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## CURRENT BOOKS

### Pacific Games

**LET THE SEA MAKE A NOISE:** A History of the North Pacific from Magellan to MacArthur. By Walter A. McDougall. Basic. 793 pp. \$30

As guiding notions go, the idea that the United States has a Pacific Destiny has enjoyed a surprisingly resilient life. By the late 19th century, West Coast railroad magnates were already insisting that the Atlantic had become the ocean of the past, and they were not alone. The Pacific Rim has beckoned to Americans of all stripes, from the early missionaries drawn to the Sandwich Isles (as the Hawaiian Islands were once known) to trading-house merchants bewitched by the lure of "four hundred million customers," the number at which China's population stood at the turn of this century. Yet the full wave of Pacific enthusiasm swelled only during the 1970s, when free marketeers and competitiveness gurus embraced the creed. Today, both G-7 summit communiqués and business journalists proclaim the "Pacific Century" as an established fact.

But what is the Pacific Century? One might first ask *where* it is, since most discussions of this Asia-Pacific region—perhaps wisely—leave the matter tellingly vague. The many recent books that describe, often with visionary nomenclature, the "East Asian Challenge," the "Asian Miracle," or the Asian "NICs" (newly industrializing countries) share a common theme: Because of their recent growth rates, Asian economies must be inherently superior. American reporting from this part of the globe conjures up a picture of undifferentiated diligence, adaptation, and progress. It also leaves a nagging sense in the national consciousness that our future dynamism, if we are to be so blessed, can be found only on western Pacific shores.

One reads far less about the serious flaws in the Asian Success Story. It is seldom emphasized, for example, that successful Asian capitalism remains mostly a *coastal* and *East Asian*

phenomenon. Within China, India, Indochina, and Indonesia, much of Asia's *interior* still reveals overpopulated misery, disastrous governance, ecological crisis, and dwindling resources. Industrialization may have irrevocably changed the texture of Korean and Japanese culture, spawning inventiveness and creativity, but the same cannot be said for Indonesia or Thailand.

Mercifully, McDougall, a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, has not added another volume to that already precariously tall stack of Pacific booster books. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1986 for *The Heavens and the Earth*, a political history of the space age, McDougall here has written an equally entertaining and informative kind of history. One of its virtues is that it goes well beyond the old story of cross-cultural conflict and Western intrusions in Asia since the 16th century. Traversing more than 400 years of diplomatic and military history, McDougall breaks into caches of Euro-imperial, Asian, and American history, ransacking these storehouses for materials that emerge from old, settled "national" histories and fashioning them into a wider tale, that of the "North Pacific."

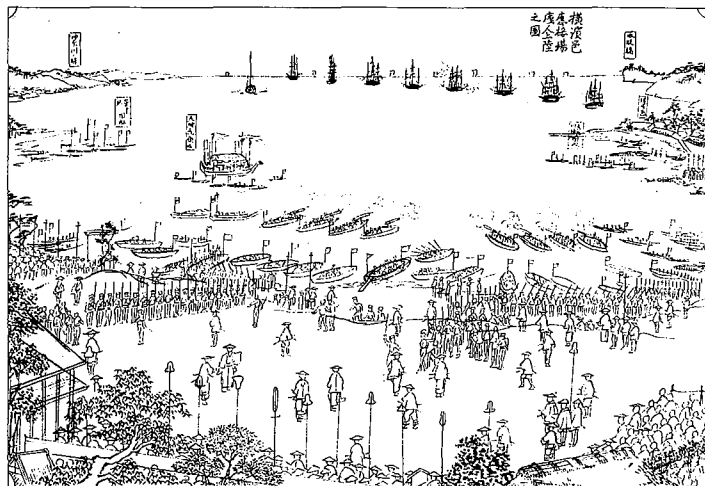
McDougall sees an enduring competition among Pacific peoples that is every bit as heated as similar contests were in the Americas, Africa, or the Asian heartland. It is a competition populated with as diverse and colorful a cast of characters as perhaps ever peopled a nonfiction book: doomed Russian sailors facing Japanese naval guns at Tsushima Bay, clever Polynesian rulers such as Kamehameha IV, naval visionaries in America or Japan, inventors who had little or nothing to do with the Pacific (Robert Fulton's steam engine and Rudolf Diesel's internal combustion engine changed the Pacific tempo forever), fumbling rulers like Russia's Nicholas II, visionary railway financiers like Collis P. Huntington and Count Sergei Yulyevich Witte.

To structure such a wealth of materials, McDougall divides it into three technological eras—the age of sail and muscle, the age of steam and rail, and the age of the internal combustion engine. But McDougall steers clear of the sort of technological determinism that marks such histories as Carlo Cipolla's *Guns, Sails and Empires* (1966). To McDougall, the dominant technologies of conquest or naval expansion are less important historically than the fact that

easier and faster passage shrank the buffer zones that once kept American, Japanese, and Russian ambitions from colliding too frequently. The Trans-Siberian railway moved millions closer to Manchuria. Rogue sea currents lost their power to becalm or disorient when steam-powered ships could cross directly from point to point. And air travel, the most emphatic consequence of the internal combustion era, has thrown millions of European and Asian people together in the contemporary Pacific.

In the Pacific, Japan and America crossed purposes early, and indeed Japanese-American antagonism is perhaps the dominant leitmotif of the second half of McDougall's history. From the anti-immigration mood in the early 20th century, and from American obstruction of Japanese aims on mainland Asia, arose periodic crises, some of which became full-blown war scares. Books such as *The Menace of Japan*, *Must We Fight Japan?* and *The Next War* appeared in the United States soon after World War I. Let us hope that the current crop of look-alike titles does not prove so prescient.

Despite its length, McDougall's book is supremely readable. But it is not without its weaknesses. One is the author's incessant striving to cast events in the North Pacific as the pivot of world politics in the 19th and



20th centuries, when the fulcrum was still in Europe—where it remained right up through the Cold War.

Also puzzling are the 14 colloquies that McDougall scatters throughout his chronicle. To these periodic *aka iki* (a Hawaiian word approximating “high deliberative councils”) he summons five major historical personages. These five spirits then judge, squabble with, or applaud the living storyteller, the “Scholar”—McDougall himself. The ghosts first appear in the book's opening pages when the author purports to nod off during a flight over the Pacific. They include Kaahumanu, Hawaiian king Kamehameha's chief consort; William Henry Seward, U.S. secretary of state during the American Civil War; Saito Hiroshi, Japan's ambassador to the United States during the 1930s; Count Witte, tsarist Russia's prime minister after 1905; and Father Junípero Serra, the Franciscan monk who built a string of 18th-century missions in California.

In his acknowledgments, McDougall thanks his editors and publisher for having accepted “the notion, not of a historical novel, but of a novelistic history written, though it be serious nonfiction, in a spirit of magic.” The colloquy that comes immediately after an account of the U.S. annexation of the Hawaiian Islands gives the “magical” tone:

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book, that they have found their historian. They will be surprised, then, and perhaps dumbfounded by the conclusion. In his closing pages, McDougall describes an America in diplomatic and economic retreat from Asia, just one generation after the end of the Korean War. He sees this withdrawal as, in fact, having been fated to occur "exactly because the United States won such a thorough victory in the Pacific War [World War II]," and because America so overextended itself thereafter. America, he writes, "took upon [itself] the burden of defending the rimlands and opened its markets and lands to the enterprise and immigrants of Asia and Mexico—all in the name of ideals of freedom, enterprise, equality and

human dignity introduced to the North Pacific by white men." I, for one, do not disagree that America's most influential time in Asia now lies behind it. At this time of new hosannas to the Pacific Age, the supreme irony lies in the American *retreat* from the western Pacific. We are leaving to Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China the vibrant markets we helped nurture, protect, and create.

—James Clad, a former Wilson Center Fellow and formerly the Southeast Asia correspondent for the Far Eastern Economic Review, is the author of *Behind the Myth: Business, Money, and Power in Southeast Asia* (1989).

## The Nature of Virtue

**THE MORAL SENSE.** By James Q. Wilson.  
*Free Press. 313 pp. \$22.95*

For nearly three decades, James Q. Wilson has been one of America's leading authorities on crime and drug abuse. No narrow technocrat or data-cruncher, Wilson, a political scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles, is that rare academic who possesses both the gift of lucid expression and the respect for the ordinary citizen necessary to discuss complex social problems in a broad, accessible way. He has written important books on bureaucracy, government regulation, urban politics, schooling, and welfare. But the study of crime and its regulation has remained at the center of his interests, not simply as a social and political problem but as a philosophical conundrum. Through his study of criminality, Wilson examines the fundamental questions of political philosophy: What is the nature of human nature, and what are the sources of social order? What are the "natural" human drives, dispositions, and poten-

tialities (if any), and how can they be melded into a relatively stable and peaceful social order? What causes individuals to violate that order? Does criminal conduct represent the breakthrough of unruly nature, aberrations of biology, or the failure of social order? How can such conduct be prevented without jeopardizing the flourishing of humanity?

In *Crime and Human Nature* (1985), Wilson and his co-author, psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein, explored the question of why the few engage repeatedly in criminal conduct. In this splendid new work, Wilson examines the rest of us: the vast majority who remain essentially decent, law-abiding, and, at times, compassionate, even in the face of desperate circumstances and obvious self-interest.

*Crime and Human Nature* proved controversial among social scientists largely because of its willingness to take seriously the possibility of biological causes of persistent criminality, a position that raises fears of discrimination, indifference to the social causes of crime, and ultimately, eugenics. *The Moral*