Never was so much false arithmetic employed on any subject as that which has been employed to persuade nations that it is in their interest to go to war. Were the money which it has cost to gain at the close of a long war a little town, or a little territory, the right to cut wood here or catch a fish there, expended in improving what they already possess, in making roads, opening rivers, building ports, improving the arts, and finding employment for their idle poor, it would render them much stronger, wealthier, and happier. This I hope will be our wisdom.

(Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia)

There are still governments that sponsor and harbor terrorists – but their number has declined. There are still regimes seeking weapons of mass destruction – but no longer without attention and without consequence. Our country is still the target of terrorists who want to kill many, and intimidate us all, and we will stay on the offensive against them, until the fight is won.

(George W. Bush, ‘State of the Union Address,’ January 20, 2005)

Happy is he who can say ‘when,’ ‘before,’ and ‘after.’ He may have been struck by hard luck, or he may have been writhing
with pain: the moment he is able to narrate the events in the order of their temporal sequence he feels as comfortable as if the sun were shining upon his belly.

(Robert Musil, *Man Without Qualities*)

Close to the end of Herman Melville’s intriguing tale about racist and nationalist stereotypes, ‘Benito Cereno’ (1855), the American captain Delano asks Benito Cereno what causes his gloom, now with all African slave rebels punished and their leader’s head stuck on a pole for public display. Delano cannot really fathom the Spanish captain’s answer:

‘You are saved, Don Benito,’ cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; ‘you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you?’

‘The Negro.’

There was silence, while the moody man sat, slowly and unconsciously gathering his mantle about him, as if it were a pall.

Reading this passage over 150 years later, with our knowledge of what has happened since, Melville’s sparse dialogue succinctly articulates what many Europeans (as well as good number of Americans, from Henry James and Mark Twain to Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, J. William Fulbright, Ward Just, *et al.*) consider a peculiar American attitude towards foreigners in general and ethnics of darker skin colour in particular that seems to have undergone only minimal changes until this day. One might call it a combination of innocence, ignorance, and arrogance. Delano is unable – or unwilling – to understand Cereno’s gloom that results from the Spaniard’s recognition, based on his experience during the slave revolt, that Africans are at least as intelligent and able as Europeans, and that it is therefore wrong by all religious and moral standards to treat them like chattels or commodities. While the Spanish captain suffers from growing depression under the weight of his insight, Delano considers the case closed: for him, the mutiny of the slaves is just an incident which, thanks to American arms, has been resolved; law and order have been reestablished, justice has been done.