In psychoanalysis we have many pejorative words that describe people who behave as imperial nations do. They get called malignant narcissists with tendencies toward grandiosity, psychic primitives dwelling in the paranoid-schizoid position who split the world into good and bad, who both love themselves and hate their designated enemies too much. In ordinary language, they are not seeing something which might make them feel uncomfortable – in particular that uncomfortable guilty feeling that comes with the realization that one has done something harmful to another. The American Empire is hardly unique when it comes to rationalization. The Romans saw themselves as bringing civilization to the barbarians, the church brought God to the heathens, the British shouldered the white man's burden, and the Americans are bringing the world the benefits of that unique blend of consumerism and libertarianism that constitute the American Way.

Denial runs through our leaders' justification of imperialism; from the earliest days when the Monroe Doctrine was said to be in the service of protecting the weak nations of the Western Hemisphere, from European imperial designs, to the present when deposing Saddam Hussein is said to be for the purpose of bringing democracy to Iraq. The justification changes but the imperial ambition remains the same.

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In Memoriam: Robert Pois (1940-2004)

Paul H. Elovitz
Ramapo College and the Psychohistory Forum

Robert A. Pois, Professor of History at the University of Colorado in Boulder where he taught for 38 years, died on January 18, 2004. His special interests and areas of expertise were in Weimar Germany, Nazism, the "Great War," German Expressionism, and psychohistory. Among his many publications were the books Alfred Rosenberg: Selected Writings (as editor in 1970, and published in the U.S. under the title of Race and Race History), Frederick Meinecke and German Politics in the Twentieth Century (1972), The Bourgeois Democrats of Weimar Germany (1976), Emil Nolde (1982), National Socialism and the Religion of Nature (1986), and The Great War (1994). His latest book, Command Failure: Psychology and Leadership, is co-authored with Philip Langer and is forthcoming this spring from the University of Indiana Press. Professor Pois wrote articles for various journals and gave numerous professional presentations. Partly because most of his colleagues in Colorado were not very accepting of his interest in psychohistory, he reached out to those on the coasts. In late-April 1989, he organized an excellent psychohistorical conference, "The Rise of Adolf Hitler and Other Genocidal Leaders." It was held at St. Mary's Medical Center in San Francisco and it involved many leading colleagues in the field. For many years he was a member of the Psychohistory Forum and he occasionally wrote articles for this publication on a variety of different subjects, most recently last September. We co-authored "Mourning, Melancholia, and the Palestinians" (March 2002 Vol. 8, no. 4: pp. 165-168) and I had looked forward to further collaboration with him.

Bob Pois died of pneumonia after a period of poor health that included a failed back operation, pancreatitis, a general physical collapse, and a week in hospice. His family was with him at the time of his death. Peter Loewenberg of UCLA, whom Bob had considered a mentor, responded to hearing of this loss with the words,

"Pois had a big heart, was a true friend; suffered for himself and his family; loved all kinds of history, particularly military history. He died too young." Despite his geographical distance from the major centers of psychohistory, he is remembered fondly by a variety of other psychohistorical colleagues, including David Beisel and Jacques Szaluta.

The life of Robert August Pois started with his birth in Washington DC on April 24, 1940. He grew up mostly in Chicago with his parents and his younger brother. His childhood was often a lonely one, punctuated by moments of joy when he and his brother would walk to the railroad tracks and observe steam and diesel trains. He retained this passion for steam locomotives throughout his entire life. His interests ran the gamut from music, art, history, philosophy, psychology, and animals (frequently of the reptile family), to the more esoteric. He explained his fascination with the Loch Ness Monster in the following manner: "Well, God is dead and socialism doesn't work, why not believe in Nessie?" While his parents bemoaned Bob's offbeat sense of humor it was part of his coping strategy. His funny stories kept his wife, children, friends, and countless students laughing over the years and anticipating the next great tale or joke.

Pois took his B.A. from Grinnell College and his masters and doctoral degrees at the University of Wisconsin, where he was a Woodrow Wilson fellow, under the distinguished intellectual historian, George Mosse (1918-1999).

Professor Pois loved to teach and the students responded quite positively to him. He put enormous energy into his lectures even when he was in great pain, as in recent years. He was an institution at the University of Colorado at Boulder where he was well known for his lectures on World War I, Nazi Germany, and the Holocaust. Bronson Hilliard, a former student, declared that "his classes were symphonies that would take you from one of these great moments of elation and wonder, then to tears, and then uproarious laughter - all in the same lecture." From year to year word spread of this professor's fascinating and informative classes. ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp) and engineering students fulfilling liberal arts requirements were among the students eagerly signing up to learn more about war, military history, the Holocaust, the folly of humankind, and much else. There are reports that Bob's sense of humor led him to tell "outrageous stories" that the students loved. One former student, who taped many of his lectures, spoke about creating a compact disc of the classes he attended so they could be shared with others. Professor Pois won numerous teaching awards and was named a University of Colorado Presidential Teaching Scholar in 1990.

He is survived by Anne Marie Messerschmitt Pois, his wife of 31 years, his daughters Rebecca, Erica, and Emily, and his brother Marc. His widow teaches in the Women's Studies Program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Condolences may be sent to her by e-mail at <Pois@colorado.edu>. ❑

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