America and Cultural Imperialism
A small step toward understanding

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America and Cultural Imperialism

“O, would that God the gift might give us, to see ourselves as others see us.”
poet Robert Burns

What this document is for
DDB has developed this white paper to examine why American businesses’ entry into the international marketplace can be made more difficult by the appearance—or reality—of cultural imperialism. It defines and identifies some of the contributing factors to America’s reputation for, and tendency toward, cultural imperialism. It also considers some of the negative aspects to American brands’ international expression of an American image, and the often double-edged appeal of American brands to non-American consumers. Finally, this document offers some key questions and practical measures businesses can apply to their product and the market they are pursuing in order to make their international relations as positive as possible.

Certain countries and certain members of those societies (intellectuals, politicians) are more likely than others to resent what they see as imperialist tendencies. However, American businesses should not dismiss it as a sometimes-issue and instead should consider the potential for conflict in every market. Furthermore, American businesses should not assume that anti-Americanism and accusations of cultural imperialism will only arise in poorer, developing-world countries. Finally, though a country may be receptive to, and supportive of, American culture and commerce, American businesses should not assume that the country aspires to adopt American culture in total.

While this project was certainly inspired by the most recent, most tragically visible expressions of anti-Americanism in recent months, it addresses issues that DDB has and will continue to work through with our clients as they pursue plans for growth. At the same time, our suggestions must be considered in the context of past and future U.S. government actions. American international commerce has been shaped by the government’s foreign relations in the past, and will continue to be affected by them in the future; the business that pursues the international marketplace must operate with sensitivity to these factors.

This document is necessarily only a brief treatment of a complex topic, but it is our intention to provide a useful start to a long-term discussion.

Definitions:
Perhaps the most reasonable place to begin to tackle this wide-ranging subject is in the dictionary.

Imperialism noun [U] OFTEN DISAPPROVING
Imperialism is a system in which a country rules other countries, sometimes having used force to obtain power over them.

Imperialism can also refer more generally to a country's efforts to have a lot of power and influence over other countries, esp. in political and economic matters.
As this definition suggests, the term imperialism has been adapted from its original narrow meaning to describe activities that go beyond taking over geographic territory. The phrase ‘cultural imperialism’ can involve ‘soft’ cultural areas such as dress, cuisine, and the arts, as well as the hard--and more volatile--areas traditionally associated with imperialism such as business, politics and religion. And because the ‘hard’ areas are inextricably linked to the ‘soft’ in cultural imperialism, for many areas of the world the ‘invasion’ by an American business also means the invasion by American culture. Says journalist David Barboza:

The lines between America, its foreign policy and its corporate brands are blurred, particularly in parts of the world where governments own or control oil companies, utilities and other big businesses. …To many, … [Americans] are the sum of their corporate identities.¹

James L. Watson, professor of anthropology at Harvard, agrees with this (mis)perception: “We don’t use the Marine Corps or the Delta Force; we use McDonald’s to dominate.”²

In the post war environment of the fifties through the early eighties, America was a brand unto itself, in contrast to the other superpower competitors, USSR and China. The period of the past decade or so has been one in which these competitive super powers either disappeared (USSR), or evolved in ways that revealed their less than superpower status. (China) The most visible export to international markets now is not American political and social culture, but a constellation of American brands. Instead of political culture, a few “leading” brands—Coke, McDonald’s IBM, Nike, Marlboro—carry a disproportionate part of the “image” of America, now a by-product of the growth of American commerce. And instead of social culture, that American image is also being shaped by popular culture and entertainment brands such as Jerry Springer, Sesame Street, Baywatch, Disney, Madonna, The Simpsons and MTV.

Causes of Resistance – Historical Foundation, Precedent
We must remember that, like cultural imperialism itself, communities’ urge to combat cultural imperialism is just as interwoven with matters of belief, politics and even identity:

…Cultural differences are often sanctified by their links to the mystical roots of culture, be they spiritual or historical. Consequently, a threat to one’s culture becomes a threat to one’s God or one’s ancestors, and, therefore, to one’s core identity.³

But there are further causes for anti-American sentiment and resistance to apparent U.S. cultural imperialism. What are they?

One cause deals with the past. History, for Americans, is of limited significance. America, compared to most countries, has a short history, and within its history, is focussed on itself. As far as most Americans are concerned, involvement with other countries or cultures is temporary, as in the case of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, or the World Wars. Furthermore, the character of America is “looking forward” much more than “looking backward.” The

² Barboza, “Too Red”
forward-looking U.S. has limited interest in the traditions of the past or even, to some extent, the present. Traditions, for Americans, frequently are impediments to movement and change. Given that the culture of the U.S. is so different from others, this distinctiveness is likely to create problems when the U.S. or its representative brands move in to seek a presence in global markets.

Additionally, our history is as a country of immigrants who, for the most part, quickly become participants in as well as contributors to the American culture. This has produced a heterogeneity that is unknown in most of the world. Individual history and culture, as a result, become far less important than the democratic approach that permits openness and participation. In practice this means that the U.S. carries forward an approach in which a local “culture” is a minor player in planning or determining a course of action.

Finally, the U.S. is—or is perceived to have—little allegiance to either its own values or to the relationships it fosters with others. As a Pakistani businesswoman commented in a recent “60 Minutes” interview discussing her country’s challenges to meld tradition with modernity, America has a reputation for staying just long enough to serve its own interests, and then it’s gone. This woman was referring to the past history of American government policy in the region, but upon reflection, she indeed captured some of the problems inherent in America’s presence in people’s lives around the world.

Causes – Contemporary Climate
Besides past contributors to anti-American sentiment and the resistance to U.S. economic expansion, there are also current factors. First, the time is ripe. History has brought most of the world to a postcolonial era in which anti-colonialist political movements and post-colonialist intellectual discourse are prevalent. Consequently, today more than ever there are organizations and outlets in place to resist any appearance of colonialism or imperialism, whether it appears in military action or commerce. These organizations and outlets have made sure that businesses can no longer operate under the illusion that the world is just a bigger version of the U.S., open and welcoming to all American outreach. As one recent article noted, “The world will not stand still and let one brand dominate.”

Says another:

Led by the United States, the world’s richest states have acted on the assumption that people everywhere want to live as they do. As a result, they failed to recognise the deadly mixture of emotions—cultural resentment, the sense of injustice and a genuine reject of western modernity [that exists].

Naomi Klein, author of No Logo, predicts that as multinational superbrands continue to eat up our culture and our lifestyles in a colonization of our mental space, there will continue to be popular backlash.

A second contributor to the resistance to U.S. economic expansion is cultural imperialism’s tie to issues of globalization in contemporary discourse. Despite its potential for positive outcomes, the idea of globalization is fraught with anxieties of its own, in large part because its realization

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would necessarily mean significant change to people’s ways of life, to the world they’ve come to
know. Says University of Chicago professor Marvin Zonis, “Globalization disrupts everything,
everywhere. It disrupts established patterns of life. …What had been valued becomes, all too
often, debased, and what had been depreciated becomes valued.” As a result, at the start of the
twenty-first century the world’s populations find themselves wavering between unity and
tribalism, seemingly at all times and on all fronts. Scholar Benjamin Barber describes it this
way: “The planet is falling precipitantly apart AND coming reluctantly together at the very same
moment.”

Variety in Type, Intensity
There are some themes that recur to some degree in several countries’ non-American feelings
about America and American brands: America’s apparent ignorance of other cultures and
arrogance about its own, and American businesses’ misguided attempts to imitate aspects of the
local culture. At the same time, however, there is a variety in both the kind and intensity of other
anti-American sentiments, depending on the country in question. Furthermore, a given country’s
perceptions are shaped a great deal by current circumstances. Consider some representative
comments from DDB international employees:

- Rather than feeling that their culture is being threatened by an American invasion,
  Australians tend to resent the ways that American brands seem to discount Australia’s
equally sophisticated and modern culture. They object to the assumption of the
universalty and superiority of American values, and mistaken American belief that all of
Australia is a technologically primitive Australian outback where every Aussie is a crude
crocodile hunter.
  At the same time, our philosophy of optimism can appear to be naïve to the more dry and
sarcastic Australian outlook and our public discourse’s frequent blending of religious and
political values seems inappropriate.

- To many in Central Europe, one of Americans’ most offensive qualities is our lack of
worldliness. Compared to the lifestyle in these countries, in which foreign language
study and travel are the norm rather than the exception, America’s isolationism, refusal to
adopt widespread practices like the metric system, and tendency to impose its own
standards on whomever it deals with all suggest an arrogance unbecoming such a young
country. Worse still, those instances in which America does reach out are often seen to
be purely economically motivated, rather than an attempt to look, listen and learn.

- Meanwhile, in China the country’s great interest in becoming a participant in the global
economy means that they are less likely to express resentment when America flexes its
economic muscles there. In fact, many Chinese citizens’ view of America and American
brands is very positive. It is only when they feel that the U.S. is rejecting or bullying
their country in the economic arena that resentment can grow. In addition, Chinese
culture’s valuing of tradition and history means that the country is particularly sensitive
to brand actions that seem to disregard those elements. For example, placing advertising
near historical landmarks appears insensitive and aggressive, and an emphasis on
Western concepts of individuality and freedom (rather than responsibilities and
sacrifices) may be seen as having a corrupting influence on the country’s young people.

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7 “Is Globalisation Doomed?”

- **France** the view of America appears to be that Americans are driven almost exclusively by economic interests, in contrast to the French, who feel that individuals (people, human beings) and their needs should be the focus of all concern and actions. Therefore, while the U.S. is credited by the French as a technological leader and in the forefront of new ideas in science and industry, the French rejection of the economic/action-driven basis of U.S. society and culture far outweighs these few positives in their view. The U.S. is seen as a new country with insufficient knowledge of other cultures, lacking in respect for history, with fewer traditions and, therefore, it is believed to have an inferior culture. American culture and politics are seen to lack intellectual rigor, imagination and creativity. The perceived action orientation of U.S. society, combined with the economic power of the U.S., results in a world view and business approach that the French consider materialistic, self-centered, domineering, and superficial.

- **Germany** operates under two contrasting views of America: the official, public one that is pro-U.S. and largely media-driven, and the unofficial one based on Germans’ personal experiences that is far more critical of America and American enterprises. Like other countries, Germans resist American businesses’ tendency to try to apply American values and consumption patterns to German markets, as well as Americans’ seemingly absolute belief in the superiority of the liberal, democratic American system. In addition, Germans see an American tendency to tackle problems through a narrow, single approach that does not allow for alternative approaches. They believe that an overall lack of appreciation for the differences between U.S. and German society keep Americans from recognizing the autonomy of German people and customs.

- While the people of **Jamaica** are generally open to American business, they would prefer that the U.S. treat their country more as an equal economic partner. Jamaicans appreciate America’s affluence (which fuels both tourism and disaster relief) and democracy, and many Jamaicans have spent or hope to spend some time in the States. In addition, upper classes use American brands as symbols of their higher social and economic status. At the same time, however, Jamaicans are wary of American business. They view U.S. businesses as being solely interested in profits and unconcerned with any negative social impact they might create. They also feel that American businesses are dismissive of established local enterprises and will even use an unnecessarily adversarial approach toward their competitors that is detrimental to the local economy. Overall, many Jamaicans suspect American businesses of committing transgressions that they wouldn’t attempt at home.

- **Japan**’s resistance to ‘outside’ influence, including business, can be formidable, and often includes government restrictions, laws, and unwritten regulations and behavior. Its somewhat antagonistic and suspicious attitudes toward American business are shaped by its strong and distinct culture. Japan’s ‘Western’ (developed) appearance is purely superficial; it differs from Western countries like the U.S. on nearly every social value and remains grounded in its Japanese culture. In fact, one of the aspects to interaction with American businesses that Japanese find most offensive is the assumption that Japan is identical to America in all but the physical appearance of its people and geography. For example, Japan and the U.S. differ greatly regarding the discussion of and attitude toward money; Japanese culture dictates that money is not discussed, affluence should not be flaunted, and compensation should be equitable with lifetime employment the goal. In contrast, Japanese can see the American approach of behaving as if money makes might and right as bullying and selfish.
Japanese people also find American attempts to mimic Japanese customs—rather than negotiating them with sensitivity—to be equally bothersome. Finally, Americans’ ignorance of the heterogeneity of Asian cultures and tendency to dictate sweeping business practices from Westernized enclaves like Singapore and Hong Kong can also lead to several cultural faux pas.

- In the Middle East the contradictory impulse toward America and American brands is particularly strong. Citizens may be at once drawn to the quality and style of popular brands and the “free life of Americans,” and repelled by the materialism and different moral values they imply, so that inanimate American objects are more welcome than American government or tourists. In addition, an American presence can be viewed as the work of corrupt government officials who are more interested in self aggrandizement and the adoption of Western ways than in representing their citizens.

- Despite cultural similarities, extensive interaction, and a general appreciation for the U.S. and its culture, many citizens of the U.K. also feel a mixture of resentment, contempt and snobbery toward America that U.S. brands must be careful not to aggravate. These feelings are undoubtedly due to America’s rise to prominence, which was almost simultaneous with Britain’s decline, but are also a residue of the traditional British class system. U.S. culture is seen by many in the U.K. as materially excessive, unsophisticated, and even braggadocious, so that the same business practices and behaviors that are perfectly acceptable and even expected in an American context appear rude or pushy in the U.K. (This is particularly true in advertising, where simply boasting about a product or company’s wealth or power is offensive.) In addition, people in the U.K. associate the U.S. with arrogance and ignorance. Indeed, many in the U.K. see Americans’ arrogance as being directly related to their ignorance of both British culture and their own limitations.

Metaphors/Analogies/Adjectives
We can gain further insight into the perspective of the individual or community that perceives and resists the (international) expansion of an American business. We can move beyond a discussion of economics or geography to delve deeper into the emotional territory. Simply put, to understand anti-imperialism, we must understand the psychological impact of an unwanted visitor. Let’s take a few moments to consider some metaphors, adjectives and analogies that can add texture to our discussion of the anxiety underlying anti-American sentiment. (The following come from readings on the subjects of cultural imperialism and globalization, as well as from ideation sessions conducted with members of the DDB Chicago staff.)

Many words that can be used to describe cultural imperialism are tied to concepts of colonialism: invasion, paternalism, proselytizing.

Other words refer to the idea of an unwanted entity entering the body politic/economic or the social psyche: virus, corruption, consumption, brainwashing, seduction.

Finally, there are words and phrases that help convey the sensation that citizens of other countries may feel when they see American business coming; they convey ideas of force, dominance and disregard: ‘lawn mower’ mentality, big, clumsy, destructive, boorish, arrogant. Our behavior can make us appear to have a distorted view of the world that is rooted in ignorance, narcissism, xenophobia and the assumption of universal values/needs/aspirations. These words add up to a picture of American businesses behaving like the worst cliché of the
American tourist: they arrive, complain about the food and accommodations, park their RV in the middle of a revered site, and then decide to stay and redecorate it to look just like home.

Some of these metaphors and analogies may seem a stretch, but consider them a mental exercise designed to move our thinking from the perspective of the ambitious and forward-thinking business bent on expansion to the self-sufficient and previously content international community that is subject to those efforts.

**The Expression of American Identity in American Brands: The Negatives**

While there are built-in past and present factors shaping public resistance to American businesses, there are also several missteps American companies make as they venture into international markets. What actions of American brands most contribute to the anti-American reactions? What have purveyors of American brands done to offend consumers in global markets?

The most common offenses involve both the scope of American extension into international markets, and the content being disseminated through that expansion. Because American size and economic strength are unparalleled since the colonial era of the United Fruit Company and the like--a factor that is reflected in some of the more successful and entrenched global American brands--the “new” global brands that have replaced those past one-dimensional companies possess two new qualities:

> These brands have a much greater presence in the everyday lives of the people;

> These brands can both attract and repel consumers with the very elements that define them as American brands.

The offenses are, in order of offensiveness:

- **Exploitation**

  Whatever the specific source of the perception, many consumers may feel that American brands (companies, really) are taking more than they give. Businesses, products, brands that contribute little to the culture or economy appear to be benefiting only Americans.

  Often associated with this is the perception that something in the local culture is being sacrificed: small shopkeepers, independent businesses are threatened, disappear, or are absorbed by the dominating American company.

  Literally, the landscape changes for the worse, with pollution of the air, water and view expected with the growth of the American presence.

- **The Corrupting Influence**

  This is a view of the American brand committing a variety of assaults on the local community. Brands or products are introduced or enhanced that involve behavior and
thinking which clash with local customs or religious or cultural norms. Often affecting young people and children most, such actions are especially offensive to adults and parents.

- **Gross Insensitivity and Arrogance**

  A wide variety of actions are interpreted as ignorance, or disrespect. For example, American brands failing to use local language, recognize local customs (e.g. using the color white inappropriately in the Middle East), or realize that local preferences are different from U.S. preferences can all be relatively minor offenses that have major consequences in the eyes of locals. For some, these are instances of American ignorance or insensitivity. At their worst, such actions provide the proof point of American arrogance.

- **Hyper-consumerism**

  For many people in foreign markets, American businesses and brands represent a greater interest in money than in humanity. Choices that are unneeded or unwanted and that “do not matter” are all suggestive of an attitude that people are less important than dollars. And in those markets, this can often be thought of as meaning “these people” are less important than money, which is a real insult to people in the market in question.

**The Duality of American Brands Abroad**

To be sure, most American brands abroad do not commit all four of these offenses at once. Indeed, at the same time that an American brand commits--or is seen to commit--one or more offenses, it may also do several things right. Recognizing the power of the branding process, it should not be surprising that the *symbolic* nature of American brands, more so than brands from any other country, yields both advantages and drawbacks in international markets. Coupled with the explosion of media outlets and choices, the picture of America from a branding perspective is inconsistent, and sometimes contradictory. The double-edged sword of American heritage has in recent times made the marketing of American brands more challenging than at any time in history.

- A brand has an intended meaning, an identity, carefully crafted by the brand stewards who manage the brand’s communications activities. Whatever this intended meaning, the brand image ultimately rests with the receiver.

- It is this image, in the eye of the beholder in international markets, which is at the heart of the issue for global marketers today.

In the context of this new “brand” environment, consumers in international markets are faced with a classic approach-avoidance conflict with respect to American products. There is a solid love/hate relationship that many international markets have with U.S. business and culture. For every positive aspect to America, The Brand, many international consumers can spot a negative one as a complement. Consider the following:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Reasons to Approach:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reasons to Avoid:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- freedom</td>
<td>- paternalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- status, power</td>
<td>- arrogance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- affluence (symbolic or real)</td>
<td>- colonialism, tyranny, lawlessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- self improvement</td>
<td>- capitalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>- modernity, advancement</td>
<td>- xenophobia</td>
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<tr>
<td>- individualism, diversity</td>
<td>- opportunism</td>
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<tr>
<td>- success</td>
<td>- cultural imperialism (covert and overt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- spirit, ambition</td>
<td>- waste/exploitation, indulgence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- access</td>
<td>- unattainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ingenuity</td>
<td>- hyper-consumerism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- choice, convenience</td>
<td>- excess, greed: overpaid, oversexed, overfed</td>
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<tr>
<td>- aspiration</td>
<td>- fast pace</td>
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<tr>
<td>- control</td>
<td>- lack of history/tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- democracy</td>
<td>- seductiveness, coercion</td>
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<td>- self expression</td>
<td>- miscegenation</td>
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</table>

Consequently, *freedom, individualism, choice, and control* can also be seen as *opportunism, hyper-consumerism, waste and exploitation*.

*Independence* can be seen as *arrogance*, American “*modernity*” can be seen as a *lack of respect* for an older, more mature culture.

The result is a condition, so to speak, that has consumers in a state of frustration and anxiety that is unfortunately attached to perceptions of the USA and all things associated with it. As an emotional state this anxiety and frustration is formless—in contrast to anger, which has a direction and specific target source.

The danger for American brands is that they can become the targets of this frustration, even though they may not be part of the original source.

The idea that the sense of opportunity in American culture and business is accompanied by an equally strong sense of exclusion and unattainability is particularly powerful in fueling anti-American sentiment. Says journalist R.C. Longworth, “It is a great swath of the world that has been passed over by the global economy [for which American cultural imperialism is one engine], which is no more than a rumor for most of the millions who live there.”\(^9\) Furthermore, there is a tension between developing countries that want to advance economically, and the developed countries that want theirs to be the last areas of advancement; the latter group blocks the development of the former group either to ‘preserve the planet’ or preserve their own advantage in the market. Again, American commerce, rather than the forces that prevent the spread of the economic growth it can bring, is usually the target of the resentment that grows out of that competition.

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What to do about it
We have considered cultural imperialism in terms of its definitions and causes, and American imagery in terms of its negatives and duality. At this point, the reader may be wondering what, if anything, American businesses can do about such a long-standing and complex problem and one which is subject to governmental and other actions beyond their control.

So what is the solution? Taking a lead from the psychological literature, the task for brand marketers is to “unbalance” the approach and avoidance elements at hand. They must operate on the brand experience and image to enhance the appeal in some way and overcome the “avoidance” side of the conflict equation.

The best direction is not to try to address the avoidance elements, which in these instances are outside the marketer’s realm. That is, make the brand more appealing, rather than make the “negatives” less repulsive. And again, this strategy must be realized within the eye of the beholder.

Therefore, to begin developing strategies to protect against cultural imperialism it is helpful to refer to the perceptions of American companies, cited above, which are most offensive in other markets and, thus, most likely to be considered expressions of American cultural imperialism, namely: Exploitation, Corrupting Influence, Arrogance, and Hyper-consumerism. Reflecting on each of these offenses in turn, we will offer some questions that can help American businesses determine whether or not they are likely to be guilty of cultural imperialism.10

Exploitation

Is there an obvious benefit to the local community from your company’s presence?

Do you create jobs that pay well, offer advancement opportunities, and provide benefits?

Do you contribute to the local economy by purchasing materials and services from local businesses?

Are you a visible participant in charitable endeavors and other aspects of community involvement?

Corrupting Influence

How do your business practices and the use of your product fit with local traditions? Do your actions or the actions of your brand violate or contradict societal norms, such as:

- Religious doctrine (both majority and significant minority religions)
- Gender roles
- Family structure or child-rearing practices

10 Some of these questions were inspired by the Bennett/Koudelova study of Western brands in the Czech Republic “Market closeness, commitment, and the international customisation of brand image” Brand Management 8 (1 September 2000).
- Social class distinctions and barriers
- Mode of dress/modesty

Are there values in the local culture that your company and brand can associate with and reinforce?

**Arrogance**

Do you have a thorough understanding of how the people of the local country differ from the United States with respect to your product category and brand?

- Customer lifestyle
- National culture
- Social attitudes
- How the category is/would be used
- Customer need satisfied by the product category
- Psychological meaning of the category in the local market
- Familiarity with the product category, brand, and competing brands

Do you employ personnel who know a great deal about the local market?

Are your marketing decisions significantly influenced by feedback received from contacts in the local market?

**Hyper-consumerism**

Is there a perceived need for the product or service you offer?

- Does it offer a meaningful improvement over what is currently available?
- Is what you have to offer viewed as a useful and worthwhile product or service?
- Does it offer a relevant benefit or is it a matter of “choice for choice sake?”
- Does it seem to be encouraging greed, waste of money or debt?

**Corporate Responsibility: What Actions Can be Taken?**

In addition to taking measures to avoid creating the four most common negative perceptions of American brands, a business can also avoid the appearance of cultural imperialism via three areas of brand and corporate image management.\(^{11}\)

**Brand Management**

\(^{11}\) This section is also inspired by Bennett/Koudelova (2000).
To battle the negative expressions of American brands, companies must make sensitivity to these key dimensions an integral part of corporate responsibility. From the corporate perspective, brand management can address this challenge in two ways:

- First, social and environmental monitoring must play a more critical role in strategic brand decisions. Growth strategies, communications programs, community involvement, as well as local marketing decisions must be made only after consideration of social and environmental implications is complete.

- Competence in incorporating social, cultural and environmental issues into the brand stewardship process should be included as an important characteristic both in the selection of managers and in the continuing training of brand management personnel.

Major corporations can encourage university business schools to recognize both the importance of these issues and the demand for graduates with such a component in their training.

**Market Commitment**

Commitment to a foreign market means that an American company is a “stayer,” not a “leaver,” with the implication that a market is important enough for resources to be used in the development of the market and a brand in that market.

- Commitment implies encouragement of a close working relationship with local partners, stimulating and indeed requiring the creation of local marketing programs that fit the demand and characteristics of that local market.

**Local Customization of Brand Image**

For a truly committed brand to succeed in a foreign market, it ultimately must address the needs of customers in that market. This may require a willingness of the brand to adjust its image and its relationships with customers, (that is, its actions as a brand) to suit that market.

- Communications, public relations, product offerings are all fair game for “market adjustments” that solidify a two-way relationship between the brand and its customers in a market: The needs of the customer are recognized, and the ability of the brand to address those needs are demonstrated.

Given that a successful brand is one that cultivates a relationship with its customers that goes well beyond the basic “buy and use” interaction, the importance of commitment, recognition, and adjustment cannot be too strongly emphasized in guiding actions of American brands in foreign markets.

This document’s examination of cultural imperialism and American brands abroad is intended to provide a clear and solid foundation to future discussions. Its consideration of definitions,
causes, manifestations and practical solutions can function as the framework from which DDB and our clients can move ahead.

Sources:
“From Sea to Shining Sea,” www.brandchannel.com