

later. Vernon has done us all an enormous service by providing an account that not only satisfies academic rigour, but also displays an insider's understanding of how political clientelism works in practice.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000056

Piero Gleijeses, *America's Road to Empire: Foreign Policy from Independence to World War One*

(London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), vii + 379 pp.

Tom Long

Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick

Just how much did the United States' early foreign policy differ from that of its European contemporaries? The historian Piero Gleijeses deploys this comparison throughout his new book, *America's Road to Empire*. As the title suggests, Gleijeses sees US and European foreign policies during the long nineteenth century as driven by imperialist expansion, and therefore similar in many respects. However, where the power of several of those European empires waned during the period – particularly in the Western hemisphere – US power grew steadily. This expansion largely came at the expense of non-Europeans who stood in the way; while US policymakers were not unique in their racism, the proximity of racial 'others' added virulence to the racial politics of the young country.

Gleijeses' arguments about an imperial United States contradict old tropes of US exceptionalism and anti-colonialism, a contrast that the text underscores repeatedly. The emphasis on US imperialism and prejudice coincides with the last several decades of historiography regarding the United States and the world from the middle of the nineteenth century forward. The book, then, adds a voice to the chorus that Mark Gilderhus dubbed the 'revisionist synthesis' more than three decades ago ('An Emerging Synthesis? US–Latin American Relations since the Second World War', *Diplomatic History*, 16: 3 (1992)). In line with the development of this synthesis, *America's Road to Empire* emphasises the links between US imperial expansion and the enactment of white, male supremacy.

The book opens several decades before the US War of Independence. Although the white men of Britain's colonies enjoyed comparatively high levels of wealth and civil liberty, the colonies and, for its first decades, the new country, were weak. The recounting of US independence suggests the author's ambitions for a multinational study of US foreign policy, with the story of independence told as much through the politics of the Parisian court as through the debates of Philadelphia.

The book's 14 chapters stretch from the middle of the eighteenth century to the brink of the First World War. Much of the book addresses the relentless territorial expansion of the United States into the lands of American Indians, the pressure that

US growth placed on European empires in the Western hemisphere, and the extension of US territory and influence vis-à-vis Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Gleijeses dedicates a chapter to US policy regarding China and Japan, as well as substantial attention to the United States' blood-soaked repression of the Philippines. Considering the book's chronological and geographical breadth, Gleijeses – best known for his painstaking multi-archival work on Cuba's foreign relations – still manages to make extensive and convincing use of primary sources.

At first, local politics trumps national cohesion in the new United States. An aversion to maintaining armed forces and paying taxes leaves the federal government ineffective in advancing its interests vis-à-vis the British, French and even declining Spanish empires. The book emphasises the US route from weakness to power, with Gleijeses describing seemingly inexorable movement along this 'road'. His account pays great attention to the consequences – especially for Indigenous and African-American peoples – but less to contingencies and feasible roads not taken. Expansion and the accompanying atrocities seem inevitable.

Gleijeses points to the continuity in US visions of expansion from Thomas Jefferson to Woodrow Wilson. Despite the soaring, universalist rhetoric of those two presidents, US leaders' principles were almost always limited to the expansion of wealth, power and rights of white men. As Gleijeses points out, the view that US expansion mimicked that of European empires was supported even by Wilson, often considered a liberal idealist in his foreign policy: 'We have shown ourselves to be kind to all world when it came to pushing an advantage', Wilson said. US actions 'have suited our professions of peacefulness and justice and liberality no better than the aggressions of other nations' (Wilson quoted p. 278). Of course, Wilson's reputation as an idealistic liberal has been eroded in recent years, as historians' focus has turned to Wilson's racism and its echoes in his overseas policies: myriad interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean and his rejection of the inclusion of Japan's racial equality clause in the League of Nations covenant.

The book offers a valuable new option for instructors or general readers looking for a chronologically expansive, but also historically grounded and carefully sourced, overview of the United States' relations with the world. Like the book more generally, Gleijeses' arguments seem directed to an audience of students and lay readers inculcated in US founding myths, rather than to professional historians or historical International Relations scholars for whom the arguments will be largely familiar. The book carries the arguments to a broader audience, and its particular value is in the combination of breadth with attention to specific events, incidents and individuals. Stylistically, the book is more effectively structured for teaching than for casual readers. Chapters are divided into dozens of subsections that often last for less than two pages, describing a specific incident. This helps balance the specific with the general, but the argument and narrative is somewhat fractured across these sections.

In Gleijeses' recounting, the history of US foreign policy is almost indistinguishable from the country's own political formation. Racism and expansion occupy the heart of both processes. At its best moments, the book sets the United States'

growth in a dynamic international landscape of inter-imperial squabbles and the fellow Atlantic, republican revolutions of Haiti and Spanish America. As Gleijeses clearly points out, there is little evidence (and limited to the country's early decades) that the expansion of the United States was driven by a response to external threats. Dangers were not entirely absent, namely the threat of impressment and pressure from the powerful British Navy, but they had little to do with the country's bloody westward march. Risks were often exaggerated in the service of expansion. Much of the book focuses on the United States' own brand of settler colonialism, fuelled by the land hunger of white citizens pushing west. These settlers often moved in advance of official government policy, spurring conflicts with European empires and Indian communities. Movement down the 'road to empire', that is, the expansion of US territory and overseas influence, was driven by the desire for land, and the presumption that white men were justified in expelling or subjugating all others to satiate that desire.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000068

Manuel R. Cuellar, *Choreographing Mexico: Festive Performances and Dancing Histories of a Nation*

(Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2022), 372 pp.

Ana Martínez

Texas State University

Manuel E. Cuellar's *Choreographing Mexico* is a long-overdue critical study of Mexican traditional and regional dance known today as *folklórico*. Scholars have often dismissed *folklórico* as a noncritical and reductionist commodity of Mexican nationalism. Thankfully, Cuellar ends such indifference through his fascinating and well-researched volume and invites readers to see *folklórico* 'as a meaningful public cultural discourse' (p. xiii). Writing from his unique experience as a dancer, choreographer and scholar, Cuellar offers a window to see *folklórico* dance as a contested cultural formulation that has been central to the creation of Mexicanness within Mexico and the Mexican diaspora. Cuellar proves that Mexican regional dance is a social embodiment that at times reproduces nationalistic tropes and at others critiques them. *Choreographing Mexico* is a rich exploration of how bodies in motion create and recreate the idea of a nation.

Spanning from the late Porfirian regime to the postrevolutionary era (1910–40), *Choreographing Mexico* is comprised of four chapters and an introduction. Cuellar's experience as a *folklórico* dancer for 30 years is central to his methodological mode of inquiry. Engaging with performance scholars like Diana Taylor, who questions Eurocentric assumptions that knowledge is transferred only by the written archive, Cuellar uses embodied knowledge as his methodological