



TRA Memorandum on James Bradley's *The Imperial Cruise: A Secret History of Empire and War*

The Imperial Cruise is a highly misleading book. Its author utilizes historical evidence selectively and improperly as he purveys interpretations of history that are sharply in conflict with the findings of a generation of credible professional and popular historians. Quite simply, skillful marketing notwithstanding, *The Imperial Cruise* is a shoddy work of history.

The *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal* will be publishing a detailed feature review of Mr. Bradley's book in one of its 2010 issues. In the meantime, a few essential points might briefly be made:

(1) To assign Theodore Roosevelt responsibility for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 is not only preposterous (why not blame Abraham Lincoln, who, by preserving the Union, made it possible for the United States later to become a formidable great power with a modern navy and a major naval base in the Pacific?), but it stands history on its head. Theodore Roosevelt adroitly cultivated a friendly U.S.-Japan relationship, an undertaking that culminated in the Root-Takahira Agreement of November 1908. During an age in which all the great powers possessed colonial empires, and in which the United States itself was pursuing a benevolent imperial policy in the Philippines and was urging other powers to take a similar approach to their own empires, there was no possible way TR could have denied Korea to Japan. But he could have gratuitously antagonized the Japanese over the issue, thereby endangering the Philippines and, more generally, signaling Japan that it should view the United States as a hostile rival. As he was preparing the U.S. Navy for a possible war against Japan – and as he was demonstrating U.S. naval power to Japan by sending the Great White Fleet around the globe (a cruise of far greater historical significance than Bradley's "imperial" one, but about which Bradley nevertheless is stunningly silent) – Roosevelt, a consummate practitioner of statecraft, also was seeking to promote peaceful and cooperative Japanese behavior. His successors lost sight of the importance of this endeavor, although it is impossible to know whether a continuation of TR's respectful policy might have averted Japan's turn to extreme militarism in the 1930s. But, to return to the main point, Bradley's contention that TR wanted Japan to build a large Asian empire by brutally seizing control of nearby and more distant territories is the exact opposite of historical reality. And ascribing responsibility to TR for Pearl Harbor is on the outer edge of the crackpot arguments that readers of history occasionally encounter.

(2) Bradley depicts Theodore Roosevelt as a thoroughgoing racist. This is another gross distortion. TR was a progressive racial thinker for his era. Yes, he believed that some peoples – particularly the Americans and the British – were ahead of others in what he called the "progress of civilization," and that the more advanced peoples should help the less advanced move

forward. But he rejected skin color and ethnicity as determinants of a people's capacities. Bradley's emphasis of the idea that TR believed in "Aryan" supremacy is especially insidious. Had TR lived into the 1930s, he almost certainly would have been the American counterpart of Winston Churchill in calling for active resistance to the Aryan-supremacist aggression of the Nazis – and he would have condemned unequivocally Japanese brutality in China.

In actuality, TR was more hopeful about Japan's prospects for responsible international behavior than he was about "Aryan" Germany's or Russia's. The President's support for Japanese retention of Korea reflected the reality that Roosevelt was evaluating Japan on its achievements and not on its non-white racial make-up. Japan had become an admirable great power, and TR was treating it as one (while always keeping the navy ready just in case).

(3) It should be pointed out that Bradley, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of contemporary American political leaders and citizens, rejects the "erroneous notion" that war is ever really necessary. Bradley apparently believes that it is a pompous fallacy to characterize any foreign nation or organization as evil. All we need are more "human links between cultures" (p. 336). In other words, appeasement works after all. The British people simply gave up on it too readily in 1939. Don't be surprised to find Bradley blaming President Barack Obama's warmongering in Afghanistan for the next major al-Qaeda attack on a Western target. Like those of the Japanese militarists, al-Qaeda's acts of aggression are the fault of the United States. In effect, Bradley is assuring his readers, if only we would all turn away from Theodore Roosevelt's ideas about preparedness and confronting international barbarism with military power, the "global community" could at last begin its long-deferred love fest.

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