



United States Colonies and Dependencies William D. Boyce (1914)

William D. Boyce was a white American raised in a Presbyterian family. He grew up in rural Pennsylvania, but in adulthood he made a fortune as a Chicago-based publisher of newspapers and magazines. In 1910, he founded the Boy Scouts of America, inspired by England's fledgling Scouting program, which Boyce had encountered in London while traveling to British East Africa for a safari.

Among Boyce's publishing ventures was a series of illustrated volumes about places around the world. One volume showcased the United States' "colonies and dependencies." As US "colonies," Boyce featured Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Panama Canal Zone; as US "dependencies," he featured Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. In these selections from the volume's introduction, Boyce expounds a version of US civil religion: a narrative of manifest destiny linked to a sense of US exceptionalism and national mission. Boyce's civil religion is grounded in white Christian nationalism and imperialism, but with these complicating ambiguities or ironies:

- He foregrounds "the white man's discovery" of America, which he follows with whites "beat[ing] back the Red Man"; but Boyce also assigns to the United States a proto-multiculturalist mission to show that "all nations can here live and work together in peace."*
- He identifies "the Christian conception of the equality of all men" as the foundation of the US political system, while he uses an arguably secularizing language about "evolution" and "Destiny" for the forces that guide US progress.*
- He seems to reflect a Protestant bias in maintaining that Filipinos, primarily Catholic, lack a "religious belief that all men are equal"; yet in Boyce's narrative of US origins, the only religious actors who appear as such are Catholics, not Protestants.*

In the story book of our planet, the white man's discovery of the grand range of country known as the American continent, the planting of a free government in the United States, and the amazing expansion of that government form one of the chapters to which thinkers and investigators are always turning. This is because men have found the history of the United States not only one of the most picturesque stories in the big "planet book" but, what is better, the most encouraging. [...] My journeys, in recent years, to every quarter of the globe and to all our outlying possessions have confirmed my belief that the United States is not only the world's best country to live in, but that colonies or territories coming under its ownership or protection are more justly treated and rapidly developed than are the similar possessions or dependencies of any other nation. [...]

Events march in procession and always forward; evolution flows in waves, generation after generation, and also always forward; and to understand the present and judge of the future, we must turn to the past. To the little band of patriots who, on the fourth day of July, 1776, gathered in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, and pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to the new nation which their action produced, conception of the present greatness of the nation they inaugurated must have been impossible. But looking back, their promptings and their purposes are clear to us—a fierce revulsion against injustice and a determination to institute a governmental organization in which the people themselves should rule.

The impulse and intention were not wholly new; men through many centuries had dreamed of such a government, and more than one attempt had been made to organize the great idea into concrete working form. But the attempts had always finally failed, mainly because former republics necessarily admitted only a portion of the people to active voice in affairs of state, thus naturally producing ruling aristocracies and autocracies. The truth is that a real republic was never possible until education and enlightenment became general, and a majority of the people were measurably capable of understanding the meaning of equality and liberty and acting intelligently in matters of government.

Even in the day of the birth of our own Republic, the time was hardly ripe, owing to much ignorance; but a basic idea not before employed was used in laying the foundation, and that was the Christian conception of the equality of all men before the Creator. Without much doubt, this belief saved us, holding the structure together until enlightenment became more general. This brings us to a vital question. A movement at present is underway to give up the Philippine Islands, one of our most important colonies, and allow the inhabitants to attempt to form themselves into an independent republic. Have they the first requisite, a religious belief that all men are equal, or the second and perhaps greater requisite of knowing enough, as a whole people, intelligently to conduct affairs of state with liberty for all? My conviction, growing out of observation and investigation, is that they as yet have not good grounds for government as a republic.

Always in dealing with our history and position in the world, we instinctively go back to Columbus. For us, the procession of events begins with him. His three little ships—*Santa María*, *Niña*, and *Pinta*—bobbing across the billows toward the American shores in 1492, lead our procession.

All know the story: From Palos, Spain, to Madeira sail the three tiny ships, then westward across unknown waters to an unknown world, striking land at San Salvador and awakening a new hemisphere into life. The nucleus of the procession gathers; the Old World stirs with excitement. Hot on the trail of gold and glory and acquisitions of fresh soil sail the “spiritual buccaneers” of Spain. The West Indies are explored and colonized; white men tread the shores of South America. Pope Alexander draws an imaginary line, north and south, 300 miles west of the Azores Islands and pronounces all lands west of that a part of Spain. Balboa crosses the Isthmus of Panama, and looks upon the Pacific, and hands its 70,000,000 square miles to the king of Spain. Ponce de León, rich from pilferings as governor of Porto Rico, is in the South searching for waters that would keep men forever young, and Florida, many times its present size, “goes Spanish.” Ferdinand de Soto, now in 1537, is governor of Cuba and Florida; and, hunting for gold with his followers, is in the country that is now South Carolina and Georgia; and, pushing onward, is the first white man to look upon the Mississippi River. Then the French are settling on the St. Lawrence, and presently Joliet and Marquette are floating down the Illinois River and the Mississippi and giving a part of these great valleys to France. Britain is in Virginia and Pennsylvania and upon the New England coast, and the Dutch are on Manhattan Island, which they afterward trade for Dutch Guiana in South America. The procession, led by Columbus and his three little ships, is fully underway.

Wars follow. The French and English and Spanish battle with one another, and all, little by little, beat back the Red Man, slaying and being slain. The grip of France relaxes, Spain’s power

dwindles, Britain rules; then Washington and independence, and we cross the threshold of national life.

Spain secretly cedes the vast Louisiana Territory to France; Napoleon, in need of money, sells it to the United States; and, later, we divide the 600,000,000 acres into a dozen great states. Again we are at war with England and are victors; then [with] Mexico, and Texas and California fall into our hands. Later we save the Northwest, and ere long North and South are grappling in a struggle that shakes our national structure to the foundation, but it stands. Then we purchase Alaska; enter into war with Spain; take over Porto Rico, the Philippines, Cuba, and Hawaii; present Cuba to itself as a gift, with a string to it; influence Panama to revolt and become a republic; buy the Canal Zone and make the world's long dream of uniting the Atlantic and Pacific a fact; and the grand procession is at our doors.

It seems a journey of Destiny, the discovery and preparation of a vast place into which human streams from all countries might flow and thrive, showing mankind the great, vital truth that if portions of all nations can here live and work together in peace, the nations of the earth themselves would live and work together in peace if given the power of choice and freedom from despotic rulers and ambitious military dictators.

Remember that every square foot of the soil that now constitutes our country and its colonies once was owned or claimed by some foreign power. That it all finally became free, and the home of self-governing people, has been the largest and most hope-inspiring of all modern facts. From all parts of the earth, the eyes of men have watched our progress with encouragement; we are still being observed and studied. In justice to ourselves and as an example to others, we can afford to follow but one course—*the path of right*. We can pursue but one just policy with our colonies, and that is to protect and hold and train them to become self-governing units of our great self-governing nation, finding strength in our unity, as we ourselves have grown from a nucleus of the first united thirteen colonies.

Source: William D. Boyce, *United States Colonies and Dependencies, Illustrated* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1914), vii-xi, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t3dz1f35h>. Public domain.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Punctuation emended for readability, including breaking up run-on sentences. *Under way* emended to *underway*. A spelled-out number converted to a numeral. Ships' names italicized. The spellings *Porto Rico* and *Guiana* reproduce the usage of the source publication, but diacritics have been added to Spanish names where needed to regularize the source's inconsistent use of them.

For the sake of modernization, capitalization is used less frequently here than in the source publication; terms converted to lowercase include *story book*, *continent*, *hemisphere*, *independence*, *states*, *king*, and *governor*. Like *Story Book*, the phrase *Planet Book* has been converted to lowercase; but in addition, quotation marks have been inserted around the latter phrase as an alternative way to clarify that the unusual term extends Boyce's metaphor of world history as a storybook. The source's capitalizations are retained for the following: geographical references, the divine or quasi-divine epithets *Creator* and *Destiny*, the racial label *Red Man* (but *white man* is lowercase here as in the source), and *Republic* when referring to the United States (but the source uses lowercase for that same word when referring to other nations, a distinction preserved here).

These edited excerpts from Boyce's introduction to his book are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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