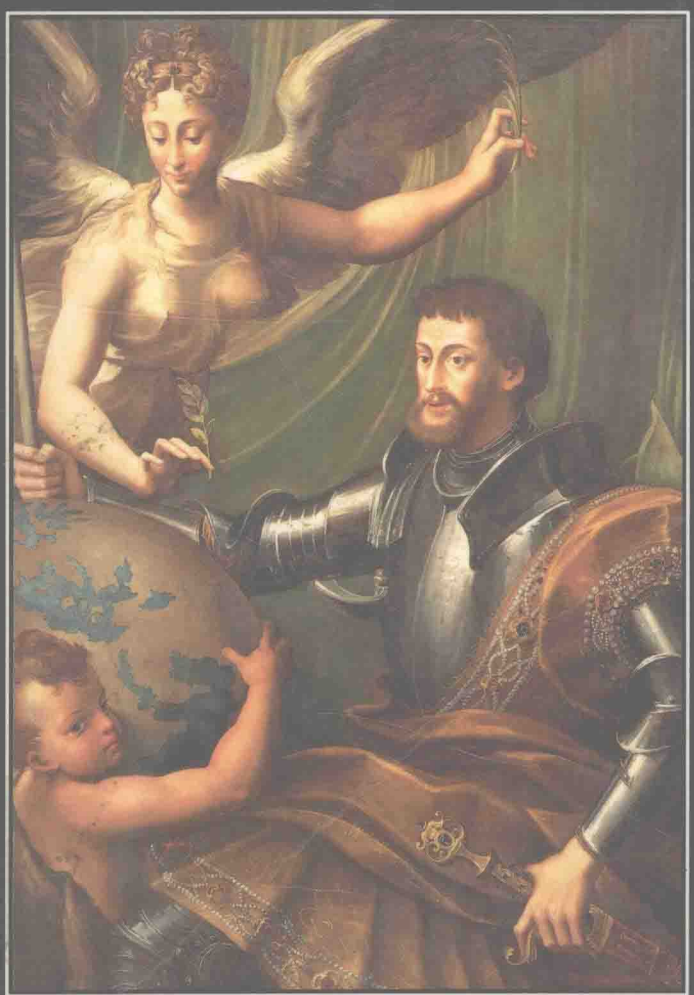
# LORDS OF ALL THE WORLD

*Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500–c.1800*



Anthony Pagden

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*Lords of all the World*

For John Elliott
*il miglior fabbro*

We need history, certainly, but we need it for reasons different from those which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs it, even though he may look nobly down on our rough and charmless needs and requirements. We need it, that is to say, for the sake of life and action, not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action. . . . We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life.

Friedrich Nietzsche,
*On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*

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This book is dedicated to John Elliott. To him I owe a debt which goes back more than twenty years, and which I can never now repay. I can only hope that this may, at least, be some small measure of my gratitude.

# Contents

# Introduction

## I

The rise and fall of the modern colonial empires have changed dramatically the human geography of the planet. The 'expansion of Europe' which began in the late fifteenth century resulted in massive migrations, many of them forced. It led, sometimes intentionally sometimes not, to the destruction of entire peoples. And it produced new nations, Creoles and mixed races, peoples who had been born and reared in colonies and whose futures, and sense of identity, were markedly divergent from those of either the European invaders or the societies of the Aboriginal populations. In its final phase it also created new states, and new political forms, or renewed and transformed versions of older political types, one of which – democratic republicanism – was to become the dominant ideology of the modern industrialized world. Colonialism also created the trade routes and lines of communication which have been responsible for a slow erosion of the ancient divisions, natural and cultural, between peoples. For those routes which once carried, often indigent, Europeans out, have more recently carried ever-increasing numbers of non-Europeans back.

The modern world has been shaped by these changes. Today we live with cultures which are porous and unstable in ways which few cultures, including most of those of western Europe, were before the early sixteenth century. We live, and are increasingly aware of so doing, in societies which are in the process of becoming plural and multicultural, in which 'English' is no longer predominantly the language of the English, or Spanish of the Spanish, in which the choices, cultural, political and linguistic, which we make are shaped by the choices and the needs of others about whom we may know very little. We live too, in a world in which the nation is in prolonged and often violent conflict with the confederation for the right to become the dominant mode of political association of the next century. And this struggle is also a legacy of Europe's colonial past. Understanding how this has come to be is an important part of what it is to be a citizen of any one place – for that, as David Hume recognized over 200 years ago, is also to be a citizen of the world.

The European empires have two distinct, but interdependent histories. The first, with which this book is concerned, is the history of the

European discovery and colonization of America. It begins with Columbus's first voyage in 1492 and ends somewhat less precisely in the 1830s with the final defeat of the royalist armies in South America. The second is the history of the European occupation of Asia, of Africa and of the Pacific. It begins in the 1730s, but only takes hold in the 1780s as European hegemony in the Atlantic is coming to an end. These 'Second European Empires' [1] have only recently been dissolved, a process which for most of their inhabitants has been a slow and murderous one. Indeed some might argue that while the French still rule in Martinique and Guadeloupe, the British occupy Gibraltar and more notoriously the islands of the South Atlantic, and the Spanish fragments of North Africa, that process is still incomplete. The more indeterminate legacies of these empires – the British Commonwealth, the informal French tutelage over parts of Africa – remain a significant feature of the relationship between the 'First' and the 'Third' worlds.

This book is concerned with the first of these two imperial phases. The discovery by the peoples of Europe that between their continent and Asia there existed another of which, prior to 1492, they had had no knowledge, nor any recorded contact, has been described as an event of world historical significance almost from the day Columbus returned from his first voyage. It was, said David Hume in 1757, 'really the commencement of modern History'.[2] The late fifteenth century, he wrote, had been a time in which 'America was discovered: Commerce extended: the Arts cultivated: Printing invented: Religion reform'd; And all the Governments and Empire almost chang'd'.[3] The discovery had devastated the intellectual world of Europe and had exposed Europeans, if not for the first time at least in uniquely dramatic ways, to a number of non-European cultures. It had also made possible the creation of the first large European overseas empires. Since the first decades of the sixteenth century, the modern world, much as Hume and most of his contemporaries might have lamented the fact, had been dominated by a struggle between the three major European powers – Spain, France and Britain – for control of the non-European world. And the main theatre for that struggle had been America.

Because of this perception of the New World as, in Voltaire's words, a 'species of new creation',[4] the European empires in America became by the second half of the eighteenth century a subject of intense historical scrutiny. Some of this attention, like the Spanish chronicles of conquest or the French and English histories of exploration and settlement which had preceded them, was openly triumphalist, and explicitly nationalist in inspiration. As the competition between the three major powers intensified, discovery, exploration and conquest became a crucial location for the display of national pride. There were those, intellectuals for the most part with increasingly cosmopolitan concerns, who, during the eighteenth

century, attempted to find something like a common purpose behind the colonizing process. For them comparison between the differing histories and objectives of the European empires could be the only possible route to an understanding of their true significance. 'In a subject as new and as little thought about as that of colonial theory', a certain Monsieur Blin, a *député* in the National Assembly, in March 1790 advised his colleagues that, in their efforts to understand the place of the old colonial system within the new French state, 'nothing is more likely to open the way to new ideas, nothing more likely to provide a more advantageous grip on one's judgement than a method of comparison'.[5]

Works such as Edmund and William Burke's *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757) or Anquetil-Duperon's *Considérations philosophiques et géographiques sur les deux mondes*[6] or, as it was originally planned, William Robertson's *History of America*,[7] had all attempted the kind of comparison which M. Blin called for. The most remarkable of them, however, far the most wide-ranging, and the one which Blin may have had in mind, was the abbé Guillaume Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes* which first appeared in 1772. This sought to compare not only Spain, Britain and France, but also Portugal, Holland, Sweden, Prussia, Russia and Denmark. Raynal's work (to which I shall return in Chapter 6) has for long been neglected, but until the mid-nineteenth century it was the most widely read account, as well as the fiercest indictment, of the first European overseas empires.

The *Histoire* is an attempt, as its title suggests, to bring together the two main spheres of European expansion into one text. It was also the first work to offer, however difficult it might be to recognize it as such today, a theory of imperialism. This, Raynal hoped, would transform the data he had amassed into some prevailing theme, some lesson, from which future Europeans might benefit. But such a theory could only, he knew, be fully understood in a global, and comparative, idiom and fully realized only by one who was, as he claimed to be, 'disengaged from all passions and prejudices'.[8]

The *Histoire*, however, was not only the most ambitious of such projects, it was also the last. Both the theorists of empire and its historians have remained curiously indifferent to the possibilities offered by comparison ever since. There have, of course, been many studies which have compared the political formation, the economies, or the institutional structures of more than one European empire. There have also been attempts to compare the developing cultures of the European colonies in America.[9] But there has been little sustained effort to examine the extended, theoretically complex, debates over the nature and the purpose of empire. Yet, in their several ways, these debates changed the whole course of European political thinking, and, in radically transformed but still identifiable idioms, continue to have a massive impact upon modern thinking about the relationship between states.

This book is not an attempt to emulate Raynal. It is concerned with a far shorter span of time – from the establishment of the first true settlements in America in the sixteenth century to independence in the nineteenth – and is restricted to three of the European empires, and only to those in America. There are obvious reasons for these limitations. Throughout this period, the British, the French and the Spanish watched each other constantly. They measured their behaviour against each other, and, far more frequently than has been supposed, borrowed from each other in their continuing attempts to understand the evolving shape of the empires which they had created. The Scandinavian, German and Russian settlements in America were too transitory to arouse much interest. The Portuguese presence in Brazil, although of more lasting importance, was overshadowed by the Portuguese empire in India. There are certainly important Portuguese theoreticians of empire (one of them, Serafim de Freitas, I discuss in Chapter 2) and writers from France, Britain and Spain who were keenly interested in the Portuguese imperial venture. But few of these have much to say on Brazil, if only because in most outward respects Brazil too closely resembled a Spanish colony to be of much theoretical significance. The Dutch, although they became the object of intense scrutiny by the British, were never until the nineteenth century an imperial power in any meaningful sense, nor ever regarded themselves as such. The claim by English royalists in the 1660s that the Republic of Holland was seeking a Universal Monarchy of the sea was an oxymoron. As every imperialist knew, 'empire' implied rulership, and that, on the British and Dutch understanding of the law of nations, could not be exercised at sea.

Any attempt to compare the ideologies of even the British, French and Spanish empires in America presents structural and thematic difficulties which, as with all comparative enterprises, can only ever be partially resolved. Although the topics I have chosen are those which dominated the various discourses of empire during this period, they were not all of equal significance, nor significant at the same time for all three empires. To attempt to recover the responses of the theorists from all three nations in equal measure would have been like attempting to reconstruct a tennis game with three players. Some of my chapters, therefore, focus on one national culture at the expense of the other two. The preoccupation with true 'lordship of all the world', for instance, began in Spain, and remained very largely a Spanish concern. In the late seventeenth century there were many Europeans who accused Louis XIV of harbouring designs of Universal Monarchy. But by this they meant, as Leibniz's satire *Mars Christianissimus* of 1683 made clear, little more than political hegemony in Europe. The ideologues of the Spanish empire, however, actually considered, if only briefly in the mid-sixteenth century, the possibility that their king might become ruler of a world state. Because of this, and because even those with more modest ambitions recognized that the

identity of the Spanish monarchy was linked to the older Roman imperial vision of the single 'orbis terrarum', Chapter 2 is largely concerned with Spain.

Similarly the question of slavery became a subject of moral and political anxiety in Spanish and in British America only after independence. In France, however, it figured pre-eminently in anti-monarchical and anti-imperial literature from the 1730s on, and by the 1790s had been placed firmly on the Revolutionary agenda. Slavery was also seen – in ways which were not replicated in either of the other two empires – as a direct consequence of the European Atlantic empires. For this reason, in Chapter 6 the question of slavery is discussed entirely in its French context, and as part of a critique whose target was, in effect, the entire colonial culture of the *ancien régime*.[10]

Neither can any comparative study make any pretence to inclusivity. The apparatus of scholarship on all three empires has grown so large since Raynal's day that any attempt to master all of it would take half a lifetime. There are obvious themes – population decline, the effect of the growth of the American trade on world markets, above all, perhaps, the whole question of the relationship between the European colonizers and the colonized – which I have either not discussed, or discussed only in passing. This is inescapably a Eurocentric study. It is an attempt to understand how Europeans thought about the empires which they had created and with the consequences of which they were compelled to live. It is also an attempt to show how that thinking changed over time, so that by the first decades of the nineteenth century a pattern of expectation – and of anxiety – had been established which would determine much of what subsequently transpired between Europe and almost the rest of the entire world.

## II

With the collapse of the European empires in America, the first phase of European expansion came to an end. These empires had all been, in their different ways and despite their sometimes self-conscious modernism, attempts to perpetuate the traditions and the values of the empires of the ancient world. 'Empire' and 'imperialism', however, are terms which have subsequently become associated not with this early period of expansion, but with the global European empires of the nineteenth century, empires which, with the exception of the lingering British presence in Canada and the Caribbean and of the French in Martinique and Guadeloupe, excluded America.[11] The invasions of India and later Africa, the settlement of Australia and the Pacific, the seizure of parts of China and the economic domination of the Persian Gulf, were all to be of far greater economic, and possibly more lasting political and human, significance than the

colonization of America had ever been. But what have often been called the 'First European empires'[12] cannot so easily be distinguished from these later developments. The language of empire, and many of its fundamental anthropological assumptions, persisted from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century, and in many cases into the twentieth. The centres of imperial power shifted from the south of Europe to the north. But two of the major states involved in colonizing the Americas, Britain and France, were also engaged in colonizing other parts of the globe in the nineteenth century. The American experience, furthermore, demonstrated that overseas settlement, despite massive logistical and technical problems, was both possible and potentially vastly profitable.

Yet the real intellectual significance for Europeans of their several experiences in America was that these had demonstrated what successful empires should *not* attempt to be. By 1800 most of enlightened Europe had been persuaded that large-scale overseas settlement of the kind pursued, in their different ways, by Spain, Britain and France in the Americas could ultimately be only destructive to the metropolis itself. They had shown that every immigrant community, no matter what its cultural origins or the degree of self-rule it is able to exercise, will one day come to demand economic self-sufficiency and political autonomy. They had shown, too, that the massive exploitation of forced native – and of imported slave – labour was wasteful of economic resources, and massively destructive of human lives in ways which even the most hardened imperialist could not quite ignore. The ordeal of the British in 1776, the French in the 1790s and the Spanish in the 1820s and 1830s had also come very close to destroying the political systems of the metropolitan powers. By the end of the eighteenth century all the major European states had suffered serious reversals, and their theorists had talked themselves into a position from which no right-thinking person should have been able to contemplate the creation of new empires. Why, then, was it precisely at that moment that the scramble for India and later Africa began?

The answer, as Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, that notable political survivor and Napoleon's foreign minister, had seen in 1797, was that the new colonies which the British had established in India were, in fact, quite unlike the old settlements in America. America had been a place of conquest and expatriation, a place where, in Talleyrand's words, 'individuals without industry without leaders and without morals' had gone precisely in order to escape the constraints of the old world. British India, by contrast, was to be a place not of settlement, but of exploitation. The Europeans in America had made the fatal mistake of handing their colonies over to those who regarded them only as places where they might secure for themselves goods and a way of life which they could never have hoped to acquire at home. They had compounded that mistake by trying to control such peoples by direct rule from a distant metropolis.[13] Their most damaging error, however, had been to cultivate the crops from which

the economic wealth of the colonies derived – primarily sugar – in lands where there was no available labour. Bringing vast numbers of human beings halfway across the globe was not merely unacceptably cruel – Talleyrand was not much troubled by that – it was also hugely wasteful, and had led to the creation of societies which, as the uprising in St Domingue on 24 August 1791 had demonstrated, were bound, sooner or later, to collapse in revolt. The British in Bengal had begun to cultivate sugar where there already existed an abundant labour force which could be paid, not enslaved. This, or so Talleyrand supposed, was a policy that would secure the dependence of the native populations without arousing their animosity. In such informal empires administrative costs were low and there was little danger of the development of an independent colonial society. The relationship that existed between colonizer and colonized was also believed to benefit both producer and consumer. A people who lived under the 'tutelage', rather than the rule, of another was clearly likely to prove more cooperative and more productive. France, Talleyrand concluded, should itself now emulate this excellent policy, and, in keeping with this new rational approach to colonization, the traveller-scientists, men like Antoine Bougainville, the 'discoverer' of Tahiti and first Frenchman to circumnavigate the world, should be asked where such future colonies should be established.[14]

British India, as Talleyrand was also aware, had been the creation of an essentially commercial society. Such societies had an abiding suspicion of conquest and the kind of imperial rule which followed conquest. To the 'merchant-adventurer' even the North American 'plantation' seemed to be little more than a relic. As the great Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter observed, for those modern merchants who were ultimately responsible for the creation of Europe's 'Second empires', imperialism 'fell into that large group of surviving features from an earlier age' which are characteristic of 'every concrete social situation'.[15] It seemed to be merely 'an element that stems from the living conditions, not of the present but of the past'. Entrepreneurs – 'capitalists' in Schumpeter's language – preferred economic gains that could be acquired at low capital expenditure. Conquests, even the conquest of relatively 'primitive' peoples, involved massive initial outlay on both military action and subsequent administration. As many had argued in the 1770s, the American colonies had cost Britain as much, if not more, than they had provided in either trade or agricultural and manufactured goods. Far better to benefit from the uncoerced labour of others. The exploitation of the Third World by the First had begun.

The new British empire in India may never have been quite as Talleyrand had imagined it. Even within Britain itself there were those, such as the radical dissenter Richard Price, who regarded British India as little more than a replay of the Spanish invasion of America, a place where 'Englishmen, actuated by the love of plunder and the spirit of conquest,

have depopulated whole kingdoms and ruined millions of innocent peoples by the most infamous oppression and rapacity'.[16] But Talleyrand was right to assume that this was an empire which had, in the first instance, been intended to be based not upon settlement but upon the enjoyment of a 'surplus' produced by a willing, if lowly paid, native population. He was right, too, in assuming that, at least at this formative stage, every effort had been made to prevent the emergence of a settler society which might one day follow the example of the Thirteen Colonies.

The British in India and later in Africa also avoided the wholesale destruction, physical as well as cultural, of the indigenous populations. This is not to say that the killing was not intense, nor that there were not many colonial administrators who seriously considered the possibility of genocide. After the 1870s apparently similar patterns of invasion and settlement to those which the Spaniards had pursued in America were being followed enthusiastically by the British, the French, the Belgians and the Germans in Africa. But the long-term effects of these were never so disastrous as the colonization of the Americas had been. India and Africa today are, very largely, populated by Indians and Africans, whereas in America the autochthonous people, though now on the increase, are a largely disenfranchised minority, with limited cultural rights, but no significant political or economic role in a predominantly Creole community. This can in part be attributed to the fact that most Asian and African peoples were militarily more robust than the Native Americans had been, and the Asian cultures more like those which Europeans were prepared to recognize as civil societies. But it was also a self-conscious policy. The doctrine of 'indirect rule', which was to become an ideological feature of subsequent British imperialism, may have been in great measure expedient, but it was also believed to benefit both colonized and colonizer alike, and it made for the creation of a wide and flexible trading base.

But by the mid-nineteenth century many of the political and economic features of British rule which Talleyrand had so admired had disappeared. In their place there had emerged a belligerent militarism which borrowed its rhetorical style, and its political culture if not its colonial policies, from the same Roman imperial imagery which had driven the earlier European empires.

This resurgence of the earlier methods of colonization does not, however, presuppose the revival of earlier ideological objectives. The European empires in America had been created in the shadow of an ancient and medieval legacy of universalism, of a presumed right of lordship over the entire world. Even the British, whose common-law traditions had insulated them to a certain degree from this predominantly Roman-law patrimony, could never quite escape the ambition to create for themselves a true *Imperium britannicum*. By the end of the eighteenth century, the European empires in America had become very different kinds of polities, but in their links with their respective 'mother countries'

they could never fully escape the terms of their creation. This is why when their hold over their American colonies finally began to weaken in the eighteenth century, the 'mother countries' responded with a desperate bid to reassert the older traditional ties. The semi-federalist solutions to the impending dissolution of their nations' empires which, as we shall see in Chapter 7, were offered to their respective governments by the Count of Aranda, Adam Smith and Anne Robert Turgot, were all attempts to formulate entirely new principles for any future colonial relations, ones which were precisely conceived on Greek rather than Roman models.

The British empire in India and Africa, although outwardly a neo-classical one, was largely untouched by Roman universalism. Instead it was, as C.A. Bayly has recently argued, the child of that other, more sinister legacy of the Enlightenment: nationalism. The assumption by the British crown of direct rule over India in 1858 constituted precisely the seizure of power by a centralized bureaucratic state from the 'aristocratic republicans' of the East India Company, who, in the attempt to safeguard their privileges, had fallen back upon the same language of country-party opposition which the American Revolutionaries had used seventy years before. Victoria's coronation as 'Empress of India' was the most fully elaborated attempt the modern world has ever witnessed to recreate the ancient Roman *imperium*. But it was meant largely for home consumption, an attempt by Disraeli to enhance the faltering status of the monarchy. Similarly Lord Cornwallis's 'viceregal pageantry', which combined images of Roman triumphalism with the now transfigured image of 'imperial benevolence', was intended to enforce the concept of loyalty to the king in the face of working-class radicalism.[17] In France, too, although the French overseas empire had never fed to the same degree on Roman imperial imagery as either the Spanish or the British, the new imperialism was the product of the nationalism which had followed the collapse of the Napoleonic empire, the last of the great unifying projects, whose inspiration had originally been a republican one.

Whatever the realities of their political organisation or economic objectives, the 'second' European empires clearly saw themselves as quite distinct from the first. The claim once made by the English historian J.R. Seeley that the British empire had been acquired in a fit of absentmindedness is patently absurd, if not actually meaningless. But it does contain one significant insight, for an empire which could, by Seeley's day, have come to *believe* that it had been acquired in this way could clearly not be, whatever else it might with time become, one sustained by any larger, cohesive cultural, political or juridical purpose. Insofar as the new European imperialists possessed any declared ideological objectives, these were supposedly limited to the quest for a world-wide civilization based upon European political and social principles.

It is here, in the domain of political and cultural self-imagining – the domain, to use Lacan's now familiar term, of the *imaginaire* – that the most