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Duncan Bell: The Idea of Greater Britain

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Introduction: Building Greater Britain

When we have accustomed ourselves to contemplate the whole Empire together and call it England, we shall see that here too is a United States. Here too is a homogeneous people, one in blood, language, religion, and laws, but dispersed over a boundless space.
—J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883)

A firm and well-compacted union
of all the British lands would form a state
that might control the whole world.
—Charles Oman, *England in the Nineteenth Century* (1899)

THE HISTORY of modern political thought is partly the history of the attempt to confront increasing global interdependence and competition. *The Idea of Greater Britain* focuses on an important but neglected aspect of this chronicle: the debate over the potential union of the United Kingdom with its so-called settler colonies—the lands we know now as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, as well as parts of South Africa—during the late Victorian age. Straddling oceans and spanning continents, this polity was to act, so its advocates proclaimed, as a guarantor of British strength and of a just and stable world. I explore the languages employed in imagining the settler empire as a single transcontinental political community, even as a global federal state, with the intention of contributing to the history of imperial thought and Victorian intellectual life. I seek to shed light on the ways in which the future of world order—the configuration and dynamics of economic and geopolitical power, and the normative architecture justifying this patterning—was perceived in an age of vital importance for the development of politics in the twentieth century and beyond.

The quest for Greater Britain was both a reaction to and a product of the complex evolution of nineteenth-century international politics. The turbulent economic and political conditions of the era engendered profound anxiety, leading to the belief that a colossal polity was indispensable for preserving strength in a world in flux. In this sense it was reactive. But it was a product in the sense that the communications technologies facilitating increasing levels of economic interdependence also generated

the cognitive shift that was necessary for people to conceive of the scattered elements of the colonial empire as a coherent and unified political unit, and even as a state.¹ In the last three decades of the century, a significant number of commentators responded to the widespread perception that the world was both shrinking and becoming increasingly competitive, and that this was a world in which Britain was losing (or had already lost) its midcentury preeminence.² A strong and vibrant Greater Britain was one of the most prominent solutions offered to the crisis of confidence in national supremacy. The debate signaled an important moment in the reconfiguration of national consciousness in a late Victorian world subject to the vicissitudes of international relations and a transfiguration of the prevailing norms of domestic political culture. It was driven in part by the perceived need to theorize and construct a bulwark against the encroachment of a powerful set of global challengers, most notably Germany, the United States, and Russia. As such it illustrates the disquieting effect that the impending loss of great power status had on a generation of thinkers. But the debate also constitutes a chapter in the intricate story charting the advent of democracy. Seen by many in Britain as a world-historical development, the emergence and spread of democracy (at least among the so-called civilized) was regarded as inevitable, as the culmination, whether intended or not, of many of the social, economic, and political trends of the previous two centuries, and it spawned a constantly mutating blend of optimism and anxiety. Imperial commentators reacted in divergent ways. For some, the spread of the Anglo-Saxon peoples across the face of the earth was the main engine of global progress; Greater Britain was, as such, a virtuous agent of democratic transformation. It foreshadowed the future. The majority, however, were more skeptical, and more nervous: the arrival of democracy prompted apprehension, and sometimes even fear. It was unclear what sort of path it would carve through the modern world, and in particular how both empire and state would be reconfigured. This group often saw Greater Britain as a counterrevolutionary response, capable of taming the transition to democracy. These concerns provided the fertile soil in which ideas about Greater Britain blossomed, flourished, and finally wilted.

¹ These lands were, of course, already occupied by various indigenous communities, nearly all of which suffered greatly at the hands of the settlers. On some of the methods of dispossession, see Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Phillips, and Shurlee Swain, *Unequal Rights* (Manchester, 2003).

² “Britain” and “England” were often employed interchangeably during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in large part due to the long-standing dominance of the English over the other realms. See here Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified* (Oxford, 2000), 11–15; and Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003). Except where I deem it appropriate, I use “Britain.”

The dates that I have chosen for the title of the book—namely c.1860–1900—act as a rough guide rather than a precise measure for the range of materials covered. In some chapters I reach further back in time, exploring dimensions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century imperial thought, while in the conclusion I discuss some developments in the early twentieth century. The bulk of the text, however, focuses on the closing decades of Victoria’s reign. Both the proximate cause of the explosion of interest in Greater Britain, and the shifts in the perception of the planet that helped underpin the idea of an integrated global polity, can be traced principally to the 1860s. The early 1870s saw a surge in proposals for an imperial federal system; during the 1880s this turned into a flood. From the mid-1890s confidence in the project of transforming the constitutional structures of the empire began to decline, as legislative success eluded the imperialists, as the leaders of the colonies displayed limited enthusiasm for such ideas, and as imperial priorities were increasingly focused on southern Africa. The war in South Africa (1899–1902) redirected imperial political thought in numerous ways, and it is for this reason that I stop at the turn of the century. Tracing the changes, as well as the various lines of continuity, would require another book.

The remainder of this introduction sets the scene for the following chapters. In the next section I explore some of the meanings of the term “Greater Britain.” I then examine the role of the imperial federation movement within the wider discourse of Greater Britain and locate the book in relation to recent work in the history of political thought and imperial history. The final section provides an outline of the arguments presented, and a breakdown of the individual chapters.

THE BOUNDARIES OF IMPERIAL DISCOURSE: IMAGINING GREATER BRITAIN

During the 1830s and 1840s the relationship between the rapidly expanding settler colonies and London came under increasing scrutiny. The Canadian rebellions (1837–38) marked a watershed, catalyzing interest in conceding limited self-government to the settlers. The late 1840s and 1850s saw many of them granted “responsible government,” which meant, in essence, the creation of limited representative institutions.³ It

³ By 1860 there were eleven self-governing colonies: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Canada (what is now Ontario and southern Quebec), New Zealand, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, and Queensland. The Cape of Good Hope turned down the offer of responsible government in 1854, but accepted it in 1872. The number of units was reduced by the creation of British North America (usually referred to simply as “Canada”) in 1867 and the federation that produced Australia in

was generally assumed that such changes would eventually result in the independence of the colonies; the point of reform was to push such a moment far into the future and to make sure that when it came the terms of separation would be amicable. “Every colony,” argued the radical politician J. A. Roebuck in 1849, “ought by us to be looked upon as a country destined, at some period of its existence, to govern itself,” a point echoed in 1856 by Arthur Mills, an esteemed Tory colonial commentator, who stated that “to ripen those communities to the earliest possible maturity—social, political, and commercial—to qualify them, by all the appliances within the reach of a parent State, for present self-government, and eventual independence, is now the universally admitted object and aim of our Colonial policy.”⁴ During the 1860s, however, many watchful observers perceived an imminent threat to the empire. This trepidation resonated throughout sections of the British elite for the remainder of the century, shaping the debate over the aims and the structure of Greater Britain.

Two distinct but related fears helped to generate and sustain the debate. From the 1860s onward many imperial thinkers were concerned with the potential impact of a socially and morally corrosive “materialism” on the population as a whole, and on the Liberal party in particular. While this fear was sharpened by a growing awareness of the constraints on British global power, the chief source of alarm was domestic.⁵ It was widely thought that under the pernicious influence of Cobdenite “Manchesterism” (as well as the rigor of Gladstonian fiscal prudence), the newly enfranchised middle and working classes would become increasingly selfish and introverted. Their sense of patriotism would evaporate. To such people, the empire would seem a burden rather than a source of greatness. Had not Adam Smith and many of his disciples derided the value of the colonies? Claiming to follow in his footsteps, the radical polemicist Goldwin Smith made a strident intervention in political debate with *The Empire* (1863), a collection of essays demanding the emancipation of the colonies. Gesturing in his direction, one exasperated imperialist complained that there “have been springing up of late years a number of half-politi-

1901. Most imperial unionists supported the federation of the individual colonies, as it reduced the problems of economic and political coordination. For a comprehensive overview, see John M. Ward, *Colonial Self-Government* (London, 1976). For general context, see Chris Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* (London, 1989); P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000* (Harlow, 2001), ch. 8; and Susan Farnsworth, *The Evolution of British Imperial Policy During the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1992).

⁴ Roebuck, *The Colonies of England* (London, 1849), 170; and Mills, *Colonial Constitutions* (London, 1856), lxix. A prolific commentator on imperial issues, Mills served as a Conservative M.P. between 1857 and 1865 and 1873 and 1880.

⁵ On the constraints on power, see Richard Millman, *British Foreign Policy and the Coming of the Franco-Prussian War* (Oxford, 1965), ch. 1. For the dynamics of domestic concerns, see J. P. Parry, *The Politics of the Constitution* (Cambridge, 2006).

cal charlatans, half ignoramuses, who are contending that the colonies are of no use to the mother country.”⁶ It was feared that this attitude would lead invariably to either benign neglect or explicitly “anti-imperial” legislation. In either case, the empire faced a dangerous challenge. Then, secondly, during the 1880s apprehension was heightened by further turmoil over democracy, Irish Home Rule, and mounting economic and geopolitical competition. This was the decade in which “socialism” came to be seen as an imminent threat to the body politic and in which the global political horizon darkened perceptibly. The two fears inspired intense disquiet about the future stability and greatness of the polity.

A number of options were canvassed, and the period witnessed rivalry between diverse conceptions of empire.⁷ During the 1870s Benjamin Disraeli propounded a vision of a military empire focused on Asia, stressing the value of India, the danger of Russia, and the imperative of bringing “civilization” to “backward” peoples. It was this particular rendition of a long-standing theme in British imperial thought and practice that served as the target of Gladstone’s successful Midlothian campaign (1879–80).⁸ Throughout the last three decades of the century, however, the focus increasingly shifted to the “Anglo-Saxon” empire. Grandiose visions of colonial unity found emotive and symbolic expression in poetry, prayer, song, and major architectural projects, as well as through the more conventional media of political thought.⁹ A small minority continued to advocate independence for the settler colonies, most notably Cobden, Bright, and Goldwin Smith;¹⁰ others recommended limiting reform to

⁶ Smith, *The Empire* (London, 1863); and M. H. Marsh, comments in the *PRCI*, I (1869–70), 14–15.

⁷ The vocabulary employed to talk about the empire lacked precision. The term “colony” had a variable referent: for some it applied only to settler territories (the main focus of this book), for others, any territory ruled by Britain. “Imperialism” was a term used for much of the Victorian period to characterize the despotic municipal politics of France; it was only in the late 1860s, and especially the 1870s, that it entered mainstream use to refer to policies of foreign conquest, and, even then, there was much confusion over its meaning as well as its normative status. For further discussion, see Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1964); Andrew Thompson, “The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire,” *JBS*, 26 (1997), 147–77; and David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁸ C. C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the Rise of a New Imperialism* (Cardiff, 1996); H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1898* (Oxford, 1997), Part II, ch. 2; and Peter Cain, “Radicalism, Gladstone, and the Liberal Critique of Disraelian ‘Imperialism’” in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁹ See, for examples, Alex G. Bremner, “‘Some Imperial Institute,’” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 62 (2003), 50–73; John Clifford, *God’s Greater Britain* (London, 1899); and Benjamin George Ambler, *Ballads of Greater Britain and Songs of an Anglo-Saxon* (London, 1900).

¹⁰ Peter Cain, “Capitalism, War, and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden,” *British Journal of International Studies*, 5 (1979), 229–48.

minor tinkering, such as conferring more honors on colonial statesmen. Many still believed, even if they did not seek to support, an argument that since self-government had been awarded to the settler communities, it was inevitable that they would eventually become independent. Decried by fate, this process should be left to follow its natural course.¹¹ The most persistent, ambitious, and from the perspective of political thought, the most interesting response, however, was the demand for a united Greater Britain.

During the late nineteenth century political theorizing was, as Jose Harris has observed, “virtually a national sport of British intellectuals of all ideological and professional complexions.”¹² Debate over the empire was no exception and it drew in a wide range of participants. Who were the proponents of Greater Britain, and what was their intended audience? Most of the figures examined in this book can be classified, to employ Stefan Collini’s felicitous phrase, as “public moralists.”¹³ They formed part of the elite class of academics, businessmen, lawyers, politicians, and journalists—often combining several of these roles simultaneously—who shaped public debate in London, the imperial metropolis. Some were prominent colonial politicians who entered the metropolitan intellectual fray only occasionally. A further category comprised the stalwarts of the organizations central to imperial debate—in particular the Colonial Society (founded in 1868)¹⁴ and the Imperial Federation League (1884–1893)—who served as propagandists and prophets of a new world. Virtually all of the high-profile advocates were men; this was a heavily gendered discourse. The colonial unionists generated a vast amount of material, penning hundreds of books, pamphlets, speeches, and essays published in the leading periodicals of the day.¹⁵ It is on these sources that I mainly focus.

¹¹ Herman Merivale, “The Colonial Question in 1870,” *FR*, 7 (1870), 171; and Robert Lowe, “The Value to the United Kingdom of the Foreign Dominions of the Crown,” *FR*, 22 (1877), 618–30.

¹² Harris, “Political Theory and the State” in S.J.D. Green and R. C. Whiting (eds.), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 16.

¹³ Collini, *Public Moralists* (Oxford, 1991). The term “public intellectual” was not widely employed until the mid-twentieth century, although many of the people I explore fit this category. See here Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 1. See also, for general context, Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and Public Identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001), Pt. I.

¹⁴ This soon became the Royal Colonial Society (1869), but, following a complaint from the Royal College of Surgeons about possible confusion over initials, it quickly changed its name to the Royal Colonial Institute (RCI). See *PRCI*, 1 (1869), 9–10. On the foundation of the society, see Edward Beasley, *Empire as the Triumph of Theory* (London, 2005).

¹⁵ I use the term “colonial unionist” throughout the book to denote individuals who advocated strengthening ties with the settler colonies in the late Victorian era. It does not imply adherence to any particular scheme or plan of action. Biographical details of most of the individuals covered can be found in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, or the relevant national biographies of Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand.

Although the movement itself stretched around the globe, with outposts located in the towns and cities of the empire, the debate centered on London, for it was considered vital to fight and win the ideological battle in the heart of the imperial system. The proponents of Greater Britain, and in particular the imperial federalists, represented one of a large number of competing and intersecting movements aiming to challenge and transform the way in which the British empire (and state) was understood. Expounding their views in the most high-profile outlets in British political culture, they succeeded in drawing the support, as well as the opprobrium, of some of the leading thinkers, public commentators, and politicians of the day.

Greater Britain meant different things to different people; therein resided both its wide appeal and ultimately one of its chief weaknesses. The term was employed in three main ways. Firstly, it could denote the totality of the British empire, the vast ensemble of disparate territories coloring the map of the world red.¹⁶ Secondly, it could refer to the settlement colonies, which by the 1870s were growing very rapidly in population, economic power, and strategic importance. And thirdly, it could mean the “English-speaking,” or Anglo-Saxon, countries of the world, encompassing not only the settlement empire but also the United States. This conceptual multivalency reflected conflicting views over the future direction of the empire, and it exposed some of the fault lines running through the political thought of the period. Although all three modulations circulated widely, the most frequent usage was in reference to the settler colonies. In his pioneering *Short History of British Colonial Policy* (1897), H. E. Egerton argued that “The Period of Greater Britain” commenced in 1886.¹⁷ This was to place the starting point at least fifteen years too late, however, for intense argument over the future of the settler empire began in earnest in the early 1870s, drawing its terminological inspiration from Charles Dilke’s best-selling travelogue *Greater Britain* (1868).¹⁸ Some thinkers preferred other labels for the colonial empire. The celebrated historian J. A. Froude named this incipient polity “Oceana,” in a deliberate republican echo of James Harrington’s utopian vision. Another commentator

¹⁶ This is the sense employed, for example, in Phiroze Vasunia, “Greater Britain and Greater Rome” in Barbara Goff (ed.), *Classics and Colonialism* (London, 2005), 34–68.

¹⁷ Egerton, *A Short History of British Colonial Policy* (London, 1897), Book V. At the time, Egerton worked at the Emigrants’ Information Office. In 1905 he became the first Beit professor of colonial history at Oxford. On his views, see J. G. Greenlee, “A ‘Succession of Seeleys,’” *JICH*, 4 (1976), 266–83.

¹⁸ Dilke, *Greater Britain*, 2 vols. (London, 1868). Other early texts include: [John Robinson], “The Future of the British Empire,” *WR*, 38 (1870), 47–74; [John Edward Jenkins], “Imperial Federalism,” *CR*, 16 (1871), 165–88; J. A. Froude, “England and Her Colonies,” *FM*, 1 (1870), 1–16; and Andrew Robert Macfie, “On the Crisis of the Empire,” *PRCI*, 3 (1871–72), 2–12. For some of the intellectual background to this shift, see Beasley, *Empire as the Triumph of Theory*.

suggested the creation of the “United States of England.” Francis de La-billière, one of the most prolific advocates of colonial unity, referred to a global “Federal Britain.”¹⁹ The most common appellation, however, was “Greater Britain.” The writings of Dilke, who soon rose to national prominence as a radical politician and strategic thinker, exemplified both the conflicting visions of political destiny common at the time and the inconsistency of imperial vocabulary. In *Greater Britain* he initially employed the term as a synonym for the British empire as a whole, although later in the book he declared that it should be confined to the “English-speaking, white-inhabited, and self-governed lands.” In his *Problems of Greater Britain* (1890), he observed that the elements of the empire “vary infinitely in their forms of government, between the absolutism which prevails in India and the democracy of South Australia and Ontario,” but he also lamented that “in popular usage” the term “Greater Britain” was “applied . . . chiefly to the English countries outside of the United Kingdom remaining under British government.”²⁰ This was problematic because he thought that discussions of the past, present, and future of Greater Britain ought to recognize the vital role of the United States.

The historian J. R. Seeley employed the term “Greater Britain” throughout *The Expansion of England* (1883), the most influential account of colonial unity in the late Victorian age. Like Dilke, Seeley started by defining it very broadly, as encompassing four “great groups of territory” inhabited “either chiefly or to a large extent by Englishmen” and subject to the sovereignty of the Crown—Australia, Canada, the West Indies, and the Cape Territories—as well as India. Nevertheless, throughout his writings he was keen to stress the radical difference between the colonial empire and the empire in India, and to highlight the primary importance of the former. And as with Dilke, his definition of Greater Britain underwent a number of shifts. At one point in *The Expansion of England*, he claimed that Greater Britain was (with a few minor exceptions) racially homogeneous, and as such it could not incorporate India. Later in the same book he argued that there were actually two separate Greater Britains, one composed of the colonial empire, the other of India, and that they were antithetical in important respects:

The colonies and India are in opposite extremes. Whatever political maxims are most applicable to one, are most inapplicable to the other. In the colonies

¹⁹ Froude, *Oceana* (London, 1886); Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge, 1992 [1656]); [Urquhart Forbes], “Imperial Federation,” *LQR*, 4 (1885), 325–26; and De Labillière, *Federal Britain, or, Unity and Federation of the Empire* (London, 1894).

²⁰ Dilke, *Greater Britain*, II, 149; and Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain* (London, 1890), I, 1 and 171; II, 157. See also Dilke, *The British Empire* (1899), 9–10. On Dilke’s tempestuous career, see David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister* (London, 1995).

everything is brand-new. There you have the most progressive race put in the circumstances most favourable to progress. There you have no past and an unbounded future. Government and institutions are all ultra-English. All is liberty, industry, invention, innovation, and as yet tranquillity.

India, composing the other “Greater Britain,” displayed the opposite characteristics; “it is everything which this is not.” Indeed, “India is all past and, I may almost say, has no future.” His priorities, as well as the main focus of his concern, were clear: “When we inquire then into the Greater Britain of the future we ought to think much more of our Colonial than our Indian Empire.”²¹ This theme was woven through the imperial discourse of the time; the colonial empire was seen anew as a space for transformative moral and political action, for the shaping of a patriotic imperial citizenry, and for the salvation of the endangered “mother country.” To generalize about the role of “the empire” during the Victorian era is to miss the vital point that many contemporaries envisioned multiple empires, governed by different political systems, subject to assorted dreams and demands, and as a consequence holding diverse places in both their affections and schemes of political thought.

For Seeley, the material foundations of this global polity had already been laid in the previous decades, even centuries, of imperial expansion. But during the eighteenth century, the crucial period in the physical expansion of empire, “the idea that could shape the material mass was still wanting.” All empires at the time, including the British, were “artificial fabrics, wanting organic unity and life.” It was only in the late nineteenth century, and for reasons explored throughout this book, that Greater Britain came to be seen as an “organic unity.” The first and most important step on the road to building Greater Britain was a cognitive one, involving a transformation in the way that people imagined the empire. “If Greater Britain in the full sense of the phrase really existed,” insisted Seeley, “Canada and Australia would be to us as Kent and Cornwall.”²² Once this shift in political—as well as spatiotemporal—consciousness was achieved, the nature of imperial policy could be redirected. And all of humanity would benefit, for it was argued that a just and peaceful world order depended on the British to regulate and police its affairs.

Traditionally viewed as the keystone of empire, India played an ambiguous role in the debates over Greater Britain. While few colonial unionists demanded withdrawal from India, and though they often displayed the arrogant self-satisfaction about its possession so common

²¹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 10, 49, 176, and 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 61, 72, and 63. This was an example later repeated in Leo Amery, “Imperial Defence and National Policy” in C. S. Goldman (ed.), *The Empire and the Century* (London, 1905), 182.

among the Victorians, they tended to stress that in the long term it was of less importance for the greatness of Britain than the settlement empire. There were a handful of suggestions to incorporate India into an expansive federation, albeit on very different terms from the settler colonies, but they were peripheral, at least until the years following the First World War.²³ Greater Britain was to be an Anglo-Saxon political space, a racial polity. “It is hard to see,” the historian Charles Oman proclaimed, how India “could be fitted into the scheme.” Froude, meanwhile, argued that the “colonies are infinitely more important to us than even India—it is because the entire future of the English Empire depends on our availing ourselves of the opportunities which those dependencies offer to us.”²⁴ Greater Britain was more important because it was seen as *British*; the settlement colonies were an extension of the British (or more commonly English) nation, constituting an “empire of liberty” that was to be transmuted into a single postimperial global formation. Important though it was to them, India was still an imperial possession, still alien. In a sense, though, the attention lavished on the Anglo-Saxon world represented a strange obfuscation of actually existing political conditions, for imperial activity in Asia and in particular in Africa was reaching new levels of intensity. This was, after all, the era of the rapacious “Scramble for Africa,” the fateful period in which the European powers, Britain foremost among them, carved up the remaining territory of that vast continent. What is perhaps most surprising about the intellectual life of the closing decades of the nineteenth century is the relative lack of attention paid, at least in metropolitan political discourse, to theorizing what J. A. Hobson later termed the “[e]arth hunger” of the “new imperialism.”²⁵

Due to its unique combination of size and wealth, the difficulty of governing it internally and defending it externally, and the prestige attached to it, India remained an overriding concern for policy-makers.²⁶ The future of the settlement empire never fully supplanted the importance of India in the political calculations of Britain’s ruling elite. I am not trying to replace one set of grand generalizations about Victorian political culture with yet another one—we have too many of those already. Instead,

²³ H. Mortimer Franklyn, *The Unit of Imperial Federation* (London, 1887); G. F. Bowen, “The Federation of the British Empire,” *PRCI*, 17 (1886–86), 294; and C. L. Tupper, “India and Imperial Federation,” *IF*, 7/7 (1892), 77–78. See also S. R. Mehrota, “Imperial Federation and India, 1868–1917,” *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 1 (1961), 31.

²⁴ Oman, *England in the Nineteenth Century*, 259; and Froude, “England’s War,” *FM*, 3 (1871), 144.

²⁵ Hobson, *Imperialism* (London, 1902), 11.

²⁶ Sneh Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy, 1874–1914* (London, 2001). This was not universal, however, for as H.C.G. Matthew observed (*The Liberal Imperialists* [Oxford, 1973], 160), many liberal imperialist politicians at the turn of the century (including Rosebery), “showed remarkably little interest in India.”

I want to complicate the picture, stressing that discussion of Greater Britain engaged and energized people across the political spectrum, including many of the leading public intellectuals of the day, and that in analyzing the contours of imperial discourse it is possible to illuminate some important and underappreciated aspects of Victorian political thought.

The creation of a global federal polity underpinned by a single nationality (or race) and governed by elective parliamentary institutions, represents one of the most audacious political projects of modern times. For much of the post-Renaissance period the legacy of Rome shaped conceptions of empire. Cicero, nearly two millennia before, had spoken in *De Republica* (51 ACE) of his compatriots as those “whose empire now holds the whole world.”²⁷ In the sixteenth century the Spanish had briefly, in a similar vein, laid claim to dominion of the globe, *dominus totius orbis*. The drive for Universal Monarchy was motivated by the same impulse. In these bombastic claims, however, “universal” often meant little more than the lands of Europe, or perhaps the Mediterranean or Atlantic worlds.²⁸ (The only substantive tradition to claim true global dominion was that of the early modern canonists, determined to expand the temporal regulation of divine universality—and here the brute facts of geopolitics and the limitations of technology rendered their vision a fantasy.) In the nineteenth century the inheritance of Rome confronted that most potent of modern ideological developments, nationalism, and this was to have a profound influence on both the justification and practices of empire, as the increasingly self-conscious national states of Europe exported their regional ambitions throughout the world.²⁹ It is this genus of nationalistic imperialism that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue has been dissolved by the corrosive forces of capital, migration, and technology, to be replaced by a formless, borderless postmodern global empire—an implausible argument that exaggerates the transformation of the state, but one symptomatic of the sense of radical novelty felt by many at the end of the twentieth century.³⁰ The tension between the demands of universality and the claims of the particular helped structure Victorian imperial

²⁷ See Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World* (New Haven, 1995), 23. See also Richard Tuck, “The Making and Unmaking of Boundaries from the Natural Law Perspective” in Allen Buchanan and Margaret Moore (eds.), *States, Nations, and Borders* (Cambridge, 2003), 143–71.

²⁸ On the boundaries of Roman political thought, see Tuck, “The Making and Unmaking of Boundaries,” 144 and 149. For an illuminating comparison of the Spanish and British empires, see J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World* (London, 2006).

²⁹ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, esp. ch. 4. On how the rise of nationalism made “universal empire” within Europe unthinkable, see also Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” [1882], reprinted in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National* (Oxford, 1996), 43.

³⁰ Hardt and Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000).

discourse. On the one hand, the “civilizing mission” was anchored in an ancient notion of the prerogative, even obligation, of the most advanced societies to bring light to the dark corners of the earth. On the other, it was never seriously proposed that this meant, literally, global dominion, and the coexistence of various competing empires was taken for granted. The idea of a polity that would simultaneously dominate the earth and offer it stability and leadership, a beneficent Greater Britain, seemed to awkwardly straddle the two positions, expansive yet circumscribed, global and yet necessarily bounded.

GREATER BRITAIN AND IMPERIAL FEDERATION:
VARIATIONS ON A THEME

The relationship between Greater Britain and imperial federation was complex and often confused. While virtually all federalists employed the language of Greater Britain, not all of the proponents of Greater Britain were federalists. Imperial federation attracted a number of renowned advocates including Seeley, Froude, James Bryce, Lord Rosebery, W. E. Forster, L. T. Hobhouse, J. A. Hobson, Alfred Tennyson, Joseph Chamberlain, W. T. Stead, and Cecil Rhodes. A galaxy of less prominent characters joined them. Opposition, meanwhile, emanated from many quarters, including such notables as A. V. Dicey, Dilke, E. A. Freeman, Goldwin Smith, Herbert Spencer, Robert Lowe, John Morley, John Bright, Gladstone, and Salisbury. The picture, though, was rarely as simple as this binary opposition might suggest, for many of the critics of federation (understood in a formal constitutional sense) were fervent advocates of a nonfederal Greater Britain. Dilke, for example, believed that federation was inappropriate as a mechanism for forging closer imperial bonds, as the colonists displayed little enthusiasm for it, and the moral and cultural foundations were already secure enough.³¹ To tamper with the existing constitutional structure would undermine the project of global colonial unity. The demand for imperial federation was, then, a subset of the wider concern over the future of Greater Britain.

The quest for a global British polity was one of the most ambitious responses to the rupture in Victorian national self-confidence. It was seen as the answer to a plethora of problems. “Restless, disappointed, alarmed, a ray of light appeared,” declared the Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford.³² Not only was this “ray of light” born of anxiety, it grew dazzling under its veil, and finally dimmed as its utility and practicability

³¹ Dilke, *The Problems of Greater Britain*, I, 458–59.

³² Montagu Burrows, “Imperial Federation,” *NR*, 4 (1884–85), 367.

appeared to recede. The proximate cause of the rise of the federalist movement was the largely unfounded suspicion that the Liberal government was intent on dismembering the empire in 1869–71. This triggered a strident campaign to “save” the empire, a drive that gathered steam during the 1870s and reached its peak in the late 1880s and early 1890s, by which time the status of the colonies was an issue firmly on the agenda of many politicians and political thinkers.³³ The IFL was created in 1884, during a “period of political unrest, agitation, and doubt.”³⁴ Proponents of federation were the most vocal, innovative and ambitious, as well as the best-organized advocates of Greater Britain. This does not mean that they developed a coherent political vision on which all agreed—far from it—but rather that they offered some ambitious proposals for the future of world order, established organizations to agitate for federation (most notably the IFL), created a campaigning journal (*Imperial Federation*), and in general tried to present the semblance of unity and common purpose. It is for this reason that I will concentrate primarily on those who identified themselves as federalists.

The difference between antifederalists like Dilke and federalists such as Seeley was often one of temperament and tactics. The antifederalist proponents of Greater Britain were in general less concerned about the exigency and extent of the crises identified by the federalists, and more optimistic about the strength of the already existing ties binding the empire. They saw no need to overlay this flourishing entity with more formal political structures. At least some of them regarded the political independence of the settler colonies as unproblematic, even as potentially beneficial, arguing that racial and national commonalities were enough to keep Greater Britain united as a global force for the foreseeable future. Demanding independence for the colonies, J. A. Farrer, a leading expert on Adam Smith, argued that “the Separatist, too, may indulge in his dream of a greater Britain, of an English Empire coterminous with English speech, concentrated, not by unnatural and galling political bonds, but by the sympathies of free communities, and by the affections of equal al-

³³ For contemporary comments on the agitation, which was initiated mainly by the withdrawal of troops from New Zealand, see William Westgarth, “On the Colonial Question,” *PRCI*, 2 (1870), 59–61; and Julius Vogel, “Greater or Lesser Britain,” *NC*, 1 (1877), 809–10. As historians now argue, imperial policy was actually marked by continuity not rupture: C. C. Eldridge, *England’s Mission* (London, 1973), chs. 3 and 4; Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, ch. 2; and Farnsworth, *The Evolution of British Imperial Policy*, ch. 6. While agreeing with this interpretation, in this book I am more concerned with the widespread shift in representations of the empire, of how it was conceived. This shift is portrayed convincingly in Beasley, *Empire as the Triumph of Theory*; and Beasley, *Mid-Victorian Imperialists* (London, 2005).

³⁴ William Greswell, “The Imperial Federation League,” *NR*, 14 (1889–90), 186. See also E.H.H. Green, “The Political Economy of Empire,” *OHBE*, IV, 358.

lies.”³⁵ Goldwin Smith, as we shall see, outlined a similar argument. The federalists tended to view the world through a darker lens, and thought that the only way to secure and strengthen the empire lay in further formalizing the existing ties, locking the colonies into a permanent constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom.

The federalists themselves were divided over how much change was required. Ged Martin has sketched a useful tripartite distinction—one that will be employed throughout the book—between the different modes of federation that were proposed during the nineteenth century.³⁶ The most straightforward politically was “extra-parliamentary” federation, defined by the operation of an organized group of high-ranking individuals offering nonbinding advice on imperial affairs. This led to a proliferation of calls for the creation of imperial Advisory Councils in London.³⁷ An alternative, more complex and constitutionally demanding, was “parliamentary federalism,” whereby the colonies were to send elected representatives to sit in London. This had been a common exhortation since the mid-eighteenth century. Finally, and generating the most ambitious proposals, “supraparliamentary federalism” demanded the creation of a sovereign federal chamber operating above and beyond the individual political assemblies of the empire, including that in Westminster. As such, so the argument went, the organization of the Anglo-Saxon colonies would resemble that of Switzerland, Germany (after 1871), and, in particular, the United States. In essence, it demanded the construction of a globe-spanning state.

The meaning of the concept of “empire” and the way in which the term “imperial federation” was employed fluctuated considerably. Such theoretical vagueness led to criticisms both at the time and in more recent analyses of imperial discourse.³⁸ Yet castigating the lack of conceptual precision displayed by the federalists—for example, emphasizing their

³⁵ Farrer, “The Problem of Empire”, *FR*, 43 (1885), 344.

³⁶ Martin, “Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820–1870,” *HJ*, 15 (1973), 65–93. Various plans are outlined in Seymour Cheng, *Schemes for the Federation of the British Empire* (New York, 1931). For contemporary snapshots, see Frederick Young, “Schemes and Suggestions for Imperial Federation,” *IF*, 1/3 (1886), 71–72; and F. P. de LaBillière, “British Federalism,” *PRCI*, 24 (1892–93), 95–120.

³⁷ See, for example, Earl Grey, “How Shall We Retain the Colonies?” *NC*, 5 (1879), 935–54; and John Douglas Sutherland, Marquis of Lorne, *Imperial Federation* (London, 1885). Lorne was the son-in-law of Queen Victoria, and served as governor-general of Canada (1878–83). He suggested that the agent-generals of the colonies be allowed the privileges of the House of Commons (such as making speeches) but without the power of the vote combined, in an unspecified manner, with a Privy Council–like board.

³⁸ Richard Jebb, “Imperial Organization” in Charles Sydney Goldman (ed.), *The Empire and the Century* (London, 1905), 333–36; J. E. Kendle, *Federal Britain* (London, 1997), ch. 3; and Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*, 76.

failure to distinguish consistently between “federation” and “confederation”—obscures an adequate historical reconstruction of the intentions and languages employed in imagining the future of Greater Britain. It was the very elusiveness of the federalist agenda that allowed such a diverse group of thinkers to remain united by a common concern for so long, and the key point is not that the movement was too amorphous, or that it lacked intellectual coherence, or indeed that it collapsed when it did, but rather that the debate was maintained at a high level of intensity for over three decades and that its echoes resounded throughout the early years of the twentieth century. Visions of Greater Britain acted as a focal point and site of political contestation for a series of wide-ranging arguments over the nature of the British state and its claims to global leadership. This was not simply a chapter in the uneven history of British federalism, or even of the empire itself.

Most contemporaries viewed the movement for imperial federation as a failure. None of the main constitutional recommendations promulgated by its leading figures was realized at the time, and it collapsed in ignominy, divided among competing interest groups and visions of the future. Although it played a significant role in the establishment of a system of imperial conferences, the first of which convened in 1887, the movement was regarded as a disappointment by many of its supporters, whose ambitions had often been far greater. Despite the vocal backing of a large number of backbench MPs, and also the patronage of some senior parliamentary figures (including Rosebery, Forster, and Chamberlain), the issue was rarely taken seriously in the highest reaches of Westminster.³⁹ It was one thing for senior politicians to voice support, another for them to actually invest political capital in trying to revise imperial policy. Dilke commented once that it was “regarded as safe for Canadian politicians to talk enthusiastically about Imperial Federation in the abstract, provided it is understood no serious practical action is to be taken towards that end.”⁴⁰ This point can be extended to include the British parliamentary elite. The federalists also suffered from their failure to attract the support of the two leading politicians of the late Victorian period. Salisbury characterized Chamberlain’s enthusiasm for imperial federation as “so distasteful that all plans for it . . . would seem in detail impractical.” This was a common rejoinder, and it highlighted the massive struggle that the federalists encountered in trying to convert skeptics to their cause.

³⁹ J. E. Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences, 1887–1911* (London, 1967), 13–16; and Michael Burgess, “The Imperial Federation Movement in Great Britain, 1861–93,” unpublished PhD, University of Leicester, 1976, ch. 3. Burgess notes the almost total absence of serious discussion in parliamentary debate between 1874–86 (81). Moreover, the movement also failed to find much favor in the Colonial Office.

⁴⁰ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, I, 100.

Neither was that other Victorian titan, Gladstone, impressed by formal federal schemes, going so far as to ridicule imperial federation as “chimerical if not a little short of nonsensical.” He dismissed summarily the plan submitted for consideration by the IFL in April 1893.⁴¹ The League broke up acrimoniously soon after, and by the outbreak of the South African War this phase of the debate was largely exhausted. Following the war, the emphasis shifted to designing proposals focusing on economic issues, or on minor political changes, rather than on significant constitutional engineering, although there were some notable exceptions to this rule.⁴²

The bulk of federalist activity occurred outside Parliament. Arguments about Greater Britain were thus formulated, disseminated, and challenged mainly in the wider public sphere, composing an important dimension of what John Darwin labels the “information milieu” of Victorian imperial campaigning.⁴³ But here the limits of the federal endeavor, rooted in a problematic conception of the nature of political action, came to the forefront. While there were numerous federalist supporters among the colonial populations, the dominant attitude in the empire of settlement was one of indifference.⁴⁴ Dilke observed that while “many of the leading colonists and distinguished statesmen that Greater Britain has produced are in favour of Imperial Federation,” it should also be understood that “some communities they represent on other questions seem on this one disinclined to follow their lead.” Another critic of formal federation wrote that a “sentimental aspiration confined to what used to be called the governing class of this country cannot reverse the history of forty years.”⁴⁵ Given the lack of parliamentary muscle that the federalists could command, this was a key failing. The more successful of Collini’s “public

⁴¹ Salisbury, letter to Henry Parkes, December 23, 1891, cited in David Steele, *Lord Salisbury* (London, 1999), 271; and Gladstone, as recorded by his private secretary Edward Hamilton in his diary, 19 November 1884; quoted in Michael Burgess, “The Federal Plan of the Imperial Federation League 1892?” in Andrea Bosco (ed.), *The Federal Idea* (London, 1990), 153. The text of the plan is reproduced in Arthur Loring and R. J. Beadon (eds.), *Papers and Addresses by Lord Brassey* (London, 1894), 289–301. Gladstone rejected it for a variety of reasons, including its lack of specificity and because it hinted at a challenge to free trade. See also Robert Beadon, “Why the Imperial Federation League Was Dissolved,” *NR*, 22 (1893–94), 814–22.

⁴² I return to this issue, and highlight some of the exceptions, in the concluding chapter.

⁴³ Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians,” *EHR*, 112 (1997), 642.

⁴⁴ From an extensive literature, see Keith Sinclair, *Imperial Federation* (London, 1955); John Eddy and D. M. Schreuder (eds.), *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism* (London, 1988); Luke Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1994); and, for some cautionary words, Douglas Cole, “The Problem of ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Imperialism’ in British Settlement Colonies,” *JBS*, 10 (1971), 160–82.

⁴⁵ Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, II, 481; and Bernard Mallet, “The Whigs and Imperial Federation,” *MM*, 61 (1890), 220.

moralists” were united in an intimate communion with their audience, and this gave their thought much of its influence and power. To a degree the same could be said of many of the federalists; they moved in the same circles, they published in the same periodicals, they were members of the same clubs. But there was a dissonance between their actual and their intended (indeed their necessary) audiences, for although they may have been at home in the comfortable rhythms of the London intellectual scene, they failed to grasp the altogether different dynamics, expectations, and ambitions of the multiple groups—comprising the politicians in Westminster, the British working classes, and the colonial settler populations—that they stressed the importance of converting to their creed. This triple failure proved fatal to most of their ambitions.

Colin Matthew has noted that by the late 1880s the IFL was dominated by Conservative parliamentary members.⁴⁶ But imperial federation was not solely, or even primarily, a conservative endeavor. As will be emphasized throughout the following chapters, advocates of Greater Britain spanned all the major political camps, making it one of the broadest and most diffuse of Victorian ideological projects. All of the leading promoters of Greater Britain argued that the future of the empire should be regarded as a nonpartisan issue, that it was simply too important to be left to the machinations of party politics. Nevertheless, the impetus and theoretical innovation in the quest for a global polity often came from liberals. This was a form of liberalism, however, that was frequently laced with traditional republican themes of virtue, patriotism, disdain for materialist luxury and excess wealth creation, agrarian nostalgia, and a striving for the common good above narrow self-interest. It combined anxiety about the future progress and moral character of the polity with a belief that the ultimate harmony of sectional interests could be secured through judicious constitutional engineering, promising the intellectual and political elite the institutional means to harness “improvement” while simultaneously taming radicalism and the damaging consequences of mass democracy. In drawing on such long-standing tropes in British political discourse, many of the colonial unionists sought to distinguish themselves sharply from what they saw as the corrosive liberalism of the “Manchester School” and the utilitarian political economists.

⁴⁶ Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, 163, indicates that in 1888 of the 83 MPs on the IFL council, only 6 were liberals (this included James Bryce). It should be noted, though, that he does not indicate how many of the nonliberals were (ex-liberal) unionists. In the early days of both the League and of the Royal Colonial Institute, there was a very significant liberal presence. The list of the Council of the IFL in 1888 is reproduced in Loring and Beadon (eds.), *Papers and Addresses of Lord Brassey*, Appendix III, 283–89. On conservative ideology, see E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism* (London, 1995); and Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World* (Cambridge, 2001).

Traditionally, unions of states have been institutional responses to perceived military weakness. This strategic impulse continued to drive the move to federate in the nineteenth century, especially after the American experiment had demonstrated that it was possible to create a strong federal state (and not simply a loose confederal alliance). It was the leading strand in imperial federalist thought. While economic considerations were also important, and while some colonial unionists demanded the creation of a commercial *Zollverein*, it was political and military concerns (infused with claims about virtue, justice, and destiny) that predominated during the period covered by this book.⁴⁷ And economic reasoning itself was often inseparable from ethical prescription: specific policies—including, in their conflicting ways, both *laissez faire* and protectionism—were often justified at least partly on the grounds that they helped to shape the moral character of individuals and communities.⁴⁸ During the late 1880s and early 1890s the political and theoretical schisms that had always divided the colonial unionists began to undermine the (at best limited) coherence of the movement. Its diverse elements never attained sufficient ideological focus, force, or consensus, for the unionists differed over the goals of federation, over the methods of persuasion to adopt, and, ultimately, over how the empire should be constituted and governed.⁴⁹

This book seeks to demonstrate that the debate over Greater Britain was both more important and more interesting than has often been recognized—more important because during the last three decades of the century the question of colonial unity was a pressing topic for many politicians and intellectuals; more interesting not because the arguments presented were highly sophisticated or original (although some were at least the latter) but because they symbolized and helped to amplify many of the tensions pervading Victorian political thought. The stakes seemed very

⁴⁷ For examples of a defense-oriented approach, see Lord Brassey, “Imperial Federation as Recently Debated,” *NC*, 30 (1891), reprinted in the *Papers and Addresses of Lord Brassey*, 156–69; and J.C.R. Colomb, *Imperial Federation* (London, 1886). For imperial preference, see Charles Tupper, “How to Federate the Empire,” *NC*, 31 (1892), 525–37; S. Bourne, “Imperial Federation in Its Commercial Aspect,” *IF*, 1/1 (1886), 8–10; and, C. E. Howard Vincent, “Inter-British Trade and Its Influence on the Unity of the Empire,” *PRCI*, 22 (1891–92), 265–88. This was a minority position, however, at least in public. For a useful account of the various types of economic reforms proposed, see Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997), 213–22.

⁴⁸ Cain, “Character and Imperialism,” *JICH*, 34 (2006), 177–200; and P. J. Cain, “Empire and the Languages of Character and Virtue in Later Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *MIH*, 4 (2007), 1–25.

⁴⁹ Following the dissolution of the IFL, competing organizations were established that focused on either the military or economic aspects of a united empire. These included the United Empire Trade League (1891), which pushed a preference agenda, the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee (1894), which stressed military co-operation, and the British Empire League (1896), composed of free traders.

high. For Seeley the future of Greater Britain was an issue of epochal significance: “what an enormous, intricate, and at the same time what a momentous problem is before us! . . . How much it surpasses in importance all those questions of home politics which absorb our attention so much!” Forster, Liberal statesman and first president of the IFL, proclaimed that failure to construct a federation would result in the “weakening of England, the increased probability of war among Christian nations, and—I do not think the words too strong—the throwing back of the progress of civilisation.”⁵⁰

Advocates of a global polity were often chastized for being utopian fantasists, their ideas detached from any secure anchorage in British political experience. The fact that they were generally unwilling to provide detailed plans for a federal Greater Britain, preferring instead to talk in elusive terms about reorienting public consciousness, was seen to confirm their crude idealism. This is not a portrait that they acknowledged. The federation of the English-speaking elements of the empire was not, argued one political radical, “of the character of a Utopian dream, but of the nature of an eminently practical and vital question.”⁵¹ For many, a federal Greater Britain served as a positive ideal, an inspirational model of the future necessary to crystallize transformative political action in the present. It functioned in a similar manner to Georges Sorel’s “myth,” as a powerful though largely indeterminate image that helped unify and motivate support.⁵² They recognized the importance, indeed the necessity, of shaping public opinion and appealing to diverse audiences both at home and in the colonies, and their style of advocacy, as a consequence, emphasized the intuitive, emotional, and symbolic aspects of politics at the expense of the more laborious elaboration of detailed proposals. This notion of Greater Britain as motivational ideal triggered an avalanche of passionate but vague rhetoric about unity, glory, and destiny—the iconographic order of Greater Britain.⁵³ While this was a plausible strategy, and perhaps the only one with any chance of success, it led to significant problems. The chief impediment appeared in attempting to translate the nebulous idea of global unity, of a providentially ordained Greater Britain, into a widely acceptable practical scheme in an intellectual and political environment that was often skeptical of radical change (let alone the specific ambitions of the federalists) and unwilling to place the colonial em-

⁵⁰ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 165; and Forster, comments, *Imperial Federation* (London, 1884), 26.

⁵¹ [Anon.], “The Federation of the British Empire,” *WR*, 128 (1887), 485.

⁵² Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge, 1999 [1908]), 28–29 and 116–17. Cf. J.D.B. Miller, “The Utopia of Imperial Federation,” *Political Studies*, 4 (1956), 195–97.

⁵³ Duncan Bell, “The Idea of a Patriot Queen?” *JICH*, 34 (2006), 1–19.

pire at the forefront of legislative priorities. Although the proponents of a federal Greater Britain failed to achieve their proximate goals, they nevertheless succeeded in raising the colonial empire to a position in metropolitan political consciousness unmatched since the American secession. The long-term repercussions of the debate were to have a pronounced (albeit indirect) effect on the shape of European and global politics in the twentieth century.

EMPIRE AND IDEOLOGY

The most impressive studies of Victorian political thought have tended to sideline issues of overseas dominion, focusing instead on the exploration of domestic intellectual movements.⁵⁴ Yet historically ideologies of empire have not been *sui generis*, but rather important constituents of broader constellations of political discourse; to examine them in isolation (or simply to disregard them altogether) is to lose much of the scope and force not only of the ideas themselves but of political theory in general. It is therefore fortunate that the history of imperial political thought has recently, albeit belatedly, attracted considerable attention; most of this work, however, remains focused on the early modern period and the eighteenth century. Although there are signs that this is beginning to change, and the Victorians are being subjected to the same forensic scrutiny as that accorded thinkers of preceding centuries, work remains to be done.⁵⁵

Part of the problem is that imperial historians and historians of political thought rarely engage in sustained and constructive dialogue, with adverse consequences for both fields. The political theory of Greater Britain has been unduly neglected. The imperial federation movement has generated a small but valuable scholarly literature. In particular, the work of Ged Martin, Michael Burgess, and J. E. Kendle provides us with a comprehensive outline of the institutional dynamics of the movement, the chronology of the agitation, and the wider political impact of the federalist movement—topics that I therefore do not engage systematically.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See, for example, John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals* (Oxford, 1988); Burrow, Stefan Collini and Donald Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics* (Cambridge, 1983); Collini, *Public Moralists*; Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism* (Oxford, 1978); Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978); and H. S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought*.

⁵⁵ For recent contributions to the literature, see the essays in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge, 2007); and also the work reviewed in Bell, "Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought," *HJ*, 49 (2006), 281–98. On developments in India, see the special edition of *MIH* ("An Intellectual History for India"), 4/1 (2007).

⁵⁶ Martin, "Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820–1870"; Bur-

Just as the understanding of the history of political thought is constrained by neglect of imperial and international affairs, so the understanding of imperial political theory is hindered by the lack of attention paid to the assorted contexts—political, social, cultural, theological and scientific—in which debates over the empire were situated. Only by interpreting the discourse of Greater Britain in relation to these fields of thought and practice is it possible to gain an adequate appreciation of the innovation and continuity, as well as the intentions and force, of the arguments. And because historians of political thought have largely ignored the idea of Greater Britain, there is a significant lacuna in our map of Victorian intellectual history. The questions raised by the notion of an intercontinental political community encompass several critical themes, including: theories of statehood, free trade, and competition; conceptions of race, culture, and nationality; attitudes to both territoriality and the sea; and relations with Ireland, continental Europe, and the United States. A study of such arguments offers important insights into the Victorian political imagination.

The Idea of Greater Britain is, in a sense, an examination of the complex and tension-ridden interface between political thought and public policy. Schemes for Greater Britain and imperial federation were not the product of political philosophers working away in secluded cloisters. They were political ideologies: “clusters of ideas, beliefs, opinions, values and attitudes usually held by identifiable groups, that provide directives, even plans, of action for public policy-making in an endeavour to uphold, justify, change or criticize the social and political arrangements of a state or other political community.”⁵⁷ Ideologists are less concerned with logical coherence and rigor (much as this might also seem important to them) than with shifting the nature of practical politics by drawing on and manipulating existing discourses, by generating wide support among target groups, and by presenting their ideas as the only viable solution to a particular set of self-defined problems. While the advocates of Greater Britain usually did not display the philosophical skills required to stir the interest of most historians of political thought, they present a case study of an

gess, “The Imperial Federation Movement in Great Britain, 1861–93”; Burgess, *The British Tradition of Federalism*; Kendle, *The Colonial and Imperial Conferences*, ch. 1; and Kendle, *Federal Britain*. See also Andrew Thompson, *Imperial Britain* (London, 2000); A. L. Burt, *Imperial Architects* (Oxford, 1913), 64–103; Cheng, *Schemes for the Federation of the British Empire*; J. E. Tyler, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity, 1868–1895* (London, 1938); Sobei Mogi, *The Problem of Federalism* (London, 1931), I; and Murray Forsyth, *Unions of States* (Leicester, 1981).

⁵⁷ Michael Freeden, “Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy” in Gerald Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (eds.), *Handbook of Political Theory* (London, 2004), 6. On politicians as political thinkers see Kari Palonen, “Political Theorizing as a Dimension of Political Life,” *EJPT*, 4 (2005), 351–66.

equally significant mode of political thinking. Their efforts also illuminate the difficulties faced when attempting to translate ambitious political visions into practice. These are lessons from which many of the political theorists of our own time, enamored of an overly abstract fusion of moral philosophy and jurisprudence, could learn.

If we understand the history of political thought as an exercise in retrieval, as an archaeological reconstruction of the languages through which past generations conceived of the world and their relationship to it, a broad interpretative approach is required. The phrase “imperial political thought” is used throughout the book in a deliberately expansive sense, as encompassing the complex of arguments invoked to envisage, interrogate, and offer potential answers to the questions raised by the existence of empire. Imperial political thought was articulated via a number of different media: traditional forms of textual “political theory” (primarily books, pamphlets, and essays); work addressed to specific expert audiences (policy papers, reports); direct but usually transient interventions into political debate (speeches and forays into journalism); and literary and symbolic representations of the empire. I concentrate largely, but not exclusively, on the first three of these categories, partly to redress the imbalance in much recent imperial historiography, mainly because this is where most of the relevant material is found. An exclusive focus on the works of canonical figures—John Stuart Mill most obviously—obscures the wider patterns of Victorian political thought. The reason for this is simple: “great” figures are often unrepresentative (or are only partly so) of the intellectual currents of any given historical epoch. Anthony Howe has argued that the theoretical mutation of the ideology of free trade in the late Victorian period “has often bemused historians, for it took place not at the level of the towering waves of economic and social theory, but in the murky shallows of recondite policy debate.” Likewise Boyd Hilton has demonstrated that focusing on the “towering waves” of economic and social theory led to a widespread misunderstanding of the ideological sources of nineteenth-century political economy, for lavishing attention on Adam Smith, Bentham, and Ricardo masked the fundamental role played by evangelical theology.⁵⁸ This is also the case with the political theory of Greater Britain. It is the “murky shallows,” not only of policy debate but also of general political argument, that we must scour in order to enrich understanding of the way in which the empire was imagined, and the multiple and often contradictory roles that it played in Victorian

⁵⁸ Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946*, 195; and Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford, 1988). See also Frank Trentmann and Martin Daunton, “Worlds of Political Economy” in Trentmann and Daunton (eds.), *Worlds of Political Economy* (London, 2004), 10.

intellectual life. Without comprehending the importance of ideas about Greater Britain, the picture of Victorian imperial discourse is radically incomplete.

A further gap in the intellectual history of empire relates to the evolution of languages of British national consciousness. There are two overlapping dimensions that here need to be separated. The first concerns Victorian perceptions of empire, the way in which it was conceived by the inhabitants of the metropole. The importance of the “empire of settlement” for the late Victorians has been underplayed in the imperial history boom of the last two decades.⁵⁹ Recent historiography, and in particular the “new imperial history,” has been dominated by explorations of the ideologies, representations, and practices of British rule in Africa and India, as well as the considerable, even constitutive, impact that these had on Britain.⁶⁰ This scholarship has provided many valuable insights, confronting issues—race, class, gender, the everyday lives of imperial subjects, and the modes and mechanisms of domination and resistance—that were for too long sidelined by an often complacent Eurocentric field. But this laserlike focus has obscured even as it has revealed, opening up some topics while occluding others.⁶¹ The second dimension overlaps with these developments, for interest in the cultural and subaltern aspects of the imperium has paralleled, and at times been intersected by, an intense debate over the various sources and permutations of British (and English) national identity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The empire unsurprisingly looms large in this literature. Linda Colley, for example, argues that a sense of Britishness was fashioned in opposition to Catholic France during the long eighteenth century, and increasingly during the nineteenth, through encounters with the “imperial other.”⁶² This

⁵⁹ Phillip Buckner, “Whatever Happened to the British Empire?” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 3 (1993), 3–32; and Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (eds.), *The British World* (London, 2003). An important exception is Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*. Although it is beset by other problems, this neglect was less true of the older imperial historiography: see, for example, the chapters by Ronald Robinson and W.C.B. Tunstall in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, ed. E. A. Benians, James Butler and C. E. Carrington (Cambridge, 1959), III, 127–79 and 230–53. Here, however, as with most work of the period, the empire is regarded in isolation from wider currents of thought, and their focus is therefore different from mine.

⁶⁰ For interesting examples, see Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History* (Cambridge, 2004); and Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn* (Durham, N.C., 2003). Skeptical notes are sounded in Peter Marshall, “Imperial Britain,” *JICH*, 23 (1995), 379–95; and Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford, 2004).

⁶¹ For an excellent discussion of these issues, pointing to both the strengths and weaknesses of postcolonial approaches, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley, 2005).

⁶² Colley, “Britishness and Otherness,” *JBS*, 31 (1992), 309–29; and, Colley, *Britons* (New Haven, 1992).

historiographical project goes some of the way to meeting J.G.A. Pocock's demand for a "new subject" of British history, encompassing the interactions of the various peoples and entities that have, over the centuries, expanded, contracted, and finally coalesced into what we know as the United Kingdom.⁶³

The confluence of the new(ish) British history and the new(ish) imperial history has highlighted important dimensions of imperial experience and British social and political development. No longer can Britain be studied in isolation from the empire, or the empire separate from Britain. What is still missing, however, is an adequate account of the languages through which the empire—or, more precisely, the various sociopolitical formations that composed the imperial system—was imagined by its inhabitants and in particular by its ideological architects. While numerous scholars have argued that British identity was formed through a binary coding of difference in relation to an exotic "Other,"⁶⁴ many, perhaps even the majority, of late Victorian British theorists of empire were concerned as much (and sometimes more) with the projection and sustenance of a coherent sense of Britishness throughout the settler communities. While visions of Greater Britain were framed in relation to a putative global racial hierarchy, at the peak of which stood the Anglo-Saxons, they were also and equally focused on other factors, including fear of increasing competition from other "civilized" states, most notably France, Germany, and America, as well as anxiety about the dangers of socialism, the emergence of a degenerate "underclass," and the perceived growth of a self-interested utilitarian liberalism among the British middle classes and governing elite.

Eliga Gould claims that following the American revolution, the British would "[n]ever again . . . think of any part of their empire as an extension of their own nation."⁶⁵ Yet for many Victorian commentators the British national "self" was thought to extend across the planet. This diasporic imagined community was composed, contends Pocock, of "neo-Britains," of people defined by their "global Britishness." While this pic-

⁶³ Pocock, "British History," *JMH*, 47 (1975), 601–21; and Pocock, "The New British History in Antipodean Perspective," *AHR*, 104 (1999), 490–500. See also Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516–1776*.

⁶⁴ Most influentially, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); and Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993). For various criticisms, see John Mackenzie, *Orientalism* (Manchester, 1995); Peter Mandler, "The Problem with Cultural History," *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 94–118; Mandler, "What Is 'National Identity'?" *MIH*, 3 (2006), 271–97; and David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism* (London, 2001).

⁶⁵ Gould, *The Persistence of Empire* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 214. He adds the rather elusive qualifier, "at least not in the way they had before 1776." This may well be the case, strictly speaking, but I would argue that the sense in which the Victorians saw it was even stronger than before. See also Gould, "A Virtual Nation?" *AHR*, 104 (1999), 476–89.

ture distorts the “history of multi-ethnic and polyglot colonial societies far removed from the United Kingdom,” it is nevertheless how such societies were painted by many late nineteenth-century colonial unionists.⁶⁶ Contemporaries viewed the idea of a seamless global nation—let alone a global state—as an innovative, indeed unprecedented, mode of political association. In a speech to the electors of Bristol (1780), Edmund Burke had preached the virtues of the great transatlantic “nation” comprising Britain and the American colonies, united as one body politic through the constitutional arterial system of virtual representation. But this was not a historical narrative (or a conception of the nation) affirmed by many late Victorians: as Seeley proclaimed, “[i]n the last century there could be no Greater Britain in the true sense of the word because of the distance between the mother-country and its colonies and between the colonies themselves.”⁶⁷ Only with the advent of instantaneous communications, and through the re-imagining of the status and purpose of the colonies and their (Anglo-Saxon) occupants, was it possible to identify the intense sense of political and cultural consciousness necessary for a true global community. Although they differed over the conceptual relationship between state, nation, and empire, for many imperialists Greater Britain was bound intimately by commonality of race, institutions, sensibility, and citizenship. The demand for a global polity was one aspect of the belief in—or fantasy of—a global (national-racial) identity.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The Idea of Greater Britain is not a chronological history of the movement pushing for colonial unity, but rather an analytical account of various aspects of late nineteenth-century political thought. It does not examine parliamentary debates over the empire or provide a detailed taxonomy of the many and varied plans for the future disseminated during the era. It makes no attempt to gauge the popularity of such plans in Britain or the colonies, or to trace the ways in which ideas circulated through the complex networks comprising the imperial system.⁶⁸ Instead it explores

⁶⁶ Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands* (Cambridge, 2005), 181–91 and 20; and for the criticism, Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race* (Basingstoke, 2002), 3.

⁶⁷ Burke, “Speech at Bristol Previous to Election” [1780] in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. W. M. Eofson (Oxford, 1981), III, 464; and Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 74.

⁶⁸ The study of the circulation of ideas and practices has generated some of the most innovative recent work on empire, including Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*; Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government* (London, 2000); and Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks* (London, 2001).

various facets of the theoretical discourse over Greater Britain as it emerged and evolved at the political core of the empire, analyzing the motivations of its advocates, the assumptions that structured their ideas, the conceptual and rhetorical moves that they made, and the cultural conventions that shaped their thought, and which they in turn sometimes attempted to challenge or remould.

There was no such thing as a “representative” proponent of Greater Britain. Colonial unionists traversed, and as such collapsed, the procrustean categories that have been employed traditionally to interpret the Victorians: individualist versus collectivist; progressive or reactionary; high, low, or broad church; Tory, Liberal, or Radical; free or fair trader; and so forth. Consequently, analyzing in exhaustive detail the thought of a small number of federalists would provide a misleading picture of the project for a Greater British century. I employ what might be termed a method of “hybrid contextualization,” insofar as I present both detailed portraits of individual thinkers and wide-ranging thematic studies of significant shifts in the theoretical perspectives shaping political consciousness. Without the former, an account of late Victorian imperial discourse would lose sight of the nuance and complexity of individual intellectual development, the specificities of sensibility, disposition, and temperament so important in shaping political ideas, and the resulting depiction would lack adequate depth and texture. But without the latter, detailed biography loses its anchorage in the intellectual fields that shape and constrain the writing and dissemination of political thought, and especially in a debate as sweeping as that over Greater Britain the vital relationship to the wider intellectual and political world would be lost.

Two general lines of argument frame the book, and set the context for the various themes pursued in the individual chapters. The first of these concerns the stimulus driving the advocates of Greater Britain. It has traditionally been argued that they were motivated overwhelmingly by apprehension about the rise of foreign competitors, both military and economic: the creation of an ambitious German state at the heart of Europe, added to the post-Civil War vitality of America and alarm over Russia, fueled anxiety about the destiny of Britain. This external pressure, so the argument runs, when combined with fear that the empire was rapidly slipping off the political agenda, triggered the outburst of writing about Greater Britain. While the rise of competitor states was certainly a key motivational factor, it was not the only one. It is also essential to take account of the anxiety—and the exhilaration—spawned by the onset of democracy, both in the United Kingdom and farther afield. Disquiet preceding the Reform Acts (of 1867 and 1884) was followed, in many quarters, by what Alan Ryan has termed “democratic disappointment,” a sense of disillusionment with the trajectory of political development. This

disenchantment should be read in light of the perceived intellectual tensions and transformations of the age. The shibboleths of Victorian self-confidence were under unremitting assault. The foundations of progress, the epistemic bases of religious and ethical belief, the sacred doctrines of political economy, even the unity and balance of the kingdom, all were challenged by advances in science, by social and political turbulence, by shifts in the philosophical current.⁶⁹ But others, usually political radicals, welcomed the coming of an age of democracy, and they looked to Greater Britain as both an exemplar and an agent of progressive change. For John Morley this was an age of “transition in the very foundations of belief and conduct,” while A. V. Dicey, looking back over the century, wrote that during the closing decades of Queen Victoria’s reign the country had witnessed that “singular phenomenon which is best described as the disintegration of beliefs, or, in other words, the breaking up of established creeds, whether religious, moral, political, or economical.”⁷⁰ Visions of Greater Britain were partly a response to this ferment.

The second line of argument concerns the novelty of the federal discourse. Miles Taylor claims that neither the “supporters nor the opponents of the schemes for imperial federation differed very much from the ideas expressed by the colonial reformers of the 1830s.”⁷¹ Yet, while there was indeed a long tradition of demanding colonial unity, most commonly via parliamentary representation, and while there were various similarities between the two periods, the structure, intensity, and theoretical focus of the later debate was different. Seeley argued that “all the conditions of the world are altered now.”⁷² New ways of imagining and justifying the

⁶⁹ Ryan, “The Critique of Individualism” in Brian Barry, Archie Brown, and Jack Hayward (eds.), *The British Study of Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2003), 109; and, for general context, John Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason* (London, 2000). For shifts, during the 1870s, in moral philosophy, economics, epistemology, the philosophy of religion, and social theory, see the essays by James Allard, Ross Harrison, Geoffrey Hawthorn, Margaret Schabas, Peter Nicholson, and James Livingston, in Thomas Baldwin (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁷⁰ Morley, *On Compromise*, 2nd ed. (London, 1886 [1874]), 29; and Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London, 1914 [1905]), 444. Individuals on apparently opposing sides of the imperial debate concurred: Seeley, “Ethics and Religion,” *FR*, 45 (1889), 501–14; and Goldwin Smith, “The Impending Revolution,” *NC*, 35 (1894), 353–66.

⁷¹ Taylor, “*Imperium et Libertas*,” *JICH*, 19 (1991), 13. Ged Martin makes the same argument: “Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820–1870”; and Martin, “The Idea of ‘Imperial Federation’” in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin (eds.), *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London, 1975), 121–39.

⁷² Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, 297. The colonial reformers concentrated more on propagating specific land reform proposals (following the writings of E. G. Wakefield) and on establishing functioning social hierarchies in the colonies in order to encourage emigration by members of all classes, than they did on general constitutional proposals for the colo-

empire followed from this belief. Although the plans for extraparliamentary advisory councils predominated, supraparliamentary proposals took center stage due to their ambition and ability to generate controversy. Parliamentary proposals, previously the most common form of argument, retreated into the wings. Furthermore, the growing awareness of the potential power of new communications technologies led to a shift in the type of political community that could be envisaged as plausible. It had by 1870 become possible to imagine a global nation-state, which would before have been largely unintelligible. Graham Berry, a leading colonial politician, proclaimed that science “has rendered that feasible which, under conditions that prevailed half a century ago, would have been impossible.”⁷³ The shifting perception of Britain’s global role heightened the urgency of the demands and also generated the audacious nature of many of the solutions proffered. Combined, these shifts marked a significant transition in imperial political thought.

Chapter 2 outlines the key political and intellectual contexts essential for comprehending the anxiety over the future of the empire. It details the insidious sense of apprehension, fueled by the fear of mass democratic politics at home and increasing global competition, displayed by many imperial thinkers during the closing decades of the century. It highlights how ideas about emigration played a vital role in helping to transform the perceived relationship between “home” and “abroad,” “domestic and “foreign,” and it examines some radical ideas about colonial unity, demonstrating how the settler territories were seen by some people as spaces for democratic experimentation and for spreading progressive politics.

Chapter 3 traces the impact that changing conceptions of time and space had on imperial thought over the long nineteenth century. Scholars have focused almost exclusively on geology and especially biology when trying to unravel the manner in which science inflected political theorizing. This is certainly an important area of inquiry, for evolutionary ideas influenced attitudes to competition, race, religion, time, and place, but such a focus has neglected the role of more prosaic industrial technologies in shaping the contours of political theory. Yet these technologies have

nial empire, let alone on conceptions of a global nation or new understandings of the state. See Wakefield, *Outline of a System of Colonization* [1829] and, *A View of the Art of Colonization* [1849], both in *The Collected Works of Edmond Gibbon Wakefield*, ed. M. F. Lloyd-Prichard (Glasgow, 1968), 178–87 and 758–1040. See also Donald Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (London, 1965), 90–155; Erik Olssen, “Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice,” *New Zealand Journal of History*, 31 (1997), 197–218; and Michael J. Turner, “Radical Agitation and the Canada Question in British Politics, 1837–41,” *Historical Research*, 79 (2006), 90–114.

⁷³ Berry, “The Colonies in Relation to the Empire,” *PRCI*, 18 (1886–87), 7.

been (and remain) a significant facet of political argument. While evolution fashioned ideas about the place of humanity in the cosmos, as well as insidious social Darwinist interpretations of human communal life, engineering (and particularly transport and communications) technologies engendered a profound transformation in the manner in which the world itself was perceived, shrinking it from a previously awesome scale to a manageable space in the minds of contemporary observers. The chapter explores the vital role played in the development of imperial discourse by what Walter Bagehot labeled the “new world of inventions”⁷⁴—in particular the ocean-traversing steamship and the submarine telegraph. It also examines how the contrasting ideas about distance articulated by Edmund Burke and Adam Smith shaped debate for much of the ensuing century. This “new world” allowed what had seemed unbridgeable distances to be overcome; the very perception of the political limits prescribed by nature was transformed.

Chapter 4 charts how the question of federalism moved to the center of British political debate, and identifies a variety of ways of conceiving the empire as a state. In particular I outline Seeley’s views on global statehood. The chapter also documents some of the conceptions of nation and race that helped structure late Victorian imperial discourse. Chapter 5 examines the way in which the perceived meaning and status of the constitution played an essential regulative function in imperial debate, and what this tells us about historical consciousness and political theory in the Victorian era. It also investigates what I term “civic imperialism,” a distinctive republican vision of imperialism that permeated the debates over colonial unity, a vision exemplified by the work of historian J. A. Froude.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine in detail the thought of two of the most influential imperial commentators, namely Goldwin Smith and Seeley. These chapters have two primary aims: firstly, they seek to deepen our understanding of their political ideas; and secondly, they highlight the similarities in their ideological projects, the unity in difference. Smith and Seeley staked out positions that were seen as occupying distinct and opposed positions on the imperial spectrum. Seeley was the intellectual figurehead of Greater Britain, Smith of those resolutely skeptical of the value of the settler empire, let alone federation. As the liberal writer and politician John Morley argued, Smith’s conclusions were “directly opposed” to those of Seeley.⁷⁵ This is how they continue to be interpreted in imperial historiography. However, although there were crucial differences between their projects, there were also many interesting parallels, and ultimately they should be understood as promoting similar ends, if by different

⁷⁴ Bagehot, *Physics and Politics* (London, 1896 [1872]), 1.

⁷⁵ Morley, “The Expansion of England,” *MM*, 49 (1884), 242.

means. Both defended a global yet circumscribed Anglo-Saxon community; both, that is, sought to construct a barricade against the decline and potential fall of Britain as a global power. The gap between the proponents of a federal Greater Britain and many of their harshest critics was, as this juxtaposition suggests, not as wide as it might at first appear. The political thought of Seeley and Smith illustrates another point that emerges from the analysis of Greater Britain. The relationship between religion and visions of Greater Britain was a complex one: there was no single religious position on the empire, and people of all denominations (as well as those of none) were to be found supporting it. It should be remembered nevertheless that the core ambition of Greater Britain was the unity of the British Anglo-Saxon community, and that a key element of this identity was its Protestantism. In this sense at least, Greater Britain could be seen as the striving for a global church, with Seeley, as we shall see, the apostle of this vision. Ultimately, though, religion played an indeterminate role in the debates.

Chapters 8 and 9 return to thematic analysis, documenting a number of theoretical innovations that underpinned late Victorian imperial thought. In chapter 8 I examine how representations of antiquity helped determine the contours of debate. Rather than looking to the Romans and Greeks for intellectual authority and for models of political action, as was traditionally the case, many colonial unionists looked instead to the example set by the United States. In order to justify their proposals they constructed a confident and future-oriented narrative of modernity, one that escaped the vision of political self-dissolution that they associated with previous empires. Chapter 9 explores the diverse ideological functions played by ideas about America. It was utilized as an archetype for a federal empire, while also sending a warning shot from history about the dangers of mistreating colonists. And due to its increasing economic and geopolitical power, and the competitive challenge it represented, it also offered one of the key motivations for constructing a global polity. I explore the tensions between these views, and also look at plans to (re)unite the United States and Greater Britain. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes some of the key dimensions of the debate and traces some of its echoes in later British political discourse.