

unqualified endorsement of American conflicts that those generations did" (8) may be overstated, but students and scholars of American religious history, military history, and foreign policy will greatly benefit from Wetzel's contribution to a debate that is ever louder and ever more immediate in the American present.

Translating Empire: The United States and European Imperialism before 1898

Priest, Andrew. *Designs on Empire: America's Rise to Power in the Age of European Imperialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. xi + 290 pp. \$35.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0231197458

Frank Schumacher

University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada

doi:10.1017/S1537781423000117

For many years now a vibrant and robust historiography has traced the multiple connections and entanglements of the United States in the world. Empire has provided a particularly fruitful analytical lens to highlight such connectivity and de-exceptionalize U.S. history by embedding the nation's historical trajectories within global developments. In contrast to the many studies that focus on the trans-imperial networks which developed in aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898, Andrew Priest explores earlier American attitudes by analyzing American perceptions of European imperialism between the 1860s and 1880s.

Priest, who teaches U.S. history at the University of Essex, argues that European empires served as a discursive reference point to advance, conceptualize, and oppose an American Empire decades before it acquired substantial colonies in the Caribbean Basin and the Pacific Ocean. This recalibration of imperial temporalities allows Priest to de-emphasize 1898 as the commonly referenced starting point of U.S. overseas empire-building. Instead, his cast of subjects—mostly members of Washington's foreign policy establishment but also reformers, suffragists, and social activists—increasingly embraced the idea of empire-building abroad. According to Priest, while Americans were initially hesitant and ambivalent, a consensus emerged which not only discursively distanced U.S. imperial practices from those of the Old World but simultaneously transposed imperial rule onto American notions of civilizing uplift and reform. The increasing infatuation with empire was neither coincidental nor temporary but grew naturally out of the American experience and developed from desires to displace the global reach of the *Pax Britannica*.

The book consists of five chronological chapters and opens with an exploration of contradictory attitudes in the United States towards European empires before the 1860s.

While many contemporary observers were deeply impressed with some empires (Britain, Russia) and repelled by others (Spain, France), most were fundamentally concerned about the impact of those empires on America's own comparatively weak polity which persisted on the margins of the international system. In response, empire-building was frequently legitimized as a pre-emptive measure to forestall potential re-colonization. Advocates of empire obfuscated conceptual contradictions between Republicanism and imperialism by reframing American empire as aiding national development undermining foreign colonialism. Many of the racist tenets of European empires, meanwhile, were shared and underwrote America's quest for hemispheric leadership.

In chapter two, Priest examines American reactions to French imperialism and its intervention in Mexico (1861-1867). The French creation of a client state in Mexico was widely interpreted as a threatening precedent and challenge to the Monroe Doctrine but William Henry Seward and the foreign policy establishment in Washington developed a set of measured responses driven by the concern that France might recognize and support the Confederate States in an effort to contain the United States. Priest concludes that "In presenting their policies merely as a response to an imperial threat in the Americas from Europe, leaders in Washington largely failed to acknowledge the growing similarities between their own outlooks and those of the European powers." (82)

Priest delves further into this cognitive dissonance in chapter three, which examines American perceptions of and responses to Spain's colonial war in Cuba (1868-1878). Despite outrage in the United States about the brutal treatment of the anti-colonial resistance and widespread calls for intervention, the Grant Administration prioritized amicable relations with Madrid over support for Cubans to safeguard Americans' material interests on the island. Priest demonstrates that the debate over intervention was shaped not only by commercial and strategic interests but also by trans-imperial racism. The failure of Reconstruction, widespread xenophobia, and racist nationalism created an oppressive intellectual climate in which racialized understandings of international relations simultaneously justified but also precluded imperial outreach.

Such contradictory perceptions between the brutally oppressive characteristics of empire and its purported civilizing benefits also informed American responses to the British intervention in Egypt (1882), which Priest discusses in chapter four. While less prominent than Spain's war in Cuba, this understudied case nevertheless impacted how Americans discussed the legitimacy of empire and the formats it could follow. An emerging Anglo-Saxonist discourse on race and a shared Anglo-American civilizing mission permeated observations by a diverse group of commentators from George McClellan to Frederick Douglass. The British Empire emerged as an awe-inspiring reference point for the future trajectory of the United States.

This rapprochement and desire to emulate imperial global reach would accelerate in the 1890s. U.S. participation in the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), discussed in chapter five, further demonstrated Americans' identification with European imperialism. While the Cleveland Administration ultimately rejected the conference findings on the exploitation of the Congo Basin and the partition of Africa, "[...] American elites were increasingly aping the European empires they observed as they absorbed lessons from them." (195)

In this wide-ranging study of perceptions, Priest makes a convincing case for the intellectual influence of European empires on U.S. imperial designs. A more detailed look at the mechanics, media, and pathways of trans-imperial learning, transfer, and appropriation would have only strengthened the book's key arguments by underlining the very concrete effects of discourse on policy. Furthermore, the book's foregrounding of

European empires as an intellectual reference point for Americans sidelines the multi-directional impact of settler colonialism on such conversations. The United States, after all, operated not just in a world of European power but also in a world of indigenous peoples competing for continental control. The presence of powerful indigenous polities in North America shaped U.S. deliberations about empire, security, race, and civilization. Settler colonialism and its genocidal outreach not only informed many of the struggles over political identity described in the book but also underwrote much of the trans-imperial conversations between the United States and European empires. Finally, the global reach of U.S. imperial imaginaries and practices before the 1890s was less timid and more assertive than many of the conversations in Priest's analysis would lead one to conclude. His assertion that "During the 1880s the United States still did not have an overseas empire of its own [...]." (122) distracts from his argument about the longevity and centrality of empire to American perceptions of the international system before the turn of the century. This spatial-temporal global arc of engagement reached from the colonization in Liberia in the 1820s, to the creation of extraterritorial enclaves in Asia and Latin America, the acquisition of islands and archipelagoes in the Caribbean Basin and the Pacific Ocean, to the establishment of naval stations, resource extraction, and export zones by the middle of the century. The United States not only translated European imperial insights, it actively built its own global presence throughout the century.

Historians for Hire: Selling the Story of McCormick's Reaper

Ott, Daniel P. *Harvesting History: McCormick's Reaper, Heritage Branding, and Historical Forgery*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023. xvi + 306 pp. \$60.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4962-0698-5.

Ellen Adams

The Alice T. Miner Museum, Chazy, NY, USA

doi:10.1017/S1537781423000130

Daniel P. Ott's *Harvesting History* tells two parallel stories. The first concerns the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company and how its origin story—the invention of the first mechanical reaper by Cyrus McCormick in 1831—came to be accepted as historical fact. While many companies used history (and more specifically, the idea of history as technological progress) to market themselves during this period, McCormick was unusual in the depth of its dedication to establishing the truth of its own historical claims and the way it consistently drew upon history to address the challenges it faced in the changing economic landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.