

# Henry George Newsletter

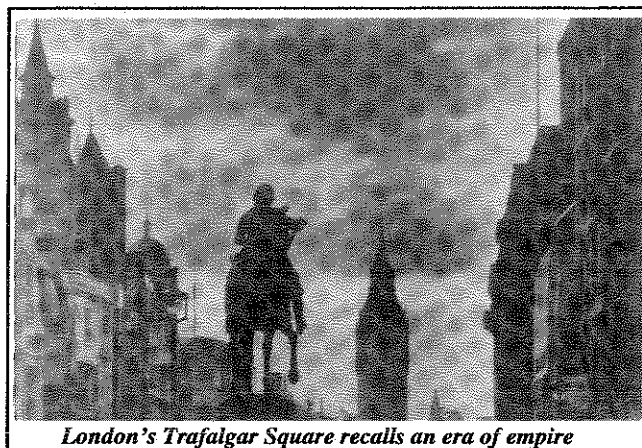
High School Edition



Issue 21, Jan. - Feb. 1994

## HAS THE SUN SET ON BRITAIN?

For over 250 years Britain was a world superpower, controlling an empire that spanned the globe. But since the end of World War II, Britain has experienced a slow and steady economic decline. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the consequent ending of the Cold War, Britain may be losing its status as an important strategic power and favored ally of the U.S. Can Britain still play a major role on the world stage? This article can be used with both the Land & Freedom series in World History #5 - *Mercantilism*, and with American History #6 - *Colonial Mercantilism*.



London's Trafalgar Square recalls an era of empire

## MYTHS DIE WITH THEIR BOOTS ON

History is continually being re-evaluated and revised and this is especially true of our concepts of the historical development of the American West. The Western film has played a significant role in shaping our view of that development, and is usually centered around the myth of the male hero. But now yesterday's heroes seem to be becoming today's debunked myths. This article can be used in conjunction with American History # 17 - *The Closing of the American Frontier*.

## FREE MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

The Stanley Foundation publishes *The Courier* three times a year, each issue concentrating on an international issue. A recent issue, "Bulgaria and Russia and Sovereignty" presented a general view of how American Foreign policy is

determined. In addition, the Foundation also makes available a number of publications such as *Deadlock Over China Policy - is a New Consensus Possible?*, *U.S. Policy Toward a Post-Socialist USSR* and *Changing Realities in the Horn of Africa: Implications for Africa and U.S. Policy*. Write to: *The Stanley Foundation*, 216 Sycamore St., Suite 500, Muscatine, IA 52761-3831



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DAVID DOMKE, EDITOR

**ICMA**, the professional association of appointed administrators serving cities, counties, regional councils, and other local governing bodies offers a guide called *Local Government and You*. This guide suggests activities to help students learn about the purpose and structure of local governments, there being more than 80,000 local governments in the U.S. Some of the activities give insight into local government in general, others are more specific and focus on using the community as a laboratory for study. Write to: **ICMA**, 777 North Capitol St., NE #500, Washington, DC 20002-4201

**The American Association of Teachers of German** offers a teacher's guide and a class set of *Timeline - Germany Divided and United, 1945 and Beyond*. The 16 page student booklet covers the Nazi era and its aftermath - the birth of a new democracy, economic recovery, the federal system, and immigration. The teacher's guide contains two overlays and suggestions for developing the unit. Write to: **AATG**, 112 Haddontowne Court #104, Cherry Hill, NJ 08034-3662

**The Australian Embassy** offers a program entitled *Australians All*, a unit on multiculturalism. The packet includes thirty copies of a student article, a poster and a teacher's resource guide. The student article is an account of relations among various groups of immigrants who have settled and built Australia, from the Aborigines to the recent arrival of Asian peoples. The teacher's guide contains background information plus tables and charts of the country. Write to: **Embassy of Australia**, 1601 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington D.C. 20036-2273

# Has the Sun Set on Britain?

by Eugene Robinson

Britain is a relatively rich country with industrial might, nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. It has international commitments and first-class diplomats, and is one of the few nations that consistently takes a global view of events.

But is Britain still important?

Politically, economically and culturally, Britain has long seen itself as one of the world's true heavyweights. But in the estimation of many observers -- and in the nightmares of British policy-makers -- middleweight status is an increasingly accurate description.

Those who see Britain's role as in decline say the two relationships from which Britain has derived its importance in the postwar era are both being reexamined. The United States, with a new generation of leaders in charge, may no longer put the "special relationship" with Britain above all others. Britain's stature in Europe, meanwhile, is diminished by the emergence of a unified Germany as the region's powerhouse.

"My feeling is that Britain, like some other European countries, is clinging to a set of myths that can no longer be maintained," says Jonathan Eyal of the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank. "Here, they talk as though the important issues still have to be decided in London. I don't think that's the case anymore."

British intellectuals and politicians have been debating since World War II whether Britain has entered into a permanent decline as a world power and the country's place on the world stage has diminished dramatically over the past half century. But the current debate is new in the sense that it reflects developments since the end of the Cold War.

The British government is determined that Britain continue to "box above its weight" on the world stage, in Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's phrase. But ordinary Britons may be losing their enthusiasm for the fight.

In a poll taken in December, only 34 percent of those surveyed said Britain should continue to be a "power in the world" -- while 49 percent said Britain should be more like "like Sweden or Switzerland."

Before World War II, Britain had its far flung empire to confer status and power. Throughout the Cold War, Britain derived outsized importance from its strategic geographical position as an island off the European coast and from its diplomatic position with a foot in both the American and European camps.

As Europe took steps toward union, Britain participated but remained somewhat aloof. Economically and politically, Britain was at least coequal with France and Germany, the other big European powers. And whenever Europe looked like an unattractive option, there was always Britain's alliance with the United States to fall back on.

Now, the world is a different place. The

Cold War has ended, and with it the Soviet threat that made Britain's geography so important. It no longer counts for much that Britain is perfectly situated to keep Russian submarines from breaking out into the North Atlantic, or to serve as an offshore platform from which to battle Communist hordes overrunning the continent.

Economic strength is much more important in determining a nation's position in the world -- and the figures show that Britain now has just the fourth-largest economy in Europe, behind Germany, France and Italy.

A reunited Germany is now clearly the dominant economic power in the region, partnered with France in a strong push toward closer European union. Britain's leaders continue to agonize over how closely to link up with what they fear will become a European superstate. The United States, meanwhile, is preoccupied with its own problems and appears determined to take more of a multilateral approach to world affairs.

Britain still has global military commitments and is able to project its power like few other nations. British forces played a major role in the Persian Gulf War, for example, and have pulled some of the toughest and most dangerous duty in the humanitarian relief effort in Bosnia.

But maintaining those commitments is expensive, and Britain's economy has been ailing. With nearly 3 million Britons unemployed and collecting benefits, the government's budget deficit is running at about \$75 billion a year. The government would like to cut defense expenditures to bring them more in line with other European countries, but officials here worry that if strength is cut too close to the bone, Britain will weaken its argument for keeping its security council seat -- coveted by both Germany and Japan.

"The aspiration that the political establishment has had in positioning Britain as one of the leading geopolitical players is increasingly untenable," says David Kern, chief economist and head of market intelligence for National Westminster Bank. "We have to devote resources in the defense area that are increasingly out of line with our economic base."

In the short and even the medium term, Kern says, Britain's economic prospects are somewhat brighter than those of other European countries.

Last September, when the British pound crashed, Britain was forced to make a humiliating exit from the European system of fixed currency values known as the Exchange Rate Mechanism. But that withdrawal allowed Britain to cut interest rates sharply, stimulating the economy. Unemployment is falling slightly, business confidence is up, industrial output has risen sharply and inflation is below 2 percent, its lowest level in nearly three decades.

But the encouraging recent economic performance is relative, since the starting point for these gains was a deep economic trough. The

economy is still not functioning anywhere near capacity, and since Britain has to export in order to grow, continuing economic trouble in important markets such as Germany may slow the recovery.

But on the plus side, London remains the region's preeminent financial center. No other city in Europe even approaches its concentration of banks, investment houses and insurance companies.

More than \$200 billion passes each day through London's foreign exchange market, the largest in the world. Banks in London account for one-fifth of all international bank lending. Insurance companies in London account for one-fifth of the total international insurance market -- although Lloyd's of London has suffered record losses.

Britain's Hamlet-like indecision over European union is not likely to be resolved anytime soon, even though the fight over the Maastricht Treaty is finally settled. While the British business community, particularly in the industrial north, has been quick to embrace the advantages of the European single market, some government officials still refer to "Europe" as if it were a strange and distant place -- rather than a larger whole to which Britain belongs.

Some believe that Britons are just in a mood to feel weak and unresolved. Polls have shown a sharp drop in respondents' confidence in almost all major institutions, from the justice system to the royal family. Politicians, especially, have suffered. John Major is now the most unpopular prime minister since opinion polling began.

Major and his aides respond that the government is unpopular, and people are unsettled, because the country is now beginning to tackle the tough problems. As economic recovery builds, they, the mood will shift.

Says a spokesman for the prime minister: "You can't suppress good news forever."

- Reprinted from the Washington Post

## Questions

1. What are some of the factors in the debate about Britain's decline?
2. What has been the role of geography in Britain's recent history?
3. How has Britain's economy affected her historical role?
4. Explain Europe's relationship with Europe today?
5. What evidence is there for the argument that Germany is replacing Britain as a favored ally with the U.S.
6. Explain the unpopularity of Prime Minister Major.

# Myths Die With Their Boots On

by Sam Howe Verhovek

Men were men in the American West conjured up in the movies of a generation ago. Cavalymen, for that matter, were cavalymen. But these days, with Hollywood rekindling its old infatuation with the Western, things are not nearly that simple.

For one thing, in the recently released "Ballad of Little Jo," a feminist interpretation of the Old West, women are men. To survive in a depraved, misogynistic mining town after her family banishes her for having an illegitimate child, Josephine Monaghan assumes a man's identity, even slashing a scar into her face to complete the ruse.

And cavalymen may become Indians, at least honorary ones, as Lieut. John Dunbar showed in the 1990 film "Dances with Wolves." But more importantly, the Old West's new myth makers are now drawing a place very different for the backdrop for the stark morality tales through which Gary Cooper and John Wayne galloped.

In part, the changes in Hollywood's vision reflects a new era that likes its myths debunked. They are in the spirit that turned Columbus, the epic navigator, into Columbus, the brutal despoiler of a pristine world.

In the West, just about every hero has come in for a thrashing, not just in films and novels but even in policy debates in Congress - ranchers are welfare cowboys on Federal subsidies, gold miners befoul rivers, Paul Bunyan kills spotted owls.

But the West has also been redefined many times before, ever since Americans started thinking there was a West. It is perhaps an inverted testament to the vast landscape, where the clouds can seem close enough to touch, that it has managed to serve as a chalkboard on which myth after myth has been created, erased and rewritten. Daniel Boone was a "western" legend when the Appalachians were the frontier. Davy Crockett supposedly complained that his biographers were making up too many tales about him. Life out West was so thoroughly romanticized that entrepreneurs like Buffalo Bill Cody offered Easterners a shooting, riding, stagecoach-robbing theme park.

Westerns have always reflected the country's sense of its moral compass. Today, in the new Old West, they pick up the national arguments about racism, sexism and violence and show a lot of confusion about who wears white hats.

The height of moral ambiguity may well have been "Unforgiven," last year's Clint Eastwood anti-Western about the godforsaken

town of Big Whiskey, Wyo. No shot is fired for an honorable reason. And when the aspiring bounty-hunter, the Schofield Kid, shoots down his prey point-blank in a privy, he practically has a nervous breakdown at the horror of it all.

At the same time, the genre remains, in one fundamental way, unchanged - the films almost always depict a world where there once were simple solutions and ironclad moral codes. You steal a horse, you get hanged.

"Many of these films still serve to remind people that there used to be a way to deal with things in a less complicated way," observed Bill Wittliff, who wrote the television screenplay for "Lonesome Dove," Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer-winning epic about a cattle drive from Texas to Montana. "That's not to say a more laudable way. But a lot of people are drawn to it because they feel we don't say anymore, 'This is right and this is wrong.' Now we say, 'Maybe there's an explanation for it. Maybe they were abused as a kid.'"

Still, much in the popular culture of films, books and television unquestionably reflects



a changing interpretation of the historic West. Instead of emphasizing epic cowboy grandeur or, the deserved conquests of an advancing civilization, many portray the West as a place full of terrible evil or sheer drudgery.

Even "Lonesome Dove," with its masterful evocation of the challenges of the trail and the elegance of a "Kansas sky seeded with stars," is laden with powerful, descriptions of tedium. "By the middle of the afternoon it was so hot nobody could think," one chapter begins. A plainswoman goes mad and kills herself with a shotgun, leaving a note: "Can't stand listening to this wind no more." And as one of the main characters lies on his deathbed, he seems to question the cattle drive itself: "Look there at Montana," he says. "It's fine and fresh and now we've come and it'll soon be ruin, like my legs."

Some of this demythologizing has happened before. "Unforgiven," a bit cheekily, even has a character who keeps mythologizing and de-mythologizing the West right on the spot. Beauchamp, a wimpy author of pulp Westerns, arrives in Big Whiskey as the sycophantic biographer of "English Bob," fearless killer. The local sheriff beats Bob up, then exposes him as a coward whose most legendary kill was of an unarmed man. Beauchamp abandons Bob to write the sheriff's life story, only to transfer his allegiance again after the Clint Eastwood character confronts the sheriff.

Beginning in the late 1960's, some films tried to puncture the macho myth. Sam Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch" did it with sickening violence, shooting up a town full of women and children. "Little Big Man" used humor, poking fun at the classic long winded, raconteur who boasts of having been the "Soda Pop Kid" and the sole survivor of the Little Big Horn massacre.

What is noteworthy about many new Westerns is how thoroughly discredited the tough guys are. In "Little Jo," for instance nearly all the men, with the exception of the Chinese laborer whom Jo saves from a lynching and who becomes her lover, are loathsome.

"Little Jo" has been called the first in a wave of feminist Westerns, to include "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues," "The Outlaws" and "Bad Girls." Part of the appeal is simple enough. "Women are looking back and trying to find women in history who were really cool," says Gail Gilchrist, the author of "The Cowgirl Companion," a history of women in the West. Look, she said, at the popularity of the movie "A League of Their Own," about female baseball players in the 1940s.

But there is also, some argue, another influence: the research by a new generation of Western historians, notably Patricia Nelson Limerick at the University of Colorado. Her 1987 book, "The Legacy of Conquest: the Unbroken Past of the American West," helped deflate notions about the glorious and necessary move West. She drew on diaries and other original sources to show just how miserable and terrifying it could be, especially for women.

"The people making the movies now may never have read her exact words," said Gregory Curtis, the editor of Texas Monthly and a student of Westerns. "But the ideas that have been put into the marketplace as it were, through her (continued on back page)

work and that of other historians have gotten a lot of currency through a kind of osmosis."

In his classic 1954 film essay, "The Western," Robert Warshaw said that it almost always fell upon the man in Western films to demonstrate virtue, if not in word then in deed, and often with his gun. "If there is a woman he loves," Mr. Warshaw wrote, "she is usually unable to understand his motives. She is against killing and being killed, and he finds it impossible explain to her that there is no point in being against these things; they belong to his world."

Thus in "High Noon," Gary Cooper is compelled to return for the shootout. His Quaker bride objects, to which he responds, "It's no good. I've got to go back, Amy, I've got to. That's the whole thing." And she ultimately goes back herself, abandoning her stand against violence to take up arms as well.

But the lessons today are not likely to be so neat. If there is killing, it is often suffused with regret. During a recent screening of "Ballad of Little Jo" in Houston, there came a point when Jo finally had to take on the gunmen of the cattle barons who are after her land. As she shot them, two men in the audience started to whoop it up in old-fashioned cowboy matinee style.

But dozens of others quickly shushed the two politically incorrect boors. Then, in the split second that it took everyone to turn back to the screen, there was Little Jo. She wasn't blowing smoke off her pistol, or riding cockily into the sunset. She had dissolved into tears.

- Reprinted from *The New York Times*

## Questions

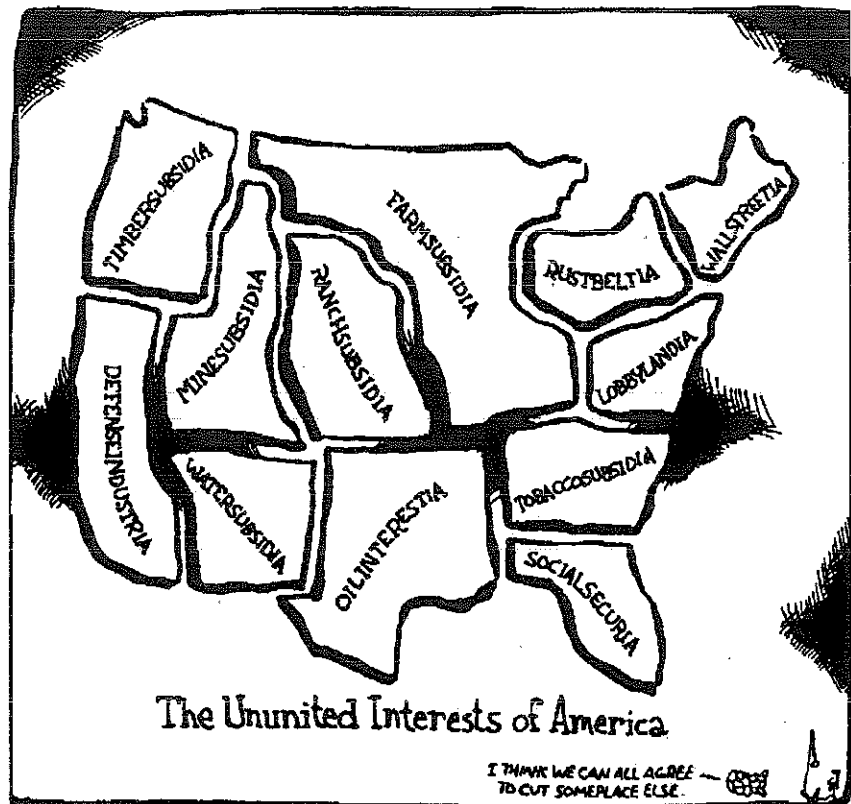
1. Explain the changes in attitude that have contributed to a re-evaluating of the history of the West.

2. Give some examples of how Hollywood has changed its depiction of the West.

3. What impact has feminism had on these changes?

4. How has new historical research contributed these changes in perspective?

5. How has the representation of killing changed in the Western film?



## Cartoon

As with the Clinton tax package, proponents of the health care plan have noted the importance that lobbyists representing special interests groups play in the enactment of legislation. In relation to the above cartoon, answer the questions below. (This exercise can be used in conjunction with lesson #4 in the Economic series, *Self-Interest*.)

1. State the central theme of the cartoon.
2. Why are the three portions of the southeastern section so labeled?
3. Why is the western section labeled the way it is?
4. What is meant by "Lobbylandia?"
5. What constitutional amendment protects the rights of lobbyists?
6. Evaluate the impact that lobbyists have upon our legislative process.

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