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THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

Nelson V. Shaw
Honors Project
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Mr. Ranchino, Adviser

PREFACE

This paper is concerned with a broad, general defining of the concept of the "White Man's Burden." There is a brief history given leading up to the "White Man's Burden," with emphasis on the Monroe Doctrine. The three composing factors of the "White Man's Burden" are Christianity, Pragmatism, and Manifest Destiny; they are explained in detail and an attempt has been made to show how they form a cohesive unit, and in turn, a foreign policy. This paper has attempted to show the beginning of American foreign policy with the hopes of better understanding our foreign policy in the 1970's.

WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

Take up the White Man's Burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captive's need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's Burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's gain.¹

Thus said Rudyard Kipling in an article to McClure Magazine in February, 1899. By this time, the United States had begun its odyssey into the world with the intention of flexing its small, but growing nationalistic and capitalistic muscle. The United States, then, at best a tenth ranked country, had quite an arduous task facing it, but stormed ahead like the reckless youth she was.² The reasons for this controversial move into the world are many, with probably no one particular motive being the sole reason. Some of the factors influencing the birth of United States diplomacy were: 1) Fredrick Jackson Turner's argument that with the end of the American frontier, the United States was restless for more areas to expand on; 2) A. T. Mahon's book, Influence of Sea Power in History, gave the theory of the country that has the largest navy always wins;³ this was a popular argument in America; 3) Many Americans were dedicated to the philosophy of Manifest Destiny--it was America's duty to make the world free and a better place to live; 4) America felt the need to get involved in power politics--Africa had been

divided by Europe in the 1890's, the U. S. was getting behind in acquiring colonies; 5) Social Darwinism--only the fit should survive in international relations; 6) Pragmatism--it was practical for Americans to get involved in the world; 7) Christianity--it was an aggressive religion, in that part of its dogma was to spread its word to the "heathen" of the world; and, 8) Strong belief in nationalism. These were some of the various reasons for America stepping out into the world in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Probably the three most influencing factors were, Manifest Destiny, Christianity, and Pragmatism, collectively known as the "White Man's Burden." When Kipling penned those lines, he showed his imperialistic ideas by displaying a disdainful hostility to the brown peoples, who, he thought, could never overcome their inferiority and could never develop the capacity for self-government; he saw the only solution for the heathen as the "White Man's Burden."⁴ Many Americans were thirsty for the world in a way only imperialism could quench. They agreed with Kipling. On the floor of Congress on December 7, 1897, Representative Joseph Wheeler of Alabama, said, "...we now produce more than two-thirds of the cotton, nearly nine-tenths of the corn, and nearly half of the steel of the world. We have but about 4%, or one twenty-fifth, of the population of the world, and it is evident that to continue our progress we must have foreign markets and foreign commerce; and to protect the merchantmen sailing under the Stars and Stripes we must possess a fleet of efficient ships manned by our brave and true officers and men. But even more important than this is the defense of our great cities."⁵ Representative William L. Greene, of Nebraska, on

Tuesday, April 12, 1898, in reference to intervening in the Spanish-American War said, "You say this is jingoism. Mr. Chairman, I would rather be called a jingoist than to be found apologizing for the atrocious and merciless action of the Spanish Government. Call it therefore what you will. The American people will respond to the cause of justice and right. The American people are ready to fight, and they want to fight...As a common people, as patriotic citizens, laying aside our parties and our prejudices, I want to appeal to you in the name of my country, in the name of our murdered dead, and in the name of God, let us vindicate American honor and the American flag."⁶ Representative John C. Spooner, of Wisconsin, on Friday, April 15, 1898, stated, "We intervene (in Cuba), Mr. President, not for conquest, not for aggrandizement, not because of the Monroe Doctrine; we intervene for humanity's sake; we intervene to gain security for the future; we intervene for our own permanent peace and safety."⁷ President McKinley said in his war message on April 11, 1898, "In the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, in behalf of endangered American interests which give us the right and the duty to speak and to act, the war in Cuba must stop."⁸ Finally, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge said in the March, 1899, issue of Forum, "From the Rio Grande to the Arctic Ocean, there should be one flag and one country, the United States!"⁹ The American imperialists found an outlet in their growing desire for foreign intervention when the Spanish-American War began. In emphasizing the position of the United States as a world power, it created a demand for action as a world power--and in 1898 that meant imperialism.¹⁰

In looking back to our early history, neutrality and isolationism were the ideas that the United States grasped until the 1890's. At the very beginning of this country, in 1776, John Adams said, "We should separate ourselves as far as possible and as long as possible, from all European politics and wars."¹¹ Until approximately 1815 the United States accepted Adam's advice and took the road to neutrality. We made no alliances with Europe; basically America: abstained from belligerent acts, remained impartial, and stayed out of involvement in war. America resorted to armed force internationally five times before 1889, only two are mentioned here, the other three are of little significance-- the two undeclared wars with the Barbary pirates, from 1801-1805, and the quasi-war with France from 1798-1800.¹² All this changed when the United States found itself aligned on the side of Europe against England, mainly because of the Essex case, British blockade of American neutral ports, and impressment of American sailors.¹³ One thing was certain after the Treaty of Ghent (a treaty signed by representatives of America and Great Britain officially ending the War of 1812), the United States had safely extracted itself from the European wars and pledged itself no more involvement in another war.¹⁴ The other armed conflict of significance was the war with Mexico in 1846. President Polk asked Congress for war saying, "The cup of forbearance had been exhausted even before the recent information from the frontier of the Del Norte. But now, after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil...war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself."¹⁵

President Polk was known to be a jingoistic leader and he favored war as an answer to a lot of problems facing the United States, for example, he was prepared to wage war to collect unpaid debts from Europe and he was willing to start war because Mexico refused to have normal diplomatic relations with the United States.

Another important facet of the pre-"White Man's Burden" era was the document called the Monroe Doctrine. This document was a product of President James Monroe and he presented it to Congress on December 2, 1823. It was a unilateral statement of foreign policy, affirming friendship and pledging aid to the American continents. The original draft of the Monroe Doctrine had provisions for aid to Greece, which was, at that time, attempting to break away from the Ottoman Empire and become a republic.¹⁶ Secretary of State John Quincy Adams vetoed that provision and the finished document spoke in terms of protection and independence of the American continents. The document basically said:

1. The American continents, by the free and independent condition which they had assumed and maintained, were henceforth not to be considered subjects for future colonization by any European power.

2. It does not comport with the policy of the United States to take part in the politics or the wars of European powers in matters relating to themselves.

3. The United States would regard as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition to itself the effort of any European power to interfere with the political system of the American continents, or to acquire any new territory on these continents.¹⁷

The Monroe Doctrine was a document of the future and Europe paid very little attention to it. It was part of a foundation that the United States would later call its foreign policy; the Monroe Doctrine has withstood the erosion of time, for instance, it was used in July, 1895 by Secretary of State Richard Olney in attempting to resolve a boundary dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela over British Guiana. Olney announced then, "There is a doctrine of American public law, well founded in principle and abundantly sanctioned by precedent, which entitles and requires the United States to treat an injury to itself the forcible assumption by an European power of political control over an American state."¹⁸ Eventually, England agreed to arbitration of the dispute. The "White Man's Burden" was evolving slowly and by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the "White Man's Burden" had arrived.

As mentioned previously, the "White Man's Burden" consisted of three facets. The first third of the "White Man's Burden" was Christianity. Christianity from the very beginning was a missionary religion, its disciples being anxious to share with others the message that exalted them.¹⁹ The first United States missionary service was offered in 1810, when the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was formed by five men from Williams College.²⁰ These men were sent to India, with fields opened soon afterward in Africa and Burma. The first missionary sent to China was Elijah Bridgman in 1829; China had forbidden all missionary activity from 1724 until 1807. When the ports of Asia were opened, the foreign merchants and the missionaries were the first to get there. Two basic segments of Christianity deal with the Puritanical theory of

success will come if you work hard enough and, the unique idea of mission--we as a people are special, we are God's chosen leaders, ie.²¹ Also, the theories of hope and charity were taken to justify America's brand of Christianity and it's entrance into the world; in turn, it was seen as our Christian duty to help the poorer, lesser advanced peoples of the world.²² The fact that many of these "heathens" already had a religion made no difference to the nineteenth century missionaries. For example, it took English missionaries twenty-three years (1797-1820) to break the native religion in Tahiti and get their first convert.²³ To get a candid view of what United States missionaries thought and the justifications they used, Robert E. Speer, the Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States in the late nineteenth century, said in 1904, "The civilized nations are beginning to perceive that they do have a duty to police the world. The recognition of this duty has been forced by trade...The civilized nations have a right to go back of the mere forms of procedure in non-civilized lands and to secure the rights denied in those lands. Indeed, it is their duty to do so and in the interest of trade they are constantly doing so...the missions are really the most constructive force at work in the Western propaganda, partly because they alone aim at once at the transformation of character and the establishment of homes on the Christian conception of the family, and partly because they alone underbase Western civilization with right principle and so settle it on secure foundations...The commercial movement is a necessary part of the great outward impulse of civilization; the missionary welcomes it as an ally...The Western trade movement needs the Christian mission for its own sake."²⁴ Further, the Honorable T. R. Jernegan, the Consul-General of the

United States at Shanghai in the late 1890's, said, "Missionary work has accomplished advantages to trade which the present awakening of China will soon evidence to be of great practical value... The ensign of commerce follows close in the wake of the banner of the cross, and he who would strike down the hand that carries the latter, injures the interest of the former." ²⁵ It is obvious that Christianity was used often and by many for justification of U.S. imperialism ; although there were missionaries who were sincere and dedicated, there were others who became rich landowners and members of crooked organizations.²⁶ The use of Christianity as justification sometimes reached the point of being ludicrous, as President McKinley showed in a speech to a group of clergymen in 1903, "The truth is I didn't want the Philippines, and when they came to us, as a gift from the gods, I didn't know what to do with them...I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night it came to me this way...the Philippines must be ours... I told the chief engineer of the War Department (our mapmaker) to put the Philippines on the map of the United States."²⁷ So, according to our Puritan heritage, it was the obligation of man to follow a calling and conscientiously cultivate his vineyard--spread the good news and save the "heathen."²⁸ Christianity had two big influences on the "White Man's Burden": 1) It defined things in black and white, yes and no. There was a clear answer for everything; and, 2) It is a very aggressive religion with a built-in evangelistic concept. The idea was that "we are right and everyone else is wrong."²⁹ Viewed

historically, one can hardly deny that religion has caused widespread tension and led directly to war; now with Christianity used as a justification for imperialism by the United States, an entire new concept is added to the discoloring of religion, Christianity in particular. For rationalizing our economic and political motives, Christianity became a priceless asset and a very important part of the triumvirate called the "White Man's Burden."

The second part of the "White Man's Burden" is Pragmatism. Pragmatism was founded by Charles Pierce and it was developed in comprehensive form by William James and John Dewey.³⁰ Pragmatism takes its name from it's central teaching that any idea which meets the pragmatic test--that is, gives practical results--must be accepted as true, provided of course, it does not conflict with experience. It was in this way that the United States applied it to it's foreign policy--as far as experience went, the U. S. really did not have any in foreign affairs, so experience did not enter in on the U. S. and it's relation to Pragmatism. The Pragmatists abandoned metaphysics as futile and taught that knowledge should be sought after, not as an end in itself, but as an instrument for improving conditions on earth.³¹ Pragmatism was a technique, requiring analysis and solution. It looked not to the theory of political institutions, but to their machinery; it sought the causes of corruption, inefficiency, and governmental impotence not in the realm of morals but in administration, economics, and psychology.³² Also, it was a democratic philosophy, it gave every man a vote, and counted the votes of all--poor and rich, ignorant and intelligent. Finally, Pragmatism taught that men held the future in their own hands--it was drenched in optimism.³³ Practical, democratic, in-

dividualistic, opportunistic, spontaneous, hopeful, pragmatism was wonderfully adapted to the temperament of the average American.³⁴ Every American knew that the world in which he lived was, in part, of his own making, that he had bent Nature to his will and won Providence over to his side, and the sublimation of this long experience to a philosophical theory could not startle him. Pragmatism later crystallized into the Progressive Movement, which was essentially an ideological and political response to the transformation of the nation from a rural, commercial economy to an urban, industrial one, and it made a concerted effort to provide the basic political, social, and economic reforms necessary; these advances were established by getting at the inequitable taxation, wasteful consumption of the nation's resources, unequal concentration of economic power, corrupt party machines, child labor, and crowded slums.³⁵ The fundamental relation of Pragmatism to the "White Man's Burden" was, it was practical for the U. S. to get involved in world affairs, the U. S. needed the foreign markets for trade and also, we had to help our "heathenistic" brothers in the world--the world would be what the U. S. made of it. William James said, "Truth happens to an idea... The ultimate test of what a truth means is the conduct it dictates or inspires."³⁶ The U. S. had an opportunistic idea of "making it" in the world economically and politically, so America set about making things happen to make their idea work. Add that to optimism and democratic individualism, and the one-third of the "White Man's Burden" was complete.

The final part of the "White Man's Burden" was manifest destiny. Manifest destiny had evolved along with the vigorous democracy in the

the early years of America--it was a compound of an earnest belief that the United States had achieved the ideal political system, which should be extended as widely as possible, and an unshakeable conviction that a beneficent providence had intended the American people to occupy the empty space stretching West.³⁷ Many others, enthusiasts of manifest destiny, for example Senator H. D. Lodge, wanted to take in everything from Panama to the North Pole. Some early examples of American ideas of manifest destiny involved the Oregon Territory and Texas, and annexing them into the United States. By the 1840's, many Americans fathered the idea of eventual possession of no less a domain than the entire Northern Hemisphere.³⁸ Probably one of the biggest reasons for the emerging popularity of manifest destiny in the 1840's was the "danger from abroad," the ambition of the European nations seemed to threaten fundamental American interests.³⁹ Typical of the thinking of that time, Representative Robert Winthrop, on January 3, 1846, spoke to Congress, "There is one element...to which I may not have done justice. I mean that new revelation of right which has been designated as the right of our manifest destiny to spread over this whole continent...if Great Britain had all our titles in addition to her own, they would weigh nothing against it (manifest destiny). The right of manifest destiny! There is a right for a new chapter in the law of nations; or rather, in the special laws of our own country; for I suppose the right of manifest destiny to spread will not be admitted to exist in any nation except the universal Yankee nation!"⁴⁰ This was the first time this doctrine was called to the attention of Congress and the American people.⁴¹ The Civil War, however, took the place of any ideas of expansion or manifest destiny. At the end of the war, the expansionist fever

was gone immediately following the Civil War. Americans were more concerned with the problems of reuniting their country, the settling of the West, and the huge industrial expansion taking place.⁴² Since they were fully occupied at home, they had little incentive to concern themselves with what was going on in the outside world. Some examples of this indifference to foreign affairs and developments was revealed by the Senate; it rejected a treaty providing for the purchase of the Danish West Indies in 1869, a treaty involving the annexation of Santo Domingo (1870) was rejected, and even the outbreak of the Ten Years' War between Spain and Cuba in 1868 could not revive sufficient expansionist spirit to capitalize on the war by acquiring Cuba.⁴³ An exception to the moribund attitude toward expansion was the purchase of Alaska from the Russian government in 1867 for the modest sum of 7.2 million dollars.⁴⁴ However, by the 1890's, there was indisputable evidence that resistance to manifest destiny in America was weakening.⁴⁵ The factors which ultimately produced the strong expansionist mood characteristic of the American public in the 1890's were several--broadly speaking, they consisted of strategic, economic, religious, and emotional strands.⁴⁶ Strategically, there was a need to obtain defensible frontiers, to eliminate bellicose neighbors, and to forestall European monarchies.⁴⁷ The navy played a major part in renewing the quest for manifest destiny. When Alfred T. Mahan's book, The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783, was published in 1890, it was evident what a major part the navy would play in expansion.⁴⁸ Basically, Mahan suggested that the country that has the largest navy is always superior--he used Great Britain as an example. Mahan became the pre-dominant spokesman

for strategic expansion, saying it was "natural, necessary, irrepressible."⁴⁹ Economically, there was a definite need for overseas markets, a need of new investment opportunities for accumulated capital, the need of additional living space for an expanding population--as best expounded by Fredrick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," and the need of an uninterupted source of raw materials for the factory system.⁵⁰ In 1897, the value of manufactured exports by the United States exceeded that of total imports--the total exports exceeded the total imports by \$286,263,144; one year later the difference soared to \$615,432,676.⁵¹ It was not until the very eve of the War with Spain that the economic case for expansionism was fully articulated. One of the first and probably foremost advocates of economic expansionism was Senator Albert J. Beveridge. On April 27, 1898, in a speech in Boston, he gave his views, "Ultimately, the trade of the world must be ours...We are Anglo-Saxons, and must obey our blood and occupy new markets, and if necessary, new lands... (This is) the Anglo-Saxon instinct of empire. American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us. The trade of the world must and shall be ours. And we will get it as our mother has taught us how. Like England, we will establish trading posts throughout the world; great colonies will grow about our posts of trade, and American law, American order, American civilization and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted...We go forth to fight for humanity; but where American blood establishes liberty and law, the American people will see that the blood is not shed in vain."⁵¹ The expansionists were never really

clear on where the United States could obtain the specific places for their economic imperialism, however; the economic expansionists helped create a climate for opinion which was favorable to the cause of manifest destiny.⁵² The religious need was brought forth in the Christianity section of "White Man's Burden." The emotional part is the most difficult part of manifest destiny to isolate and identify.⁵³ Presumptively, adventure and desire for conflict made up the fundamental element of emotionalism. The oppression Americans had experienced since the end of the Civil War, the routine business of making a living, with its emphasis on materialism, and the rebuilding of the nation gave Americans a thirst for adventure. Manifest destiny quenched that thirst. The tensions from this type of society brought out the desire for conflict. For instance, the increasing disparity between rich and poor, the growing bitterness of the farmer, the violence of labor dispute, Coxe's Army, just to name a few, caused a pessimism that found an outlet in jingoism.⁵⁴

When the Spanish-American War came into America's picture on April 26, 1898, the United States was, in fact, using the doctrine of "White Man's Burden" to justify its imperialistic motives. The one act that set the imperialistic wheels in motion was the blowing up of the American battleship Maine in Havana harbor. However, the clamor in America for U. S. entrance into Cuba was great even before this incident, i.e., the Republicans had included a plank in their platform in the election of 1896 which called for Cuban independence.⁵⁵ Also, entering into our campaign in Cuba was the "de Lome letter," which the Spanish Ambassador to America, de Lome, had written calling McKinley a "wishy, washy, scared President."⁵⁶ This letter was

released in an Eastern newspaper and this infuriated the American public. Another reason for our entrance into Cuba was some Americans felt that Spain was threatening the United States security by having armed soldiers in Cuba.⁵⁷ Finally, "Yellow Journalism" helped fan the fires of imperialism and antagonized the American public until we finally entered the war. After our entrance into the war, the Press used thrilling and spectacular stories to keep the public's interest going for the war. "Yellow Journalism" had its emphasis on blaring headlines and the sensational story, caring not if the story was true or even close to it.⁵⁸ The "White Man's Burden" was overwhelmingly our justification of war with Spain, however. It encompassed the majority of arguments for intervention--it was America's fate to free Cuba from tyranny, there was brutality being exercised by the Spaniards in their Cuban labor camps--our Christian ethics wouldn't stand for that, the U. S. had to meet the European threat in this hemisphere, and America could develop Cuba into a political and economic asset for America.⁵⁹ A peace treaty was signed six months later on December 10, 1898 (called the Treaty of Paris, in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the U. S. The U. S. did not believe the Philippines were ready for independence; it was decided that they needed our "guidance" for awhile.) When the Filipinos learned that their independence was not at hand, they rose up in what was called the Philippine Insurrection (1899).⁶⁰ In this episode, the United States employed a force of 70,000 men to fight. It was in the year, 1899, that America blindly left its "noble and magnanimous" cause of the "White Man's Burden," turned its back on Jefferson's words, "Conquest is not in our principles," and

stepped boldly into the sphere of militaristic imperialism.⁶¹ America had violated the principle of consent of the governed, by using force and not "relying on fate." McKinley said that the United States' fundamental purpose in the Philippines was "to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of the blessing of good and stable government...under the free flag of the United States...Americans come not as invaders or conquerors but as friends eager to assure the full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of free peoples."⁶² True "freedom," then, was not the national liberty being withheld, but the "individual" liberty which was being offered by America. Unfortunately the Filipinos did not buy the story. When their opposition rose, the followers of the "White Man's Burden" could no longer conceal what was happening by flowery rhetoric, it was clearly imperialism.

The "White Man's Burden" transgressed into jingoistic imperialism after the Philippine Insurrection--this imperialism consisted of two emotions, which were as diverse as the olive-branch and the arrow of the American eagle; these emotions were humanitarianism and a belligerent spirit of national self-assertion; these two emotions meshed together to form "a vigorous American foreign policy." This "vigorous foreign policy" is still followed today, even though it has seen many alterations. It seems that in the 1960's, the U. S. was still depending on the emotions of humanitarianism and the belligerent spirit of national self-assertion to get our way. We still fought a country (Vietnam) desiring freedom from American control. We still got nationalism confused and we still wanted to protect "poor, ignorant countries from being exploited by some foreign nations--this time the enemy was Communism and sometimes nationalism. In fact,

many experts today in foreign policy say that one of our major flaws in foreign policy is our inability to deal with nationalistic movements--we can't tell the difference between nationalism and Communism. Senator J. William Fulbright suggests that we reject the narrow, egotistical, self-righteous, and arrogant in the use of power America that Teddy Roosevelt strived for and instead seek out the humanistic and self-critical America of Abraham Lincoln.⁶³ Senator Fulbright goes on to suggest that we should take nationalistic movements realistically, not necessarily as threats to the United States, but as genuine movements of the people; and then accept them, not look at the situation as if it is our destiny to alter. The "White Man's Burden" set off a spark that is still being felt today in the 1970's. It was a florid justification of a mainly self-centered and selfish nation, eager to step out into the world. Today the U. S. is suffering from a foreign policy that was developed at the turn of the century; it droops around America's neck like the albatross that hung on the neck of the ancient mariner. It is time that the United States heed the words of President John F. Kennedy when he spoke in the early 1960's, "There cannot be an American solution for every world problem."

FOOTNOTES

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²⁴Richard W. Leopold and Arthur S. Link, Problems in American History, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952, pps. 611-615.

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³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Thomas H. Johnson, The Oxford Companion to American History, New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 659.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷John B. Rae and Thomas H. D. Mahoney, The United States in World History, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 289.

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³⁹Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 143.

⁴¹Ibid.

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- 44 Ibid.
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- 47 Leopold, op. cit., p. 117.
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