

## Naval War College Review

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Volume 57  
Number 1 *Winter*

Article 33

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2004

# First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power,

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### Recommended Citation

Kingseed, Cole C. (2004) "First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power,," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 57 : No. 1 , Article 33.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol57/iss1/33>

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high. The book's highlights include insightful overviews of the U.S. and British navies during the Cold War era by George W. Baer and Eric Grove, and a piece on the current and future direction of the Royal Navy by Geoffrey Till. Because the authors are able to examine specific navies and periods in some detail, this volume illustrates more effectively than *Navies of Europe* the full range of political, economic, and technological factors that typically shape a state's naval policy.

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Zimmermann, Warren. *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002. 562pp. \$30

The path of America's rise to global dominance has always attracted the attention of distinguished historians and political scientists, ranging from Henry Adams to Walter LaFeber to Stephen E. Ambrose. Warren Zimmermann, a thirty-three-year veteran of the Foreign Service, joins the fray with *First Great Triumph*, a provocative analysis of the "fathers of American imperialism" at the onset of the twentieth century. Zimmermann examines how President Theodore Roosevelt, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, Secretary of State John Hay, and Secretary of War Elihu Root engineered American imperial expansion in the decade from 1898 to 1908.

Why these five men? Zimmermann claims not only that they were influential in establishing the United States as a global power but that their characters

and beliefs helped determine how that power would be used. In essence, this book is about imperialism by "Roosevelt and his friends." Zimmermann also gives due credit for constructing the first overseas empire to Admiral George Dewey, Leonard Wood, Philippine colonial governor William H. Taft, and President William McKinley. Regrettably, he downplays the contributions of Admiral Stephen B. Luce and Secretary of the Navy Benjamin F. Tracy, both of whom influenced Mahan in the development of his naval theories.

Graduates of the Naval War College will find Zimmermann's analysis of Mahan's career particularly interesting. Zimmermann's Mahan is the preeminent American strategist of his generation, a "pen and ink sailor" who in midcareer found himself "out of sorts with the navy which accurately considered him a misfit and a complainer." At home in Newport, Rhode Island, Mahan articulated a doctrine of seapower as the controlling factor to national greatness. Like George Kennan, who authored the containment doctrine a half-century later, Mahan inspired American foreign policy with his insightful analysis of America's position among nations.

The centerpiece of this work, however, is undoubtedly Roosevelt. Roosevelt constructed the first true imperial presidency and ushered in the "American Century." Fresh from his heroics during the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt was catapulted to the White House upon the assassination of William McKinley. By the time he departed eight years later, the United States was the dominant force in the Caribbean and a major presence in Asia. On the strength of his marshaling of public

opinion and judicious use of America's economic and military power, Roosevelt, not Woodrow Wilson, emerges as the true "father of American diplomacy." During the Roosevelt administration, American foreign policy combined national power with what Zimmermann terms "high purpose."

Zimmermann offers equally compelling character sketches of the other members of Roosevelt's team. Lodge emerges as a political manipulator who guides imperialist policies through Congress. Hay contributes to American hegemony in the Western Hemisphere by developing closer ties with Great Britain, while Root creates the first American colonial administration, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Their combined efforts made their country a power to be reckoned with on the international scene.

However, Zimmermann's crystal ball looks far bleaker as the United States enters the twenty-first century. Here Zimmermann's interpretation is based on too much conjecture and too little fact. Despite the massing of American military might in the Middle East in the aftermath of 11 September, Zimmermann

opines, this country faces an erosion of its power due to a weakening of the U.S. presidency and the reemergence of congressional dominance in foreign policy. Additionally, he sees a current trend toward nonmilitary involvement and an unwillingness to commit military forces in support of foreign policy. Lastly, Zimmermann posits that international terrorism has produced a backlash against U.S. policies as well as the cultural, ideological, and economic principles that guide the United States.

In summary, Zimmermann offers a provocative interpretation about American imperialism during the last century and a chilling prognostication for the current one. The reader is more likely to concur with his thesis that the expansion of the United States to an international power was not an aberration but a culmination of forces that had dominated the political and economic scene since its birth, than with the decline in the power of the presidency, which is more a function of personality than of the reemergence of legislative authority.

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