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Locating Empire

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Calling the United States an empire is hardly the provocation it once was. More than a quarter-century after Amy Kaplan's oft-cited lament about the "absence of empire in the study of American culture" there is a scholarly cottage industry dedicated to the subject.¹ It is multidisciplinary, disputatious, and constantly revising its objects of attention. Definitional debates over whether to apply empire to the United States – *au courant* in the mid-2000s – have ebbed, giving way to nuanced discussions about that empire's forms and impacts. Broad in scope, this scholarship has progressively revealed the contours of the American empire across time and space, albeit in a fragmentary way that has created myriad temporalizations and competing visions of where empire was, when empire was, and what empire does. It has pushed forward understandings of the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of U.S. imperialism and also adopted innovative methodological approaches to the topic. But the physical and conceptual boundaries of America's empire are often set within individual studies, which add and subtract territories and repertoires of rule according to the governing logics of their introductory chapters. This malleability continuously generates novel avenues of inquiry and reframes familiar ones.²

Empire has travelled an uneven path within the historiography of U.S. foreign relations, often present but, until recently, not always foregrounded. Extended reflections on the history of these histories appear in numerous places and I will only briefly sketch their twentieth-century trajectories here.³ The present tradition of empire studies in the field dates to the 1920s and 1930s and the scholarship of progressive historians like Charles Beard, who surveyed U.S. activities in Latin America and Asia and identified expansionist tendencies.⁴ This work received extensive updating and revision between the 1950s and 1970s by the "Wisconsin School" of foreign relations historians, a loose designation used for William Appleman Williams and his student-successors Walter LaFeber, Thomas McCormick, and Lloyd Garner (who themselves became major figures in the field). Their writings advanced a

¹ Kaplan elaborated on this idea at length in "Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 3-21

² A predictable-but-necessary caveat: the readings cited here are indicative and only partially representative of the vast literature on these topics. A standalone bibliographic companion to U.S. empire is sorely missing from the field.

³ Most notably by Paul A. Kramer in a trio of influential review essays: "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (Dec. 2011): 1348-91; "Embedding Capital: Political-Economic History, the United States, and the World," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 3 (July 2016), and "The Geopolitics of Mobility: Immigration Policy and American Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 123, no. 2 (April 2018): 393-438. Other pieces have tackled empire at specific junctures in U.S. history. Examples include Emily Conroy-Krutz, "Empire and the Early Republic," H-Diplo Essay No. 133, *H-Net Reviews*, September 10 2015, Available at: <http://tiny.cc/E133> and Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, "New Frontiers Beyond the Seas: The Culture of American Empire and Expansion at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present*, Vol. I, ed. Christopher R.W. Dietrich (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 233-251.

⁴ Charles Beard, *The Devil Theory of War: An Inquiry into the Nature of History and the Possibility of Keeping Out of War* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1936). Books produced on U.S. empire during the interwar period were not necessarily critical, however, with a number written by former colonial officials like William Cameron Forbes, *The Philippine Islands*, 2 vols. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1928) and Joseph Ralston Hayden, *The Philippines: A Study in National Development* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1942). Published by trade presses, this latter genre arguably had more widespread influence than progressive responses to imperialism.

set of economics-centered arguments about an “Open Door” empire, which had emerged in the late-nineteenth century and manifested in both formal colonies and “informal” influence over nominally sovereign states. Their work arrived amidst the cultural foment of the Vietnam War era, overlapping – although not entirely synchronizing – with Marxist-infused New Left critiques of U.S. neo-imperialism.⁵ Despite the work of Williams et al., much of the scholarship appearing in the nascent field of diplomatic history reflected other scholarly preoccupations – chiefly debates over Cold War culpability that obscured the imperially constituted dimensions of the post-war global order.

New critical histories of American power continued to appear in the 1980s, evident in studies by Emily Rosenberg, Glenn Anthony May, and others. It was not until the late 1990s, however, that empire fully re-emerged. This occurred in the afterglow of a slow-boiling epistemic crisis within the world of foreign relations history centered on the over-production of elite-focused histories and, more generally, criticisms that the field lacked methodological creativity. The argument that U.S. foreign relations history needed widening coincided with growing attention to the role of culture in shaping these foreign relations, the incorporation of analytical approaches from other academic disciplines, and a new investment in international, transnational, and global history.⁶ Galvanized by Kaplan’s intervention and drawing from work in anthropology, sociology, postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, critical theory, and gender studies, historians directed attention back to empire – particularly the overseas colonies of the Progressive Era. Monographs and edited volumes by Kristin Hoganson, Catherine Ceniza Choy, Anne Foster, and others in the late 1990s and early 2000s mapped this empire and brought foreign relations histories into closer conversation with historical sociologists, cultural geographers, and area studies scholars working on related areas.⁷ The Bush administration’s post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan further revitalized academic interest in the historical roots of U.S. imperialism and the terminological utility of empire when discussing the emergence, development, and consequences of the American juggernaut. A flood of books with “empire” in their titles followed, each grappling with the concept and its applications to varying degrees of rigor and success.

In his seminal 2011 historiographical essay “Power and Connection”, Paul Kramer remarked that empire periodically vanished from the study of U.S. history before resurfacing during moments of overseas or domestic crisis. Each successive wave of accounts, he argued, over-

⁵ Williams’ book *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959) remains the anchor point here. Other influential texts are Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963); Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America’s Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967), and Lloyd C. Garner, *Imperial America: American Foreign Policy Since 1898* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1976).

⁶ The essay that kicked off the long-lived crisis was Charles S. Maier’s “Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,” in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 355-89. Mark Philip Bradley reflects on the genesis this soul-searching in “The Charlie Maier Scare and the Historiography of American Foreign Relations, 1959-1980,” in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Frank Costigliola and Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9-29. Transnational and global approaches to the writing of American history were productively elaborated by Ian Tyrrell, “American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,” *American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (Oct. 1991), 1031-55 and in Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁷ Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Anne Foster and Julian Go, eds., *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

emphasized its own novelty and downplayed earlier research: empire was, in effect, discovered and revealed anew every twenty or so years.⁸ A decade on, imperial histories of the United States appear to have broken from this cyclicity and stabilized as a major area of study (if not in their arguments and approaches). This aligns with a field-wide shift towards an “America in / and the World” model that balances traditional areas of focus like diplomacy, statecraft, military affairs, and economics with considerations of (among many other things) race, gender, sexuality, domesticity, environment, mobility, violence, and exchange – producing more capacious understandings of what comprises “foreign relations.”⁹ Histories that use empire as a central framing device now dot the historiographic landscape, ranging from the imperial origins of the continental settler state to the multivalent forms of U.S. power at the dawn of the twenty first century. While debates over big-picture causal questions (“When did the empire begin?”, “Why did it take the shape(s) it did?”, etc.) continue, many of these new histories attend to the textures and terrains of the American empire, illustrating how its constitutive parts functioned or malfunctioned and the ways individuals and communities experienced imperial intrusions. They invariably operate across and between established fields in the humanities and social sciences, contributing to a large and loosely assembled research cluster we might call U.S. empire studies.

An important caveat applies here: despite its present ubiquity within the academy, empire remains an insurgent category in the American public imagination, commonly found in the pages of progressive periodicals but minimized or absent elsewhere. In moments of embrace, supporters of the U.S. imperial model have stressed its exceptional qualities – a world-straddling entity committed to democracy promotion, open markets, and judicious force projection – and abstracted it from historical antecedents.¹⁰ But, more commonly, exceptionalist discourse abstracts further, replacing “empire” with palatable alternatives like “superpower” or “global leader” that “generate less emotion and controversy” and lean on the polity’s perceived anticolonial origins.¹¹ The primary vehicles for historical education in the United States – school textbooks, news media, and popular culture – reflect this. Where empire surfaces it is treated episodically (1898 and its immediate aftermaths) and not structurally.¹² A half-century of American rule in the Philippines, for instance, is represented by a small handful of Hollywood films, only one of which has been made since the 1950s.¹³ Debates over the historical legacies and contemporary resonances of empire do not animate the American public commons like they do in European states, mainly because there is no general consensus that an empire existed or exists.¹⁴ Although historians like Daniel

⁸ Kramer, “Power and Connection,” 1383-85.

⁹ Matthew Connelly et al., “SHAFR in the World,” *Passport* 42, no. 2 (2011): 4-16; Erez Manela, “The United States in the World,” in *American History Now*, eds. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 201-20.

¹⁰ Or, in some cases, compared it favourably to them. See Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005). Many of these works surfaced in the decade following the September 11 attacks, most famously Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹¹ Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 210), 7.

¹² On “empire awareness” in universities see Isaac Zvi Christiansen et al., “Awareness of U.S. Empire and Militarist Ideology: A Survey of College Students from a Southwestern University in the United States.” *International Critical Thought* 10, no. 1 (2020): 71-88.

¹³ The most recent of these is John Sayles, dir., *Amigo* (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 2010).

¹⁴ Historians of the British Empire have extensively mined how imperial pasts are remembered. See, for examples, Dane Kennedy, *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire* (Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018); Peter Mitchell, *Imperial Nostalgia: How the British Conquered Themselves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

Immerwahr have made inroads by publishing works on the U.S. empire geared towards an educated general readership, the palatability of exceptionalist *ür*-narratives remains a substantial complicating factor and reveals the communicative gaps between scholarly and public worlds.¹⁵

The elastic boundaries of what empire is, does, and means present further complications. In its classic sense, an empire is a large state governing spaces and peoples beyond its core territories. Grammars of inclusion and exclusion – the citizen vs. the subject – are a key distinguishing feature of rule and shape life within the empire. This emphasis on hierarchy and distinction contrasts with the nation-state’s pretensions to homogeneity, although the two forms overlap regularly in the history of the modern world. Empires feature shifting “repertoires of power” that evolve, transform, and dissolve over time and manifest in a range of forms, including settler and extractive colonies, protectorates, client states, special administrative zones, reservations, and mandates.¹⁶ The heterogeneity of the imperial formation ensures that its power is rarely monolithic and subject to constant revision from within and without. It is thus useful, Ian Tyrrell suggests, to think of an empire as a “historically changing social formation rather than an ideal type.”¹⁷ In the U.S. case, imperial mutability underpins arguments over scope, duration, aims, characteristics, and outcomes. It also produces debates over how to effectively harness empire as a mode of analysis, creating disjunctures between empire as a set of spatial practices and “the imperial” as an inclusive way of evaluating power relations.¹⁸ In popular discourse, views of empire have shifted over time, from relatively inert in the Early Republic, to contested during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, to overwhelmingly negative following the Second World War. This transition from indifferent or admiring to epithetical has also influenced who writes about the U.S. empire and how they do so.

The remainder of the chapter considers how empire has been applied to the history of the United States, both at “home” on the continent and in what Anne McClintock refers to as American “offshore histories.”¹⁹ It is organized around three overlapping imperial formats. First, a transcontinental settler empire that emerged from imperial power struggles between Europeans and Native Americans in the eighteenth century, violently constituted itself across the nineteenth, and retroactively nationalized its history while still engaging in colonial practices. Second, a searching and omnivorous state looking to expand its global presence and, by the late-nineteenth century, able to do so through overseas colonies, corporate enclaves, and client states. Third, an economic, military, and cultural colossus maintaining a hybrid empire characterized by strategic points of territorial control, unparalleled military capacity, and monetary mechanisms of influence and coercion. These modalities resist strict chronological containment, cresting at different moments but remaining robust after their peaks. It is, for instance, difficult to argue that the nineteenth-century continental empire drew to a Turnerian close when settler colonialism is structured on permanency, or that the

¹⁵ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018).

¹⁶ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010), 5-8.

¹⁷ Ian Tyrrell, “Empire in American History,” in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 545.

¹⁸ Daniel Immerwahr, “The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in U.S. History,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (Dec. 2016), 373-91.

¹⁹ Quoted in Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 86.

Second World War ended an era of overseas colonialism when Puerto Rico and myriad islands in the South Pacific remain unincorporated spatial assets of the United States. Likewise, the strategic dispersal of troops, maintenance of debt relationships, and moral arguments for interventionism that characterize the post-WW2 era are themselves evident in a host of hemispheric and overseas entanglements stretching back to the 1800s. These seams are useful for interrogating different iterations of the imperial in U.S. and global history. The United States empire was and is Janus-faced: shaped by durabilities but also responsive enough to reorganize itself at specific historical junctures. There has been no teleological arc of empire, however. The projects described below were not preordained, unitary, or uncontested – and they often slotted together unevenly. The following considers the histories of these interlocking formats and introduces some ways scholars have analyzed them.

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The first seam of U.S. empire studies explores territory, settlement, and race on the North American continent and emerged from a constellation of other sub-fields and disciplines, including the history of the American West, the history of the Early Republic, Native American studies, borderlands studies, and American studies. Collectively, these works trace the United States' emergence from two centuries of imperial rivalry in North America, its competition with the British, French, Russian, and Spanish empires for land and resources, and its relations with indigenous societies who themselves made and unmade alliances based on their own complex politics. During the eighteenth century, the continent's vast interior was what Pekka Hämäläinen calls a "paper empire," nominally subject to European sovereignty claims but primarily shaped by Native Americans, whose societies ranged from small bands to powerful polities like the Comanche and the Lakota Sioux.²⁰ An international arena in and of itself, North America was also in the slipstream of early globalizations, with growing connections to the Pacific and Indian Ocean worlds augmenting long-embedded links to Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East.²¹

The field of inter-imperial and inter-polity struggle in North America was sprawling, and the American Revolution was one of many possible outcomes. The Revolution's core crisis – fraying intra-imperial bonds between a European settler elite and their metropolitan overlords – was not unique and would repeat itself elsewhere in the Americas over the next half-century.²² Nor was the Revolution "anti-imperial" in the twentieth-century sense. The wealthy white colonists who conceptualized and led the movement against Britain did not repudiate the idea of empire *in toto*, nor did they propose a radically egalitarian levelling of colonial society extending to women, Native Americans, African Americans, or the landless. According to Peter Onuf, leaders like Thomas Jefferson believed empire required revitalization rather than abandonment. Severing the colonies from the rule of foreign grandees and infusing them with republican virtues could accomplish this, creating an "empire for liberty" uncontaminated by the worst political excesses of the monarchical Old World. The seeds of exceptionalism emerged, in part, from ideas about the young republic's

²⁰ Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Shapes of Power: Indians, Europeans, and North American Worlds from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century," in *Contested Spaces in Early North America*, ed. Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 66.

²¹ Rosemarie Zaggari, "The Significance of the 'Global Turn' for the Early American Republic: Globalization in the Age of Nation-Building," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (2011): 10-37; Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1-15.

²² Josep M. Fradera, *The Imperial Nation: Citizens and Subjects in the British, French, Spanish, and American Empires* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2018), 23-52.

providential ability to remake the Atlantic World's dominant political form – an origin story that also seeded future imperial disavowal.²³

The construction of this settler empire, and its subsequent narrative and legal absorption into the national body, has been a key site of analysis for scholars looking at the imperial dimensions of the Early Republic. As Rosemarie Zaggari reminds us, conventional “early national” approaches can reify exceptionalist dogmas and obscure certain inheritances.²⁴ Chief among these inheritances were reinvigorated commitments to “population movement, land acquisition, and racial imperialism,” which had slowed in the late eighteenth century as the British struggled to manage an empire in crisis.²⁵ Settler-colonist power found an engine in the ambitions of the fledgling U.S. state. Continentalism – later superseded by the more flexible “Manifest Destiny” – offered incentives in the form of resources, security, and prestige. Opportunities to experiment with imperial nationhood existed from the outset, commencing with the 1783 Treaty of Paris, which included sovereign rights not only to the thirteen colonies but also a vast hinterland stretching west to the Mississippi River and encompassing scores of Indian nations (none of whom appeared at the bargaining table). The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 chartered a territorial government for the lands south of the Great Lakes, initiating a model of conquest, settlement, and deferred sovereignty that became the imperial vehicle for spatially constituting a settler nation.²⁶

A spate of recent scholarship has explored the varied ways this acquisitional model spread, including through formalized inter-imperial conflicts and transfers with the French (1803), British (1818), Spanish (1819), and Russian (1867) empires, massive colonial acquisitions following the Mexican-American War (1846-48), and fraught treaty relations with hundreds of indigenous groups.²⁷ Alongside these purchases and conquests advanced claims “that the territory on the frontier was part of a clearly delimited national whole.” This, according to Mark Rifkin, “validated government authority over a distant and heterogenous social landscape.”²⁸ Spatial consolidation unfolded over the nineteenth century and informed an annexationist imaginary that partitioned the continental domestic from the overseas foreign, a development that would powerfully impact settler conceptions of “homeland.” But the imperial construction of the United States was hardly the naturalistic and inevitable frontier triumph famously depicted in the writings of historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Instead, there were what Brian Rouleau calls “many Manifest Destinies” playing out across the long nineteenth century, evident in political struggles between eastern powerbrokers over the

²³ Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville and London: 2000), 53-79.

²⁴ Zaggari, “The Significance of the ‘Global Turn,’” 5.

²⁵ Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

²⁶ Jeffrey Ostler, “‘Just and Lawful War’ as Genocidal War in the (United States) Northwest Ordinance and Northwest Territory, 1787-1832,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 18. No. 1 (2016), 3-5.

²⁷ A small sampling includes Andy Doolen, *Territories of Empire: U.S. Writing from the Louisiana Purchase to Mexican Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Frymer, *Building an American Empire*; Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony*, 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020); Peter J. Kastor and Françoise Weil, eds., *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia); Bethel Saler, *The Settlers' Empire: Colonialism and State Formation in America's Old Northwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Roxanne Willis, *Alaska's Place in the West: From the Last Frontier to the Last Great Wilderness* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

²⁸ Mark Rifkin, *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

shape of the patchwork nation, the diverse agendas of state and territorial leaders, the emergence of vocal social protest movements that resisted “expansion”, and the ethnically and linguistically mixed settler and indigenous societies dispersed across vast distances and often only nominally connected to a federal apparatus whose capacities lagged behind its lofty sovereignty claims.²⁹ The interactive borderlands of the American West connected not only to the uneven story of U.S. national development but also a multi-continental culture of Anglo settler colonialism unfolding across Canada, Australia, and Africa.³⁰

The interactions between European settler-colonists and Native Americans are key to understanding the imperial dimensions of nineteenth century U.S. history, yet they have until recently remained beyond the purview of foreign relations historians. As an instrument of empire, settler colonialism is premised on a logic of elimination: the physical extermination of indigenous bodies; the attempted eradication of indigenous languages and cultural practices; the denial of indigenous land claims and concomitant physical removal of non-settler peoples from those lands; and the obscuring of non-settler histories.³¹ The last of these points is relevant for understanding how advancing settler frontiers discursively domesticated space, creating local histories that began with European arrivals and were subsequently incorporated into the larger “national” story of the United States.³² Within the historical discipline, nationalist self-narratives severed the foreign relations between indigenous peoples and settler-colonists from the study of American foreign relations, where works attended to North America primarily through examining U.S. political, military, and economic interactions with European empire-states in an emerging international system.³³ Primitivized in Euro-American discourse and with their sovereign statuses gradually subordinated to U.S. law (“domestic dependent nations”), Indian groups occupied a nebulous place in settler histories.

In an incisive 2015 essay, Brian DeLay noted foreign relations historians’ “disinclination to meaningfully integrate North America’s native peoples in analyses of U.S. empire is difficult to reconcile with basic history” and argued for U.S.-Indian relations as a primary feature of nineteenth-century American foreign relations history.³⁴ Scholars working within Native American history, borderlands studies, and the history of the American West have already done much work towards this end. New studies in these fields present a dynamic image of a continent shaped by selective diplomacy, extreme violence, economic opportunism, moralistic missionizing, environmental obstacles, and overlapping sovereignties. These works reveal hybrid spaces where the emerging U.S. empire engaged with Indian groups not only from a hegemonic position but also as a rival and occasional ally. In centering Native American agency within and beyond these zones of overlap, such histories call our attention to the gaps between the totalizing fantasies of the settler-colonial mindset, the reach and

²⁹ Brian Rouleau, *A Companion to U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to the Present*, Vol. I, ed. Christopher R.W. Dietrich (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 142-47.

³⁰ James Bellich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-19.

³¹ This “logic” is most famously explored in Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409. For a contextualization of the American case within a global framework see Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

³² Kristin L. Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin, 2020), 3-33.

³³ This began to shift in the 1990s with works such as William Earl Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

³⁴ Brian DeLay, “Indian Politics, Empire, and the History of American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (2015), 927-42.

resources of the U.S. state, and the role of Indian polities in shaping the politics and culture of large swathes of the continental interior until the closing decades of the nineteenth century.³⁵ Recognizing agency and contingency does not obviate the reality or impacts of settler-produced ethnic cleansing, forced acculturation, and genocide during this period, but instead contextualizes them within destabilizing inter-polity competition, regional settler colonial power dynamics, hardening structures of race, and the disruptions of state formation. Books and articles by Nancy Shoemaker, Brian Loveman, Walter Hixson, and other foreign relations historians suggest a field now grappling with these issues more carefully, placing U.S.-Indian relations within their own imperial context.³⁶

The globalizing of the Early Republic (1780s-1850s) introduces a second seam of foreign relations scholarship on empire, which considers U.S. overseas activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Americans could be found throughout the ports of the world in the early nineteenth century and were supported by an expanding network of consulates, trading posts, and naval squadrons. A junior actor among the more established global empires, the United States nevertheless sent its navy abroad to protect commercial interests (The Barbary Wars, 1801-5; 1815), profited from imperial wars in China (Treaty of Wangxia, 1844), launched its own Pacific Squadron (1821), mimicked European empires in its “opening” of Japan (1853-54), and cultivated scientific prestige by commissioning exploratory fleets to map and catalogue the world (United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-42).³⁷ American missionaries could be found throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas, where they mimicked and critiqued their British counterparts. As Emily Conroy-Krutz illustrates, these pious wanderers thought often about empire, developing visions of a moral

³⁵ On the historiography of North American indigenous peoples and the American West, see Ned Blackhawk, “Currents in North American Indian Historiography,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (42): 319-324 and Philip J. Deloria, “Nation to Neighborhood: Land, Policy, Culture, Colonialism, and Empire in U.S.-Indian Relations,” in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. James Cook et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 343-82. See, also, Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Pekka Hämäläinen, *Lakota America: A New History of Indigenous Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Janne Lahti, *The American West and the World: Transnational and Comparative Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Claudio Sant, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

³⁶ Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2010); Richard Maass, *The Picky Eagle: How Democracy and Xenophobia Limited U.S. Territorial Expansion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). A good introduction to settler empire is Walter L Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

³⁷ Brett Goodin, *From Captives to Consuls: Three Sailors in Barbary and Their Self-Making across the Early American Republic, 1770-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 152-155; Kendall Johnson, *The New Middle Kingdom: China and the Early American Romance of Free Trade* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 8-34; Barry Alan Joyce, *The Shaping of American Ethnography: The Wilkes Exploring Expedition, 1838-1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 1-10; Macabe Keliher, “Anglo-American Rivalry and the Origins of U.S. China Policy,” *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 227-57; John H. Schroeder, “Commodore Matthew C. Perry and Japan,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Military and Diplomatic History: The Colonial Period to 1877*, eds. Christos G. Frentzos and Antonio S. Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 249-56.

imperialism legitimated by paternalistic benevolence rather than extraction.³⁸ Groups like the American Board of Foreign Missions made inroads in Hawaii as early as 1820, initiating a settler-colonial encounter that would culminate in the islands' formal annexation by the United States eight decades later.³⁹ American missionaries likewise supported colonization schemes in West Africa, founding the American Colonization Society in 1816 to help "repatriate" formerly enslaved peoples to Liberia. Ruled by an Americanized governing elite and protected by the U.S. Navy's Africa Squadron, the new state manifested settler-indigenous dynamics similar to those found elsewhere.⁴⁰ Federal law also enhanced U.S. globality. The Guano Islands Act (1856) permitted U.S. citizens to take "peaceable possession" of any unclaimed island beyond the jurisdiction of another government that contained guano deposits. Dozens of these islands eventually came under American control, sources of profit and new territorial horizons for an expanding polity.⁴¹

What do we call these incipient global ventures? Konstantin Dierks suggests the term "imperializing," which acknowledges that the United States "did not yet pursue the brute colonialism and interventionism that it would after 1898" (with North America as a glaring exception) but that it was increasingly able to project itself politically, militarily, and economically into the world – "even if without the buttress of a comprehensive state-driven program, or a lapidary cultural teleology like 'manifest destiny'."⁴² We might add a cultural dimension to this capacity driven argument. The decades prior to the American Civil War witnessed a broadening of imperial imaginaries. This included previously noted missionary civilizing missions, but also the expansionist designs of powerful slaveholding elites, who shaped colonial acquisitions in the American West and fantasized about the extension of American power (and slavery) into Central America and the Caribbean Basin. They consciously connected their projects to European colonial empires, where according to Matthew Karp, there was a "general acceptance that racial hierarchy and bound labor were necessary elements of modern civilization."⁴³ An air of possibility and profit likewise motivated freebooting military dreamers, known as filibusters, who developed coup plots of varying scales and intensities in Venezuela, Canada, Mexico, and Nicaragua throughout the Early Republic era.⁴⁴ Even the Monroe Doctrine (1823), an iconic piece of American foreign policymaking that opposed any European attempts to claim new colonies or reclaim old ones in the Western Hemisphere, contained imperial potential in its anticolonial assertions, which carefully avoided any declaration of the United States' future plans.⁴⁵

³⁸ Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 9-10.

³⁹ Seth Archer, *Sharks Upon the Land: Colonialism, Indigenous Health, and Culture in Hawai'i, 1778-1855* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 17-88.

⁴⁰ Robert Murray, "Bodies in Motion: Liberian Settlers, Medicine, and Mobility in the Atlantic World," *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 4 (2019): 615-46.

⁴¹ Christina Duffy Burnett, "The Edges of Empire and the Limits of Sovereignty: American Guano Islands," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 779-803.

⁴² Konstantin Dierks, "Americans Overseas in the Early American Republic," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 1 (2018): 33-34.

⁴³ Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 9.

⁴⁴ Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 139-163; Albert L. Hurtado, "Empires, Frontiers, Filibusters, and Pioneers: The Transnational World of John Sutter," *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (2008): 19-47; Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-18.

⁴⁵ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 85-122.

In the aftermath of the Civil War (1861-65) the most pressing extraterritorial concerns of the ruptured metropolitan core remained the consolidation of contiguous borderland spaces. Although limited in size and resources, the U.S. Army served as an important administrative and disciplinary tool of federal state-builders, overseeing the early stages of southern reconstruction (effectively an act of internal colonization) and enlarging its role as the hard edge of settler power in the western territories.⁴⁶ The nationalization of colonized frontier space in the post-war decades occurred amidst an era of profound transformation that further bound the United States – through intertwined flows of capital, commodities, technology, people, and ideas – to a globalizing world.⁴⁷ It remained a secondary player in diplomatic and military terms, carefully negotiating its position amidst European and Asian empires, but was rising as a commercial colossus whose corporate combines both profited from and shaped the world marketplace. U.S. steel, iron, oil, timber, mining, agriculture, and manufactured consumer goods boomed between the 1860s and 1890s, even amidst a two-decade international recession, and by the turn of the twentieth century the American share of the global market had grown to 10%. The massive migrations of between 50 to 70 million people within and between Europe, Asia, and North America in the latter-half of the nineteenth century would also reshape the United States, sharpening racialized distinction in urban areas and creating heterogeneous settler frontiers on the continent.⁴⁸ Donna Gabaccia’s research on “immigrant foreign relations” shows how the cultural configurations produced by these movements inflected ideas about empire and America’s place in the world.⁴⁹

The imperial imaginaries and extraterritorial aspirations of the pre-Civil War Era persisted. Blueprints for a “true” continental union incorporating Canada and Mexico appeared in the writing and speeches of statesmen like William Henry Seward, while Congress debated annexing territory in the Caribbean and Central America, animated in part by a desire to build an isthmian canal that would enshrine transoceanic naval and commercial ascendancy in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁰ In 1867, the United States claimed Midway Atoll, named for its equidistance between North America and Asia and coveted for its strategic location, and purchased Alaska from the Russian Empire for \$7,200,000 – the territory’s indigenous peoples did not receive a seat at the bargaining table.⁵¹ Hawai’i experienced its own transformations as white settler commercial operations, mainly in the form of plantation agriculture, began reshaping its lands and challenging its cultures.⁵² The U.S. government

⁴⁶ These massive undertakings are surveyed in Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and its World in an Age of Civil Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 233-400. On the U.S.-Indian relations after 1865 see C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and Peter Cozzens, *The Earth is Weeping: The Epic Story of the Indian Wars for the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016).

⁴⁷ Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 15-80; Leon Fink, *The Long Gilded Age: American Capitalism and the Lessons of a New World Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 120-47; Emily S. Rosenberg, “Transnational Currents in a Shrinking World,” in *A World Connecting, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 815-998.

⁴⁸ Walter LaFeber, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume II: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1-44.

⁴⁹ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ Joseph A. Fry, *Lincoln, Seward, and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 154-86; Immerman, *Empire for Liberty*, 98-127.

⁵¹ Jessica Arnett, “Between Empires and Frontiers: Alaska Native Sovereignty and U.S. Settler Imperialism” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2018), 1-66.

⁵² Noelani Arista details how Kanaka Maoli governance mitigated these intrusions for decades in *The Kingdom and the Republic: Sovereign Hawai’i and the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

rewarded these white elites for their efforts with the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875, which created a duty-free market for Hawaiian sugar and gave the United States what amounted to “favoured nation” status in the archipelago.⁵³ The United States’ unilateralist 1871 intervention in Korea, which saw it deploy forces on the peninsula, presaged an enhanced willingness to pursue commercial opportunities in the Pacific by coercion or outright violence. A preoccupation with naval power grew among political and military elites in the final decades of the nineteenth century, in part driven by the popularity of naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan’s writings on the subject. The concomitant expansion and modernization of the U.S. Navy in the 1880s and 1890s bolstered arguments for enhanced overseas influence.⁵⁴

Historians have offered a range of explanations for the 1898 war with Spain, an unambiguously imperialistic venture that led to formalised colonial control in the Caribbean Basin, Southeast Asia, and new territories in the South Pacific.⁵⁵ Wisconsin School scholars like Williams and McCormick identified a metastasizing American capitalism in search of new markets – particularly in Asia – and flexible in its methods of securing them.⁵⁶ More recently, A.G. Hopkins and Marc-William Palen have challenged this interpretation, arguing that the “Open Door” was not as open as previously imagined and that the economic foundations of “new” overseas empire should be reassessed and set within the fractious domestic political environment of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The Spanish-American War and its subsequent colonial outgrowths, Hopkins contends, should also be placed within nineteenth-century globalizations and understood as culminating events in the U.S. attempt to sever its “material and cultural” dependence on the British Empire.⁵⁷ Among historians looking primarily at political and economic causative factors, Thomas McCormick provides the most resonant image of the United States at the dawn of the twentieth century: a newly assertive empire that had secured its role within an imperially constituted international system and could comfortably pursue its extraterritorial ambitions. It would do so not only through the maintenance of formal colonies in places like the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico, but also via a growing number of “protectorates, satellites, puppets, [and] client states” in Latin America and the Asia-Pacific.⁵⁸ This varied imperial repertoire mimicked the other major empires of the era, generating its momentum from the perceived needs of capital, the cultivation of geopolitical prestige, and the moralizing language of racial uplift. A commitment to diffuse colonial arrangements had, of course, also shaped the United States since its founding. We therefore need to interrogate the specificities of 1898 and its long aftermaths alongside structural, material, and ideological connections to earlier traditions of

Press, 2019). See, also, Gary Okihiro, *Island Worlds: A History of the Hawai'i* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁵³ Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism*, 153-58.

⁵⁴ Greg Russell, “Alfred Thayer Mahan and American Geopolitics: The Conservatism and Realism of an Imperialist” *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (2006), 119-140.

⁵⁵ An early attempt to think about the historiography of U.S. empire during this period is Edward P. Crapol, “Coming to Terms with Empire: The Historiography of Late-Nineteenth Century American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 16, no. 4 (1992): 573-97.

⁵⁶ See, especially, McCormick, *China Market*.

⁵⁷ Marc-William Palen, “The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism, 1890-1913,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 1 (2015): 184-85; A.G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 19. On the imperial economics of the pre-1898 decades see Marc-William Palen, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846-1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁸ Thomas McCormick, “From Old Empire to New: The Changing Dynamics and Tactics of American Empire,” in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, eds. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 72-73.

U.S. colonial conquest and “imperializing.” Viewed in this light, the interventions of the early twentieth century appear more as opportunistic adaptations than momentary aberrations.⁵⁹

Early revisionist accounts of a shape-shifting imperial formation finding its global footing were updated and expanded upon in the 1990s and 2000s. Scholarship initially focused on the Spanish- and Philippine-American Wars before broadening outwards to encompass a host of overseas entanglements. These works textured prior interpretations with considerations of gender, race, class, religion, labor, migration, environment, and violence. The best of them devoted their energies to locating and dissecting American imperial power rather than debating its existence. Key texts considered the ways gender informed discourse, policy, and culture during and after the wars with Spain and the First Philippine Republic⁶⁰; revealed how racial hierarchies underwrote politics, law, medicine, education, intimacies, and militarized violence in the Philippines⁶¹; explored the racial politics and anti-migrant xenophobia that drove arguments against empire⁶²; interrogated the cultural productions of American colonials in the Caribbean⁶³; illuminated the histories of Filipino, Puerto Rican, and Pacific Islander populations in the United States⁶⁴; mapped U.S. labor regimes in Central America⁶⁵; illustrated the ways that empire shaped metropolitan science, policing and incarceration,

⁵⁹ The ties that bind the “old” empire and the “new” – and the complications that arise from disaggregating them too fully – are discussed in Katherine Bjork, *Prairie Imperialists: The Indian Country Origins of American Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Oliver Charbonneau, “‘A New West in Mindanao’: Settler Fantasies on the U.S. Imperial Fringe,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 3 (2019): 304-23; Rebecca McKenna, “Igorot Squatters and Indian Wards: Toward an Intra-Imperial History of Land Dispossession,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 3 (2019): 221-239. In contrast, the perils of imperial comparison are detailed in Paul A. Kramer, “Transits of Race: Empire and Difference in Philippine-American Colonial History,” in *Racism in the Modern World: Historical Perspectives on Cultural Transfer and Adaptation*, eds. Manfred Berg and Simon Wendt (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 163-191.

⁶⁰ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁶¹ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Julian Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Vincente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia, eds., *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

⁶² Eric T. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton, eds., *Empire’s Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

⁶³ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Mary A. Renda and Thomas H. Holloway, “Practical Sovereignty: The Caribbean Region and the Rise of U.S. Empire,” in *A Companion to Latin American History*, ed. Thomas H. Holloway (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 307-29.

⁶⁴ Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Augusto Espirito, “Transnationalism and Filipino American Historiography,” *Asian American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2008): 171-84. A useful overview is found in Keith L. Camacho, “Filipinos, Pacific Islanders, and the American Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, eds. David K. Yoo and Eiichiro Azuma (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-17).

⁶⁵ Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America’s Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Jason Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Empire in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

industry, environment, and public policy⁶⁶; and identified comparisons and connections between U.S. and European empires.⁶⁷ Monographs focusing on this period (1890s-1930s) in the past decade have continued to expand the field by reflecting on the imperial dimensions of citizenship, food, sport, resource management, international law, banking, anticolonial nationalism, imperial transfer, education, labor migration, architecture, and a range of other topics.⁶⁸

The decades surrounding 1898 have become a locus for scholars examining the U.S. empire. Unlike continental colonialism, abstracted through the process of nation-state formation, or early and mid-nineteenth century “imperializing”, *arriviste* in flavor but also inchoate, the wars in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia created overseas colonies that, following 1901 Supreme Court opinions in the so-called “Insular Cases”, would be zones of indefinite colonial exception encompassing millions of people. Further, the decision to attack, and subsequently inherit, a flagging European empire was a bold intervention into a landscape where “world power” and “imperial power” remained interchangeable terms. These actions marked the United States as not only an economic competitor, but also a polity willing to assert itself among the global empires of the day and to operate in a manner familiar to them: by maintaining an extracontinental spatial portfolio characterized by adaptive forms of rule and with its borders blurred by shifting terminological distinctions. Thus seized Native American homelands were “national” space, Hawaii and Alaska were “territories” subject to deferred sovereignty, the Philippines and Guam were “formal” colonies, and extended military occupations in Cuba, the Panama Canal Zone, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua were “limited-term” interventions. The wars of 1898 also produced a vocal anti-imperialist movement in the United States and its colonies. Voices included black activists, women’s rights advocates, and colonised Filipinos and Puerto Ricans, all of whom drew unflattering comparisons between the American drive for empire and its European

⁶⁶ The best entryway to discussion of multidirectionality in the U.S. empire remains McCoy and Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible*. See also Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America’s Civilizing Mission* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2006); Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶⁷ The pioneering collection is Go and Foster, *The American Colonial State in the Philippines*. See also Anne L. Foster, *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ A small sampling includes Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation: A Global Intellectual History of the Philippine Revolution, 1887-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Oliver Charbonneau, *Civilizational Imperatives: Americans, Moros, and the Colonial World* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2020); Benjamin A. Coates, *Legalist Empire: International Law and American Foreign Relations in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Solsiree Del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898-1952* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Fradera, *The Imperial Nation*; Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); April Merleaux, *Sugar and Civilization: American Empire and the Cultural Politics of Sweetness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Rebecca Tino McKenna, *American Imperial Pastoral: The Architecture of U.S. Colonialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); JoAnna Poblete, *Islanders in the Empire: Filipino and Puerto Rican Laborers in Hawai’i* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Antonio Sotomayor, *The Sovereign Colony: Olympic Sport, National Identity, and International Politics in Puerto Rico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

analogues.⁶⁹ Yet elite anti-imperialists like the industrialist Andrew Carnegie also lay the groundwork for durable myths about 1898 as an overseas misadventure shading an otherwise shining history of national integration, anticolonial righteousness, and global commercial growth.⁷⁰ Displacing empire proved more resonant than embracing it in the American popular imagination, especially as the era of high imperialism gave way to decolonization and neoliberal globalization. Anti-imperialism became a flexible tool, producing pointed critiques of U.S. activities but also being instrumentalized for exceptionalist ends as empires unravelled globally.

The diminishment of colonial empire in American political and popular discourse introduces a final seam of U.S. empire studies, which examine twentieth and twenty first century U.S. global power in an ostensibly postcolonial age.⁷¹ Research in this broad category tends to focus on the Cold War and beyond, but the origins of these discussions originate with earlier economic and military interventions in Latin America and Asia; the rise of global governance before and after the first World War; the Progressive Era and interwar spread of American manufacturing, technology, and management techniques; and the discursive positioning of the U.S. model as an alternative to both European imperial hegemony and Soviet revolutionary socialism. In his detailed comparative study, Julian Go shows how this increasing devotion to hybrid forms of influence and control – some territorial, some not – was hardly “post-imperial” but instead bore a strong resemblance to other diversified empires (namely the British).⁷² American political, military, corporate, and academic elites concealed this resemblance in the early decades of the Cold War, recasting the U.S. colonial empire, according to Colleen Woods, as a long exercise in decolonization. They obscured points of continued territorial control, cast communism as a neo-imperial menace, and forged loan schemes, security arrangements, bilateral agreements, and modernization programs to maintain their influence in Western Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.⁷³

Studying the United States in an era of global supremacy (1945-) has created a set of ever-forking research paths. Deep traditions of disavowing empire and investing in alternatives to formalized colonial rule dovetailed with both the global political mood of the post-war decades and the swelling resources and reach of the U.S. state and its proxies. The result was an enhanced political commitment to imperial anticolonialism – even as the United States continued to maintain its own colonial territoriality and work with and through the remnant European empires – and the diffusion of the imperial through relations with subordinate polities under the aegis of a so-called *Pax Americana*.⁷⁴ Historians grappling with the period inevitably become entangled in questions about the relationship between the United States and globalization, with the latter as both product and producer of the American footprint, and the distinctions between “empire”, “hegemony”, and other descriptors of supranational

⁶⁹ Julian Go, “Anti-Imperialism in the U.S. Territories after 1898,” in *Empire’s Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism*, eds. Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 79-96; Erin Murphy, “Women’s Anti-Imperialism, ‘The White Man’s Burden,’ and the Philippine-American War,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 7, no. 1 (2009): 1-12.

⁷⁰ Echoed in the “imperial moment” writings of Samuel Flagg Bemis. See *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1936).

⁷¹ Ian Tyrrell, “Empire in American History,” 543.

⁷² Go, *Patterns of Empire*, 235-46.

⁷³ Colleen Woods, *Freedom Incorporated: Anticommunism and Philippine Decolonization in the Age of Decolonization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 1-19.

⁷⁴ Daniel J. Sargent, “Pax Americana: Sketches for an Undiplomatic History,” *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 3 (2018): 357-76.

power.⁷⁵ They also often concern themselves in thorny matters of intent, causality, and agency in asymmetrical relations between and across “major” and “minor” sovereign nations and their peoples.

Some accounts deemphasize territoriality and instead focus on the adaptive and contested instruments of coercive globality. The scope of analysis here is continuously growing and draws from histories of capitalism, global governance, migration, development, warfare and intelligence, domesticity, international relations, science and technology, material culture, and the environment. Some key areas of study include the utilization of debt relationships and developmental “aid” packages to discipline, reward, and otherwise manage Global South clients⁷⁶; the expansion of the U.S. intelligence apparatus, the use of covert action, and the deployment of expert knowledge to subvert the sovereignty of foreign states⁷⁷; the ways American state and non-state actors have shaped (or bypassed) global institutions, international law, and post-war alliance systems⁷⁸; the intensified globalizing of U.S. corporate interests, including the transnational replication of Fordist production models, conditioning of labor markets, and linguistic / technological standardizations of global business practices⁷⁹; the refinement of interventionist ideologies – namely neoconservatism and liberal internationalism – to validate foreign wars⁸⁰; the export and impact of American consumer culture(s) and mass media⁸¹; and how manifestations of U.S. power have failed,

⁷⁵ For a public-facing example see Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire, 1945-2000: The Rise of a Global Power* (New York: Viking Press, 2012). On empires in a more general postwar context see David Mayers, *America and the Postwar World: Remaking International Society, 1945-1956* (London: Routledge, 2018), 121-50.

⁷⁶ David Ekbladh, *The Great American mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Thomas C. Field, “Transnationalism Meets Empire: The AFL-CIO, Development, and the Private Origins of Kennedy’s Latin American Labor Program,” *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 2 (2018): 305-34; Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

⁷⁷ Joseph Darda, *Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Osamah F. Khalil, *America’s Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Wen-Qing Ngoei, *Arc of Containment: Britain, and the United States and Anticommunism in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016);

⁷⁸ Michael Kwet, “Digital Colonialism: U.S. Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South,” *Race & Class* 60, no. 4 (2019): 3-26; Noel Maurer, *The Empire Trap: The Rise and Fall of U.S. Intervention to Protect American Property Overseas, 1893-2013* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Alejandra Roncallo, *The Political Economy of Space in the Americas: The New Pax Americana* (London: Routledge, 2014); Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁷⁹ Steve Coll, *Private Empire: Exxon Mobil and American Power* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Mark Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Adam Moore, *Empire’s Labor: The Global Army that Supports U.S. Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology and European Users* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); Robert Vitalis, *America’s Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (London: Verso, 2009); Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (London: Routledge, 2004); David C. Hendrickson, *Republic in Peril: American Empire and the Liberal Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁸¹ Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the*

produced unintended outcomes, been reimagined and rewired by non-Americans, and shaped the American domestic.⁸²

Notions of a deterritorialized postcolonial empire powered by debt bondage, consumerist allure, and militarized omnipresence require tempering to account for how the strategic control of space has remained a key technique in U.S. worldmaking. Respatializing the empire following the Second World War required not only the national absorption of Hawaii and Alaska (1959) and the decolonization of the Philippines (1946), but also the continued maintenance of geographically dispersed and lexically obscured territorial assets outside of the state system. The most populous of these – Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands – are colonial holdovers, subject to degrees of incorporation in the United States yet also politically alienated, culturally othered, and systemically underdeveloped. Pacific Islands served as sites of nuclear colonialism, subject to devastating testing regimes and Frank Schumacher notes that they still function as “central outpost[s] in a forward territorial perimeter designed to protect and project the polity’s imperial power.”⁸³ Closer to home, Native American lands have been utilized for similar ends and, more generally, U.S.-Indian relations retain features – subordinated sovereignty, limited self-governance – that are paradigmatically colonial.⁸⁴

Extraterritoriality has likewise manifested in hundreds of overseas military bases, which are justified via geostrategic interest and magnified threat assessment. As of 2015, eight hundred of these zones of microsovereignty existed, located in seventy countries and territories. They range from massive installations (Camp Humphreys in South Korea) to small “cooperative security locations” (Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso) and, alongside acting as sites of forward deployment, serve as detention facilities, training centers for local allies, logistical hubs, and repositories for conventional and nuclear weaponry.⁸⁵ The contemporary “empire of bases” is unprecedented in scope, although Brooke Blower reminds us that it is not entirely novel in American history, with roots in the frontier military forts, overseas factories, and isolated outposts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸⁶ Interactions between American soldiers and local peoples shape recent multidisciplinary accounts of the subject, which reveal how basing impacts economies, produces racialized violence, and negatively conditions global

Cold War (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sarah Ellen Graham, *Culture and Propaganda: The Progressive Origins of American Public Diplomacy, 1936-1953* (London: Routledge, 2015); Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸² Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Andrew C. McKeivitt, *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Victoria Reyes, *Global Borderlands: Fantasy, Violence, and Empire in Subic Bay, Philippines* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁸³ Frank Schumacher, “Reclaiming Territory: The Spatial Contours of Empire in U.S. History,” in *Spatial Formats Under the Global Condition, Vol I. Dialectics of the Global*, ed. Matthias Middell (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 139.

⁸⁴ J.M. Bacon and Matthew Norton, “Colonial Empire Today: U.S. Empire and the Political Status of Native American Nations,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 2 (2019): 301-31.

⁸⁵ David Vine, “Where in the World is the U.S. Military,” *Politico*, July / August 2015. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/us-military-bases-around-the-world-119321>

⁸⁶ Brooke L. Blower, “Nation of Outposts: Forts, Factories, Bases, and the Making of American Power,” *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 455-59.

perceptions of the United States.⁸⁷ The global base archipelago intersects with and emerges from another salient feature of U.S. imperial territoriality: military-administrative occupations of extended duration and transformative intent. These also have antecedents (primarily in Latin America), but if we isolate our focus strictly to the post-WW2 era, major examples can be found in West Germany, Austria, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Occupation in these countries extended beyond basing to include a spectrum of state-building, disciplinary, and extractive exercises that muddied civilian-military distinctions as they attempted to produce the consent of occupied peoples. An array of monographs and essays ably detail individual case studies, although a comparative and connected synthesis on the American culture of occupation remains unwritten.⁸⁸

A chapter of this length can only fleetingly indicate the plural forms of empire and the research being produced on them. These forms emerge from littoral borderlands of early colonial North America and thread their way through centuries to a twenty first century where variegated U.S. power has become a global norm. The growing scholarly consensus that the United States is (or at least has been) an empire is tempered by its sceptics within the academy, the lure of exceptionalism in popular discourse, and continued debates over the spatial and temporal locations of empire among those studying it.⁸⁹ How the American empire is understood and applied within periodized historiographies varies, of course. The settler empire, the overseas colonies, and the unbounded hyperpower have produced bodies of scholarship that are not always mutually conversant, mirroring the tapestry-like qualities of the empire itself. This should not be taken as evidence of analytical fuzziness or terminological inapplicability, however. Writings on other durable imperial formations identify variety, adaptation, and rupture as standard features of empire rather than evidence of its absence.⁹⁰ We should apply this same standard when thinking synthetically about empire in U.S. foreign relations history.

Rich in contextual detail and examining an overwhelming variety of global interactions, critical works on the American empire chart evolving imperial practices and varied spatial formats, situating the United States alongside other empires. They challenge demarcations between the “national” and the “imperial” and identify imbrication, puncturing over-determined boundaries between “foreign” and “domestic” histories. These critical interventions extend to perspective and narration, with many imperial histories interrogating the coloniality of the archives and considering voice and voicelessness within the study of U.S. foreign relations. They also experiment with scale. Empires are inherently complex forms of networked power that created and are delimited by diffuse links between locality,

⁸⁷ Mark L. Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai'i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Akemi Johnson, *Night in the American Village: Women in the Shadow in the U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa* (New York: The New Press, 2019); Catherine Lutz, *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle Against U.S. Military Posts* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); David Vine, *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (New York: Metropolitan, 2015).

⁸⁸ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Dexter Filkins, *The Forever War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸⁹ For questioning of the “empire thesis” see Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *American Umpire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). One does not have look beyond book titles for exceptionalism: Dick Cheney and Liz Cheney, *Exceptional: Why the World Needs a Powerful America* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2015).

⁹⁰ Cooper and Burbank, *Empires in World History*, 1-22; Philip Pomper, “The History and Theory of Empires,” *History and Theory* 44 (2005): 1-27.

region, continent, and global. In recognizing the formation and maturation of the American empire within nested modern globalisms, the best of this new research defamiliarizes and reframes the history of the United States in the world.