

**OLLI LECTURE #7****November 1, 2011****Franceline at GMU Sterling: November 14 @ 1 p.m. in Room 232**

You may recall that I ended up last time with a quotation from that great imperialist **Cecil Rhodes** (1853-1902), who said: *"If there be a God, I think [what] he would like me to do is paint as much of the map of Africa British red as possible."*

Well, he tried. **The Boers had attempted to flee British colonialism** after 1815 by moving to the Transvaal, but once diamonds and gold had been found there the Redcoats were in hot pursuit. The result was **the Boer War (1898-1901)**, which began badly for the British and ended in victory only after 52,000 imperial lives had been lost (1,400 Australians, 507 Canadians, and 421 New Zealanders) while countless Boers had been killed as well. The result was the creation of the Union of South Africa, modeled in no small measure on the Dominion of Canada which the British had created in 1867, laying the basis for the existing Commonwealth of Nations that held its annual meeting of 54 nations just last week. Not anybody much noticed.

Cecil Rhodes wasn't finished yet and in an attempt to realize his **dream of a "Cape to Cairo" railroad** encouraged his fellow South Africans to move yet further north and create another British colony beyond the Transvaal, which he modestly allowed to be named for himself, "Rhodesia," now renamed Zimbabwe. But there were other Europeans in the imperial business. For example,

- **The French** – who used their bases in Algeria and Tunisia to move south into the Sahara (see Gary Cooper in "Beau Geste") and from thence across Africa toward their other holdings on the island of Madagascar off the East Coast.
- **The Portuguese** – who were the first Europeans to colonize Africa had since established imperial outposts at Angola on the West Coast and Mozambique on the East. When Victoria reigned they were beginning to construct a railroad that would link those two mineral-rich colonies.
- **The Belgians** – who got into the imperial business in a big way after 1878, thanks to the efforts of an Anglo-American journalist, Henry Stanley (1841-1904). It was he who "found" the British missionary, Dr. David Livingstone (1813-1873) who was living quietly and beneficently in what is now Zimbabwe. Based on his sensational report of this encounter, Stanley was invited to meet with King Leopold I of Belgium (1835-1909) and on the basis of that conversation convinced the King to create the International Congo Association, a private firm that was set up to exploit the vast resources of the Congo basin. The result of this experiment in private enterprise is vividly described in Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) unforgettable Heart of Darkness (1902). To this day, we have no idea of how many Congolese perished as slaves and serfs at the behest of the owners of the Congo Association. When Leopold died in 1909, the region became the Belgian Congo and remained that way into living memory.
- **The Italians** – The late nineteenth century witnessed a mass exodus of Italians from their newly-created nation-state. Many came to the United States but they also showed up in great numbers in Latin America; hence it's called "Latin America" not Hispanic America. But the Italians also wanted to rank among the Great Powers by carving out its own empire in Africa. In the 1892, they landed troops in Somalia and

moved on to Eretria and eyed with some eagerness on the ancient Christian kingdom of Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia).

As these expeditions collided with each other, the threat of imperial wars in distant lands was manifest. As he had done in 1877 with the Russo-Turkish War, German Chancellor Bismarck summoned an international conference to meet in Berlin in 1885 to discuss the African situation. This Berlin Conference allowed the delegates (all Europeans and no Africans) to sit around a table and carve up the African continent into “spheres of influence.” By the time they had finished their work, no independent state existed in Africa except Liberia (which was an American colony), Ethiopia, and Libya. The Italians were soon to try to take over the latter two. To this day, we still deal with the boundary lines set up at this conference in Berlin by Bismarck.

Why did he summon it? Having gained pre dominant power on the European continent in 1871, he was not interested in expanding German power abroad. In fact, the imperial rivalry between Britain and France suited his designs nicely, keeping the British preoccupied with their adventures overseas and the French diplomatically isolated in Europe. There was pressure in the new German empire for that nation to gain “its place in the sun.” Bismarck was wary of these imperial temptations (led by the Navy League) but at the conclusion of the Berlin Conference accepted German protectorates over Southwest Africa, the Cameroons, and Tanganyika (then called German East Africa).

Some Africans didn’t like this arrangement. In fact, one of them, Mohammed Ahmed (1844-1885) declared *jihad* against the British intrusion into Egypt and the Sudan. He inspired a great rebellion in 1883 against the infidels and declared himself to be the “Mahdi,” a name which means “the one who offers divine guidance in the right way.” Ahmed’s rebellion caused a British-led Egyptian column to march into the Sudan where, much to everyone’s surprise, they were massacred with losses in the thousands.

The last thing that British Prime Minister Gladstone wanted at the moment was yet another imperial war and he agreed to send General “China” Gordon to Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, to negotiate a settlement. Gordon was at that time negotiating with King Leopold of Belgium to take the leadership of the International Congo Association. But he was a good soldier and accepted Gladstone’s commission to negotiate a treaty with Mahdi Ahmed. As this illustration demonstrates, Gordon failed in his mission and was killed by rebels in Khartoum in January 1885. Prime Minister Gladstone was thereafter obliged to send in a punitive British expedition to crush the Mahdi’s rebellion. It happens that Mohammed Ahmed died of natural causes six months later, but the British column (under the command of General Horatio Kitchener (1850-1916) met the Mahdi’s forces (50,000) at Omdurman (1898) and obliterated them with Maxim guns. Winston Churchill (1874-1965), a war correspondent for London’s *Morning Post* witnessed the slaughter and wrote: “The maxim guns came into action. A dozen Dervershirs are standing on a sandy knoll. All in a moment the dust began to jump in front of them, and the clump of horsemen melts into a jumble on the ground.” Thus, 10,000 of the Mahdi’s followers were killed; 13,000 wounded; and 5,000 were taken prisoner. British loses were 47 killed in the engagement and 352 wounded. Gladstone was shortly thereafter forced to resign.

Shortly after Kitchener’s victory at Omdurman there was yet another victory for British imperialism. As you will recall, the French had been pressing eastward from the Sahara toward the Indian Ocean while the British had been pursuing Cecil Rhodes’ dream of a Cape to Cairo axis. The two forces met at a desert watering hole in the Sudan called Fashoda in 1894. A French cavalry unit under the command of Captain Jean Marchand met up with British forces under Kitchener at the same place. The incident produced a diplomatic crisis, even cries for war on both sides of the Channel. Cooler heads prevailed, however, and the French backed down. They needed friends; not more enemies. In fact, we have a monument to France’s eagerness to find allies facing us

this month in New York harbor. It's **the Statue of Liberty**, designed by Frédéric Bartholdi (1864-1904) and donated to the United States in 1886 for the purpose of reminding the nation that France was a democratic state, too, and had been instrumental in gaining our independence from Great Britain during our Revolution.

The crisis at Fashoda and the subsequent Boer War caused Victoria's ministers to rethink their policy of "splendid isolation" from the European continent. They recognized that in their war against the Boers in South Africa hardly any power in Europe applauded them; that they were indeed "isolated." In fact, the new German Kaizer, Wilhelm II (1888-1918) [a grandson of Queen Victoria] had openly sided with the Boers and hinted at German support for their cause. There was also the United States to consider. Prior to its civil war, the US was an emerging and strongly neutralist power. Afterward, however, it proved to be formidable both industrially and militarily. So much so that in 1867, the mere threat of US intervention in Mexico against the French-backed **"Emperor" Maximilian I of Austria** (1864-67) was sufficient to inspire Mexican revolutionaries against him and ultimately cause his death before a Mexican firing squad.

As you know, the United States had already established its presence in the Pacific area with the arrival of Commodore Perry's fleet in Japan even before the civil war. That presence became far larger in 1869 when the **first transcontinental railroad** was completed at Prospect Point, Utah, meaning that goods could be moved far more quickly from the manufacturing centers on the American east coast to ports on the West for shipment to Asian markets. It also worked the other way, of course, and American entrepreneurs eyed those new markets with great interest.

That explains that, when in 1898, war broke out between the US and Spain, the first place the Americans attacked was not Cuba ("Remember the 'Maine'") but **the Philippines**. As you may have noticed in last Tuesday's broadcast of Charlton Heston's "55 Days in Peking" American forces played a significant role in defeating **the Boxer Rebellion** (against the imperial powers) in China that lasted from 1899 to 1901. The Chinese rebels were called "Boxers" in the West because the name of the overarching group that led this anti-Western uprising was "The Righteous and Harmonious Society of Fists." At that concluding date, the Chinese imperial government was tasked by the **Treaty of Peking (1901)** to pay eight western nations 60 million pounds over a 39-year period for the damages the Boxers had caused. This treaty led to the eventual bankruptcy of the Chinese empire and the overthrow in 1911 of its ancient dynasty. Subsequently, the Theodore Roosevelt administration used these funds to underwrite Chinese student fellowship to American universities.

Among the signatories of that treaty was imperial Japan which had already embarrassed the Chinese in an 1894-1895 war that pitted Japan's newly-acquired industrial might against obsolete Chinese weaponry. The Japanese won a spectacular victory over their ancient rivals and extracted from them in the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895): the right to rule Taiwan (formerly called "Formosa" by the Portuguese); the independence of Korea (thus becoming a Japanese "protectorate"); occupation of the Liaodong Peninsula at the mouth of the Yellow Sea; and obliging the Chinese to pay a 200 million pound indemnity. 'Small wonder that the Boxer nationalists were enraged at China's impotence against these imperial aggressors.

They weren't the only ones. There were, for example, the Ethiopians who annihilated an Italian army at **the battle of Adowa** (1896) as Italian troops attempted to add Abyssinia to their new Roman Empire. Italy would eventually include the deserts of Libya to its imperial dreams in 1911 and get revenge for Adowa under Mussolini in 1935 by using poison gas against their indigenous opponents.

Still, there had been imperial triumphs. The Canadians in 1840 saw the last of the British forces there withdraw in 1840 and in 1867 the British parliament agreed to proclaim that **Canada was "a dominion"** of the

Empire, meaning autonomy for the Canadians. Much the same formula was then applied to British settlements in Australia (1901), New Zealand (1907), and South Africa (1910).

But then there were the Irish. **English armies had invaded Ireland** for quite a long time. Some of the first were among assigned to the task by Queen Elizabeth I (Queen 1588-1601); and among her champions there was Sir Walter Raleigh (1554-1618), who was awarded 40,000 acres of Irish property for his victory at the **Battle of Smerwick in 1580**. The English and the Irish are only remotely akin ethnically. When Henry VIII (who reigned from 1509-1547) declared himself to be head of the Church of England (1534), Irish Catholics resisted his claim and thus the fighting began. It was serious in Elizabeth's time, but genocidal when Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) came to power in 1648. Cromwell was a zealous Protestant and severely persecuted Irish Catholics. To this day, Irish Protestants (who still hold power in Northern Ireland) march through Catholic areas of Londonderry parading their orange colors to show their admiration of the Dutchman William (of William & Mary) who defeated Catholic armies at the **Battle of the Boyne (1690)**. That demonstration to this day still costs Irish lives.

What Cromwell's victory imposed on the Irish was an established Protestant faith, the Church of Ireland, supported by public taxation. Catholics were excluded in Ireland (and England) from holding public office and obliged each year at least to attend a Protestant service. **More, the great landed estates** of Ireland were rewarded to Protestants, especially in the North where the Scots were assigned for their support of the Hanoverian dynasty (against the Stuarts in the seventeenth century) by the allocations of land ownership. So, if you were an Irish Catholic, you would see your priest only in hiding and work your land for the profit of a usually-distant (London townhouse) landlord who knew nothing of you or your family. 'Small wonder that when the French Revolution occurred that in the 1790's French invaders were welcomed on Irish shores.

The **potato blight of the 1840's** only exacerbated these problems and millions of the island's population fled; many to America. But those who remained came increasingly to believe that the only solution to their problems was "Home Rule." That meant autonomy within the British Empire for the Irish people. Some wanted absolute independence (and a republic) but in elections held on the island during the late nineteenth century "home rule" was the popular theme.

The champion of this movement was **Charles Parnell (1846-1891)**, an Irishman who was elected to parliament in 1875 and soon became the foremost voice for Home Rule in the London parliament. His cause was finally embraced by British Prime Minister William Gladstone and had a good chance of being adopted until his enemies revealed that Parnell had been involved in a love affair with a Katherine O'Shea, a married woman, (1846-1921) and had fathered three of her children. The Irish were outraged, the Tories were delighted, and **Gladstone's proposal for Irish Home Rule went down to defeat** in the House of Commons in 1886 and later was defeated in the House of Lords in 1893. Already in his 'eighties, the Parnell scandal ended Gladstone's career in politics and Gladstone died in 1898 after four terms as Victoria's prime minister.

Gladstone had long since been outflanked by his Tory opponent, **Benjamin Disraeli**. In a brief stand as prime minister in 1867, "Dizzy" introduced a bill into parliament that would expand the electorate by nearly a million voters to include small property owners. He had been first elected to parliament in 1837 and became the classic model of a compassionate conservative. He had written several novels, including *Sybil: A Tale of Two Nations (1845)*, which described in touching tones the plight of Britain's industrial class working women. Disraeli advocated a conservative cause (like Bismarck) that attacked the Liberal "laissez-faire" philosophy and called for a "crown and cottage" alliance that meant governmental support for the poor and would earn popular following. To this, of course, he added the delight of imperial conquests. His approach was a huge electoral success (much

admired later by Richard Nixon) and gained Disraeli the prime ministry in 1846 and again from 1874-1880. Gladstone, when once again he became Prime Minister (1880) added still more to the electorate by introducing a bill that, although it still excluded women from voting, included all working men except those engaged in servile activity. Even that restriction was eliminated after World War One. Women gained the vote at the same time.

So, Great Britain was approaching democracy on the eve of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victoria's reign in 1887. There was a great celebration of the event with 50 European royals on hand and Mark Twain commenting that it "stretched to the limit of sight in both directions." Still, Irish republicans were arrested in a failed effort to blow up Westminster Abby where the celebrations were to be held in the so-called "Jubilee Plot" of 1887.

There would be another huge celebration arranged by the Tory government of Lord Salisbury (Robert Cecil) ten years later on the occasion of her "Diamond Anniversary" in 1897. Salisbury had already served as Tory prime minister three times and would serve in that office again until 1903. I quote now from Walter Arnstein's new volume, Queen Victoria (2003) about the occasion:

*"The 78-year-old queen was not prepared to take on again the feeding and housing of what would have proved a yet larger gathering of European royal relations. A ban on all crowned heads would make it unnecessary for her to entertain Kaizer Wilhelm II of Germany, who was once again proving difficult. Grudgingly her cabinet agreed to such a ban, and the prospective celebratory vacuum inspired the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain [1836-1914] to transform the Diamond Jubilee into a true ceremony of empire. As he pointed out to Salisbury, 'there has never been in English territory any representation of the Empire as a whole...All eleven prime ministers of the Empire's self-governing colonies were therefore invited as guests of the government...[The occasion and the tradition]...[now] form the regular Commonwealth conferences [which] survive into the twenty-first century."*

In describing the event, Arnstein continues:

*The procession of June 22, 1897, which took place in brilliant sunshine, was climaxed by a religious service outside of St. Paul's cathedral where a grandstand had been set up for thousands of dignitaries and where Victoria remained in her carriage...The archbishop of Canterbury intervened with a spontaneous cry, 'Three cheers for the Queen.' The spectators responded with delight, and the band and the chorus burst into 'God save the Queen.' The return journey to Buckingham Palace [was] routed through the poorer sections of the metropolis south of the Thames. It turned out to be the greatest ceremonial occasion in the history of London and in the life of the Queen. [She wrote in her journal]:*

*"No one ever, I believe, has met with such an ovation as was given to me, passing through those six miles of streets...The crowds were quite indescribable, and their enthusiasm truly marvelous and deeply touching. The cheering was quite deafening, and every face seemed to be filled with real joy." So, it now seems, it should have been.*