

Walt Whitman and American Imperialism

Whitman made a few predictions for the future of the U.S. in his essay "Democratic Vistas." In this November 1868 passage Whitman's prediction is mostly false; however, it does reveal a confidence in an ever-expanding America:

In a few years the dominion-heart of America will be far inland, toward the West. Our future national capital may not be where the present one is. It is possible, nay likely, that in less than fifty years, it will migrate a thousand or two miles, will be re-founded, and every thing belonging to it made on a different plan, original, far more superb. The main social, political, spine-character of the States will probably run along the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers, and west and north of them, including Canada. Those regions, with the group of powerful brothers toward the Pacific (destined to the mastership of that sea and its countless paradises of islands) will compact and settle the traits of America, with all purely native stock.

Whitman mentions Canada in "Democratic Vistas," and he would often speak of the country as if it were to become part of the United States. His expansionist ideal was not limited to Canada; Cuba comes into the picture in another one of his predictions, this from another series of essays published in *Specimen Days*, 1882. Once again, he foresees the United States as becoming a dominant superpower, a view shared by many during the Spanish-American war:

Long ere the second centennial arrives, there will be some forty to fifty great States, among them Canada and Cuba. When the present century closes, our population will be sixty or seventy millions. The Pacific will be ours, and the Atlantic mainly ours. There will be daily electric communication with every part of the globe. What an age! What a land! Where, elsewhere, one so great? The individuality of one nation must then, as always, lead the world. Can there be any doubt who the leader ought to be?

Other notable lines from Whitman's *Specimen Days*, full of national confidence and pride:

"It seems as if the Almighty had spread before this nation charts of imperial destinies, dazzling as the sun . . ."

"America will be empire of empires, overshadowing all else, past and present . . ."

"America, inheritor of the past, is the custodian of the future of humanity."