

# The “American Century” in World History

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On the eve of U.S. participation in World War II in 1941, when the publisher Henry Luce proclaimed that the twentieth century was the American Century, he proposed to mark the entrance of the United States into the mainstream of world history. After a long period of political isolation, he pointed out to Americans in his *Life* magazine, their country was on the verge of assuming a role as a preeminent power, manifesting its economic, cultural, philanthropical, and political influence on societies all over the globe. “Consider the 20th Century,” Luce wrote. “It is [ours] not only in the sense that we happen to live in it but ours also because it is America’s first century as a dominant power in the world.”<sup>1</sup>

World power was the payoff of the American experience. Luce posited, the product of American intellectual, scientific, artistic, and commercial life, and of its prestige. Luce may have been narrow and ethnocentric in his observations of America’s rise. But what deserves attention in its own right is how Luce believed the United States would influence other cultures. He wrote not only of an epic turning point in U.S. history, but of a sea change in world history. What influence would the United States exert on world history? And how would other peoples in developing countries and empires in decline react to that influence?

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<sup>1</sup> Henry R. Luce, “The American Century,” *Life*, 17 February 1941, pp. 61–65. The article was reprinted in a book, Henry R. Luce, *The American Century* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941). “The American Century” was also reprinted in full in the *New York Times*, 4 March 1941, pp. 14–15, and condensed in *Reader’s Digest*, April 1941, pp. 45–49. Luce’s article also appears in U.S. Congress, House, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 5 March 1941, *Congressional Record* 87:1828–31.

Luce's perception of the modern world preceded that of the modernization theorists, but they were working on the same wavelength. Coming to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s, the modernization theorists reflected the American notion that the United States would benefit the rest of the world in its struggle to achieve wealth, democracy, and progress. Like these global thinkers, Luce analyzed the disparity in development between rich and powerful societies and those that were poor and underdeveloped, and he considered the contacts and interchanges between states in capitalistic trade, culture and western lifestyle, economic and technological aid, and liberal democracy. Luce, who founded and became editor-in-chief of *Time* and *Life* and head of the world's largest media empire, examined these issues in simple, nontechnical terms understandable to the general readers of his mass-circulation magazines, and his expressions for a mass audience may help us to comprehend the discourse at home as well as abroad concerning the formation of a world order.<sup>2</sup>

Luce made his assessment of America in the world after he had studied history at Yale and Oxford and traveled across Europe and Asia exploring the sites of ancient and modern history. Born in Dengzhou, China, in 1898, the son of missionaries who were part of a zealous missionary movement, Luce saw China as a nation in decadent decline at a time when the United States was building an empire beyond its North American borders. In 1912 Luce sailed to England, the heart of the venerable British Empire, the most extended of empires, where he learned firsthand about British history by touring the grassy remains of the Roman walls of Verulam and witnessing debate in the mother of parliaments. Before attending Oxford in 1920, he boarded the Orient Express for a trip through scenes of lost empire: Budapest, Bucharest, and Constantinople. During a later stay in Rome, he saw the ruins of the ancient forum, strolled along the Tiber, and reflected on America as an empire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On modernization theory, see C. E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); for a review of the theory's development and critics, see Craig A. Lockard, "Global History, Modernization and the World-System Approach: A Critique," *The History Teacher* 14 (1981): 489-515.

<sup>3</sup> On Luce, see W. A. Swanberg, *Luce and His Empire* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972); John Kobler, *Luce: His Time, Life, and Fortune* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968); Henry Luce, *The Ideas of Henry Luce*, ed. John K. Jessup (New

So when Luce wrote about the American Century, he peered back over twenty centuries, seeking a parallel in power in the empires since antiquity. He looked beyond Rome to the ascendant periods of the Vatican, Genghis Khan, the Ottoman Turks, and the Chinese emperors, and then to nineteenth-century England. After World War I, Lenin projected a world order, and so did Hitler in World War II, but Luce believed their efforts were in vain. Though Luce had opened his survey to nonwestern civilizations, the United States was essentially the culmination of Luce's westward sweep of world empires of the past.<sup>4</sup>

It was the decline of the last of the great global empires, Great Britain, that precipitated Luce's look at America's new world position. He had grown up accepting British power as a constant, and he upheld Britain's stand as a bulwark for democracy, but the German Luftwaffe made havoc of British cities and drove its population underground, and Britain's defense of remote parts of the world through its empire was flagging. He worried that the fall of Britain would set the stage for a possible Japanese attack in the south seas, which would leave the Americans withdrawn to Hawaii to "wait."<sup>5</sup>

Now it was America's turn. Luce believed that a new American world role would benefit the United States. After all, Americans had rejected "an opportunity unprecedented in all history, to assume the leadership of the world" in 1919. They had "bungled it" in the 1920s and had avoided the opportunity in the 1930s. So, for Luce, it was time "to accept wholeheartedly our duty and our

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York: Atheneum, 1969), which includes an introduction on Luce's thought, pp. 3-31; and Patricia Neils, *China Images in the Life and Times of Henry Luce* (Savage, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990). A focus on Luce's business can be found in Robert T. Olson and Curtis Prendergast, *Time Inc.*, 3 vols. (New York: Atheneum, 1968-86); and James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne, 1987).

Henry Luce, speech to "Senior Group" of Time Inc. editors, executives, and writers, New York, 4 May 1950, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 380; Henry Luce to Father and Mother, 19 January 1913, Time Inc. Archives, New York. Verulam, or Verulamium, was the ancient name for St. Albans in southeastern England, where Luce attended school; the town had Roman ruins, including a temple and fragments of a town wall. John George Bartholomew, *Gazetteer of the British Isles* (Edinburgh: John Bartholomew and Son, 1972); Oliver Mason, *The Gazetteer of England* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972); Henry Luce to Father and Mother, 24 December 1920, Time Inc. Archives, New York; Henry Luce, address at Temple University, Philadelphia, 18 June 1953, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 123-25.

<sup>4</sup> Luce, "American Century," p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.”<sup>6</sup>

But in acting in their self-interest, Luce saw four means by which Americans could provide services of modernization to the world. The first area of Luce’s vision was economic. He imagined “America as the principal guarantor of the freedom of the seas” and airways, and as the “leader of world trade.” A second part of the vision was that the United States should send technical and cultural skills throughout the world. Other peoples would welcome highly trained and skilled American engineers, scientists, doctors, movie makers, entertainers, airline developers, road builders, teachers, and educators. A third point of Luce’s vision was foreign aid. “It is the manifest duty of this country,” Luce said, “to undertake to feed all the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilization are hungry and destitute.” Finally, the United States as a world power would have to adhere to its traditional political thought founded on the ideas of freedom and equality of opportunity, as well as “the great principles of Western civilization—above all Justice, the love of Truth, the ideal of Charity.”<sup>7</sup>

Luce saw American power reaching in every direction of the compass: rejuvenating the tired powers of Europe, whose nineteenth-century world order was passing, and uplifting the developing lands that had once been European colonies or spheres of influence. If Britain had been a great power of the recent past, China was a big but weak ancient country ready once again for renewal, this time by contacts with the modern United States. America, Luce thought, was taking over the role once played by Europe: led by Britain in the period after 1750, Europe had gone on “from strength to strength,” proceeding from “the Age of Enlightenment to the Age of Empire,” and engineering a technological revolution in communications between the Old World and the New, with the printing press, ever-faster sailing ships, and the steamboat. So for Luce, modernization meant westernization, or more specifically, perhaps to a large degree, Americanization. America, Luce was pleased to say, had been spared the splendor

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

and the burden of empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and he saw no irony in its present position. “We are required today to assume worldwide responsibilities, but not in the sense of imperialism,” he explained. Free of wild swings between democracy and tyrannies and the ugly conflict of class warfare stirred up by Karl Marx and communism, America offered to the world “a new land, with a fresh start.”<sup>8</sup>

In the economic realm, Luce saw U.S. goods, capital, and currency benefiting the millions of peoples looking to America “to achieve some small part of the material welfare of this age of science and technology. They want it—and intend to have it soon.” When Chiang Kaishek was asked what he wanted to do when the war ended, Luce quoted him saying, “Build railroads.” Chinese plans for railroads prompted Luce to predict that with modern transportation the people would solve “a basic fault in their agriculture—the specter of famine in one province while ruinous surpluses are piling up in another.” The Chinese further planned to build hydroelectric power plants, and they sought machinery and the technical skill to go with it. In short, they wanted “to lift, and lift again, their standard of living.”<sup>9</sup>

Luce understood the phenomenon of technology transfer in simple terms. He found an American model in Westinghouse Electric International, which by building new factories in China and Mexico demonstrated modern technology. Luce encouraged financial investment in physical capital, but more than most business leaders he recognized the added value of investment in human capital. He appreciated that Westinghouse taught the Chinese and Mexicans to run their factories by bringing the workers to East Pittsburgh to gain the necessary know-how. Westinghouse management doubted that this investment was going to deal the company out of the Chinese and Mexican markets for waffle irons and light bulbs, and would certainly not put it out of the market for generators, transmission equipment, and high technology equipment. On the contrary, this association was to be mutually profitable. Luce had no conception of other nations mounting an industrial challenge to the United States. The name “Westinghouse”

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<sup>8</sup> Luce, address to the Society of Colonial Wars at Wayne, Pa., 17 May 1966, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 142–43. Modernization as westernization was later a conception associated with modernization theory. See Black, *Dynamics of Modernization*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Luce, speech at Rochester, N.Y., 22 April 1942, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 200.

and its workers. Luce stated, "have gone into those countries to stay."<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the exchange of culture, from his own experience as a youth in China, Luce remembered Americans living in their private compounds, with their own particular customs, fashions, foods, and songs. On the Fourth of July of his ninth or tenth year, he spent the hot afternoon with forty or fifty Americans gathered on a "lovely lawn with shade trees and the sweet fragrance of lilacs along the wall." He was sentimental about characteristically American ways in a foreign setting: "The children were gay in red, white and blue paper dresses and suits, and everybody had a flag. There were plenty of firecrackers . . . popping . . . off. . . . Presently came the eats—especially ice cream, made, of course, in our ice-cream freezers, brought from America. . . . Then . . . slow summer twilight began—it was time now for the fancy fireworks. They burst and whirled above us. And then again the hush of eventide and we sang our song: "My country, 'tis of thee. . . ." Luce might have allowed at least that fireworks had been a Chinese invention.<sup>11</sup>

U.S. influence did not have to remain isolated. Luce believed, since peoples who lacked American engineering, science, medicine, movie studios, airlines, roads, and education would welcome them. The cross-cultural work of the United States around the globe would be effected through the free movement of people, goods, and ideas. Ocean-going ships and overseas planes of the United States and its allies with the right to go anywhere they pleased would provide this free movement in an open world.<sup>12</sup>

Luce also saw culture extended through education. He favored American universities in China, like those at which his missionary father had taught. Shandong Christian University had a campus modeled after an American college with a tower at the center, an

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<sup>10</sup> Luce, speech to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, New York, 18 November 1946, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 243. Luce's simple view of technological transfer can be considered in light of the recent valuable work of Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Luce might have concurred with Headrick's conclusion: "Simply stated, the reason the tropic's experienced growth but little development under colonial rule is that investments went into physical not human capital, and that the transfer of technology was more geographic than cultural" (p. 384).

<sup>11</sup> Luce, speech to "Senior Group" of Time Inc. editors, executives, and writers, New York, 4 May 1950, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 377.

<sup>12</sup> Luce, "American Century," p. 65.

observatory in the corner, and buildings erected in a distinctly American architecture, “a plain and to be sure useful and economical American style.” Later that American functionalism would be supplemented by a style of Chinese beauty, and the merging of the American into the Chinese was symbolic “of an inward and spiritual grace which all the American leaders of education in China have cultivated for years and years—namely, the desire that in the management of their institutions, Americans should become less and less and Chinese more and more. Today most of the colleges are mostly run by Chinese. If this be imperialism, make the most of it—and if this is imperialism, the Chinese would say: give us more.” So his idea of modernization as westernization held firm, especially since the students attending these American-founded schools, Luce added, would become the leaders of China.<sup>13</sup>

The Americans in China would uplift its civilization. Luce believed. He called the American travelers and workers the “A.E.F.—the First A.E.F. of World War II—the American Expeditionary Force in China.” For many years thousands of Americans—educators, missionaries, businessmen, soldiers, diplomats—had been in China. Most of them. Luce called “good, some of them not quite so good, but all of them working with China, hoping with China and sharing with China an unshakable faith in that great future when China will be a mighty force on the side of peace and decency.”

In Luce’s estimation, because of the AEF, U.S. prestige stood higher in Chinese esteem during World War II than ever before. The number of Americans was growing with the experts laying down the Burma Road, intending to double and quadruple its traffic, and with aviators from the United States enlisting with China. Luce quoted the words of one New Zealander, who was working alongside the AEF. His words were: “If only they realized . . . if only Americans knew. . . .” Luce finished the thought: “If only Americans knew how tremendously much they could achieve in China today—if only they knew what colossal things could be done with only a little money, a little sympathy, a little courage.”<sup>14</sup>

In the articulation of a vision of how the world should appreci-

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<sup>13</sup> Luce, speech on United China Appeal, Boston, Mass., 12 March 1941, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 194–95.

<sup>14</sup> Luce, speech on United China Relief, New York, 18 June 1941, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 197–98.

ate the American cultural impact on it. Luce was in a unique position. As the head of Time Inc., he oversaw the first U.S. company to move into international publishing on a large scale, with overseas editions first of *Time* and later of *Life*. His multinational communications corporation then was representative not only of the spread of U.S. economic order, but also of American communications and their cultural content. For Luce, the connection between the United States as the leading world power and Time Inc. as the world's largest communications empire was conscious. At the twentieth anniversary of Time-Life International (TLI), Luce declared: "TLI was started in 1945 because the U.S. was literally the only power in the world capable of restoring some of the continuities of civilization. . . . It is this towering uniqueness of power and influence [of the United States] that is . . . the factual premise—the existential premise for the assumption that Time Inc. should do things in the international world."<sup>15</sup>

In the field of foreign aid, Luce believed that even advanced industrial nations like Britain could never win a complete victory in World War II without American help, and in turn Britain was almost certain to accept U.S. war aims. Developing nations like China with large numbers of hungry and poor needed aid most of all. Luce's prescription was that for every dollar Americans spent on armaments, a dime would pay for a gigantic aid effort. By having farmers produce greater harvests of crops, and having "a humanitarian army of Americans" distribute the food free of charge, hunger and poverty for most of the people of the world would be eliminated.<sup>16</sup>

Luce saw America bringing democracy through power to Asia, where the developing world was struggling to create and build nations and to institute new governments. In the summer of 1945, Luce, sailing through the Pacific on the mighty flagship, the U.S.S. *Yorktown*, expressed gratitude to Admiral Arthur Radford and his men, "because we civilians can sit up on your bridge and talk to you as equals—equals under the Constitution of the United States. You talk to us, free and easy, as you would talk to *any* American who is not under the great and honorable compulsion

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<sup>15</sup> Elson and Prendergast, *Time Inc.*, 3:81.

<sup>16</sup> Luce, "American Century," pp. 62, 65. Luce elaborated on this point of providing food to other peoples in an editorial comment, "Food: We Could Eat Less; Other Men and Women and Children Are Starving," *Life*, 24 March 1941, p. 34.

of military discipline. Thus you prove to us—and to all who serve under you—that America's greatest fighting men are also great civilians—true lovers of that human liberty for which they fight."<sup>17</sup>

This was the example of democracy, law, and freedom of speech that Americans offered to China, but Luce did not fully see the paradox that the example was represented by military force. Luce came only slowly to observe that the difficulty of representing democracy was compounded by the servicemen who saw China as backward and corrupt. Continuing on his trip to Chongqing in October 1945, Luce traveled over rough roads in a jeep, watching the fields and little towns pass by, until the jeep broke down, and a truckload of GIs picked him up. Luce, sitting on the hard floor, listened to a sergeant, "one of those typical Americans who speak slowly and deliberately, repeating guidebook facts with what appears to be deadly accuracy," and though he maintained "an air of ruthless scholarship," most of the facts he recited were "unflattering" to the Chinese. Nearby was a "loud-mouthed wisecracker," who, when they passed a battalion of Chinese soldiers carrying guns, yelled out, "The war's over, so now you're going to fight." The scholarly fellow, pointing out occasional airplanes parked under trees off the road, said, "There are a great many of these planes, which the Chinese kept completely hidden in reserve while all the time they were yelling for more airplanes to be brought over the Hump" of the Himalayas.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, Luce saw the United States as having a unique role in world history. Luce took exception to Rudyard Kipling's dictum; "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Yes, Luce agreed, humankind had been split into two great halves, the Orient and the Occident, divided by thousands of years of separate history, which had resulted in different intellectual, ethical, and political patterns of thought. The Americans in the first half of the twentieth century had "rejoined Europe," rescued it from its wars, and become the "leader of the West." In the second half of the twentieth century, he predicted a test of "our leadership of the world by whether or not we can do our part in bringing East

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<sup>17</sup> Luce, speech to the officers and men of the U.S.S. *Yorktown*, June 1945, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 354.

<sup>18</sup> Luce, private account of visit to Chongqing, October 1945, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 355–56. See also p. 392, where Luce later discusses the "very great weakness of China."

and West together in basic mutual understandings, intellectual, ethical, and political.”<sup>19</sup>

But Luce did not envision some simple economic, cultural, philanthropical, or political exchange of equality, even one in which the West would share some sense of logic and objectivity, and the East a way of subjective thought and spirit. The West and the East did not complement each other, countered Luce, who put no stock in the equation that “the West has half the truth and the East has the other half, and if you put the two together, then you have the whole truth about human nature and destiny.”

Luce’s contrary view accorded with his interpretation of the present point in history and his view of modernization as westernization: the “East has little if anything to say or to propose to the West. It is the West which must speak to the East out of our complex experience and faith.” The East was “eager to acquire our technology. That is to say, the nations of the East want the obviously useful material end products of Western civilization. But what lies behind and beneath modern plumbing and the automobile and atomic energy? We might say that what lies behind our technology is the Renaissance, with its enthusiasm for the expansion of human power and happiness through knowledge,” and ancient Greece with its leap into the logic of mathematics and philosophic reason. Luce did not mean to imply that “the future of mankind will be fashioned by the West,” but that “the future of mankind will be fashioned by the response of the East to the West. The responsibility of the West is to know what it is it has to say, and to say it well—to give effective reasons for the faith that is in us.”<sup>20</sup>

The culmination of this rejuvenation of the East was to take place in Vietnam. While the United States was increasing its military buildup in Vietnam in 1967, Luce called the constitutional convention in Saigon an “extraordinary happening” because the East was emulating the West. “There is a bill of rights, guaranteeing certain rights to individual citizens as against the state—freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from arbitrary arrest and so on. Nothing of this sort is anywhere to be found in the Asian tradition.” The very expression of nationalism, Luce

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<sup>19</sup> Luce, speech to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, 3 December 1965, in Luce, *Ideas*, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207–209.

observed, was "a Western concept." He did not see that nationalist spirit manifested in North Vietnam, which eventually triumphed over the U.S. involvement and unified the nation.<sup>21</sup>

In 1942, Vice President Henry Wallace, a liberal spokesman of President Roosevelt's New Deal, countered Luce's ideas. Wallace took them as a point of departure for his own vision: "Some have spoken of the 'American Century.' I say that the century on which we are entering—the century which will come of this war—can be and must be the century of the common man." Wallace hoped the advanced nations like the United States would help the developing nations begin the industrial process without military or economic imperialism. As the masses of India, China, and Latin America learned technology and became productive mechanics, Wallace predicted, their standards of living would improve dramatically, but this significant improvement in the human condition had to be determined by the peoples of developing countries, not by a preeminent foreign power.<sup>22</sup>

The differences between Luce and Wallace helped define a domestic debate between Republican and Democrat, conservative and liberal, businessman and public servant about the manifestations of power. The real test of American influence would come as the people of other nations responded to it. The acceptance or dis-

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<sup>21</sup> Luce, speech to students at the University of California at Santa Barbara, 1 February 1967, in Luce, *Ideas*, pp. 214–15.

<sup>22</sup> Henry A. Wallace, "The Price of Free World Victory," *Free World*, June 1942, p. 12; *The Century of the Common Man*, ed. Russell Lord (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1943), pp. 19–20. A long extract appeared in Louise W. Holborn, ed., *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations*, September 1, 1939–December 31, 1942 (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1943), pp. 79–85.

For the differences between the concepts of Luce on the one side and Wallace on the other, see William L. O'Neill, *A Better World, The Great Schism: Stalinism and the American Intellectuals* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 52. For a differing view suggesting that the two were not so far apart, see Dwight Macdonald, "The (American) People's Century," *Partisan Review* 9 (1942): 294–310; and Dwight Macdonald, *Henry Wallace: The Man and the Myth* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1948), pp. 31–35, 70–72. On the American Century, see also Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Critical American: The Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1984), pp. 38–39. One historian, Norman D. Markowitz, has taken exception to Macdonald's assertion in *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941–1948* (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 53–54. On Wallace's distrust of the American Century idea, see also John Morton Blum, ed., *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942–1946* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 25; and Richard J. Walton, *Henry Wallace, Harry Truman, and the Cold War* (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 14.

approval of Luce's and Wallace's visions in other countries helps to reveal what legitimacy their approaches had as realistic ways of viewing the world.

Shortly after the "American Century" article appeared, Time Inc. received reaction from readers abroad and noted favorable letters or requests for reprints from around the world: from Tahiti, Canada, Cuba, the Philippine Islands, England, and France. Typical of the comments made in an internal memorandum of Time Inc. analyzing the responses as of 14 March 1941 was the following: "One zealous Cuban asked for a copy of the editorial which he planned to translate into Spanish and distribute among his friends." In Luce's files were letters from Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Scotland. A writer from Toronto asserted that Luce's "frank, candid and sane" appraisal had implications not only for Americans but for Canadians as well, because the entire "hemisphere must be the source of all intellectual and cultural advancement as well as a commercial supply base for the rest of the world." Though the memorandum on letters to the editor acknowledged some unfavorable views among the respondents, Time Inc.'s own accounting of other people's opinions may not be totally objective, and for those opinions a direct look at specific examples may be instructive.<sup>23</sup>

A commentary by the London *Economist* in 1942 attempted to be judicious about the waning of British power, but nevertheless, in recognizing the rise of the United States, it took an imperial view of the concept of the American Century. What prompted this consideration was another *Life* editorial, this one not written by Luce, which stated that the American people were not fighting to hold the British Empire together. The *Economist* did not find this assessment attractive. On the contrary, the magazine argued that the empire had provided a world service. Would the Allies be better off "if Britain had left all the parts of the Empire to be occupied by the enemy? Will China be aided if India is abandoned and a decision made not to retake Burma? Would the United States have been best served if Australia had been given over to the Japanese?" And so on around the world, were it not for the British,

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<sup>23</sup> Memorandum on "Response to Mr. Luce's The American Century," 14 March 1941, Time Inc. Archives, New York. A collection of letters to Luce on the "American Century" article is in the Henry R. Luce Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. See, for example, Harvey Caulfield to Henry Luce, 17 February 1941; Frank S. Booth to Henry Luce, 10 April 1941.

would the Middle East, North Africa, and the Suez Canal have fallen to the enemy? The "greatest virtue and strength of the British Empire was the security which it provided for all its parts by maintaining the Pax Britannica." Malaya, Burma, and the Indies had fallen, and India and Australia were threatened, because "the British—and American—navies lost control of the eastern seas," while the British air and land defenses were severely insufficient.

The crucial question for the British was: Would this be "The American Century"? After the war the United States and Britain had a "common task": to organize and extend the material apparatus of civilization for the benefit of all peoples. "The leadership in this mission," granted the *Economist*, "can be America's. There is a sense in which, because of the size and strength and wealth of the United States, this must be the American Century." True, as President Wilson had believed, the right result of World War I would have been U.S. leadership, and though the chance was spurned, the opportunity was now open again. But the editors had in mind rather an Anglo-American Century. Reflecting Churchill's hopes to keep Britain a great power through close association with the United States, the commentary desired that the United States and Britain should cooperate with each other "with no narrow thoughts of prestige or precedence." The British were preparing themselves, it seems, for a gentle relative decline with diminished expectations. As for the countries of the developing world, "for whose interests Life is so rightly, if so wrongheadedly, concerned," their main need was to produce, trade, and achieve self-rule. Britain would not oppose the growth of China, or even the economic independence of its own colonies, including India.<sup>24</sup>

The fame of Luce's essay grew, and as early as 1951 a Zurich magazine, *Die Weltwoche*, noted that the "American Century" article, carried abroad by Luce's "universal publishing concern," had become "a classic." "While *TIME* grew, America grew too, the center of political weight moved to the west, and the U.S. was forced into a position to assume world leadership and responsibility," the Swiss publication observed. That was the change Luce implied when he wrote of the American Century. The United States undertook its task not with a cheap optimism, the Swiss publication noted, but as a "dangerous but inevitable fate." The "American Century" article, after all, had begun with the com-

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<sup>24</sup> *Economist*, 17 October 1942, pp. 469–70.

ment that Americans were “not happy,” revealing a “pessimistic trend” in the “American way of life.” “But despite all this doubt there is a basic hope . . . that America, maturing by its fate and growing by its duty will carry the ‘American Revolution’. . . as her mission across the earth.”

The Swiss struggled to be neutral about this American Century in a world of change featuring a new superpower with influence in the old domain of Europe. Luce had to face his share of criticism, the Swiss article noted, whether for featuring on the pages of *Life* a holy picture next to lingerie fashions, or for being “a warmonger, a reactionary, hungry for power, a new kind of fascist.” The Swiss view was that these “criticisms do not always come from the ‘left’ but also very often from persons who have been close to Luce.” Perhaps like America, the Swiss postulated, Luce had not yet found the peace and happiness that wealth and influence had never yielded. The reaction abroad to the idea of the American Century was at best grudging. To U.S. allies it may have symbolized America’s position of power, but it did not seem sensitive to their interests.<sup>25</sup>

As wartime enemies became allies and former allies became Cold War enemies, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* in 1961 noted that Luce presented both “America and her enemies with the political slogan about ‘the American century’.” In the two decades since the first use of the concept, no one had “more incisively shaped the image of America as seen by the rest of the world, and the Americans’ image of the world, than TIME & LIFE Editor Henry Robinson Luce.” Luce had done more than at led American thought: “No American without a political office—with the possible exception of Henry Ford—has had greater influence on American society. Luce. . . was the first—between the wars—to use the term American Century.” In addition, Luce had influence over foreigners. The German magazine told of Winston Churchill counting Luce among the seven most powerful Americans. And Luce’s publishing empire was more far-reaching than any other public opinion corporation in the world.

The German perspective was that Luce’s global view grew out of attachment for the China of his youth. But “all of Luce’s appeals for assistance to Chiang Kai-shek” proved in vain when Mao Zedong emerged victorious in the Chinese revolution and

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<sup>25</sup> *Die Weltwoche*, March 1951; translation of the article is in Time Inc. Archives, New York.

"history was ungracious enough to deny Luuc's wishes." Perhaps history would be the final arbiter as to whether this would indeed be the American Century.<sup>26</sup>

The English historian Arnold Toynbee, who wrote the epic work *A Study of History*, a comparative investigation of global civilizations, offered the most serious, globally minded critique of the American Century. As Toynbee became a popular sage, *Life* magazine published a major article devoted to Toynbee's work. What seemed a Toynbee "cult" prompted the critic Max Lerner to charge mischievously: "It is not Toynbee's fault that he has been made part of Henry Luce's gallery of secular saints and been canonized in both *Time* and *Life* and his writings treated as if they were a Koran of the American Century." The interest in Toynbee's unique breadth of historical knowledge peaked as Americans sought a guide to U.S. international involvement in a world whose moral and intellectual outlines they had only begun to glimpse.<sup>27</sup>

Toynbee's monumental work enjoyed popular success, and it sparked thought about the place of the United States in the world, beyond the current impression among Americans that their country was in a special historical position of power. But Henry Luce fell out with Toynbee over one critical point. Toynbee regarded the United States as "simply a peripheral part of European civilization." Luce believed in "America as a special dispensation—under

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<sup>26</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 27 December 1961, pp. 56-68; translation of the article is in Time Inc. Archives, New York. See also Henry R. Luce, notes on trip to Germany and Austria, typescript, 1946, Time Inc. Archives, New York. The impact of Luce's activities abroad, particularly in Italy after Clare Booth Luce became ambassador there in 1953, is summarized in Luigi Barzini, Jr., "Ambassador Luce, As Italians See Her," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1955, pp. 27-28. The English-language *Manila Bulletin* reported on its front page during a visit by Luce on 31 May 1941: "Tall, with bushy eyebrows and a professorial seriousness, the most influential publisher in America seems every inch the author of *The American Century*."

<sup>27</sup> "A Study of History: A Brilliant English Thinker Named Toynbee Sees the Past in Terms of the Challenges and Responses That Make and Break Civilizations," *Life*, 23 February 1948, pp. 118-33; Max Lerner, *Actions and Passions: Notes on the Multiple Revolution of Our Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 140. The quoted passage comes from Lerner's essay, "Toynbee; History as Poetry and Religion as Bulwark," originally published 2 May 1948. *Time* ran several pieces on Toynbee. He was the subject of its cover story in an article entitled "The Challenge" (*Time*, 17 March 1947, pp. 71-81). See also "The Chariot to Heaven," *Time*, 5 April 1948, pp. 58-60; and "Invaluable 10%" *Time*, 30 October 1950, p. 71. He was treated as a celebrity in its "People" column: "People," *Time*, 1 March 1948, p. 32. On Toynbee's part in American historiography, see Donald W. White, "History and American Internationalism: The Formulation from the Past after World War II," *Pacific Historical Review* 58 (1989): 157-62.

Providence,” and he told Toynbee so. To this, Luce’s critics shook their heads. They said his opinion tended “to idolatry of a nation.” Toynbee himself took this view: civilizations would break down by idolizing false images. But Luce responded that he “knew well the dangers of that sin,” for he had once been obliged to answer in a private memorandum to himself the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr’s warning of the temptation of sin inherent in the concept of the American Century. Americans “must have courage to face objective facts under Providence,” Luce concluded. Toynbee’s writing had offered a significant foreign perspective from which Americans might have learned to be a little less parochial in the exchange of trade, aid, and culture. But it would actually have little immediate impact on the popular conception of America’s world role.<sup>28</sup>

The reaction of other peoples to Henry Wallace’s *Century of the Common Man* was decidedly different. Soon after the publication of his text in the United States, Mexico printed with American support a large edition of the Spanish translation of Wallace’s speech, “El precio de la victoria” (“The Price of Victory”) for widespread distribution in Latin American countries. This distribution occurred despite some opposition in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, which, according to Wallace, was alarmed at references to the French and American revolutions; some committee members feared the speech might create unrest in Cuba and disrupt relations between the two countries.

The *Century of the Common Man* proved attractive to leaders who did not agree on many matters, such as Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill, and spokesmen for the developing world. On a visit to Washington, D.C., a few days after the end of the war in

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<sup>28</sup> Luce, remarks at dinner of *Time* editors, New York, 14 November 1952, in Luce, *Ideas* (n. 3 above), p. 70. Toynbee writes of the idolatry of a nation in his *Study of History*, part 4, “The Breakdowns of Civilizations,” specifically chap. 16, “Failure of Self-determination.” He describes societies going wrong by idolizing what is wrong—an “ephemeral self,” an “ephemeral institution,” and an “ephemeral technique.” Discussing the ecumenical church, he writes, “the spirit of devotion, which was a beneficent creative power when directed through the channels of a *Civitas Dei* to God Himself, has degenerated into a destructive force when diverted from its original object and offered to idols made by human hands. Parochial states, as our medieval forebears knew, are man-made institutions which, being useful and necessary, deserve from us that same conscientious but unenthusiastic performance of minor social duties which we render in our time to our municipalities and county councils. To idolize these pieces of social machinery is to court disaster” (*A Study of History*, 2 vols., abridged D. C. Somervell [New York: Oxford University Press, 1946–57], 1:355).

August 1945, de Gaulle remarked to Wallace in English (a language he infrequently used): "The century of the common man is assured because we have won the war." Wallace replied merely, "Is it?" At a luncheon in Washington during a visit to the United States in 1954, Churchill declared: "The people of Russia have had a very rough time in the twentieth century, the century of the common man. The common man in no country have had a worse time than they have had in the twentieth century, with all the bloody struggles in which they have had to engage, in the revolution and the disciplinary measures, internal . . . stresses which have fallen upon them." The Egyptian minister professed admiration for Wallace's speech, adding that he hoped the United States would not continue to allow England to oppress small countries.<sup>29</sup>

Even John Foster Dulles, a conservative member of the Republican Party, the opposition to Wallace's Democrats, on returning from a trip to England, reported to Wallace: "Your point of view has made a very deep impression over there."<sup>30</sup>

A telling piece of foreign reaction came from Clare Boothe Luce, the wife of Henry Luce. In 1954, while serving as the U.S. ambassador to Italy, she wrote a confidential memorandum to President Dwight Eisenhower, entitled "Russian Atomic Power and the Lost American Revolution." Mrs. Luce attributed the revival in World War II of America's "ideological leadership of the world's masses" to U.S. war aims. She made reference to the Century of the Common Man. She omitted the American Century.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wallace, *Price of Vision*, pp. 180, 187–88, 478; Henry A. Wallace, *El precio de la victoria* (Mexico, D. E.: Editorial Mundo Libre, 1942); Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Year Book, 1943* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1943), p. 63; "Text of Churchill's Remarks at Press Luncheon in His Honor in Capital," *New York Times*, 29 June 1954, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> John Foster Dulles to Henry A. Wallace, 27 July 1942, John Foster Dulles Papers, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J. Dulles also wrote Wallace after Wallace's address on world organization on the eighty-sixth anniversary of the birth of Woodrow Wilson, 28 December 1942, that he had "read with great interest, and a large measure of agreement, your Woodrow Wilson Birthday address" (John Foster Dulles to Henry A. Wallace, 30 December 1942, John Foster Dulles Papers, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.).

<sup>31</sup> Clare Boothe Luce, "Russian Atomic Power and the Lost American Revolution," 21 August 1954, p. 6, in C. D. Jackson Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans. In contrast to de Gaulle's positive statement to Wallace, the American correspondent for *Paris Soir*, Raoul de Roussy de Sales, was skeptical of Wallace's Century of the Common Man. "It is the classic Utopia," he wrote in his diary. Wallace had tailed to realize, de Sales continued, that Hitler was "Wallace's Common Man gone mad." De Sales feared the collective mediocrity of democracy; see his *The Making of Yesterday: The Diaries of Raoul de Roussy de Sales* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), pp. 254–55.

The division of thought abroad about the American Century and the Century of the Common Man was seen during a visit by Wallace to England in the spring of 1947. Wallace tried to explain to audiences the differences between Luce and himself. In Liverpool and Manchester he held up a recent copy of *Life* containing the article by James Burnham, "Struggle for the World," condensed from the book by that name. Wallace read from it, explaining that he held "nothing against Henry Luce," whom he called "a man of the highest sincerity and integrity." He reported:

As I read the headline, "World War III has already begun," I could feel a cold shiver run through the entire audience. As I read the words, "only a United States monopoly of atomic weapons can prevent" an all-out war, the audience exclaimed in astonishment and obvious unbelief. I continued reading from the statement calling for "an American empire in opposition to the Soviet empire," and heard murmurs throughout the audience.

When I read the "Program for a US empire," which speaks of "sweeping economic and political concessions to friends," there were cries of "No!" These cries were louder at the words, "force when and where needed," and louder still at the words "joint citizenship with the British empire." Here there were shouts of . . . "Never that way!"<sup>32</sup>

The differences in outlook on the world between the two visions—the American Century and the Century of the Common Man—occurred to observers abroad. From his post in London, the perceptive foreign correspondent Edward R. Murrow saw that the fate of European diplomacy and postwar peace—as he wrote to a

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<sup>32</sup> Wallace's account is in "Report from Britain," *New Republic*, 28 April 1947, pp. 13–14. See James Burnham, "Struggle for the World," *Life*, 31 March 1947, pp. 59–80. Wallace's quotations are nearly exact and correspond to pp. 60, 65, and 76 of the *Life* article. The book by Burnham was similarly entitled *The Struggle for the World* (New York: John Day, 1947). In an editorial comment, "Struggle for the World" (*Life*, 21 April 1947, p. 38), the editors admitted Burnham was belligerent, but excused that trait because he was stating "facts about war and peace at a time when too many Americans are softheadedly talking as though peace could be attained by wishing hard for it." The editors referred readers to the speeches of Henry Wallace. Before a congressional hearing in 1948, Wallace denied that he had called America imperialistic to people in Europe, saying, "Now, before you go any further with that, sir, what I did precisely was to read from *Life* magazine, an article by Mr. Burnham, and the conclusions in the boxes by *Life* itself, which spoke specifically about the American Empire. I read that at Manchester, precisely as it was given in *Life* magazine" (U.S. Congress, House, *United States Foreign Policy for a Post-War Recovery Program: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 80th Cong., 2d sess., 1948, pt. 2, p. 1613).

young colleague, Eric Sevareid, in 1942—would depend on the answer to the question whether Henry Luce or Henry Wallace “is the forerunner of the American policy of tomorrow.” Looking at Asia, a writer for the *Far Eastern Survey* recorded in 1942 that two currents of thought would influence policy. One was the demand, like that of Wallace, for racial equality and economic and social justice for colonial peoples. The other, propounded by Luce in his “‘American Century’ idea,” was that the United States must embark on international relations that were “positive, expanding and energetic.” It was too soon to know if this idea bordered upon “imperialism.”<sup>33</sup>

These were apt statements, and though they were indicative of how even Americans not entirely of Luce’s persuasion talked about the world, not fully comprehending the countries affected by their policies, some other peoples agreed with the dichotomy in American policy. Americans were faced with a choice, in the detached view of the British political scientist and economist, Harold J. Laski. The choice was not between withdrawal and participation in the world, but between an aggressive nationalism that sought safety by domination and a benign participation in a world effort to prevent war. Laski recognized “a considerable body of American opinion which looks to an aggressive nationalism,” the advocates of which were deeply impressed by the scale of American power: “We are now entering, they say, upon what is, in fact, the ‘American Century’.” Likewise, the Canadian R. B. Bryce of the Department of Finance in Ottawa, recognizing America’s “dominant political and economic power,” saw the choices before the nation: “If this is to be either the American Century, or the Century of the Common Man, or both,” he wrote in 1943, “American capital must go abroad to make it so.”<sup>34</sup>

Luce did not put much credence in the criticism. In the area of

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<sup>33</sup> Edward R. Murrow to Eric Sevareid, 26 August 1942, Papers of Eric Sevareid, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; An Observer, “Ostrich into Eagle?” *Far Eastern Survey* II (30 November 1942): 243–44. Another foreign correspondent, Howard K. Smith, wrote in *The State of Europe* (New York: Knopf, 1949) wondering “Whose Century?” and preferred not “the American Century”—or “the Communist Century”—but “the Century of One World.” To bring this about, the “American liberals of both parties—in alliance with the Socialists of Europe and their allies among the liberal-minded Europeans—have their job cut out for them” (p. 407–408).

<sup>34</sup> Harold J. Laski, *The American Democracy: A Commentary and an Interpretation* (New York: Viking, 1948), p. 503; R. B. Bryce, “International Aspects of an Investment Program,” in Seymour E. Harris, ed., *Postwar Economic Problems* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943), pp. 361, 364.

economics, his desire for profits for Americans was evident, but he also had a sincere belief that other people wanted what U.S. industry could offer. He did not accept the charge that American business people were “dollar imperialists.” As he told business leaders, the Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov had accused them of that. “He says you aren’t wanted and gives the signal to all his stooges to say it behind your back. . . . Don’t believe it: it is a lie.” He told business people not “to cower in moral turpitude.” “Everywhere in the world the people want the American businessman,” he said in 1946. “And most of the governments want him too—even when, for the sake of their own particular demagogueries, they have to make noises to the contrary.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, in his own eyes Luce had been a consistent critic of British and European imperialism and an advocate of ending colonialism. He denied that he espoused U.S. imperialism, telling an interviewer (and intentionally using slang for emphasis): “It has been proposed that I write a redefinition of the American Century and explain that I wasn’t no imperialist. I don’t know who has taken worse raps than I have for opposition to imperialism. . . . You can’t extract imperialism from ‘The American Century’.” He had assumed that the U.S. role must reflect democratic ideals, existing as “an internationalism of the people, by the people and for the people.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Luce, speech to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, New York, 18 November 1946, in Luce, *Ideas* (n. 3 above), p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> Elson and Prendergast, *Time Inc.* (n. 3 above), 1:463; publisher’s note in Luce, *American Century* (n. 1 above), p. 45; Luce, “American Century” (n. 1 above), p. 64. In 1942 *Life* had stirred up an international commotion with an editorial attack on British imperialism. “Doubtless it is presumptuous for a single periodical to attempt to speak for the American people. Nevertheless, the editors of *Life* . . . make no apology for their presumption. We assure you that we do speak, in this instance, for a large portion of our 134,000,000 fellow citizens.” One “thing we are sure we are *not* fighting for is to hold the British Empire together” (“An Open Letter from the Editors of *Life* to the People of England,” *Life*, 12 October 1942, p. 34). British news reporters and government officials, as well as the correspondent Edward R. Murrow on the radio from England, attacked the article. For a small part of the response, which appeared in the pages of *Life*, see Vernon Bartlett, “A Communication: A Journalist Member of Parliament Replies to *Life*’s Open Letter to the English People,” *Life*, 26 October 1942, p. 24. Luce sent a personal representative T. S. Matthews, *Time*’s executive editor, to a close aide of Churchill, Brendon Bracken, the minister of information, to explain his position—that the different aims of Britain and the United States should not separate the two countries—but after two meetings the problem was still unsettled. Luce finally sent a letter to some British friends in government and the press, explaining that he had not personally written the editorial’s words, and stressing the common objectives of the two countries to create a postwar order. See Elson and Prendergast, *Time Inc.* (n. 3 above), 2:22–27.

Wallace's aims seemed to differ so little from his own that Luce felt compelled to write the vice president. "If your disapproving reference to 'The American Century' helped you to gain higher ground, I am of course deeply gratified. But I should not like to think that anything of substance in the essay written under that title is inconsistent with your hopes and promises for the increasing freedom and welfare of 'the common man.'"

Wallace replied, taking account of world opinion, which he distinguished from his own. "It will interest you to know that I do not happen to remember anything that you have written descriptive of . . . 'The American Century' of which I disapprove. . . . Nevertheless, it has happened that the phrase, 'American Century,' did rub the citizens of a number of our sister United Nations the wrong way." What mattered to Wallace was to bring "to pass the essence of that which you described in your letter, no matter what we may call the century in which we are about to enter." Still Wallace made plain in his letter that the citizens of other countries may have been more frank to him than they had been to Luce.<sup>37</sup>

Luce had no inkling of the decline of the power of the United States when he died in 1967. The United States was still preeminent, even as it was increasing its involvement in the Vietnam War. But the gap between the reception of his American Century idea at home and abroad may provide a clue to the tensions that would be its undoing.

Luce's concept of the American Century revealed an ethnocentric view of the world, which foresaw the potential impact of U.S. power but did not fully take account of the life and culture of other peoples. The evidence from foreign publications and letters, whether from England, Switzerland, Germany, or Tahiti, was that other peoples might accept the reality of the magnitude of U.S. power. They often commented on the attractiveness of modern and democratic American institutions that Luce believed would make a contribution to the larger world. But the political order that Luce also desired, although he may not at first have realized the risk, might have to be enforced by military means. When power was imposed not by the attraction of modern and democratic institutions, but by force, that dominance provoked resistance. To that resistance Americans, as in the Vietnam conflict that

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<sup>37</sup> Henry R. Luce to Henry A. Wallace, 14 May 1942, and Henry A. Wallace to Henry R. Luce, 16 May 1942, Time Inc. Archives, New York.

Luce supported, reacted with military solutions, rather than the economic, cultural, or philanthropic solutions Luce had first envisioned. The military buildup demanded an increasing amount of resources to sustain it.

Luce had seen Britain in decline. But it never occurred to him that the United States might face a similar fate. About Britain, he wrote after a visit in the 1930s: "If the world steps into another era of 'progress,' I fear England will be left placidly behind. England is living on her capital. It is a tremendous capital. Even greater than its vast money and material capital is its capital of character and laws and customs." But Luce believed corruption had set into this character.<sup>38</sup>

Luce never saw the United States as a debtor nation with an enormous trade deficit and a dependence on foreign capital; a nation that had exhausted once great resources and damaged its environment; a nation that was living beyond its means; a nation whose cities were torn by divisions among people of different cultural and political traditions. Nor did he foresee the rise of the East to challenge the West, and the United States in particular. He never conceived of the Pacific Century, now spoken of in the Asian lands along the rim of the Pacific basin. Luce wrote of the Pacific: "The Pacific Ocean is now our ocean. It never before was anybody's, since the earth was formed. The Chinese of the great Central Kingdom never came down to the sea—they never built any ports, let alone ever set out across the stormy deeps." Luce was of course mistaken that the Chinese "never came down to the sea" in their own centuries, for the Chinese voyages of the fifteenth century, reaching the coasts of Africa, were significant. But Luce went on: "The British may have held a kind of sway as part of their Rule Britannica. The Japanese, with ferocious industry, pretty nearly held it commercially and made, as we recall, a bid to establish their imperial sun in all its skies, but they were doomed to fail because of the United States. Now the Pacific is America's. This is the kind of truth which may never perhaps be said and may not be moral to say. Yet it remains a fact."<sup>39</sup>

The attempt to realize the significance of U.S. impact on the world became more: a statement of an exceptional American

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<sup>38</sup> Luce, report on European trip, July 1934, in Luce, *Ideas* (n. 3 above), p. 339.

<sup>39</sup> Luce wrote an article, "America and Asia," for *Life* (23 February 1953), pp. 120–34, but the concluding paragraphs from which these sentences are quoted were omitted from the magazine article, according to John K. Jessup, "either for space or for tactical reasons." See Luce, *Ideas* (n. 3 above), p. 365.

place in history. Toynbee had adduced historical precedent when he issued the warning that the idolization of a state precedes its decline. And Henry Wallace had a point he could hold to: the pre-eminence of U.S. power—the American Century—was a flash in the pan against the global advent of the mass society—the Century of the Common People. The mass society had not always been politically democratic in the liberal tradition. But explosive demographic growth, the revolutionary changes that toppled old-fashioned forms of authoritarian rule, and the opening of an era of scarcity for a world more tightly integrated than ever before had empowered people who resisted paternalistic but powerful foreign states trumpeting ideas like “the American Century” and “modernization as westernization.” The final and grimmest evidence of the advent of a mass society was the industrialization and mass production of death, evidenced from World War I to the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

Flying home over the Pacific from the last battles of World War II, Luce meditated that he “only knew that the United States had planted its flag and buried its dead in Okinawa; so far west America in World War II had really, in fact and in spirit, gone, and from there it would never retreat.” For Luce this was the nature of American expansion, which had begun on the Atlantic coast and continued to the coast of China.<sup>40</sup> But Okinawa was returned to Japan in 1972. And the United States lost the Vietnam War, retreating in 1975. The United States also lost its trading markets globally, running trade deficits after 1971, and became a debtor nation in 1985. The American Century never entirely realistically envisioned the world, but Luce may have had an inkling of the historic sense that preeminence is not everlasting. He spoke of but one century in which America would be the greatest power.

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<sup>40</sup> Luce, *Ideas* (n. 3 above), pp. 365–66.