* does try to publish articles that are thought methodologically innovative, that address large themes of interest beyond specific fields, or that are found to be in some way exemplary.

An article by the prominent historian David Armitage, once of Columbia and now of Harvard, recently republished without amendment, falls into these categories.<sup>2</sup> “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” (hereafter “Greater Britain”) was originally published as the centerpiece of an *American Historical Review* forum on the “new British history,” a phrase borrowed from J.G.A. Pocock.<sup>3</sup> Armitage tells those outside the field of British history what has been going on within, and suggests ways in which scholars of what was once the most traditional of historical specialties, notorious not only for its kings and battles but also for its ministers and constitutions, have gone beyond what are held to have been that field’s “normal boundaries or expectations.” The new British history is inevitably set against, and indeed over, the old Whig history. As might be expected, the new British history emphasizes the multicultural and non-traditional approaches of recent scholars, who are said, in an editorial phrase evoking the combination of linguistic terminology and sham authenticity too common in current academic prose, to “range broadly in space and subject”—as though the old Whigs had not.<sup>4</sup>

Armitage is a noted scholar of early modern British imperial history, his *Ideological Origins of the British Empire* being a defining work on the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> But in the process of denigrating the old British history, Armitage—as will be shown—makes a number of factual errors and misleading claims, his article revealing among other traits a disdain for his professional predecessors. As Lord Curzon’s biographer David Gilmour has recently remarked, some American academics “spend too much time agreeing with each other in seminar rooms and genuflecting to each other in print, a process often accompanied by much mockery of dead historians,” and here we have a prominent example of the practice, notable for both its genuflections and its mockery.<sup>6</sup> A kind of cozy arrogance is of course a familiar professional and moral hazard: if our predecessors had got everything right, there would be nothing left for us to publish. The present essay uses “Greater Britain” as an epitome, indeed a self-selected epitome, of current academic practice, and makes an argument not merely about British history but also about the rhetorical techniques and the ideological conventions—the “essential unity” in the *AHR*’s revealing editorial

phrase—with which mainstream American academics approach British, imperial, and indeed American history.

Armitage’s “Greater Britain” presents a historiographical narrative of the progress of British history running over several generations, culminating in those who now write in the pages of the *American Historical Review*. The narrative is impressive above all in the breadth of its citations—Armitage displays an impressive mastery of current scholarship—and will be a useful source of material for many a future reading list. His account of the “new British history” is a species of what the historian of the United States Leo Ribuffo has called a “certification narrative”:<sup>7</sup> it describes and approves the existence of the field, attesting to its professional legitimacy and significance, and certifying the canonical status of its leading scholars. The certification narrative is of course itself certified by publication as the centerpiece of a forum in the journal that, editorial false modesty notwithstanding, does in fact stand at the pinnacle of the American historical hierarchy. It is a kind of writing that is performative and at points imperative, rather than purely descriptive, in that it describes not only what the field does and should do, but also lays down what the field must not do and where it must not go, handing out approval or dismissal according to the needs of the discipline and the prejudices of its adepts.

Armitage’s “Greater Britain” is built around an account of the vision of British history presented by Sir John Seeley in his famous, much-cited, but now little-read book *The Expansion of England*, a volume based on lectures given at Cambridge in 1882–1883.<sup>8</sup> Seeley attacked what he contended was the inwardly focused constitutional history dominant in his day, and insisted on the causal importance of foreign policy, and specifically of the empire and of imperial trade, to British history. Armitage follows Seeley in his attack on the traditional type of “Whig” political history, but otherwise discovers in his Victorian forebear little more than a caricature of everything he most dislikes about the British past. In the desire to repudiate Seeley’s imperialism and his English nationalism, Armitage is led into a large and revealing number of errors about the earlier historian and his context. This paper lays out these solecisms in some degree of detail not merely because obvious errors ought not to appear in the pages of the *American Historical Review*, but also

because, as is argued, these errors provide some insight into the conventional attitudes that allow error to pass as sophistication.

“Greater Britain” stands to this day as a field-defining statement by the house organ of the American historical establishment of how British history should be written: the *AHR* has not revisited it, has published no correspondence on it, and it has been treated respectfully elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> It is not an obscure, let alone an iconoclastic, academic paper: it is on the contrary exemplary, as its author and his editors intended, of recent trends in British history, and it commanded respectful commentaries from the senior historians invited to respond, including—perhaps from mere courtesy—Pocock himself.<sup>10</sup> Precisely because it is an exemplary account of “the normal boundaries and expectations” of current scholarship, Armitage’s article, and specifically the pattern of its errors—errors that I take care to refute in some detail from published, easily available, and well-known sources—is a useful guide to the worldview and sensibilities of the current historical establishment.

Armitage’s narrative does three things: it presents an extensively referenced, and it must be said very useful, summary of recent historiography, emphasizing the multinational and multicultural character of the British Isles and the importance of imperial history; it asks what use Seeley is for the understanding of this history, concluding that while Seeley was right to emphasize the expansion of Anglo-British power both within the British Isles and overseas, his views are of little further value; finally, it tells us what we are supposed to think about Seeley, his Victorian context, his professional successors, and indeed about the British past as a whole. This paper responds by also doing three things: it refutes Armitage’s errors about Seeley and his time; it examines the rhetorical functions of the polysyllabic academic rhetoric in which the article’s judgments are cast; and, finally, it finds in that rhetoric a consistent vein of hostility to both Victorian England and the twentieth-century United States—the two most important states to have grown out of British imperial history—and argues that this hostility blinds the exponents of “the new British history” to many of the most persuasive arguments for the importance of “Greater Britain” as an object of historical analysis. I conclude by suggesting a more tenable term—“the Anglian world”—for the world that the British made.

## "MODES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY": A CARICATURE OF SEELEY

Though Armitage hangs his description of the "New British history" on his account of Seeley and his imperial ideas, he is heavy-handed in his denigration of the earlier historian, and indeed of Victorian historical writing as a whole. But before Seeley is knocked off his pedestal, he is set up as the first historian to take the empire and the British diaspora seriously. Discussing the originality of *The Expansion of England*, we are told that:

None of the major modes of historiography in the nineteenth century or most of the twentieth had any place for the imperial enterprise. An insular history of English exceptionalism maintained a willful amnesia about England's outlying dependencies.<sup>11</sup>

These incautious absolutes ("none... had any place") posit an incredible historical oversight. Seeley's innovation, writes Armitage, was to remedy this obvious defect, presenting a vision of an imperial Britain.

There has been considerable debate—among both historians and contemporaries—about the extent to which the empire impinged on politics, on the economy, and on culture. In broad outline, many current historians on the left argue for the centrality of imperialism to British history: in his emphasis on the empire's importance to culture and specifically to identity, Armitage has a great deal of company among so-called "post-colonial" writers such as Edward Said and Anne McClintock, and like them he emphasizes not merely the centrality of the empire to British identities, but also what he sees as its morally dubious and psychologically fraught character.<sup>12</sup> More cautious and one must say more empirical scholars such as Bernard Porter, publishing after Armitage, have argued that many Britons were not greatly concerned with or aware of the empire.<sup>13</sup> This debate on the cultural centrality of empire reprises the pattern of an earlier argument about its economic importance, in which those on the anti-imperial and often neo-Marxist left had also insisted on the importance of empire—British wealth, it was contended, was dependent upon imperial exploitation—while conservatives argued that the empire had been neither economically significant nor beneficial: as Marx might have said, arguments always repeat themselves, beginning with the economic base and ending in identity politics. These historiographical

debates reverse the pattern of the nineteenth century, when imperial arguments focused on current policy rather than retrospective guilt. Then it was critics of the empire who were usually at pains to minimize its importance, while imperialists emphasized its centrality to British power and wealth. The progressive anti-imperial historian of the present therefore finds congenial the imperialist Seeley's insistence on the importance of empire, though otherwise he finds little to admire—and quite a bit to denigrate—in his Victorian predecessor.

Whatever view one takes of the place of empire in Victorian culture generally, to say with Armitage that no kind of Victorian history addressed “the imperial enterprise” is to construct a straw man. Seeley himself anticipated the claim to originality made on his behalf, saying that, “we seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.”<sup>14</sup> Seeley's fit of absence of mind became one of the most widely repeated imperially related phrases, at any rate along with John Bright's famous allegation that British foreign policy was “neither more nor less than a gigantic system of out-door relief for the aristocracy of Great Britain.”<sup>15</sup> All historians, like all lecturers, feel the need to make some claim to originality, but this particular claim, as was signaled by Seeley's subjunctive mood and his consciously exaggerated phrase “half the earth,” was more of a rhetorical warm-up than a literal truth: Seeley was pointing less to English ignorance of the empire than to the fact that there had never been a plan to acquire it, that it was usually thought of as a disparate collection of naval bases, dependent states, emigrant societies, and commercial possessions, and that there had in fact been extensive discussions in decades prior to his lectures of the desirability of getting rid of it.<sup>16</sup> Seeley protested against what a senior colonial official, Sir Frederic Rogers (from 1871 Lord Blachford), had contemporaneously referred to as “the accepted belief that colonies are ‘young nations,’ whose separation from the parent stock is a question of time,” and against what he saw as the consequent tendency to avoid systematic thought about the empire.<sup>17</sup>

Seeley's sardonic and knowingly exaggerated claim about “as it were. . . a fit of absence of mind” is not cited in “Greater Britain,” whose allegations about the imperial oversights of earlier kinds of British history entirely lack Seeley's verbal nuance. There was in fact a lot of space for the empire and its

dependencies in Victorian history, and numerous “major modes of historiography” addressed imperial subjects, even if that multi-volumed age produced no brief single-volume overview of imperial history as compelling as Seeley’s. The only type of nineteenth-century history actually named is, inevitably, the much-derided “Whig” history. But even the canonical nineteenth-century Whig historian Macaulay, ostensibly obsessed with internal constitutional quibbles to the exclusion of all else, gave a large place to imperial enterprises: he probably exaggerates the role of the failure of the Darien Company (an attempt to emulate the English East India Company, as Armitage well knows<sup>18</sup>) in the Scottish union of 1707. The French wars of Macaulay’s hero William III, which obviously had a large colonial and maritime component, were never far from his mind.<sup>19</sup>

Insofar as Seeley’s “absence of mind” remark did claim originality for his topic, he was rapidly refuted by the anti-imperialist statesman John Morley, who in reviewing *The Expansion of England* cited the Liberal historian J.R. Green on the elder Pitt’s statement that “in Germany I can conquer America.”<sup>20</sup> Morley was also able to note the assertion of Thomas Carlyle in his biography of Pitt’s contemporary Frederick the Great that the great question of the eighteenth century had been “Colonial Empire, whose is it to be?”<sup>21</sup> Imperial themes made regular appearances in Carlyle, long a canonical author by the time Seeley spoke at Cambridge: “Like the old Romans, and some few others, *their* [the English] epic poem is written on the Earth’s surface,” proclaimed the Scotch prophet.<sup>22</sup> Pitt the Elder was still popularly remembered in the nineteenth century for his slogan “Ships, Colonies, Commerce,” a slogan that, along with the much-repeated incantation that “trade follows the flag,” remained controversial and attracted any number of counter-polemics from radicals such as Richard Cobden.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to imagine current politicians inveighing against a slogan of a century ago: the Victorians were intensely historicized people, and the current historian who pontificates about which aspects of history they did not discuss should tread carefully.

In addition to Whig history there was of course an equally partisan, and equally prolix, tradition of Tory history, in which the Tory hero Pitt the Younger’s naval, Indian, and Egyptian victories held a prominent place.<sup>24</sup>

There was also an allied heroic mode of history, of which Carlyle was the theorist and his follower J.A. Froude perhaps the best-known practitioner, which put seafarers, soldiers, and imperial conquerors at its center. One scholar has counted well over a hundred biographies of naval officers published in Victorian England, and detailed biographical dictionaries of such officers were standard works; the army, most of whose Victorian campaigns were imperial, had its own crop of heroes in such household names as Sir Garnet Wolseley (Gilbert and Sullivan's "very model of a modern Major-General"), Lord Roberts of Kandahar, and "Chinese" Gordon.<sup>25</sup> To this directly heroic mode of history might be added an operational mode, which aimed to extract military lessons from colonial campaigns: most imperial campaigns produced an ambitious officer-historian, eager to discover and to propound practical operational knowledge, the best-known example being a certain Lieutenant W.S. Churchill of the Fourth Hussars and Twenty-First Lancers.<sup>26</sup>

A fifth major mode of nineteenth-century historiography, after the Whig, the Tory, the heroic, and the operational, was constituted by the numerous histories of particular possessions, going back to James Mill's career-making *History of India*, and forward through any number of histories and textbooks of imperial possessions and imperial wars. Pretty well every colonial war, from Afghanistan to Zululand—both controversial subjects when Seeley spoke—produced its haul of instant histories, and the public bought them.<sup>27</sup> These histories should, however, be separated from those of the heroic and operational modes, as many were controversialist in intent, and some denounced imperial expansion or the uses to which imperial power was put.<sup>28</sup>

A sixth (and for these purposes final) frequent Victorian historiographical mode, also overlooked by "Greater Britain," aimed to extract lessons on imperial policy from historical knowledge, politics and history being disciplines not separate in the Victorian mind. It might be called the didactic or exemplary (or, in the case of America, counter-exemplary) mode. Perhaps the best known of such works was Sir George Cornwall Lewis's *Government of Dependencies* of 1841.<sup>29</sup> Lewis, a poor-law reformer and future Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote one of the earliest and most highly regarded works among what turned into a genre of imperial analysis. In the nineteenth century he was regarded as a canonical authority on empire, attracting the

respectful notice of other imperial analysts and writers, including Oxford professors like Herman Merivale, politicians like J.A. Roebuck, Earl Grey, and Viscount Bury, and leading activists such as Edward Gibbon Wakefield of the Colonization Society and H.R. Fox-Bourne of the Aborigines' Protection Society.<sup>30</sup> The Victorians being who they were, most of these studies began with extensive histories of all the colonies, dependencies, and empires known to mankind, or at any rate to the author, and many of these authors were impressively learned: Lewis went back to the Athenians and came forward through the Venetians, the Ottomans, and the Spaniards before considering the history and problems of the British Empire; Roebuck considered the history of British colonies going back to Virginia and New England, to which Wakefield also made frequent reference; Merivale surveyed the historic colonial policies of the major European powers; Bury covered all the European colonies in the Americas; Fox-Bourne went back to the colonization of Ireland.

None of the foregoing “modes” of history—the Whig, the Tory, the heroic, the operational, the colonial, or the didactic, a list which is no doubt far from exhaustive—neglected the empire, and some could be accused of exaggerating its importance. That Seeley's work became canonical as quickly as it did is less evidence of the novelty of his subject than of his compelling statement of ideas that the public could recognize on a subject with which it was already concerned: works of complete originality do not usually seize the public's attention. Armitage, obviously a learned and intelligent man, would no doubt on being challenged concede some of these points, perhaps pleading rhetorical excess. The really interesting question is why this sweeping denigration was thought appropriate, and why his straw man should have been thought worth constructing.

#### “GREATER BRITAIN”

Having exaggerated Seeley's originality in order to denigrate his contemporaries, “Greater Britain” goes on to describe Seeley's historical vision:

Although Seeley put the term “Greater Britain” into general currency, he had not coined it. The credit for its invention goes to Sir Charles Dilke whose imperial travelogue of 1868 had used it to describe the

colonies of white settlement. Seeley's strictly armchair survey of the same territories encompassed the Canadian Confederation, the West Indies, southern Africa (especially the Cape Colony), Australia and New Zealand as part of an "ethnological unity" with "England" that was held together as a community by common ties of "race" (or nationality), religion and "interest." There were many peculiarities in Seeley's conception of Greater Britain. He excluded India, because it had been acquired by conquest rather than settlement, although he still included the West Indies and Australia. . . He also assumed a community of interest between white Britons at home and abroad that would not be tested until World War I some thirty years later. Even though Seeley's work gave comfort to the Imperial Federation movement of the 1880s, on whose political fringes he operated, his main aim was to effect an expansion of the English historical imagination. . .

The political conception of Greater Britain lasted only as long as the hopes for Imperial Federation. . . Why then, should his ideas matter now? Why should historians of Britain and the Atlantic world pay any attention to a long-dead English Latin professor turned historian, whose political vision was utopian and whose other major works are mostly slumbering memorials to evangelical Broad churchmanship, Victorian Prussophilia, and introverted diplomatic history? One reason is the family resemblance between Seeley's vision of "Greater Britain" and J.G.A. Pocock's appeals, almost a century later, for a new approach to British history.<sup>31</sup>

I have quoted this lengthy passage in one piece because it contains within the space of a page a striking number of erroneous or misleading statements. Cumulatively it expresses a disdain for, and an apparent disinterest in, past ways of thought: there is something strikingly unhistorical about the sensibility that would ask in a professional journal why historians should "pay any attention" to a man long-dead, as though paying attention to the ideas of the past, and even to the ideas of those so unfashionable as to have been Victorian Latinists, was not what historians do. The answer provided to the rhetorical question, Seeley's resemblance in one respect to a

current historian, is in fact the only reason the *AHR* has for interest in a man “long-dead.”

Almost every sentence in the above passage is misleading. These solecisms tell us little about Seeley, but much about the American historical profession. The first sentence is correct that the term “Greater Britain” was coined by Sir Charles Dilke, but wrong to credit Seeley with putting the term into “general currency”: Dilke’s travelogue became a bestseller, going through eight editions and propelling him into Parliament, and was still in print when Seeley published.<sup>32</sup> Though Seeley employed “Greater Britain” when in an oratorical mode, he more frequently simply said “England,” a term which he began by defining, with a care for exact language worthy of a modern deconstructionist, as the state based at Westminster.<sup>33</sup> The term “Greater Britain” was in fact almost a journalistic cliché by the time that Seeley spoke, being picked up by politicians and after-dinner speakers such as Sir Julius Vogel of New Zealand, a regular participant in imperial controversies in the metropole.<sup>34</sup> The second sentence is wrong to say that Dilke applied the term to settlement colonies only—he, unlike Seeley, included India within it—and also wrong to imply that Dilke, who devoted a quarter of his text to his travels in India and related territories, did not visit or write about the subcontinent.<sup>35</sup>

Armitage’s third and fourth sentences above go on to say that there were “many peculiarities” in Seeley’s conception of “Greater Britain,” including the exclusion of India. It is true that for Seeley “Greater Britain” did not include India, but the assertion that Seeley’s vision was peculiar is seriously misleading: for Seeley, as indeed for most other Victorians, “Greater Britain” consisted of the settler colonies, and not of all places in some way under British rule. The Victorians, with their inveterate classicism, often used the term “colony” in its etymological sense to mean an emigrant colony: it had no necessary connotations of political subordination, as it does today.<sup>36</sup> For Dilke and other prominent authors such as the geographer C.P. Lucas, editor of a long series on the empire, and the anti-imperialist Oxford historian E.A. Freeman, the term could sometimes encompass the United States, the destination of most British emigrants.<sup>37</sup> While Dilke and Freeman included the United States within “Greater Britain,” Seeley did not go quite

so far, saying only that “the United States is almost as good as a colony to us.”<sup>38</sup>

Far from being “peculiar,” Seeley’s distinction between settlement colonies dominated by emigrants and dependencies occupied by conquered peoples was standard in the imperial literature of the time, and it seems a reasonable one today: Canada and Australia share characteristics that Botswana and Pakistan do not. Armitage’s determined effort to find peculiarity in what was standard reveals more than mere ignorance of Victorian usages: in implying that Australia was a colony of conquest, he is establishing distance between himself and Seeley by signaling his sensitivity to the experience of that country’s dispossessed Aborigines. Whether these statements of allegiance are quite intentional is difficult to say, but they express clearly if deniably the egalitarian, multicultural, and consequently anti-Victorian sensibilities of the present.

It should also be noted that though the above text gives the impression that Seeley “excluded” India not merely from “Greater Britain” but also from *The Expansion of England*, those who have read that book with any degree of active interest will of course know that India occupies a third of the volume—more than any other imperial territory—and that it has a central place in Seeley’s narrative of the “long hundred years’ war” for trade and empire with France from 1689 to 1815. That story is the centerpiece of Seeley’s argument, but it entirely escapes the notice of his modern critic, who seems uninterested in economics, grand strategy, or high politics—which is to say in what most interested Seeley.<sup>39</sup>

The seventh sentence above says that “Seeley’s work gave comfort to the Imperial Federation Movement, on whose political fringes he operated.” The organized Imperial Federation movement did not exist when Seeley published. The Imperial Federation League was formed the following year, in 1884, and far from “operating” on its fringes, Seeley was a key figure, along with its leader the former Liberal minister W.E. Forster, and any number of other major political and cultural figures from both major parties, or indeed from neither, and it included senior colonial leaders such as the Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald and the just-resigned Premier of the Cape Colony, Thomas Scanlen.<sup>40</sup> It was hardly farfetched, given

the presence of Macdonald, Scanlen, and others, to imagine a community not merely of interest but of loyalty between Britain and the settlement colonies. Far from being “assumed” by Seeley, as the sixth sentence above says, that community of loyalty was a widely advertised political fact, as anyone familiar with the colonial exhibition of 1886 and the jubilees of 1887 and 1897 would know. It was a community that found expression in the Boer War and subsequently—as Armitage does note—in the two World Wars. It is difficult to avoid the impression that the author finds those imperial sentiments rebarbative, incomprehensible, or perhaps both. One obvious answer to the rhetorical demand to know why modern historians “should . . . pay any attention” to Seeley today is the fact that Seeley, far from being a fringe operator, expressed the sentiments and the worldview of leading Britons and neo-Britons (to borrow a usage from Pocock) at the apogee of British power. It is an answer that seems not to occur to this author.

The final paragraph above tells us that Seeley’s politics were “utopian.” This is flatly wrong: like most Liberal imperialists he was a pragmatist, and his unsentimental view of the close relation between power and wealth—expressed most systematically in *The Expansion of England*—was in marked contrast to the utopianism of the philosophic radicals and Free Traders of the Victorian Liberal party. While he was no social Darwinist, conflict and change were central to Seeley’s historical vision. Though Seeley would have preferred some form of imperial institutionalization, he explicitly recognized and accepted the possibility of imperial fragmentation.<sup>41</sup>

The next clause in the same sentence disparages Seeley’s “slumbering memorials to evangelical Broad churchmanship, Victorian Prussophilia, and introverted diplomatic history.” Seeley’s main theological work, *Ecce Homo*, a study of the life of Jesus, went through five editions in its first year and remained in print for a generation. Though it commanded support from many quarters, including, as Owen Chadwick notes, even from some evangelicals, it was famously attacked by a leading evangelical, the philanthropist Lord Shaftesbury, as “the most pestilential book vomited . . . from the jaws of Hell.”<sup>42</sup> Seeley was associated with the liberal and rationalist and not with the evangelical wing of the Church, and these distinctions were taken very seriously. The epithet “evangelical” seems intended to imply old-fashioned

narrow-mindedness, though Seeley's theology, with its interest in the historical Jesus and in the exegetical possibilities of new philological techniques, was neither.

Seeley's "Prussophilia," as evinced by his biography of Baron von Stein, applied largely to the liberal reformers of the 1813 war of liberation: in this he was as Prussian as John Stuart Mill. The dismissal of Seeley's "introverted diplomatic history" is an equally false, and indeed self-contradictory, description of *The Growth of British Policy*, Seeley's book about Britain's role in early modern European power politics. That work gives central places to nationalism, to the pan-European reformation, and to similarly transcontinental dynastic politics, and traces the creation of a "British" nationality from an older, purely English one in a manner that would be congenial to those "new British historians" who emphasize the plasticity of Britishness.<sup>43</sup> In ideas about religion and about history, as in his politics, the liberal rationalist Seeley was in many ways a figure central to the mindset of his time, and some of his arguments remain thought-provoking even today: it is only the curiosity of the present that can really be said to be "slumbering."

These multiple errors—overstating Seeley's originality in a way that Seeley himself was too sophisticated to do, exaggerating the ostensible oversights of the Victorians, finding Seeley peculiar where he was in fact conventional, placing him on the fringes when he was actually central, attaching false but usually depreciatory epithets to Seeley's writings—form a pattern. The pattern makes it clear that no one familiar with Seeley's Victorian context reviewed this *AHR* state-of-the-field survey: one may ask why it was not felt necessary. A second, related question pertains to the absence thus far of responses to the *AHR*'s errors. That none of the many Victorianists familiar with Seeley and his context—I have thus far said little original about either—have spoken up perhaps points to the fragmentation of the discipline: specialists tend their gardens quietly, allowing the *AHR* to claim to speak for the "unity" of the profession. The certification narrative seems mainly intended—or at any rate mainly to function—to decertify its Victorian opponent in order to emphasize by contrast the enlightenment of the present. It displays a species of what has been called "chronological snobbery" that is in its own inadvertent way quite whiggish: the ideas of the past were inferior,

blinkered, and probably reactionary, but the progressive and clear-sighted historian of the present is here to set us right.<sup>44</sup>

SIR JOHN SEELEY, HISTORICAL MATERIALIST

Seeley's *Expansion of England* was compelling because it presented a compact, intellectually reputable, and systematic explanation of the empire as the outcome of an economically driven imperial struggle between primarily the English and the French, but not neglecting the Spanish and the Dutch. A reader of Seeley will find an account of the economic dynamics of empire that anticipated in many respects the neo-Marxian world-systems theorists of the present day. For Seeley, the dynamics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were governed by the logic of mercantile competition, and this "vast historic cause" provided the key to understanding early modern history:<sup>45</sup>

It seems to me to be the principal characteristic of this phase of England that she is at once commercial and warlike. A commonplace is current about the natural connexion between commerce and peace, and hence it has been inferred that the wars of modern England are attributable to the influence of a feudal aristocracy. Aristocracies, it is said, naturally love war, being in their origin military; whereas the trader just as naturally desires peace, that he may practise his trade without interruption. A good specimen of the *a priori* method of reasoning in politics! Why! How came we to conquer India? Was it not a direct consequence of trading with India? And that is only the most conspicuous illustration of a law which prevails throughout English history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the law, namely, of the intimate interdependence of war and trade.<sup>46</sup>

Seeley went on to insist, with a sometimes almost philistine materialism redolent of some Marxists, that:

Behind all the courtly foppery of the grand siècle [the seventeenth century] commercial considerations now rule the world as they had never ruled it before, and as they continued to rule it through much of the prosaic [eighteenth] century that was then opening.<sup>47</sup>

At the time that Seeley wrote, a long and almost hegemonic tradition of writers from Adam Smith, forward through Jeremy Bentham and the Mills, to the colonial “separatists” of the mid-Victorian years, had argued that colonies and empires were not of commercial value, and had insisted further that the state’s power to direct economic activity was at once minimal and almost necessarily negative in effect.<sup>48</sup> Such ideas found their canonical political expression in the doctrines of Richard Cobden and the Free Trading Anti-Corn Law League, which held that colonies and the associated practice of commercial protection were but “the costly appendage of an aristocratic government,” of no benefit to anyone else.<sup>49</sup> Those verities had supported the mid-Victorian belief that the colonies would, and should, evolve rapidly to complete independence: if their economic value was unrelated to the political connection, ran the argument, why pay for their defense? Seeley’s *Expansion of England* replies with a historical summary of the intimate interconnections between commerce, power, and war, and an attack on the deductive “*a priori*” propensities of classical political economy, and on its “little Englander,” Free-Trading, and anti-imperial consequences. Seeley was insisting that economics and power should not be thought of separately.

In this, Seeley found an echo in the Oxford dons J.S. Cotton and E.J. Payne, who simultaneously argued for the commercial importance of empire.<sup>50</sup> Within twenty years, prominent pro- and anti-imperial writers such as Sir Halford Mackinder on the right and J.A. Hobson on the left had taken up his theme of the historical connections between economic activity and imperial expansion.<sup>51</sup> Seeley’s theme also anticipated the growth of the new field of economic history, which was just beginning to declare its independence from the deductive techniques of classical Ricardian political economy, and which really became a discipline in its own right only in the 1880s.<sup>52</sup> Walter Bagehot at one point recalled the words of a friend, “in my time political economy books used to begin, suppose a man on an island”; it was this practice of reasoning from assumed original conditions that Marx derided as a “Robinsonade”; this was the “*a priori* method of reasoning in politics” against which Seeley and the economic historians rebelled, and against which Seeley’s economic interpretation of imperial history should be read.<sup>53</sup>

In arguing for a systemic view of the empire and its economics, Seeley was a part of a larger late-Victorian reexamination of the once-dominant verities of classical political economy and its “night watchman state.” The insistence that wealth could not historically be dissociated from power was a line of thought that led to calls for more assertive and programmatically directed state action from both right and left. The reassertion of the political and historical significance of economics was also by implication a statement of the economic significance of political decision making. It was a statement made in an ideological climate that had until that point taken an extremely pessimistic view of the possibilities of positive state action in the economic sphere, but that was beginning, in the face of the “great depression” (as it was called by contemporaries) of the 1870s and of the evident successes of notoriously protectionist powers such as the United States and Germany, to rethink that dogmatic skepticism. The clear implication was that *laissez-faire* would no more do for the empire than it would for the domestic economy.

Since Seeley, the economics of empire has attracted a great deal of scholarly and polemical attention, from the writings of Hobson and Mackinder forward through the extended controversy surrounding John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson’s famous “Imperialism of Free Trade” article, to very recent, thorough, and carefully nuanced works on the profitability of empire by Lance Davis and Robert Huttenback, and on “gentlemanly capitalism” by P.J. Cain and A.J. Hopkins.<sup>54</sup> The economics of empire has been central not only to the historiography of imperialism, but to popular and political echoes of those arguments—as anyone familiar with the name of Lenin would know. One of the strangest things about Armitage’s review of imperial historiography is his complete disregard of this central topic: we are in the presence of a sensibility fascinated by identities, but uninterested in economics.

Quentin Skinner has argued that:

The essential question which we therefore confront, in studying any given text, is what its author, in writing at the time he did for the audience he intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate by the utterance of this given utterance.<sup>55</sup>

Skinner places particular emphasis on the range of things said and not said in a particular context. It is only by asking Skinner's questions that one can form any reasonable understanding of an author's intent or significance. Armitage's article manifestly fails to locate Seeley in the context of what was contemporaneously being said about imperial political and economic topics. It evinces little interest in what Seeley was really, to use Skinner's persistent verb, "doing." But Seeley was an English imperialist, and a Victorian to boot, a creature rebarbative to current sensibilities, and therefore suitable for use as a straw man, and at that point interest in the real Seeley and his world slumbers.

#### THE RHETORIC OF DENIGRATION

Armitage concludes his description of Seeley with the assertion that he had a "majestically static" vision of the empire.<sup>56</sup> The adjective is ridiculous: Seeley's emphasis on the international economics of earlier centuries and on the possibilities of steam and electricity in his own, like his perception of a need for a new and more purposeful imperial policy, was anything but static.<sup>57</sup> One is left to conclude that it is majesty more than stasis that is thought objectionable. In the same vein, the description of English and particularly Victorian attitudes to history as "narrowly whiggish," is worse than uninformative:<sup>58</sup> it would be closer to the truth, given the tendency of some Whig historians to see all history through the lens of rational progress—Buckle's *History of Civilisation* comes to mind—to speak of a consciousness that was too broadly rather than too narrowly whiggish.<sup>59</sup> These terms if taken as description are flatly wrong; their direct meaning is clearly not intended. I therefore turn to what Skinner would call their perlocutionary import.

The errors, the oversights, and most of all the epithetical spin of "Greater Britain" are not random—they are strikingly univocal—and they are not mere verbosity. These errors, certified by the prestigious house organ of the dominant faction of the American historical profession, and reprinted without correction or modification five years later, tell us something about the mind of the American academy today.<sup>60</sup> Asking Skinner's questions

about the context and expectations surrounding the article at issue, one can surmise that it clearly said the kind of things in the kind of language that American historians expect to read in their leading peer-reviewed journal, and so provoked little further questioning. I have taken some space to refute in detail, and perhaps at first glance too much pedantic detail, the article's numerous errors in order to raise questions about those expectations.

A prominent imperial historian and essayist of an earlier generation, A.P. Thornton, in one of the best but now forgotten books on empire I have ever read, remarked that "some of the fervour that was expended in the building of Empires is now diffused in writing about them."<sup>61</sup> But fervor implies controversy, and whatever element of fervor a hostile critic might find in the present essay, in Armitage there is only the self-satisfied assurance of a man expressing a consensus. His is not a voice that expects serious contradiction. The governing conceit of Thornton's generation was one of ostentatious common sense, often expressed with an element of self-deprecation and not a little wit: the writer bowed before the learning of the authority under criticism, and only wished to express some slight doubt on a simple but invariably double-edged point. The current generation acts out a very different conceit: the familiar figure of the oppositional intellectual speaking truth to power has degenerated into a kind of self-regard secure in its institutional position, but still enjoying the pleasures of opposition to the conservatism of the surrounding and supporting society. While the earlier conceit wore its learning lightly and expressed itself in a plain if often paradoxical style, the learning of the newer is ponderous, deliberately abstruse, thickly allusive in its signs and subjects, and concerned to advertise not merely the erudition but also the progressivism of the writer. The old style expressed itself in simple words, but its meanings were complex, nuanced, and precisely phrased. Now, the vocabulary is complex, but all too often not the meaning.

The professor of English David Bromwich has identified what he calls a "police blotter slang" of interrogations, complicities, and collusions in much current academic writing, remarking that it is a slang with a "copious and explicit vocabulary of praise and blame."<sup>62</sup> There are in the *AHR* definite traces

of the police blotter, but Armitage prefers a related argot of psychopathology: Anglo-British exceptionalism is to be “palliate[d]”;<sup>63</sup> Victorian English views of the empire were afflicted with first “wilful amnesia” and then “aggressive amnesia”;<sup>64</sup> Seeley’s history was “introverted,” and many Britons suffered from “imperial introversion”;<sup>65</sup> the Anglo-Scottish union of 1707 was driven by “compulsions” (so much for the agency of Macaulay’s Scottish merchants);<sup>66</sup> the idea that some kind of natural community existed in the Atlantic world in the twentieth century is similarly a “distorting compulsion.”<sup>67</sup> Histories that defy such compulsions have been ignored or “repressed.”<sup>68</sup> This psychopathological language of course implies that Britain’s empire was in some way a morally compromised and “aggressive” or “compulsive” undertaking, the guilt for which was presumably compensated for by “amnesia” or “introversion.” The language functions at the level of assertive imputation, and of course these pseudo-Freudian imputations are in their nature neither directly demonstrable nor falsifiable. They can therefore be deployed promiscuously, allowing the writer to tell us what he thinks and what we should think. The whole is armored with an often spurious quantity of notes, creating a facile impression of evidentiary support for assertions inherently incapable of demonstration. It is difficult to believe that the author, obviously a sophisticated writer, uses these rhetorical tactics inadvertently.

The most obvious function of these tactics is that of defining the range of respectable opinion: the certification narrative spends a great deal of time delineating, apparently without irony, the views that are “acceptable.”<sup>69</sup> It is Armitage’s term, and one can only gather that he is describing opinion “acceptable” among those accepted as sophisticated, pluralist, anti-exceptionalist, right- (or left-) thinking Ivy League historians. A narrative that delineates the bounds of the acceptable among the accepted is essentially an identity narrative. Within it, laudatory terms apply, with few exceptions, only to current scholars. In the past, we have only what are called the “admiring constitutionalism” of Bentham and Bryce and the “navalist obeisance” of Mahan.<sup>70</sup> Bentham, Bryce, and Mahan, along with Seeley, go into their pigeonholes, described, denigrated, dismissed: real scholars, we are given to understand, are obeisant to no one and admiring of nothing. That Seeley knew as much Indian history, Bentham more Blackstone, Mahan more naval

and military history, and Bryce as much constitutional and political history as their cultured despisers is allowed to pass unnoticed.

Through its most eminent figures, the Victorian era as a whole is calumniated. It is difficult to imagine a historian applying similar terms of denigration to almost any other past society: would Livy's concern for character, Herodotus's for ethnicity, or Gibbon's relish for unintended consequences—let alone, of course, the words of a woman or an Aborigine—be so smoothly dismissed, or would the *AHR*'s resident authority try to understand each author in the context of his own time, “as it really was,” with some sense of engaged interest? There is a hostility to the Victorians and to what they are imagined to have been like—imaginings, as I have noted, that are far from accurate—that perhaps speaks of our very proximity to the period. An eminent scholar of that period, Gladstone's biographer H.C.G. Matthew, has remarked that, “the *mentalité* of the Victorian is perhaps more foreign to the twentieth century mind than any since the reformation”;<sup>71</sup> it is a difference that combines with their proximity in time, in language, and in many aspects of their culture to produce the almost advertent incomprehension, the carefully cultivated sense of disdainful distance, that is expressed by the uninterested errors of Armitage's article. There is in all this a tacit admission that the Victorians are felt—and that is the apposite verb—to be enough like present-day Anglo-Americans that they merit a disdain that no current historian would wish to evince toward Romans or Greeks, let alone Aborigines or Africans, and it is, moreover, a disdain felt to reinforce the progressive credentials of the disdainer. We “other Victorians,” to borrow a phrase of Michel Foucault—discussing attitudes to sex rather than empire—have been constructing our identities against those world-encompassing Victorians for the past century, and some still feel it necessary.

The language of psychopathology has two main targets: what the author is pleased to call the “fictive nationalisms” of the United States (or as Armitage has it, “*United States of American*,” italics and adjective in original) and of Great Britain.<sup>72</sup> His language at points shifts from psychopathology to psychotherapy: these “fictive nationalisms” are “cherished,” twice require “comfort,” and Pocock, suspected of retaining an

atavistic loyalty, is “aggrieved and abandoned.”<sup>73</sup> One can play a number of semantic games with a word such as “fictive,” emphasizing its similarity to the term “fiction” and hence to the idea of something made, concocted, or imagined—all progressive and sophisticated people of course know that nationalisms construct Benedict Anderson’s much-cited “imagined communities.”<sup>74</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “fictive” as “imaginatively creative” or “feigned,” and traces its etymology to the Latin term for the latter. It would be difficult to think of many nationalisms more influential and more resilient in the world of the past few centuries than those associated with John Bull and Uncle Sam, two characters remarkably similar in their commonsensical and sometimes philistine hard-headedness, however uncongenial they may be to current academic sensibilities. Perhaps some who have waved the Union Jack or Old Glory were feigning their allegiances, but most were not—as sophisticated students of nationalism such as Anderson would allow—and there is a large element of disrespect for past peoples, and indeed for some present people, in these trivializing “fictive” epithets. As so frequently in this text, such adjectives fail when read as direct description. But they do tell us something of the attitudes of the academic establishment whose peer-reviewed process has certified this narrative of its own ostentatiously oppositional identity.

The language of psychopathology is on occasion replaced by that of direct prohibition and even of anathema: we are warned against “the ‘cloven hoof’” of Anglocentrism, which is to be “rebuked,” and Armitage issues repeated injunctions against any notion that England or America might be “exceptional.”<sup>75</sup> “Exceptionalism” is not directly defined, but “the New British History” is congratulated for having seen that “England is now rightly recognized as but one among three kingdoms and at least four nations that have coalesced, colluded and collided,” so the reader is left to gather that dissent from that statement would constitute the anathematized “exceptionalism.”<sup>76</sup> One could just as well say that London is but one city in England, Britain but one country in the empire, or the United States but one in NATO. While the proposition that there were once three kingdoms within the British Isles is true, that is not all that the statement means to say: it means to say that

England is of no greater essential importance than nations such as Wales or Ireland, and of course it is permissible to allude to those last two nations and their associated nationalisms without inverted commas or other typographical nonsense. It is obvious that the author would like England to have been but one country among an indefinite but expansible group of “at least four,” and here he engages in a bit of discursive construction, carefully leaving the door open for other potential nations. (One wonders who comes next, Cornwall or Yorkshire? Likely not Ulster.) But obviously England, like America, has been centrally important in ways that Cornwall or Wales were not. We may ask why anyone should want to deny that obvious reality.

The United States is not from an economic point of view an egalitarian society. But in matters of status, esteem, and public piety, it is an intensely if somewhat speciously egalitarian society, and few sectors of American society are more ostentatiously egalitarian than the academy. All nations, ethnicities, races, genders, and other identity or attributive groups need to be recognized, their contributions memorialized, and their status certified. Thomas Bender sees an element of “noblesse oblige” in this desire for inclusiveness.<sup>77</sup> A writer given to Freudian imputation might interpret it as compensation for a lack of more substantive kinds of equality. A certain amount of conspicuous egalitarianism helps to maintain the conceit of the progressive scholar working to subvert the strictures of an imagined authority.

The egalitarian temper of the present rebels at the notion that some people were more important than others. It is a sensibility whose hostility to power can, in its sillier moments, lead to a reluctance to recognize and historically to describe and to explain power: the egalitarian historian who distributes too much agency to serfs or slaves, or indeed to Irishmen, workers, or Aborigines, can end by sounding like an apologist for earlier hierarchies of power. A sensibility that rebels against the recognition that some people and some countries have been more central than others can become an obstacle to historical understanding, as the erroneous denigration of the English nationalist Seeley and his contemporaries demonstrates.

To these ideological predilections there is of course added the bureaucratic need for each scholar to make original contributions to knowledge, and since

Victorian proconsuls and American Presidents are historical fields perceived to have been pretty well plowed over, it is understandable that a generation of historians should have chased agency over Irish bog, Welsh vale, and pirate foc'sle. At its best, such scholarship of lesser-known or "subaltern" historical actors can provide context and depth to history, as well as responding to a perfectly legitimate intellectual interest in the experiences of past people who did not have the resources to produce multiple volumes of *Lives and Letters*. But it can also, and in Armitage does, lead to an aversion to the notions of centrality or importance, and to a consequent and striking disinterest in England at the apogee of its influence. It is a disdain supported less by argument than by ideological anathema: "exceptionalism" is to be avoided not because it is inaccurate but because it is sinful, as the reference to its "cloven hoof" reminds us.

#### THE ANGLIAN WORLD: AN OBJECT OF ANALYSIS

Armitage presents "Greater Britain" as "a category of historical analysis," and of course he is alluding to Joan Wallach Scott's similarly titled article on gender, an article that must stand as one of the most successful, indeed by now canonical, examples of the genre of the certification narrative.<sup>78</sup> But there is an elementary category error here: Scott advanced gender as a transhistorical category analogous to class, a category that was argued to be like class a historically fluid social construct. Obviously, "Greater Britain" is a collective noun, an entity, or set of related entities, for historical analysis, rather than a category of analysis applicable across all history. "Greater Britain" is no more a category of analysis in Scott's sense than is, for example, "late antiquity," or "the Hellenistic world." But it is just as valid an object of speech and analysis as either of those two oft-discussed collective nouns. As with the Hellenistic world, the Anglo-American world shares among other cultural traits a language, a literature, and indeed an ideological tradition or set of traditions, and as with the Hellenistic world it enjoyed—if that is the right word—only a relatively brief moment of rather tenuous political unity.

The original source of the phrase "Greater Britain" gives some clues to the ways in which we might think of the societies named by that collective

noun. Dilke was an often acerbic young man, as full of confidence in himself personally as he was in the exceptional power and worth of the society near whose social apex he stood. As might be expected of an intelligent and privileged young man, he was equipped with an enterprising spirit but few self-doubts; he can be at points ridiculous but at others preternaturally perceptive. His narrative proceeds purposefully around the globe, but its import and some of its tone is caught by his preface:

In America, the peoples of the world are being fused together, but they are run into an English mould: Alfred's laws and Chaucer's tongue are theirs whether they would or no. There are men who say that Britain in her age will claim the glory of having planted greater Englands across the seas. They fail to perceive that she has done more than found plantations [i.e. emigrant colonies] of her own—that she has imposed her institutions upon the offshoots of Germany, of Ireland, of Scandinavia, and of Spain. Through America, England is speaking to the world.

Sketches of Saxondom may be of interest even upon humbler grounds: the development of the England of Elizabeth is to be found, not in the Britain of Victoria, but in half the habitable globe. If two small islands are by courtesy styled "Great," America, Australia, India must form a "Greater Britain."<sup>79</sup>

Dilke's emphasis on the antiquity of Saxon legal traditions, something of a Victorian and Whig cliché, was admittedly overdone, and though he was a radical in the context of his time, his cultural pride will no doubt seem almost indecent to current academic sensibilities. Dilke had a primarily cultural rather than ethnic understanding of "Greater Britain," as his inclusion—unusual, for a Victorian—of India in that collective name indicated, and as his reference to the imposition of British institutions upon emigrants of other ethnicities emphasized. His was a cultural self-confidence that, unlike Seeley's imperial vision fifteen years later, did not need to put much stress on political links: Dilke could even foresee the possibility of Indian resistance to British rule, writing (only a decade after the 1857 mutiny) that, "by means of centralization and railroads, we have created an India which we

cannot fight,” and going on to call the Anglo-Indian government “a mere imperialism, where one man rules and the rest are slaves.”<sup>80</sup>

It is a comment on the cultural self-confidence of the Victorians that they could produce a welter of terms, from Dilke’s “Greater Britain” and “Saxondom,” to the more widely used “Anglo-Saxon,” to J.A. Froude’s “Oceana,” to Seeley’s often metonymic use of “England,” to name however imprecisely the larger globe-girdling cultural or (for some authors) political entity of which they were a part or wished to be a part.<sup>81</sup> It is perhaps an equally eloquent comment on our current lack of cultural self-confidence that we do not now have a satisfactory expression for what Churchill called “the English-Speaking peoples.” Armitage quite correctly notes that “social, economic, cultural and religious interactions [have taken] precedence over political and institutional continuities” in much recent academic historiography, and of course the cultural and other influences, mutual and external, of the English-speaking peoples have been of obvious global importance in the past few centuries. But despite the interest of historians in culture, language, and other non-political topics, we have no adequate term for “Greater Britain,” that most influential of linguistic and cultural communities. Although the occlusion of purely political history might have allowed space for an integrated history of the politically divided English-speaking world, that trend has been accompanied by a distaste for master narratives, and any coherent account of Britain, its diaspora, and its global consequences would be above all the grand narrative of a dominant culture.

A number of possible names for that culture exist, but none are very satisfactory. The term “the English-speaking peoples” puts its sole emphasis on language, has a perhaps outdated air of Churchillian orotundity, and has no satisfactory adjectival cognate. The notion of an “Anglosphere” has been put forward by some commentators, but the term is awkward and also has no corresponding adjective.<sup>82</sup> Similar ideas have been advanced by the eminent historian Robert Conquest, though without proposing an effective name.<sup>83</sup> Niall Ferguson has coined the term “Anglobalization,” but it is close to impossible to pronounce and is unlikely to catch on.<sup>84</sup> “Anglo-Saxon,” though still used in French, has in English undesirable and also indelible connotations of the biologically essentialist racism of a

century ago. “Anglo-American,” aside from excluding the antipodeans, might be understood in a similar racial sense by many in the United States. Pocock, borrowing from the New Zealand historian James Belich, has suggested “neo-Britains” as a term for societies founded by British colonists, and though reasonable enough—a certain place called New England has been fairly important—it has the twin disadvantages of not including the original and historically central British island and state, and of sounding foreign to Americans.<sup>85</sup>

Armitage professes to find value in the idea of “Greater Britain,” but I doubt that he intends to write its history: his colleagues’ sensibilities would not put up with greatness. They recoil from even the elements of unity and centrality contained in the names of Britain and the United States, and Armitage himself often has trouble writing without derisive inverted commas of the actually existing, self-described political entities commonly known as Britain and the United States.<sup>86</sup> He sometimes feels the need to avoid even the name of “Britain,” speaking of “the Three Kingdoms” or the “archipelago” or the “Islands of the North Atlantic,” and resorting to the infelicitous adjective “archipelagic” as a substitute for “British,” as though the British Isles were a bunch of South Sea kingships of roughly equivalent influence.<sup>87</sup> It is, to be fair, Pocock who first told us of this “archipelago” that few past Britons ever named: most past Britons were inclined to speak in the singular of “our Island,” as in *Our Island Story*.<sup>88</sup> In a similar vein, Armitage’s “*United States of American*” flaunts its advanced sensibilities. If anyone had the combination of foolhardiness and erudition required to write a history of Greater Britain, typographic games and other forms of mockery would not be far behind.

Let me suggest the adjective “Anglian” to describe the world that Dilke named “Greater Britain.” It is of course derived from the Latin name for the original English-speaking country, the country whose culture, constitution, economic practices, ideologies, and technology have been, as Dilke wrote, so widely influential around the globe. It is appropriate that the centrality of England should be thus emphasized: this polemic is written in English, not Welsh or Irish. At the same time, the “Anglian world” is a term sufficiently free of other connotations that it is open to definition. The Anglian world

might be thought of—following the suggestion of Freeman and any number of other Victorian historians<sup>89</sup>—as a group of societies comparable to the ancient Hellenistic world, sharing an origin, a language, a culture, and a history, the latter obviously not always a history of comity. As one might intelligibly say that classical Athens was more central to the Hellenistic world than was Armenia, it ought to be obvious, the egalitarian sensibilities of the present aside, that Gladstone’s London and Eisenhower’s Washington were more central and more important than most other contemporaneous places. We ought further to be able to speak of the states that worked under the names of England or Britain or the United States without playing word games or feeling the need to disport too many ironic inverted commas: the people who lived—and live—in those countries did not in the main treat them with derision.

It is easy to think of ways in which one can intelligibly speak of the Anglian nations together or comparatively. They have the most aged constitutions in the modern world, the left-wing Scottish nationalist Tom Nairn having recently described the creations of 1689 and 1787 without notable affection as “bath-chair constitutions” and “codgers.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the only country with a case of what might be called constitution-olatry comparable to that of Hanoverian and Victorian England is today’s United States. One might explain the resilience of those codgers by reference to their geographical separation from Eurasia, and the consequent relative non-involvement of standing armies in their politics, but that would be what Armitage stigmatizes as “geographical determinism,” and we are twice warned against such “Euro-skeptical” attitudes and “anti-Europeanism”:<sup>91</sup> as so often, a disparaging label stands in place of an argument.

The Anglian world came together three times in the twentieth century when faced with threats from Eurasia, but we are warned that too much focus on this fact would lead to “the distorting influences of Cold War, NATO historiography.”<sup>92</sup> NATO is an organization whose merits and significance can of course be debated, but that is quite precisely what Armitage feels it unnecessary to do. Instead, we have only another of his ideological prohibitions. We would need to disregard the interdiction against “NATO history” in order to observe that the Anglian world retains today a degree

of military and political cohesiveness whose history goes back a century, as recent events in Iraq have demonstrated. Whatever one thinks of that cohesion—and its value is of course far from uncontested—it is a fact. The Anglian nations, including Australia and to some degree English Canada, are among the few Western countries in which the military is widely held in high esteem and, for better or worse, in which armed force is considered an admissible tool of foreign policy. One might also mention the leading role of technology in the Anglian domination of modern global history, from the Royal Navy’s discovery of a means of determining longitude to the Pentagon-inspired internet. On the other side of this particular coin, it was the Anglian world that gave birth, nearly simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic, to the modern world’s first secular peace movements, and also to the kind of liberal internationalism that resulted in the League of Nations and its successor organization. Scholars such as Martin Ceadel have explained Anglian liberal internationalism as a consequence of geography—Britain and the United States are close enough to Europe to be concerned by events there, but not so close as to be preoccupied by threats—but of course we have been warned against “geographical determinism,” though not favored with an explanation of why geography may not explain some aspects of history.<sup>93</sup>

Not everything that one might say about the Anglian world will universally be thought positive. A strain of judgmental and at times almost Manichean public moralism that can be linked to evangelical Protestantism has informed public affairs in the Anglian countries since at least the seventeenth century. That moralism can be connected to what are by pan-Western standards unforgiving attitudes toward failure and criminality, and unusually high incarceration rates. Many Anglian countries have endemic traditions of lower-class violence, from English football hooliganism to American lynch-law and Australian bushranging. Many will connect that observation to the fact that the Anglian countries are among the most economically unequal nations in the modern West. It is primarily in the Anglian countries today, within the advanced West as a whole, that unabashedly free-enterprise, small government, anti-tax parties have any serious chance of winning office: many British leftists hope to overcome this regrettable fact by submerging their

country in Europe, rather as in Canada such parties normally have been relegated to the opposition benches by the predominant role of non-Anglian Quebec within the Ottawa federation.

Outside the world created by British emigration, Anglian influence has been great: among the most influential creations of the British in India and Africa was a Fabian intelligentsia weaned on the anti-imperialist radicalism of J.A. Hobson—"an India which we cannot fight," as Dilke projected. The Indian National Congress was intimately connected to the Fabian Society, and many of the first generation of post-colonial leaders, from Nehru to Nyerere, learned their statist and anti-capitalist economic views at the feet of such preceptors as Harold Laski of the London School of Economics: perhaps here, in the economic failures of the era of independence, is a legitimate reason for post-colonial guilt.

Like the Hellenistic world of antiquity, the influence of the modern Anglian world has been wide and deep, for better and for worse. We live in a world that argues in English about free trade, individual rights, constitutional change, and the consequences of technology. One could go on to mention any number of ways, demographic, cultural, economic, political, and military among others, in which the Anglian world is a useful name for an object of historical thought. An era that, as Armitage points out, has refused to have its history written on purely national, political, or state-oriented lines should be open to the parallels and confluences within and without the Anglian world. But such a history would also have to note that the states calling themselves England and the United States have been of preeminent power and hence importance over the past two or more centuries.

The problem here is obvious. Armitage wants to argue for the usefulness of "Greater Britain" as a fundamentally misconceived "category of analysis," but he dislikes the two most powerful states to have been created by "Greater Britain": the state that most Victorians, in common with Seeley, called "England"—a usage that gets an egregious "sic," notwithstanding Seeley's careful definition—and the United States, whose name he is equally pleased to annotate.<sup>94</sup> It would be difficult to write a history whose principal actors one wants to dismiss as "fictive," and whose names one has trouble writing without dismissive irony. Evident disinterest in constitutional,

military, naval, and economic affairs, which is to say in many of their greatest historical achievements, will be an additional obstacle. Impelled by the sensibilities of the present and the bureaucratic necessities of the academy, we end not with an idea of Greater Britain, but with only the prospect of a succession of lesser Britains, scattered about the “archipelago” and indeed the globe, leaving the centers of imperial agency rather to the side, which is quite precisely where they do not belong. If historians need another highly theorized, transhistorical “category of analysis,” perhaps it is that of importance.

Although Armitage ends by observing that British history did not always happen in Britain—a fact of course well known to Seeley and Dilke—nor American in the United States, and calling for “novel integrative histories,” it is hard to see how the histories of the Anglian peoples could accurately be integrated beginning from a frame of mind ideologically hostile to our two most important historical polities. Those two states have between them commanded the often enthusiastic loyalties of most of the Anglian peoples over the past few centuries: to denigrate them is to denigrate those peoples. While I would not suggest that the historian must always like his subjects—Gibbon denigrated quite well—some imaginative sympathy for the past and its values is surely requisite. The Anglian story will probably be best told by a historian like Seeley, or indeed Churchill, who can find something in it and in its most important states and their achievements worthy of his esteem, or at least of his engaged interest. An integrative history of the Anglian world will have to go far beyond “the normal boundaries and expectations” of the academic mind, boundaries that the *American Historical Review* has mapped, and indeed fenced off, in such close detail.

## NOTES

1. <http://www.historycooperative.org/ahr/guidelines.html>, accessed 17 October 2005.
2. David Armitage, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 427–445; and “Greater Britain,” in David Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516–1776* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1–19. Pagination in the latter volume is strange, reflecting the fact that it is a set of photographic reprints of articles, preserving their original page numbers. References here are to the original *AHR* version.
3. J.G.A. Pocock, “The New British History in Atlantic Perspective: An Antipodean Commentary,” *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 490–500.

4. [The Editors], "AHR Forum: The New British History in Atlantic Perspective," *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 426.
5. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
6. David Gilmour, "Calcutta in the Cotswolds," *London Review of Books*, 3 Mar. 2005, 13–16 at 14.
7. Leo Ribuffo, "Why is There so Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do so Few Historians Know Anything about It?" *American Historical Review*, 99: 2 (Apr. 1994): 438–449 at 439.
8. Sir John Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London, 1883).
9. See for instance, Nicholas Canny, "The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History," *The Journal of American History* (Dec. 1999): 1093–1114 at 1100; and Ian Tyrrell, "Making Nations/Making States: American Historians in the Context of Empire," *The Journal of American History* (Dec. 1999): 1015–1044 at 1024.
10. Eliga H. Gould, "A Virtual Nation: Greater Britain and the Legacy of the American Revolution," *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 476–489; Jane Ohlmeyer, "Seventeenth Century Ireland and the New British and Atlantic Histories," *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 446–462; Ned C. Landsman, "Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire," *American Historical Review*, 104: 2 (Apr. 1999): 463–475; and Pocock, "The New British History," 490–500.
11. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 428.
12. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).
13. Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
14. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 8.
15. James E. Thorold Rogers, ed., *Speeches by John Bright, M.P.* (London, 1869), vol. II, 382.
16. The best secondary source on mid-Victorian imperial "separatism," as it was called, remains C.A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (London: Heinemann, 1960 [1924]). Central primary sources on the desirability of getting rid of colonies are Goldwin Smith, *The Empire* (Oxford and London, 1863); Sir Charles Adderley, *Review of 'The Colonial Policy of Lord J. Russell's Administration,' by Earl Grey, 1853; and of Subsequent Colonial History*, 2 vols. (London, 1869).
17. Lord Blachford, "The Integrity of the British Empire," *Nineteenth Century* (Oct. 1877), 355–365 at 355.
18. David Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516–1776*, 97–118.
19. Baron Macaulay, *The History of England, from the Accession of James II*, C.H. Firth, ed., (London, 1913–1915), vol. VI, 2907–2934.
20. John Morley, "The Expansion of England," *MacMillan's Magazine* (Feb. 1884), 241–243.
21. Morley, "The Expansion of England," 244.
22. Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London, 1909 [1843]), 163.
23. Richard Cobden, *Political Writings*, second edition (London, 1868), vol. I, 289–290.
24. See for instance, the leading Victorian biography of Pitt, which returns relentlessly to imperial themes. Earl Stanhope, *Life of the Rt. Hon. William Pitt* (London, 1861–1862), vol. I, 129–203; vol. III, 189–203; vol. IV, 317–349; and *passim*.
25. C.I. Hamilton, "Naval Historiography and the Victorian Hero," *Historical Journal*, 23: 2 (June 1980): 381–398 at 382. For dictionaries, see John Marshall, *Royal Naval Biography*, 12 vols. (London, 1823–1830); and William R. O'Byrne, *A Naval Biographical Dictionary* (London, 1849).
26. Winston Spencer Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (London, 1898); and *The River War*, 2 vols. (London, 1899). Other representative examples are Major George Chesney, *Indian Polity: A View* (London, 1868); Henry Brackenbury, *The Ashanti War: A Narrative*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1874); Colonel R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *The Matabele Campaign* (London, 1897). Chesney, Brackenbury, and Baden-Powell are names well known to students of the Victorian army, and names that were well known to the Victorian public.

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27. To take only South African examples closely contemporary with Seeley, see for instance, Frances E. Colenso and Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Durnford, *History of the Zulu War and its Origin* (London, 1881); Thomas J. Lucas, *The Zulus and the British Frontiers* (London, 1879); William Henry Parr Greswell, *Our South African Empire*, 2 vols. (London, 1885); and F. Reginald Statham, *Blacks Boers and British: A Three-Cornered Problem* (London, 1881).
28. In the above list, the works of Colenso, Durnford, Lucas, and Statham fall into the anti-imperialist category, while Greswell defended the imperial campaign.
29. George Cornewall Lewis, *An Essay on the Government of Dependencies* (London, 1841).
30. Herman Merivale, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*, new edition (London, 1861); John Arthur Roebuck, M.P., *The Colonies of England: A Plan for the Government of Some Portion of our Colonial Possessions* (London, 1849); Earl Grey, *The Colonial Policy Of Lord John Russell's Administration* (London, 1853); Viscount Bury, *Exodus of the Western Nations* (London, 1865); Edward Gibbon Wakefield, *A View of the Art of Colonization: With Present Reference to the British Empire* (London, 1849); H.R. Fox-Bourne, *The Story of Our Colonies* (London, 1888 [1869]).
31. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 430–431.
32. Dilke by 1885 considered his work to be completely out of date, and withdrew it from publication despite the fact that it continued to sell well, as he remarks in the preface to his later *Problems of Greater Britain*. The latter work is cited by Armitage, though one may wonder, given this error about the prominence of Dilke's first work, whether he read as far as the introduction. Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain* (London, 1890), vii.
33. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 6–7.
34. Sir Julius Vogel, "Greater or Lesser Britain," *Nineteenth Century* (July 1877), 809–831.
35. Charles Dilke, *Greater Britain*, fourth edition (London, 1869), viii, 403–563.
36. See, for instance, Lewis, *Essay on the Government of Dependencies*, 173; Merivale, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*, xii; and Fox-Bourne, *The Story of our Colonies*, 187–190.
37. Dilke, *Greater Britain*, viii; C.P. Lucas, *Introduction to a Historical Geography of the British Colonies* (Oxford, 1887), 3; and Edward A. Freeman, *Greater Greece and Greater Britain and George Washington, The Expander of England: Two Lectures* (London, 1886), esp. 84–91.
38. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 58.
39. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 179–290, 17–36.
40. These and other names are listed as participants in Forster et. al., "Imperial Federation League: Report of the Adjourned Conference, 1884" (London, [1884]).
41. "Letter from Seeley," in W.E. Forster, *Imperial Federation: Report of the Conference held July 29, 1884* (London, 1884), 18–20.
42. Quoted in Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: A. & C. Black, 1972), vol. II, 65.
43. J.R. Seeley, *The Growth of British Policy* (Cambridge, 1895).
44. C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 207–208.
45. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 110.
46. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 110–111.
47. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 131.
48. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), vol. II, 146–256; Jeremy Bentham, "Emancipate Your Colonies!" [1793], *Rights, Representation and Reform*, Philip Schofield, Catherine Pease-Watkin, and Cyprian Blamires, eds., *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 297–311; James Mill, "Colony," *Essays from the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (London, 1992 [1828]), 19–29; and John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Society*, ed. John M. Robson, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), vol. XIX, 562–563.
49. Richard Cobden, "1793 and 1853," in *Political Writings*, vol. I, 195, 195n.
50. J.S. Corton and E.J. Payne, *Colonies and Dependencies* (London, 1883), esp. 117–124.
51. H.J. Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas* (London: William Heinemann, 1902); and John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: Robert Nisbet, 1902).

52. W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (Cambridge, 1882), and *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times* (Cambridge, 1892); and also W.J. Ashley, *Surveys Historical and Economic* (London, 1900). A secondary account of academic economic history and its attack on the deductive character of classical political economy is Alon Kadish, *Historians, Economists and Economic History* (London: Routledge, 1989).
53. [W. Bagehot], "Mr Cobden," *Economist* (8 April 1865), 397–398 at 397; and Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 83.
54. Hobson, *Imperialism*; Mackinder, *Britain and the British Seas*; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, 53/54, Second Series, VI: 1 (1953): 1–15; Lance Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: the Economics of British Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
55. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, 8: 1 (1969), 3–53 at 48–49.
56. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 431.
57. Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 298–300.
58. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 429.
59. Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, 3 vols. (London, 1882 [1855]).
60. Armitage, *Greater Britain*, 1–19.
61. A.P. Thornton, *For the File on Empire* (London: MacMillan, 1968), 300.
62. David Bromwich, *Politics by Other Means: Higher Education and Group Thinking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 112, 114.
63. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 432.
64. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 428, 439.
65. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 440.
66. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 442.
67. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 437.
68. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 444.
69. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 429, 438.
70. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 434.
71. H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875–1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 256.
72. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 438.
73. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 430, 431, 443.
74. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 161 and passim.
75. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 431, 432, 433, 438, 444.
76. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 432.
77. Thomas Bender, "Strategies of Narrative Synthesis in American History," *American Historical Review*, 107: 1 (Feb. 2002), < <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.1/ah0102000129.html> > (accessed 26 Nov. 2005), para 17.
78. Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review*, 91: 5 (Dec. 1986): 1053–1075.
79. Dilke, *Greater Britain*, vii–viii.
80. Dilke, *Greater Britain*, 505, 543–544.
81. J.A. Froude, *Oceana, or England and Her Colonies* (London, 1886).
82. James C. Bennett, *The Anglosphere Challenge: Why the English-Speaking Nations Will Lead the Way in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004).
83. Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York: Norton, 2000), esp. 24.
84. Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
85. J.G.A. Pocock, "The New British History," 492, 492n.
86. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 439.
87. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 440, 441, 444, 445.

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88. J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *Journal of Modern History*, 47: 4 (Dec. 1975): 603, and passim; and Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall, *Our Island Story: A Child's History of England* (London: Jack, 2005).
89. Edward A. Freeman, *Greater Greece and Greater Britain*, 5, 31–32.
90. Tom Nairn, "The Empire's Last Stand," *London Review of Books*, 26: 12 (24 June 2004): 13–15 at 14.
91. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 428, 431, 444.
92. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 444.
93. Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730–1854* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 200–210; and Martin Ceadel, *Thinking about Peace and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
94. Armitage, "Greater Britain," 443.