

Little America

Australia, the 51st State

ERIK PAUL

 **Pluto Press**
LONDON • ANN ARBOR, MI

The New Imperialism

Current theories of international morality have been designed to perpetuate the supremacy of English-speaking peoples.

E. H. Carr

AUSTRALIA IN THE EMPIRE

Australia and the US have much in common. Both were born out of British invasions of the new world and the brutal dispossession of indigenous land and culture to form new nation-states. While their histories diverged for many generations, there has been a marked convergence in recent decades with Australia increasingly an adjunct to US foreign policy and more like the US in shaping its politics and civil society. Binding the similarities in economic and political culture is a shared messianic crusade to save the world from chaos and evil and a vision of a new world order promising prosperity and peace.

The Americanisation of Australia is an important phenomenon which is changing what Australia is about in ways the country relates to the world and transforms its economy and society. Why is Australia so close and so much like the United States? At the core of this issue is Australia's modern imperial history and the construction of a colonial mentality of dependency on protection from a powerful patron. Australia's nation-state is a modern creation of the British Empire and the expansion of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. From the beginning, Australia's nation-building has been sustained by a series of confrontations with Asia moving from colonial consolidation and Cold War to a new world of globalisation and war against terrorism.*

Australia's modern history as a nation-state has been shaped and constructed by its relations with non-Europeans. Captain Cook's landing on the shore of what is today Sydney marked the beginning of

* The geography of the Asia-Pacific includes all the countries listed under Asia in the Australian Bureau of Statistics, appendix 2 of the Balance of Payment Regional Series, 5338-0, 2001-02. Countries which are part of Asia can also be found under regional headings of West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, in addition to a number of Pacific Island states important to Australia and discussed in this book.

more than 200 years of 'aggression, injustice and inhumanity towards the Aboriginal people of this land' (Coombs 1980). The dispossession of their land and culture began with the raising of the British flag and by 1830 the entire continent and the islands of Norfolk and Tasmania had been taken in the name of Britain. Aboriginal armed resistance in the interior of the continent continued into the 1920s. Torres Strait islands were taken by Queensland's colonial government in the 1870s, and in 1883 Queensland annexed what is today the southern half of New Guinea.

Invasion raised the question of proprietorship and the legitimacy of taking a continent from its inhabitants, which in turn engendered fear that people in the region, particularly Chinese, would take the land from British settlers. Asian migrants came in large numbers and their success in working the land and business enterprise brought them into conflict with Anglo-Irish settlers. In the 1880s non-Europeans were in a majority in tropical Australia. 'Asians made up half of the settler population in the Northern Territory and Western Australia and more than half in Darwin, Broome and Thursday Island' (Reynolds 2003:xv). Competition for resources formed the basis for the intense level of racism against Asians during that period. Architects of the white-Australia policy such as Isaac Isaacs manipulated the crowds with his call to free Australia 'for all time from the contaminating and degrading influence of inferior races' (Reynolds 2003:160).

Fear of invasion by Asia's 'yellow hordes' was legislated for in the 1896 New South Wales Coloured Races Restriction Bill, the first of many colonial laws, which barred entry to 'all persons belonging to any coloured race inhabiting the Continent of Asia, or the Continent of Africa, of any island adjacent thereto, or any island in the Pacific or Indian oceans' (Yarwood 1964:1). Alfred Deakin, who played a leading role in the creation of the continent's federation, tabled the commonwealth's first piece of legislation, the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901, which he said was to uphold the purity of the 'British race' and to 'exclude alien Asiatics as well as the people of Japan' (Meaney 1999:18).

The act of federation led to new waves of dispossession and deportation. Asian settlers were encouraged to leave and thousands of islanders were deported after 1904 under the Pacific Island Labourers Act. Racism had become the foundation of Australia's identity. An anti-Asian mentality justified the taking of the continent and aggression against its Aboriginal population. Race supremacy legitimised the conquest. It brought to a quick end the existence

of a vibrant multicultural society in northern Australia. As a result tropical Australia 'stagnated. It became a backwater – increasingly mono-cultural, socially conservative, provincial – which is the way it was seen by outsiders during much of the twentieth century. It also became more racist than it had ever been in the past' Reynolds 2003:187).

Australia's important military role in the British Empire was to expand and protect its territorial and commercial integrity. Australia sent troops to New Zealand to fight the Maoris' attempt to keep the British out of their islands. Then came military expeditions to the Sudan and South Africa, and to China to put down a native rebellion against European presence and the British policy of creating an addiction to opium amongst the Chinese. Later during the West's major civil war (World War I), Australia intervened in Turkey and Egypt, and added German northeast New Guinea to its growing empire. These were all preliminaries to the coming Pacific battles and mass killing of World War II.

Japan was modernising and rising to the challenge of Western imperialism. New ideologies about liberty and class struggle in the region were contesting Western presence and exploitation. Japan's territorial aggrandisement and commercial and military expansion challenged Anglo-American hegemony in a series of power plays among imperial players. The treaties between Japan and Britain in 1902 and Japan and the US in the Taft-Katsura agreement of 1905, were attempts to negotiate an understanding about the division of spoils in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan could keep Korea and Taiwan as long as it did not interfere with Anglo-American colonies and regional commercial interests. Imperial geopolitics put the contestants on a collision course and Australia was irremediably drawn into preparations for war. Prime Minister Alfred Deakin invited the US Great White Fleet to visit Sydney in 1908 as a sign that 'England, America and Australia will be united to withstand yellow aggression' (Macintyre 1999:142).

During WWI Prime Minister Billy Hughes warned Australians that should Germany win the war 'this lonely outpost of the white man's civilisation will be deprived of its scanty garrison and left open to cheap Asiatics, reduced to the social and economic level of Paraguay or some other barbarian country' (Victoria 2002:3). After the war, Hughes voted against Japan's motion for 'racial' equality in the League of Nations and made sure that trade in the newly acquired German New Guinea would be monopolised by Australia and free of Japanese

and Chinese traders or migrants. In the 1930s Australia's restrictions on non-British imports brought retaliation against its wool export to Japan. Australia's discrimination against Japanese migrants became a source of anger and anti-Western sentiment in Japan which was manipulated to advantage by nationalistic and militaristic domestic forces (Walker 1999; Meaney 1996).

Preparation for war against Japan unfolded in the 1930s with the inclusion of Australia in the defence of the British Empire. Britain withdrew from the Anglo-Japanese alliance and reconfigured Singapore island as a naval fortress, partly to protect Australia's north, and the US built up its forces in colonial Philippines against Japan's southern expansion. Imperial confrontation gained momentum with the rise of nationalism and demands for independence in the region. Communism was a growing political force in many parts of Asia and a threat to colonialism and to Japan's militarist culture. In Australia, fascism was mobilising larger sections of society. Japan went to war on the slogan of 'Asia for the Asians' while the West called for an end of fascism in the name of liberty and freedom. With the fall of British Singapore and the surrender of some 16,000 troops, Australia was at war with Japan. The arrival in 1942 of General MacArthur in Darwin, to take command of all Australian forces, marked the beginning of Australia's role as an adjunct to the US empire.

Australia's confrontation with Asia after WWII was an integral part of the Anglo-American alliance against communism. The Cold War was another hegemonic war between the US and Russia which expanded throughout the world largely because it became entangled with anti-imperialist movements and wars in many territories occupied by Western forces. In Asia the rise of nationalism and demands for independence destabilised the entire region, and Mao Tse Tung's Communist Party victory in 1949 raised anew Australia's fears of an Asiatic invasion. Communism was the new enemy, another disease which, like the plague, had to be fought off throughout the Asia-Pacific region to save white Australia from destruction. Australia's new axis of evil went from China to the whole of Southeast Asia.

From the late 1940s, Australian military units intervened in Malaya, Singapore, Borneo, Korea, New Guinea and in Malta to defend British power in Egypt. In 1954 Australia joined the US, NZ, Britain and France in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) to secure Western colonial interest in Indochina, Thailand and Pakistan. Other treaties signed in the 1950s such as ANZUS (Australia–New Zealand–US) further incorporated Australia in the Anglo-American

alliance to regain control of the Asia-Pacific region. A watershed was the Vietnam war. Australia started by sending advisers in 1962 followed by a full-scale military intervention in 1965. At the time, Australia was collaborating with the US push for a regime change in Indonesia. Covert operations by intelligence agencies enabled General Suharto's military takeover and contributed to the massacre of large numbers of Sukarno supporters and other outcasts. Under Suharto's rule, close to 100,000 political prisoners were detained without trial for many years in Indonesia's gulag.

After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union Australia became a sheriff of the US new world order. Australia was the first country to join the alliance in the 1991 Gulf war against Iraq, and this was followed by sending troops to Cambodia to effect a regime change in 1993. In the late 1990s Australia became a major enforcer in controlling the 'arc of instability' to its north with operations in Papua New Guinea's (PNG) war against Bougainville, and, after Suharto's resignation in 1998, in the 'liberation' of East Timor from Indonesia. In 2002 Australia sent troops to Afghanistan and the following year took part in the US invasion of Iraq. In 2003 Australia's military went to the Solomon Islands to take over the administration of the country, and the following year began operations to resume control of the country's budget, courts and police force.

With the election of John Howard's conservative coalition in 1996, Australia became an integral part of the US–UK global geostrategy, and more assertive in its relations with the world and its region. A major regional task for Australia has been to advance the causes of market fundamentalism particularly in island states where Australia has a dominant economic position. Elsewhere in Asia, Australia has been engaged in strategies to weaken economic regionalism and promote an Anglo-American model of capitalism, particularly in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN). One ploy has been the formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to counteract the economic power of the European Union and weaken proposals for an East Asian economic bloc dominated by China which would exclude Australia and the US.

Australia's policy to secure the 'arc of instability' – the crescent of islands to the north of the continent – has been a fixture of foreign policy since federation. In 1943, H.V. Evatt, the minister for external affairs, declared that Australia's security 'depended upon it controlling an arc of territory from northern Australia stretching some 2,400 km

to encompass Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies, New Guinea and the adjacent islands' (Day 2001:230). In more recent times, control of Australia's problematic north led to the 'liberation' of East Timor in 1999, followed by military intervention in PNG and the Solomon Islands. Moreover, Australia put neighbouring countries on notice about the right to preemptive strikes to safeguard its national interests when in December 2002 John Howard stated on public and commercial TV that he was prepared to order attacks against terrorists in Asia (Barker 2002). Of particular concern to Australia is the growing strength of Islam in Indonesian politics and attacks against Christian minorities in the region.

Beyond the Pacific islands states and Indonesia, Australia is shaping the formation of an East Asian version of Europe's North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with Japan, South Korea and Singapore. The construction of a regional security architecture aims to maintain political regimes friendly to the Anglo-American alliance and destroy movements which might constitute a threat to its economic and political security. However, the main game is to manage a regional balance of power and encourage unfriendly relations between China and Japan, and to confront China's emergence as a potential challenger to US hegemony. Australia has an important role to play in this global power competition with the militarisation of the continent functioning as part of the US global nuclear and missile defence strategy (Bush 2002).

Australia's symbiotic relationship with the US is part of the global expansion of capitalism and the transformation of society by the unremitting pressure of a market economy. Capitalism has been an important factor in the history of modern Australia – from the early years of primitive accumulation through dispossession of indigenous land and resources to the eager adoption of an American model of capitalism in more recent years. Australia needs a substantial share of Asia's growing wealth to sustain its living standards and liberal democracy but the security of this enterprise is based on US hegemony to safeguard Australia's markets and capital investments in the region. US power is the country's insurance policy for the security of some 20 million people on one of the richest and largest pieces of real estate in the world.

The expansion of capitalist activities in Australia has led to a shift of power from citizens to corporations and a neo-right political elite. In recent years there has been a marked decline in Australia's democracy and a rise in the suppressive powers of the state. To a

large extent the process has been dictated by the adoption of a US model of economic and political culture. This is clearly exemplified with the dominance in the country's universities of US business and management values and practices, and the political weight of neoconservative think-tanks in Australia's political life. Another major factor in the Americanisation of Australia are the restrictions imposed over the years on the rights of employees. Government policy to control labour practices and relations has disempowered the union movement. Legislation passed in late 2005 will further control labour relations and shift more workers to the minimum wage. The University of Sydney's Professor Russell Lansbury, a leading academic in industrial relations, commented that the new legislation will further undermine employees' right to work and will promote greater social inequity (Lansbury 2005).

Civil society is changing dramatically because of the widespread privatisation of public assets and the expansion of market forces in education, government services and infrastructure. At the same time the role and power of corporations has altered the nature of Australia's politics and civil society. There are many aspects to this change seen in the pressure of advertising and consumerism encroaching in everyday life and that of corporate excision of urban space. Corporations are gaining control of shopping areas, gated communities, parklands, schools, museums and libraries, roads and airports, as well as large tracts of rural Australia. Australia's market democracy is fuelled by postmodern greed and the accumulation of more wealth. An obsession on making money, buying bigger cars and houses, and the production of waste has become a dominant character in social and economic life. The politics of economic growth and mass consumption has become national policy and advertised as the solution to rising problems of unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation. While rich Australians benefit from generous tax cuts there has been a marked decline in the quality of public education, transport and health.

There are substantial social costs to Australia's neoliberal regime such as a high rate of incarceration and white-collar crime and political corruption. Social pathologies are a dominant feature of economic rationalism and a high percentage of the population suffers from mental-health problems. Australia shares with other affluent overdeveloped societies the more complex social problems of mass gambling and drug addiction. Another outcome is the looming environmental crisis signalled by many disturbing phenomena

such as the unhealthy state of the country's major river systems, the extent of salinity and land degradation, and the loss of biodiversity (Lowe 2005). Despite a scientific consensus that Australia's climate is warming up, the government has made no significant effort to reduce Australia's ranking as the highest greenhouse-gas emitter per capita among industrialised countries.

Australia and the United States have a sense of exceptionalism in their foreign policy and manifest destiny to shape the world order. Their elite share a view that their civilisation is under threat from dark forces in Asia and in the Islamic heartland, and are suspicious of continental Europe's commitment to democracy. Both countries are partners in an Anglo-American Christian mission to protect and advance what is good and moral for the world. Australia's political and economic elite enthusiastically support the US-led agenda to reform and internationalise national economies and incorporate nation-states into a 'free trade' global economy. Anglo-American capitalism's recipe for success is popularised in Australia by works such as Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* which claims that prosperity comes from wearing the 'Golden Straitjacket'. But Friedman reminds us that the pathway to a free world for market capitalism needs a firm hand and the 'hidden hand of the market will never work without [the] hidden fist' of the US military (Friedman 1999:373).

NEW IMPERIALISM

Since the end of the Cold War the US new world order has failed to deliver on the American dream of prosperity and liberty for all of humanity. The new world order is turning out to be another form of imperialism based on the politics of mass deceit. World poverty and inequality are increasing and the institutions of global governance are largely means by which rich countries maintain their affluence and set up rules which deprive others of the opportunities to join their ranks. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have generated economic stagnation and crisis and increased the suffering of the poor. The US-designed system of global governance has proven incapable of meeting the needs of humanity in times of crisis and unwilling to prevent human disaster as in the case of the 1994 Rwanda genocide (Dallaire 2004). Instead, the US-led coalition has chosen to respond to the problems of poverty and exclusion by military means and

preemptive strikes against those who rebel against an unjust world system.

Since the end of the Cold War the G7 neoliberal and free trade policies have caused widespread human suffering and environmental degradation among poorer countries. Joseph Stiglitz blames the IMF for increasing poverty and inequality in many parts of the world (Stiglitz 2002). US finance capitalism has been a key instrument to gain control and bribe governments. Debt and the addiction to money and promises of more loans have been used to cajole and further bribe governments to reform their economies (Perkins 2004; Pettifor 2003; US 2003). Jagdish Bhagwati has denounced the 'Wall Street-Treasury complex' for engineering major financial crises and setting back the agenda on human development and democratisation (Bhagwati 2004). Chalmers Johnson describes the IMF as 'an instrument of American power, one that allows the United States to collect money from its allies and to spend the amassed funds on various international economic operations that serve American national interests' (Johnson 1998:659). Andrew Bacevich and others argue that globalisation is above all a coherent strategy to expand the American imperium (Bacevich 2001; Gowan 1999; Smith 2004).

A world capitalist economy entrenches poverty and makes it impossible for developing regions and countries to catch up with the richer parts of the world. Trade rules implemented by the WTO advance the interest of corporations and rich countries. Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang focuses on the nature of exploitation in the new world order in his findings that rules introduced by the WTO and other institutions of global governance are not meant to help poorer countries but to preserve the interests of the G7. He accuses rich countries of 'kicking away the ladder' from underneath poorer countries and preventing the have-nots from becoming 'Americans' (Chang 2003a). Wallerstein's world-system analysis describes the neoliberal offensive as 'one gigantic attempt to slow down the increasing costs of production – primarily by lowering the cost of wages and taxation and secondarily by lowering the cost of inputs via technological advance' (2003a:226). John Gray claims that global capitalism is 'endangering liberal civilization' and that the global free market is an Anglo-American project which 'engenders new varieties of nationalism and fundamentalism ... imposing massive instability on developing countries' (Gray 1999:210).

Susan George has attacked globalisation's construct as directly opposed to human rights because its goal has little to do with the