



Quelle

Edwin L. James, „America’s Moral Influence, If Any“ (Artikel in: The New York Times, 19. August 1930)¹

The American public gives too much credit to what may be called, and what is called in Europe, our effort to guide the world aright.

America’s great world political position is not due primarily to our moral leadership but primarily to our wealth and economic position. It is not to our moral teachings that the rest of the world responds, but to our material power. If we were a poor and weak nation the world would today care no more about what we thought than did the world before the Great War.

It is not difficult to understand why the Old World does not take our exhortations to heart any more. There is the old story of the League of Nations. There is the World Court. There are other things, like the International Bank – all of which seem to represent our advice to others as to how to do their business, while we do ours some other way. Our advice as to how other nations should act is, of itself, of very little more influence than our example of how we stop our own nation from drinking intoxicating liquors.

Now those who still believe that ‘the moral sense’ of America is a real factor in international affairs will surely cite the Kellogg pact as an example of how we do good and do it altruistically. But no one who has lived in Europe in recent years can believe in the dominant moral effect of the Kellogg pact as an active moral factor in world affairs. Almost the only attraction Europe ever saw in it was the line the United States signed on. No European nation promised anything in the anti-war pact that it had not already agreed to in the covenant of the League of Nations. But there was the signature of the United States, which seemed to promise the cooperation of our great material power in curbing the aggressor in another war. And that made a powerful appeal. But this appeal lay not in any new religion the Kellogg pact brought to a soul-hungry world. It was based on the great political power of America because of our enormous wealth and potential military and naval power.

Owen Young said recently that this country is too rich to be loved. It is the power and not the morals of the rich man which are influential in his community. Even if he has high morals, no one pays much attention to them. It is less his religion than his money which counts.

Does any one believe seriously that the deference and respect Great Britain has shown for us in the past decade represent a belief in our moral superiority, a realization of our superior civilization on this side of the Atlantic or a better system of government and social order? Not at all. Britain is extremely practical in foreign affairs. There is no new approval of America, but there is a realization of our material power as something to be reckoned with seriously, and Britain does just that.

One hears it said in America that the London naval treaty shows how the United States leads the world to disarmament. Who believes that England and Japan see disarmament in our building a billion dollars’ worth of new warships? What happened at the London naval conference was that Britain agreed to hold still, at relatively her present position, until we caught up, if, in return, we agreed not to exceed that position after catching up. And Japan took her place in the picture for the obvious reason she had no desire for the United States to build to a degree which would call for too great expenditures if Japan were to hold her proportionate position.

No European diplomats saw any altruistic motive in our program at London. They saw only the United States using its great potentialities to assure itself its position of naval parity with Britain,

¹ Edwin L. James, „America’s Moral Influence, If Any“ (Artikel in: The New York Times, 19. August 1930), gekürzt wiedergegeben in: Reader’s Digest (Oktober 1930), S. 513-515.

and that for rationalistic purposes. No other nation took seriously our dogma that for purposes of pure self-defense we need as great a naval force as the wide-flung British Empire. Our professed moral desires were smothered under our building program.

It is no exaggeration to say that Europe sees us as nationally selfish in our refusal to commit ourselves in any way as to measures to be taken to maintain peace or to restore peace if it is broken. While we say it is to preserve our precious liberty, other nations say we seek to preserve our right to trade with warring nations or to do whatever else may be to our advantage, as we see it at any given time.

Of course, in the first five years after the World War the nations of Europe, on their backs and seeking American aid, took all pains to avoid offending us and therefore appeared to give careful and weighty consideration to our altruistic advice. The succeeding five years changed that. Today, Europe, to a rapidly increasing decree, feels itself getting back to where it may treat with us on a plane of equality. And that puts Europe in a position to do what the Old World likes about our advice. More and more we shall hear that words unaccompanied by acts will not be taken as seriously as in the past.

Europe will not admit that Americans are any better than Europeans. It takes no little effort to get Europeans to agree that Americans are as good as they are, in morals, in education, in civilization or in government. Therefore, Europeans do not care for American moral influence.

But Europeans do know the importance of America in the world. Because they are more used to studying and judging world affairs than we are, they realize, perhaps better than we do, just how important is the United States. Their eyes are on us all the time. They must reckon with us; they must do business with us. And so they must know what we are doing and what we may be going to do. That gives us our great importance and out of that grows our influence. Although not exercised as actively as it will be later on, American world political power is interestingly important not only because of its might, but because of its present underdevelopment.

There is no capital which does not take the United States into consideration at almost every turn. There is no country where the power of the dollar has not reached. Conversely, there is no zone where our interests are not involved. Isolation is a myth. We are not isolated and cannot be isolated. The United States is ever present.

We must deal with the world and the world must deal with us. Let there be an international conference, and the imponderable influences bring the United States there. It is always the case that the American position is among the most important. Few world problems arise in which the influence of the United States will not swing the decision if we take a real interest. Opposition to the United States is a serious undertaking. Our dollars are powerful; there are so many of them.

There is not yet a realization in the United States of the great political power our material position has brought us. And whether we will use that power when we feel it as other nations have or whether we will use it in a new and different manner – there is the greatest question of world politics.

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Auf diese Quelle bezieht sich ein einführender und erläuternder Essay von von Saldern, Adelheid: Über Frieden und Flotten. Europa im Kontext amerikanischer Weltpolitik in den 1920er Jahren. In: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte (2007), URL: <<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2007/Article=220>>.